

## **Chapter 1: Verbal Skills**

At the end of this chapter, after the review, we will include a "Test Your Knowledge" section. These questions are not the same style of questions you will see on the Wonderlic! Instead, they are intended to help you improve your fundamental understanding of the core concepts so that you are prepared for the types of questions you will encounter on the exam. Simply going through countless practice tests will not help you improve, but rather reinforce mistakes you might be making, since you cannot learn from missed questions if you do not go back and review the concepts behind what you've missed.

On the Wonderlic exam, you will encounter many questions that directly test your vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension skills. Although you are not expected to know every word in the English language for your test, you will need to have the ability to use deductive reasoning to find the choice that is the best match for the word in question, which is why we are going to explain how to break a word into its parts of meaning.

### **Word Parts**

#### **prefix – root – suffix**

One trick in dividing a word into its parts is to first divide the word into its **syllables**. To show how syllables can help you find roots and affixes, we'll use the word **descendant**, which means one who comes from an ancestor. Start by dividing the word into its individual syllables; this word has three: **de-scend-ant**.

The next step is to look at the beginning and end of the word, and then determine if these syllables are prefixes, suffixes, or possible roots. You can then use the meanings of each part to guide you in defining the word. When you divide words into their specific parts, they do not always add up to an exact definition, but you will see a relationship between their parts.

*Note:* This trick won't always work in every situation, because not all prefixes, roots, and suffixes have only one syllable. For example, take the word **monosyllabic** (which ironically means "one syllable"). There are five syllables in that word, but only three parts. The prefix is "mono," meaning "one." The root "syllab" refers to "syllable," while the suffix "ic" means "pertaining to." Therefore, we have one very long word which means "pertaining to one syllable."

The more familiar you become with these fundamental word parts, the easier it will be to define unfamiliar words.

### **Roots, Prefixes, and Suffixes**

#### **Roots**

Roots are the building blocks of all words. Every word is either a root itself or has a root. Just as a plant cannot grow without roots, neither can vocabulary, because a word must have a root to give it meaning.

**Example:** The test instructions were **unclear**.

The root is what is left when you strip away all the prefixes and suffixes from a word. In this case, take away the prefix "un-" and you have the root **clear**.

Roots are not always recognizable words, because they generally come from Latin or Greek words, such as **nat**, a Latin root meaning **born**. The word **native**, which means a person born of a referenced place, comes from this root, so does the word **prenatal**, meaning before birth. Yet, if you used the prefix **nat** instead of **born**, just on its own, no one would know what you were talking about.

Words can also have more than one root. For example, the word **omnipotent** means all powerful. **Omnipotent** is a combination of the roots **omni-**, meaning all or every, and **-potent**, meaning power or strength. In this case, **omni** cannot be used on its own as a single word, but **potent** can.

Again, it is important to keep in mind that roots do not always match the exact definitions of words and they can have several different spellings, but breaking a word into its parts is still one of the best ways to determine its meaning.

### **Prefixes**

Prefixes are syllables added to the beginning of a word and suffixes are syllables added to the end of the word. Both carry assigned meanings. The common name for prefixes and suffixes is **affixes**. Affixes do not have to be attached directly to a root and a word can often have more than one prefix and/or suffix. Prefixes and suffixes can be attached to a word to completely change the word's meaning or to enhance the word's original meaning. Although they don't mean much to us on their own, when attached to other words affixes can make a world of difference.

Let's use the word **prefix** itself as an example:

**Fix** means to place something securely.

**Pre** means before.

**Prefix** means to place something before or in front.

### **Suffixes**

Suffixes come after the root of a word.

**Example: Feminism**

**Femin** is a root. It means female, woman.

**-ism** means act, practice or process.

**Feminism** is the defining and establishing of equal political, economic, and social rights for women.

Unlike prefixes, **suffixes** can be used to change a word's part of speech.

**Example:** "Randy raced to the finish line." VS "Shana's costume was very racy."

In the first sentence, **raced** is a verb. In the second sentence, **racy** is an adjective. By changing the suffix from **-ed** to **-y**, the word **race** changes from a verb into an adjective, which has an entirely different meaning.

Although you cannot determine the meaning of a word by a prefix or suffix alone, you *can* use your knowledge of what root words mean to eliminate answer choices; indicating if the word is positive or negative can give you a partial meaning of the word.

## Synonyms and Antonyms

**Synonyms** are groups of words that mean the same, or almost the same, thing as each other. The word **synonym** comes from the Greek roots **syn-**, meaning same, and **-nym**, meaning name. **Hard, difficult, challenging, and arduous** are synonyms of one another.

