

CHAPTER 1

WORD KNOWLEDGE

The Word Knowledge subtest of the ASVAB is about one thing only—knowing the meaning of words. You will be given a word and then asked to select the word that has the same meaning as that word. Alternately, you will be given a word and then asked to select the word that has the opposite meaning of that word.

The Word Knowledge subtest of the ASVAB is about one thing only—knowing the meaning of words.

ASVAB tip!

The Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score is computed using four subtests, including the Word Knowledge subtest. Your AFQT score is critical because you must have a minimum qualifying score in order to enlist.

Understanding Synonyms

SYNONYMS are words that have the same or nearly the same meaning. For example, the pairs of words below are synonyms:

SYNONYMS: words that have the same or nearly the same meaning

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| car—automobile | huge—gigantic | unclear—vague |
| cry—weep | destruction—devastation | envoy—agent |
| poke—jab | excitement—thrill | expansive—broad |
| construct—assemble | under—beneath | competition—match |

Often, synonyms can be used interchangeably. You could say that the instructions were *unclear* or *vague*. A movie made her *cry* or *weep*. The children loved the *excitement* or *thrill* of the fireworks.

Below are more examples of synonym pairs:

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| credible—plausible | temporary—interim | catapult—launch |
| doleful—sorrowful | wet—moist | traverse—cross |
| ghastly—dreadful | accomplice—partner in crime | couch—sofa |
| cynical—pessimistic | gloomy—bleak | aversion—distaste |
| beautiful—attractive | depart—exit | perfection—excellence |

A running list of synonyms

Start your own list of synonyms now. As you learn the meanings of new words, add them to the list.

In test questions about synonyms, you will be asked to choose the word with the meaning that is closest to that of the tested word. Four possible answer choices will follow. Read all the answer choices carefully. Let's try one together.

Example

Affluent most nearly means:

- A. painful
- B. wealthy
- C. pensive
- D. native

Which answer choice could be used interchangeably with affluent? The answer is B, wealthy. *Affluent* and *wealthy* mean nearly the same thing.

Synonyms galore

A thesaurus is a reference book containing lists of synonyms. If you look up the word *energetic*, you might find the following words: dynamic, lively, peppy, robust, tireless, and vigorous. You can also find synonyms in many dictionaries at the end of the word's entry.

Now you can try some.

Practice Test Questions

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1. <u>Defeat</u> most nearly means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Consider B. Devote C. Overcome D. Glare | <p>2. <u>Hazard</u> most nearly means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Duty B. Risk C. Occupation D. Chamber | <p>3. <u>Meddle</u> most nearly means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Interfere B. Reflect C. Merge D. Communicate |
|--|--|---|

Answer Key

1. **C. Overcome**

The word *overcome* has nearly the same meaning as the word *defeat*. They both mean *to win a victory over*.

2. **B. Risk**

The word *risk* has nearly the same meaning to the word *hazard*. They both mean *something that can cause harm*.

3. **A. Interfere**

The word *interfere* has nearly the same meaning as the word *meddle*. They both mean *to take part in someone's business without being asked*.

In other test questions, a word will be used in a sentence, and you will be asked to choose the synonym. If you don't know the answer, try substituting each answer choice for the word in the original sentence to see which answer choice has the same meaning.

For your convenience, the practice test questions also appear at the end of the book so you can sit down and go through them all at once.

The best study tool!

Each time you come across a new word, write it on an index card and write the meaning on the back. These will be your study flashcards. Create flashcards for words you see in this study guide (in this chapter and in all of the other chapters!), words you hear on the news, words you read in magazines—anywhere you see new words. Have friends or family members quiz you—or quiz yourself!

If you don't know the answer, try substituting each answer choice for the word in the original sentence to see which answer choice has the same meaning.

Example

Choose the word that has nearly the same meaning as the underlined word.

Sue will endeavor to teach her children patience.

- A. strive
- B. run
- C. fail
- D. allow

Which answer choice has nearly the same meaning as *endeavor*? Try substituting each answer choice in the original sentence. If the sentence doesn't make sense, you can eliminate that answer choice. ("Sue will *run* to teach her children patience?") The answer is A, *strive*. *Endeavor* and *strive* mean nearly the same thing. They both mean *to devote serious effort*.

