

VOCABULARY QUESTIONS

In the reading section of both the paper TOEFL test and the computer TOEFL test, there will be a number of vocabulary questions. On the paper test, the vocabulary questions will always be multiple-choice questions. On the computer test, vocabulary questions may be multiple-choice questions, or they may be click-on questions: you may be asked to look at one word in a passage and click on another word with a similar or opposite meaning, or you may be asked to click on a word with a given meaning.

To answer a vocabulary question, it is, of course, helpful if you know the meaning of the word that is being tested. However, it is not always *necessary* for you to know the meaning of the word; often there are skills that you can use to help you find the correct answer to the question: (1) finding definitions from structural clues, (2) determining meanings from word parts, and (3) using context clues to determine meanings.

SKILL 8: FIND DEFINITIONS FROM STRUCTURAL CLUES

When you are asked to determine the meaning of a word in the reading section of either the paper TOEFL test or the computer TOEFL test, it is possible (1) that the passage provides information about the meaning of the word, and (2) that there are structural clues to tell you that the definition of a word is included in the passage. Look at a multiple-choice example from the paper TOEFL test where a structural clue to the meaning of the tested word is included in the passage.

Example from the Paper TOEFL Test

The passage:

One of the leading schools of psychological thought in the twentieth century is **behaviorism**—the belief that the role of the psychologist is to study behavior, which is observable, rather than conscious or unconscious thought, which is not.

Line (5) Probably the best-known proponent of behaviorism is B.F. Skinner, who is famous for his research on how positive and negative reinforcement influence behavior. He came to believe that positive reinforcement such as praise, food, or money were more effective in promoting good behavior than

(10) negative reinforcement, or punishment.


The question:

In “**behaviorism**” in line 2, a psychologist is concerned with

- (A) conscious thought patterns
- (B) unconscious thought patterns
- (C) observable actions
- (D) unobservable actions

This question asks about the meaning of the word *behaviorism*. To answer this question, you should look at the part of the passage following the word *behaviorism*. The dash punctuation (—) indicates that a definition or further information about behaviorism is going to follow. In the information following the dash, you should see that the behaviorist is interested in *behavior, which is observable*, so the best answer to this question is answer (C).

Now look at a multiple-choice example from the computer TOEFL test where a structural clue to the meaning of the tested word is included in the passage.

Example from the Computer TOEFL Test 

Reading

One of the leading schools of psychological thought in the twentieth century is behaviorism—the belief that the role of the psychologist is to study behavior, which is observable, rather than conscious or unconscious thought, which is not. Probably the best-known proponent of behaviorism is B.F. Skinner, who is famous for his research on how positive and negative reinforcement influence behavior. He came to believe that positive reinforcement such as praise, food, or money were more effective in promoting good behavior than negative reinforcement, or punishment.

Look at the expression positive reinforcement in the passage. Positive reinforcement might take the form of

a gift


a reward

a bribe

a penalty

This question asks about the meaning of the expression *positive reinforcement*. To answer this question, you should look at the part of the passage following the expression *positive reinforcement*. The expression *such as* indicates that examples of *positive reinforcement* are going to follow. Your job is to look at the examples of positive reinforcement and draw a conclusion about what positive reinforcement might be. Since *praise, food, or money* might be given in return for a job well done, then *positive reinforcement* must be a *reward*. You should click on the second answer to this question.

Next look at a click-on example from the computer TOEFL test where a structural clue to the meaning of the tested word is included in the passage.

Example from the Computer TOEFL Test 






Reading

One of the leading schools of psychological thought in the twentieth century is behaviorism—the belief that the role of the psychologist is to study behavior, which is observable, rather than conscious or unconscious thought, which is not. Probably the best-known proponent of behaviorism is B.F. Skinner, who is famous for his research on how positive and negative reinforcement influence behavior. He came to believe that positive reinforcement such as praise, food, or money were more effective in promoting good behavior than negative reinforcement, or punishment.

Look at the expression negative reinforcement in the passage. Click on another word or phrase in the passage that is close in meaning to this expression.

This question asks about a similar meaning to the expression *negative reinforcement*. To answer this question, you should look at the part of the passage around the expression *negative reinforcement*. The word *or* following *negative reinforcement* tells you that the idea is going to be restated in different words. You can see in the passage that another word for *negative reinforcement* is *punishment*, so you should click on *punishment* to answer this question.

The following chart outlines the key information that you should remember about structural clues to help you to understand unknown vocabulary words:

STRUCTURAL CLUES  		
HOW TO IDENTIFY THE QUESTION	on both paper and computer tests  	What is the meaning of “X” in line Y? The word “X” in line Y is closest in meaning to... The word “X” in line Y could best be replaced by...
	on computer test only 	Look at the word X in paragraph Y. Click on another word that is close in meaning to X. Click on the word in paragraph Y that could best be replaced by...
TYPES OF CLUES	punctuation	comma, parentheses, dashes
	restatement	<i>or, that is, in other words, i.e.</i>
	examples	<i>such as, for example, e.g.</i>
WHERE TO FIND THE ANSWER	Information to help you determine what something means will generally be found after the punctuation clue, the restatement clue, or the example clue.	
HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find the word in the passage. 2. Locate any structural clues. 3. Read the part of the passage after the structural clue carefully. 4. Eliminate any definitely wrong answers and choose the best answer from the remaining choices. 	

