

Analogies

An analogy is a form of comparison in which one part of the comparison is used to explain the other part. Analogies use logic to create relationships between words or concepts, and they can be set up as a problem, a paragraph, and an entire story or essay. There are tricks to solving analogies that are set up as problems:

Example 1. thieves : den :: cards : _____ (possible answers: gambling, deck, ace)

- In the example above, the single colon = “*is (are) to*” while the double colon = “*the same way*”
- This analogy problem translates to: “thieves *are* to den *the same way* cards are to _____.
- To solve this, notice that there is a corresponding relationship between the plurals “thieves” and “cards” so there probably is a singular relationship between den and _____.
- There is no relationship between *gambling* and *cards* that corresponds to *thieves* and *den* so we can eliminate *gambling*. However, *thieves* are found inside a *den*. An *ace* is a type of card, but we are looking at a relationship whereby *card*, like *thieves* are in something. What are cards *in*? A *deck*, which is the correct answer

Often analogies draw relationships between antonyms, synonyms, relationships between people and other relationships where you have to select the *best* answer.

Example 2. good : evil :: _____ : saintly (possible answers: bad, horrible, perfect)

- Good and evil are opposites. Perfect has no opposite relationship with saintly, so that doesn’t work.
- The answer is *bad*; it most closely resembles *good*; horrible is just a greater degree of “badness.”

Example 3. Ceasar : Lincoln :: _____ : Booth (choices: Table, Leader, Brutus)

If you learned your American history, you know that John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln so the answer can’t be *Table* or *Leader* because there is no relationship between these words and *any* of the others. Brutus assassinated Ceasar, so that is the correct answer.

- Notice that in all three examples, the answer is the same part of speech as its corresponding word. That is, *den* and *deck* are both nouns; *bad* and *good* are both adjectives; and *Brutus* and *Ceasar* are both Proper Nouns. This is a helpful when you are given an analogy with several choices to choose from and you aren’t sure what certain words and/or relationships mean.

In the example below, the 12-month calendar is compared to the duration of geological time.

In like manner, geologists will sometimes use the calendar year as a unit to represent the time scale, and in such terms the Precambrian runs from New Year’s Day until well after Halloween. Dinosaurs appear in the middle of December and are gone the day after Christmas. Human beings arrive a couple hours before New Year’s.

In an **argumentative essay**, you have to be careful using analogies because if an analogy's logic does not create a strong relationship between concepts, you will have a false argument, or fallacy. Look at this sentence about a man unhappy with a neighbor screaming at his dog

“The way my neighbor treats my dog is akin to the way Hitler treated the Jews during the Holocaust.”

The analogy fails to recognize that his neighbor is rude, but has hardly done anything organized to force him into slave labor, or kill him. Indeed, although dramatic analogies can make certain rhetoric memorable, they are often weak arguments because they are often easy to refute.