ASVAB tip!

The CAT-ASVAB is the version of the ASVAB that is taken on a computer. It is an adaptive test, which means that the difficulty of the questions changes depending on how well you are doing.

Now you try some. Read the sentence and answer choices carefully.

Practice Test Questions

Choose the word that has nearly the same meaning as the underlined word.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>1. Rainy days make me feel <u>languid</u>.</p> <p>A. Ill</p> <p>B. Lazy</p> <p>C. Lonely</p> <p>D. Isolated</p> | <p>2. Young children are known for their <u>incessant</u> questions.</p> <p>A. Loud</p> <p>B. Nosy</p> <p>C. Endless</p> <p>D. Thoughtful</p> | <p>3. In the end, the accused was <u>vindicated</u>.</p> <p>A. Charged</p> <p>B. Condemned</p> <p>C. Apologetic</p> <p>D. Acquitted</p> |
|--|---|---|

Answer Key

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>1. B. Lazy</p> <p>The word <i>languid</i> means <i>sluggish</i> or <i>without energy</i>. The word that has nearly the same meaning as <i>languid</i> is <i>lazy</i>.</p> | <p>2. C. Endless</p> <p>The word <i>incessant</i> means <i>never ending</i> or <i>going on for a long time</i>. The word that has nearly the same meaning as <i>incessant</i> is <i>endless</i>.</p> | <p>3. D. Acquitted</p> <p>The word <i>vindicated</i> means <i>to be cleared from accusation or wrongdoing</i>. The word that has nearly the same meaning as <i>vindicated</i> is <i>acquitted</i>.</p> |
|---|---|---|

Look it up!

This study guide is a great source of new vocabulary. If you don't know the meaning of any word in any of the examples or practice test questions, look it up in the dictionary, and remember to create a flashcard for each new word that you learn.

Understanding Antonyms

ANTONYMS are words that have opposite meanings. For example, the pairs of words below are antonyms, or opposites:

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| delay—rush | pursue—abandon | straight—crooked |
| public—private | assurance—doubt | escalate—lessen |
| lackluster—shiny | identical—dissimilar | unrelated—kindred |
| genuine—counterfeit | climb—decline | clamorous—hushed |
| humane—cruel | prominent—unknown | irreverent—respectful |
| laborious—easy | mistreat—coddle | natural—synthetic |

ANTONYMS: words that have opposite meanings

In test questions about antonyms, you will be asked to choose the word that is the most opposite in meaning to the tested word. Let's try one together.

Example

The word most opposite in meaning to stormy is:

- A. unruly
- B. weathered
- C. brief
- D. calm

Which answer choice is the opposite of *stormy*? Think of a *stormy* relationship. Which answer choice is the most opposite in meaning? The answer is D, *calm*. *Stormy* means *marked by turmoil*. The word that is the opposite of *stormy* is *calm*.

Shuffling the deck

Review the vocabulary flashcards you created yesterday before learning new words today. Every few days, try shuffling the flashcards, and quiz yourself on the first 20 or 25 words.

Practice Test Questions

1. The word most opposite in meaning to stifle is:
 - A. Guide
 - B. Adjust
 - C. Smother
 - D. Encourage
2. The word most opposite in meaning to condone is:
 - A. Pardon
 - B. Rotate
 - C. Disapprove
 - D. Prevail
3. The word most opposite in meaning to reprimand is:
 - A. Chatter
 - B. Praise
 - C. Scold
 - D. Postpone
4. The word most opposite in meaning to spontaneous is:
 - A. Deliberate
 - B. Impulsive
 - C. Magnificent
 - D. Confined
5. The word most opposite in meaning to proponent is:
 - A. Adversary
 - B. Witness
 - C. Dependent
 - D. Supporter

Answer Key

1. **D. Encourage**
To *stifle* means *to quell or to end by force; to smother*. The opposite of *stifle* is *encourage*.
2. **C. Disapprove**
To *condone* means *to pardon or overlook*. The opposite of *condone* is *disapprove*.
3. **B. Praise**
To *reprimand* means *to scold or find fault with*. The opposite of *reprimand* is *praise*.
4. **A. Deliberate**
Spontaneous means *not planned or thought out in advance*. The opposite of *spontaneous* is *deliberate*.
5. **A. Adversary**
A proponent is *a person who supports a cause or a belief*. The opposite of *proponent* is *adversary*.

