



Prepped & Polished, LLC

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Hi. I'm Terri, with Prepped & Polished in South Natick, Massachusetts. Today, I'm going to share some power strategies with you to help you master synonyms on the ISEE and the SSAT. Synonym questions make up 50% of the verbal reasoning portion on both tests. It's to your advantage to assimilate these power strategies and make them work for you.

Let's talk a little bit about format. All synonym questions have a stem word in capital letters, followed by 4 answer choices on the ISEE and 5 answer choices on the SSAT. Your task is to select the answer choice that is closest in meaning to the stem word. Let's try that out with Power Strategy #1.

When you know the stem word, cover the answer choices, and then think of a word, phrase or definition closest in meaning to the stem word. Then look for that word among the answer choices. For 'bizarre', you think to yourself, "Strange is close in meaning," then you're going to uncover the answer choices. 'Only' doesn't work, 'unable', 'found'. The closest in meaning to 'strange' is 'odd'; there's your answer.

Power Strategy #2: If you don't know the stem word, try to think of a context that you know. Have you heard the word before? Have you read the word before? Let's try two examples. 'Abate': Maybe you've heard a weather person say, "The storm will abate by midnight," and you took that to mean 'reduce in intensity' or 'lessen'. Let's see if any of the choices match that. Not 'pretend', not 'finalize', not 'endanger', or 'oppose'. 'Decrease' would be the right answer. How about 'surrogate'? Perhaps you've heard of a surrogate mother, a substitute mother, and we actually see that word for Choice E. We know right away, right off the bat, that that's the correct answer. Done.

Power Strategy #3: Positive/Negative. If a stem word is positive, then the answer choice must be positive. If a stem word is negative, the answer choice must be negative. Let's look at an example: 'Belligerent', is a negative word. I don't know if you're familiar with 'bell-', a word part, but that means war-like. Belligerent is a negative word. It helps if you put + and - signs next to the words to see which are positive and negative. We can get rid of A, C, and E right off the bat, and we're less with 'messy' and 'antagonistic'. Belligerent is closest in meaning to antagonistic, so D is the correct answer.



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Power Strategy #4: Word Parts. Word parts can give you powerful clues to figure out the meaning of words. Prefixes come at the beginning of words, suffixes are at the end, and a root can be in any part of the word. Let's look at a few examples. Apathy: The prefix 'A' means without, '-pathy' means feelings or emotions, so 'without feelings or emotions'. Let's look at the choices: Sorrow, ability, sickness, inconvenience; indifference is the closest in meaning to 'without feelings', so E would be the correct answer.

How about monotonous? 'Mono' means one and 'tone' has to do with sound. If you heard one sound over and over, it would be annoying and it would also be repetitious. We know that D, 'repetitious', would be the correct answer, and that's how word parts can help you.

Power Strategy #5: Eliminate. Use all of the power strategies to help you eliminate. Cross out answers that are farthest from the meaning of the stem word. This is a real timesaver and will keep you on track. Remember on the ISEE, always guess. There's no penalty for guessing so you can even take a wild guess if you don't know the answer. On the SSAT, guess after eliminating at least 2 answer choices.

Here's a bonus tip for you: Of course, the best way to excel on the SSAT and ISEE with synonyms is to read all kinds of material, whether it be literature, magazines, editorials, newspapers. Look up unfamiliar words right away and add them to your growing vocabulary. You never know, you might see one of those words on the ISEE or SSAT synonym portion. I hope these power strategies will help you to get your best score on the synonym section of the ISEE and the SSAT. Power-up and good luck.