TOEFL EXERCISE 8: Study each of the passages and choose the best answers to the questions that follow.

PASSAGE ONE (Questions 1–4)

The teddy bear is a child’s toy, a nice soft stuffed animal suitable for cuddling. It is, however, a toy with an interesting history behind it.

Line Theodore Roosevelt, or Teddy as he was commonly called, was president of the United
(5) States from 1901 to 1909. He was an unusually active man with varied pastimes, one of which was hunting. One day the president was invited to take part in a bear hunt; and inasmuch as Teddy was president, his hosts wanted to ensure that he caught a bear. A bear was captured, clanked over the head to knock it out, and tied to a tree; however, Teddy, who really wanted to hunt a bear, refused to shoot the bear and, in fact, demanded that the bear be extricated from the ropes; that is, he demanded that the bear be set free.

(10) The incident attracted a lot of attention among journalists. First a cartoon—drawn by Clifford K. Berryman to make fun of this situation—appeared in the *Washington Post*, and the cartoon was widely distributed and reprinted throughout the country. Then toy manufacturers began producing a toy bear which they called a “teddy bear.” The teddy bear became the most widely recognized symbol of Roosevelt’s presidency.

1. According to line 1 of the passage, what is a “teddy bear”?
 - (A) A ferocious animal
 - (B) The president of the United States
 - (C) A famous hunter
 - (D) A plaything
2. Look at the word *pastimes* in paragraph 2. This word could best be replaced by
 - past occurrences
 - previous jobs
 - hunting trips
 - leisure activities
3. Look at the word *extricated* in paragraph 2. Click on another word or phrase in paragraph 2 that is close in meaning to *extricated*.
 - (A) a newspaper
 - (B) a type of teddy bear
 - (C) a drawing with a message
 - (D) a newspaper article
4. In line 10, a “cartoon” could best be described as
 - (A) a newspaper
 - (B) a type of teddy bear
 - (C) a drawing with a message
 - (D) a newspaper article

PASSAGE TWO (Questions 5–8)

Line
(5) A supernova occurs when all of the hydrogen in the core of a huge star is transformed to iron and explodes. All stars die after their nuclear fuel has been exhausted. Stars with little mass die gradually, but those with relatively large mass die in a sudden explosion, a supernova. The sudden flash of light can then be followed by several weeks of extremely bright light, perhaps as much light as twenty million stars.

(10) Supernovae are not very common; they occur about once every hundred years in any galaxy, and in 1987 a supernova that could be seen by the naked eye occurred in the Magellan Cloud, a galaxy close to the Milky Way. Scientists periodically detect supernovae in other galaxies; however, no supernovae have occurred in the *Milky Way* (the galaxy that includes Earth) since 1604. One very impressive supernova occurred in the Milky Way on July 4, 1054. There was a great explosion followed by three months of lighted skies, and historical chronicles of the time were full of accounts and unusual explanations for the misunderstood phenomenon—many people believed that it meant that the world was coming to an end.

5. A “supernova” in line 1 is which of the following?
 - (A) The iron component of a star
 - (B) The core of a star
 - (C) The hydrogen in a star
 - (D) The explosion of a star
6. According to the passage, which of the following best describes the “Magellan Cloud” in line 7?
 - (A) A galaxy inside the Milky Way
 - (B) A cloud composed of hydrogen
 - (C) A galaxy near Earth’s galaxy
 - (D) A cloud in the sky above the Earth

7. Look at the expression **Milky Way** in paragraph 2. The **Milky Way** is
- part of Earth
 - a galaxy close to Earth
 - the galaxy that is home to Earth
 - a creamy-colored cloud in the sky
8. Click on the word in paragraph 2 that is closest in meaning to “unusual occurrence.”

SKILL 9: DETERMINE MEANINGS FROM WORD PARTS

When you are asked to determine the meaning of a long word that you do not know in the reading section of either the paper TOEFL test or the computer TOEFL test, it is sometimes possible to determine the meaning of the word by studying the word parts. Look at a multiple-choice example from the paper TOEFL test where the answer can be determined from a word part.

Example from the Paper TOEFL Test

The passage:

Ring Lardner was born into a wealthy, educated, and cultured family. For the bulk of his career, he worked as a reporter for newspapers in South Bend, Boston, St. Louis, and Chicago. However, it is for his short stories of lower middle-class Americans that Ring Lardner is perhaps best known. In these stories, Lardner vividly creates the language and the ambiance of this lower class, often using the misspelled words, grammatical errors, and incorrect diction that typified the language of the lower middle class.

The question:

The word “**vividly**” in line 6 is closest in meaning to

- (A) in a cultured way
- (B) in a correct way
- (C) in a lifelike way
- (D) in a brief way

This question asks about the meaning of the word *vividly*. To answer this question, you should notice that the word *vividly* contains the word part *viv-*, which means *life*. Answer (C) is therefore the best answer to this question.