Think “opposite”

Be careful when answering questions that ask for a word that is the opposite. It is easy to choose a word that is a synonym by accident. Keep the word *opposite* in your mind as you examine each answer choice. When you think you have the correct answer, ask yourself, “Is this word the opposite of the tested word?”

Using Root Words

The key to expanding your vocabulary is learning **WORD ANALYSIS**: examining word parts for clues to a word's meaning. A **ROOT WORD** is a word part to which a prefix, suffix, or another word part must be added. A root cannot stand alone.

WORD ANALYSIS: examining word parts for clues to a word's meaning

Roots are the key

If you do only one thing to prepare for the Word Knowledge subtest, learn roots. Knowing roots allows you to figure out the meaning of many words you don't know.

ROOT WORD: a word part to which a prefix, suffix, or another word part must be added

Example

The word *dermatology* includes two root words: *derma* and *logy*.

Each root has a meaning, but neither of the roots can stand alone. Together, they make up a word.

Derma means *skin*.

logy means *study of*.

Dermatology is *the science or study of skin and skin diseases*.

Example

The word *incredulous* is made up of the prefix *in-*, the root word *cred*, and the suffix *-ous*.

The prefix *in-* means *not*.

The root *cred* means *believe*.

The suffix *-ous* means *full of*.

Incredulous means *not believable; unbelieving*.

ASVAB tip!

On the CAT-ASVAB, the Word Knowledge subtest is 8 minutes long and has 16 questions.

Many of the roots used in our words today originated in Latin and Greek. Begin by learning the Greek and Latin roots below.

| GREEK ROOTS | | |
|-------------|-------------------|--|
| Root | Meaning | Example |
| anthrop | human | anthropology, misanthropy |
| auto | self, alone | automobile, automatic, autonomous |
| bibl | book | bibliography, bibliophile |
| chron | time | chronology, chronicle |
| gen | birth, race | generation, genetics |
| graph | write | paragraph, autograph |
| ortho | straight, correct | orthodontist, orthography, orthopedist |
| phobia | fear | claustrophobia, acrophobia |
| therm | heat | thermometer, thermal, thermos |

Know your roots

In addition to creating flashcards for new words, create them for new roots. Write the root on the front of the index card. On the back, write the meaning, along with two or three words that contain the root.

| LATIN ROOTS | | |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Root | Meaning | Example |
| capt | take, hold, seize | capture, captivating |
| cede, ceed, cess | go, give way, yield | recession, proceed, exceed, recede |
| duc, duct | lead | conductor, induce, deduction |
| dys | abnormal, bad | dyspepsia, dyslexia, dystopia |
| ject | throw, hurl | eject, inject |
| port | carry | porter, portable |

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| | | |
|------------|-----------|------------------------|
| spec, spic | look, see | spectacle, conspicuous |
| voc, vok | call | vocation, invoke |
| vor, vour | eat | carnivorous, devour |

Searching for your roots...

This study guide lists common root words, but there are many, many more. To learn more root words, use an Internet search engine. Search for *root words* and you'll get hundreds of thousands of hits!

To practice using root words, try these test questions.

Practice Test Questions

1. **Recede means:**
 - A. Carry
 - B. Retreat
 - C. Seize
 - D. Throw
2. **Voracious means:**
 - A. Willing
 - B. Confused
 - C. Hungry
 - D. Exhausted
3. **Introspection means:**
 - A. Self-examination
 - B. Standard
 - C. Cumbersome
 - D. Go-between
4. **Dysfunctional means:**
 - A. Old-fashioned
 - B. Extreme
 - C. Broken
 - D. Appropriate
5. **Genocide means:**
 - A. The killing of an entire species of animals
 - B. The killing of a cultural, national, or racial group
 - C. The killing of an entire group of mammals
 - D. The killing of a species of plant

Answer Key

1. B. Retreat

Recede contains the root *cede*, meaning *go, give way, or yield*. Answer choice B, *retreat*, is another way of saying *to give way or to yield*. The root provides a clue to the correct answer. The definition of *recede* is *to move away from; retreat; withdraw*.