**Antonyms** are sets of words that have opposite, or nearly opposite, meanings of one another. The word **antonym** comes from the Greek roots **ant-**, meaning opposing, and **-nym** (name). **Hard and easy** are antonyms.

**Synonyms do not always have exactly the same meanings, and antonyms are not always exact opposites.**

For example, **scalding** is an adjective that means burning. Boiling water can be described as scalding or as hot. **Hot and scalding** are considered synonyms, even though the two words do not mean exactly the same thing; something that is scalding is considered to be extremely hot.

In the same manner, antonyms are not always exact opposites. **Cold and freezing** are both antonyms of scalding. Although freezing is closer to being an exact opposite of scalding, cold is still considered an antonym. Antonyms can often be recognized by their prefixes and suffixes.

Here are rules that apply to prefixes and suffixes of antonyms:

- **Many antonyms can be created simply by adding prefixes.** Certain prefixes, such as *a-*, *de-*, *non-*, and *un-*, can be added to words to turn them into antonyms. **Atypical** is an antonym of **typical**, and **nonjudgmental** is an antonym of **judgmental**.
- **Some prefixes and suffixes are antonyms of one another.** The prefixes **ex-** (out of) and **in-/il-/im-/ir-** (into) are antonyms, and are demonstrated in the antonym pair **exhale/inhale**. Other prefix pairs that indicate antonyms include **pre-/post-**, **sub-/super-**, and **over-/under-**. The suffixes **-less**, meaning without, and **-ful**, meaning full of, often indicate that words are antonyms as well. For example: **meaningless** and **meaningful** are antonyms.

## Context Clues

The most fundamental vocabulary skill is using the context of a word to determine its meaning. Your ability to observe sentences closely is extremely useful when it comes to understanding new vocabulary words.

### Types of Context

There are two different types of context that can help you understand the meaning of unfamiliar words: **sentence context** and **situational context**. Regardless of which context is present, these types of questions are not really testing your knowledge of vocabulary; rather, they test your ability to comprehend the meaning of a word through its usage.

**Situational context** is context that comes from understanding the situation in which a word or phrase occurs.

**Sentence context** occurs within the sentence that contains the vocabulary word. To figure out words using sentence context clues, you should first determine the most important words in the sentence.

**Example:** I had a hard time reading her illegible handwriting.

- a) Neat.
- b) Unsafe.
- c) Sloppy.
- d) Educated.

Already, you know that this sentence is discussing something that is hard to read. Look at the word that **illegible** is describing: **handwriting**. Based on context clues, you can tell that **illegible** means that her handwriting is hard to read.

Next, look at the answer choices. Choice a) **Neat** is obviously a wrong answer because neat handwriting would not be difficult to read. Choice b) **Unsafe** and d) **Educated** don't make sense. Therefore, choice c) **Sloppy** is the best answer choice.

### **Types of Clues**

There are four types of clues that can help you understand context, and therefore the meaning of a word. They are **restatement**, **positive/negative**, **contrast**, and **specific detail**.

**Restatement** clues occur when the definition of the word is clearly stated in the sentence.

**Example:** The dog was dauntless in the face of danger, braving the fire to save the girl.

- a) Difficult.
- b) Fearless.
- c) Imaginative.

Demonstrating **bravery** in the face of danger would be **fearless**, choice b). In this case, the context clues tell you exactly what the word means.

**Positive/negative** clues can tell you whether a word has a positive or negative meaning.

**Example:** The magazine gave a great review of the fashion show, stating the clothing was **sublime**.

- a) Horrible.
- b) Exotic.
- c) Bland
- d) Gorgeous.

The sentence tells us that the author liked the clothing enough to write a **great** review, so you know that the best answer choice is going to be a positive word. Therefore, you can immediately rule out choices a) and c) because they are negative words. **Exotic** is a neutral word; alone, it doesn't inspire a **great** review. The most positive word is **gorgeous**, which makes choice d) **Gorgeous** the best answer.

The following sentence uses both restatement and positive/negative clues:

“Janet suddenly found herself destitute, so poor she could barely afford to eat.”

The second part of the sentence clearly indicates that destitute is a negative word; it also restates the meaning: very poor.

**Contrast clues** include the opposite meaning of a word. Words like **but**, **on the other hand**, and **however** are tip-offs that a sentence contains a contrast clue.

**Example:** Beth did not spend any time preparing for the test, but Tyron kept a rigorous study schedule.

- a) Strict.
- b) Loose.
- c) Boring.
- d) Strange.

In this case, the word **but** tells us that Tyron studied in a different way than Beth. If Beth did not study very hard, then Tyron did study hard for the test. The best answer here, therefore, is choice a) **Strict**.