2. C. Hungry

Voracious contains the root word *vor*, meaning *eat*. Answer choice C, *hungry*, is related to eating. The root word provides a clue to the correct answer. The definition of *voracious* is *craving or consuming large amounts of food or exceedingly eager*.

3. A. Self-examination

Introspection contains the root word *spec*, meaning *to look or see*. The definition of *introspection* is *the act of looking within oneself*.

4. C. Broken

Dysfunctional contains the root *dys*, meaning *abnormal or bad*. The definition of *dysfunctional* is *not working normally or properly*.

5. B. The killing of a cultural, national, or racial group

The word *genocide* is made up of the root *gen-* which means *birth or race*. Answer choice B includes *racial group*. The root is a clue to the correct answer.

Latin and Greek roots are often found in words related to the sciences, such as medicine, and in words related to law, the government, and the military.

Here are a few medical terms and their root words:

| Root | Meaning | Medical Term |
|--------|---------------------------|--------------|
| algia- | pain | myalgia |
| arthr- | joint, limb | arthritis |
| dent- | of or pertaining to teeth | dentist |
| onco- | tumor, bulk, volume | oncology |

Here are a few related to law, the government, and the military:

| Root | Meaning | Military Term |
|--------|------------|-------------------|
| -cracy | government | autocracy |
| dem- | people | democracy |
| milit- | soldier | militia, military |
| jud- | law | judge, judiciary |

Using roots

Look at all of the tables of roots. Which other words can you think of that come from these roots?

Using Prefixes

A **PREFIX** is a word part added to the beginning of another word or word part. Knowing the meaning of a prefix can help you figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

Example

The prefix *sub-* means *under* or *below*.

When *sub-* is added to the base word *zero*, the definition changes. *Subzero* means *below zero*.

PREFIX: a word part added to the beginning of another word or word part

Here is a list of common prefixes and their meanings. You'll notice that some prefixes have more than one meaning.

| PREFIXES | | |
|----------|---|--------------------------|
| Prefix | Meaning | Example |
| ante- | before, prior to, in front of | antecedent, anteroom |
| bene- | good | benefit |
| circum- | around | circumvent |
| de- | away from, off, down, reverse action of | derail, decline, defrost |

A **base word** is a word that can stand alone, like *human*, *color*, or *learn*.

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| | | |
|--------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| hemi- | half | hemisphere |
| inter- | between, among | international |
| mal- | bad | maltreat |
| post- | after in time, space | postpone |
| super- | over and above, very large | supertanker |
| un- | not, reverse of | unhappy, unfasten |

To practice using words with prefixes, try these test questions. Remember to look for the prefix and think about its meaning. Does the prefix somehow help reveal the meaning of the word? Look for connections to the meaning of the prefix in the four answer choices.

Practice Test Questions

- Circumfluent** means:
 - Examining
 - Marching
 - Encompassing
 - Preventing
- Antebellum** means:
 - Before the war
 - Afternoon
 - Within reason
 - Around midnight
- Benevolent** means:
 - Greedy
 - Hungry
 - Confused
 - Compassionate

Answer Key

- C. Encompassing**
Circumfluent contains the prefix *circum-*, meaning *around*. Answer choice C, *encompassing*, means to *form circle around*. This answer choice is related to the prefix meaning *around*. The prefix provides a clue to the correct answer. *Circumfluent* means *flowing around; encompassing*.
- A. Before the war**
Antebellum contains the prefix *ante-*, meaning *before*. Answer choice A, *before the war*, includes the meaning of the prefix. The prefix provides a clue to the correct answer. *Antebellum* means *of or during the period before a war, especially the United States Civil War*.
- D. Compassionate**
Benevolent contains the prefix *bene-*, meaning *good*. The prefix provides a clue to the correct answer. *Benevolent* must be related to something good, such as the correct answer, *compassionate*.

Use it!

Use each new word that you learn immediately. For instance, send an email message to a friend and use the new word in a sentence. Or tell a family member about the new word, what it means, and when you might use it.

Using Suffixes

A **SUFFIX** is a word part added to the end of another word or word part. Suffixes are strong clues to a word’s meaning. They also determine the part of speech. For example, a suffix can make a word a noun, an adjective, a verb, or an adverb.

Example

The suffix *-ant* means *relating to*. It is a **NOUN SUFFIX**, a suffix that creates a word that is a noun.

When added to the word *occupy* (a verb), it becomes *occupant* (a noun).

Example

The suffix *-ish* means *pertaining to or like*. It is an **ADJECTIVE SUFFIX**, a suffix that creates a word that is an adjective.

When added to the word *fool* (a noun), it becomes *foolish* (an adjective).

SUFFIX: word part added to the end of another word or word part

NOUN SUFFIX: a suffix that creates a word that is a noun

ADJECTIVE SUFFIX: a suffix that creates a word that is an adjective

Here is a list of common suffixes and their meanings.

| SUFFIXES | | |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Suffix | Meaning | Example |
| -able, -ible | able to | understandable |
| -acious | full of | vivacious |
| -en | to become | widen |
| -fy | to make | simplify |
| -ible | able to | convertible |
| -ical | pertaining to | economical |
| -ism | doctrine | capitalism |
| -ize | to become | crystallize |

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| | | |
|-------|----------------|----------|
| -less | without | homeless |
| -most | at the extreme | topmost |
| -ous | full of | furious |
| -ward | toward | westward |

Know your prefixes and suffixes

Remember to create flashcards for prefixes and suffixes, too. Write the prefix or suffix on the front of the index card. On the back, write the meaning and at least one example. See how many examples you can think of.

To practice using words with suffixes, try the following test questions. Just like words with prefixes, remember to look for the suffix and think about its meaning. Does the suffix somehow help reveal the meaning of the word? Look for connections to the suffix meaning in the four answer choices.

Practice Test Questions

Choose the word that has nearly the same meaning as the underlined word.

- Maggie was hoping to modernize her kitchen.
 - To make modern
 - With modern features
 - Able to be modern
 - Toward a modern style
- Looking at the paper, Joe found it quite legible.
 - To become clear
 - With understanding
 - Able to be read
 - Pertaining to reading
- Jordan's boss describes him as ambitious.
 - Without ambition
 - Like an ambition
 - Pertaining to ambition
 - Full of ambition
- John studied Thatcherism in his government class.
 - The former leader, Margaret Thatcher
 - The doctrine of Margaret Thatcher
 - The biography of Margaret Thatcher
 - The family of Margaret Thatcher

Answer Key

1. **A. To make modern**

The suffix *-ize* means *to become*. When added to the base word *modern*, the definition is *to make or become modern*.

2. **C. Able to be read**

The suffix *-ible* means *able to*. When added to the root word *leg-* (meaning *read*), the definition is *able to be read*.

3. **D. Full of ambition**

The suffix *-ous* means *full of*. When added to the base word *ambition*, the definition is *full of ambition*.

4. **B. The doctrine of Margaret Thatcher**

Because the suffix *-ism* means *doctrine of*, we know that the word's meaning is *the doctrine of Margaret Thatcher*.

Don't miss out on the chance to learn a new word

Is a word in the table of suffixes new to you? Did you not know the meaning of an answer choice in one of the practice test questions? Look up the meaning of each word that's new to you and then create a flashcard for it. It might be on the test!

Understanding Word Forms

Sometimes a familiar word can appear as a different part of speech. For example, many people might have heard that *fraud* involves a criminal misrepresentation, so when it appears as the adjective *fraudulent* (e.g., "He was suspected of *fraudulent* activities"), it is possible to make an educated guess about the meaning.

Sometimes a familiar word can appear as a different part of speech.

Example

You might not know the word *turbulent*, but you've probably heard of *turbulence* on airplanes. Thinking about the word *turbulence*, what might be the meaning of the word *turbulent*? Perhaps *bumpy*, *rough*, or *shaky*? In fact, those are all synonyms for *turbulent*. The definition of *turbulent* is *characterized by confusion or disorder*.

Mnemoni-what?

A mnemonic is any technique that helps you remember. There are lots of silly mnemonics you can use to help you learn new vocabulary. To remember the meaning of *grapple* (to grip or hold), you could think, "I grapple an apple." To remember the meaning of *parallel*, you could imagine the *ll* in the word *parallel* as parallel lines. To remember that *advent* means beginning, you could remember that *advent* begins with the first letter of the alphabet.