**Specific detail clues** give a precise detail that can help you understand the meaning of the word.

**Example:** The box was heavier than he expected and it began to become cumbersome.

- a) Impossible.
- b) Burdensome.
- c) Obligated.
- d) Easier.

Start by looking at the specific details of the sentence. Choice **d)** can be eliminated right away because it is doubtful it would become **easier** to carry something that is **heavier**. There are also no clues in the sentence to indicate he was **obligated** to carry the box, so choice **c)** can also be disregarded. The sentence specifics, however, do tell you that the package was cumbersome because it was heavy to carry; something heavy to carry is a burden, which is **burdensome**, choice **b)**.

It is important to remember that more than one of these clues can be present in the same sentence. The more there are, the easier it will be to determine the meaning of the word, so look for them.

## **Denotation and Connotation**

As you know, many English words have more than one meaning. For example, the word **quack** has two distinct definitions: the sound a duck makes; and a person who publicly pretends to have a skill, knowledge, education, or qualification which they do not possess.

The **denotations** of a word are the dictionary definitions.

The **connotations** of a word are the implied meaning(s) or emotion which the word makes you think.

**Example:** "Sure," Pam said excitedly, "I'd just love to join your club; it sounds so exciting!"

Now, read this sentence:

"Sure," Pam said sarcastically, "I'd just love to join your club; it sounds so exciting!"

Even though the two sentences only differ by one word, they have completely different meanings. The difference, of course, lies in the words "excitedly" and "sarcastically."

## **Nouns, Pronouns, Verbs, Adjectives, and Adverbs**

### **Nouns**

Nouns are people, places, or things. They are typically the subject of a sentence. For example, "The hospital was very clean." The noun is "hospital;" it is the "place."

### **Pronouns**

Pronouns essentially "replace" nouns. This allows a sentence to not sound repetitive.

Take the sentence: "Sam stayed home from school because Sam was not feeling well." The word "Sam" appears twice in the same sentence. Instead, you can use a pronoun and say, "Sam stayed at home because *he* did not feel well." Sounds much better, right?

### **Most Common Pronouns:**

- I, me, mine, my.
- You, your, yours.
- He, him, his.
- She, her, hers.
- It, its.
- We, us, our, ours.
- They, them, their, theirs.

### **Verbs**

Remember the old commercial, "Verb: It's what you do"? That sums up verbs in a nutshell! Verbs are the "action" of a sentence; verbs "do" things.

They can, however, be quite tricky. Depending on the subject of a sentence, the tense of the word (past, present, future, etc.), and whether or not they are regular or irregular, verbs have many variations.

**Example:** "He runs to second base." The verb is "runs." This is a "regular verb."

**Example:** "I am 7 years old." The verb in this case is "am." This is an "irregular verb."

As mentioned, verbs must use the correct tense – and that tense must remain the same throughout the sentence. “I was baking cookies and eat some dough.” That sounded strange, didn’t it? That’s because the two verbs “baking” and “eat” are presented in different tenses. “Was baking” occurred in the past; “eat,” on the other hand, occurs in the present. Instead, it should be “ate some dough.”

### **Adjectives**

Adjectives are words that describe a noun and give more information. Take the sentence: “The boy hit the ball.” If you want to know more about the noun “boy,” then you could use an adjective to describe it. “The little boy hit the ball.” An adjective simply provides more information about a noun or subject in a sentence.

### **Adverb**

For some reason, many people have a difficult time with adverbs – but don’t worry! They are really quite simple. Adverbs are similar to adjectives in that they provide more information; however, they describe verbs, adjectives, and even other adverbs. They do **not** describe nouns – that’s an adjective’s job.

Take the sentence: “The doctor said she hired a new employee.”

It would give more information to say: “The doctor said she **recently** hired a new employee.” Now we know more about *how* the action was executed. Adverbs typically describe when or how something has happened, how it looks, how it feels, etc.

### **Good vs. Well**

A very common mistake that people make concerning adverbs is the misuse of the word “good.”

“Good” is an adjective – things taste good, look good, and smell good. “Good” can even be a noun – “Superman does good” – when the word is speaking about “good” vs. “evil.” **HOWEVER**, “good” is never an adverb.

People commonly say things like, “I did really good on that test,” or, “I’m good.” Ugh! This is **NOT** the correct way to speak! In those sentences, the word “good” is being used to describe an action: how a person **did**, or how a person **is**. Therefore, the adverb “well” should be used. “I did really well on that test.” “I’m well.”

The correct use of “well” and “good” can make or break a person’s impression of your grammar – make sure to always speak correctly!