

9 Analogies and Figurative Language

6.3 b

Authors use **figurative language** to describe one thing in terms of another. To understand the comparison, you must identify what the two have in common. For example, “Susan is a lion out on the field today.” The speaker is probably trying to say that Susan is playing fiercely, not that she is eating small animals. (*Note:* You will learn more about different types of figurative language in Lesson 16.)

Analogies are similar to figurative language. The author uses them to make a comparison, too. But the relationship is often more detailed or complicated. Figurative language is often used as a memorable image or a quick description. An analogy is often used to explain an idea or support an argument. For example, Mark Twain said:

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.

Twain wanted to persuade people to choose their words carefully. Lightning is dramatic and powerful, while lightning bugs are small and weak. Twain’s analogy states that the same difference applies to the right word and the almost right word.

Example

The author’s statement that “fishing gear is like a wild stallion” suggests that the gear is—

- (A) very expensive.
- (C) powerful and not easy to control.
- (B) designed only for men to use.
- (D) not meant to be used for long.

D I S C U S S	<p>(A) The equipment may be costly. But <i>expensive</i> is not a trait normally associated with wild horses. This is an unlikely choice.</p> <p>(B) Stallions are male horses, and there are few women in fishing. But this relationship does not make sense.</p>	<p>(C) Wild horses would be hard to control. The rest of the paragraph describes how dangerous and fast the fishing lines are, so this choice makes sense.</p> <p>(D) The article describes how fishermen work for days or even a month out at sea. This choice cannot be true.</p>
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Connections Think of an admirable characteristic that you or someone you know has shown. What comparison would you make to describe it? For example, people once said that someone trustworthy was “as honest as the day is long.”

In school and on tests, you may be asked questions about analogies directly. The usual form for a complete analogy is—

hungry : famished :: tired : exhausted

You can read the analogy as “hungry is related to famished as tired is related to exhausted.” In this case, the relationship is one of *degree*. “Famished” means “extremely hungry,” just as “exhausted” means “extremely tired.”

Many relationships can be tested with analogy questions. Here are a few common examples.

Relationship	What It Means	Example
Synonyms	The words mean about the same thing	teacher : instructor
Antonyms	The words mean about the opposite	frosty : fiery
Actor/action	People or objects and what they do	heart : beat
Source/product	An object and what is made from it	clay : pot
Part/whole	A piece and what it is part of	musician : band
Home	A living being and where it lives	whale : ocean
Example	An example or type of a broader group	rap : music
Cause/effect	An action and the result of that action	sleepy : yawn
Degree	Things that differ in “how much”	smart : brilliant

Example

Which word BEST completes the following analogy?

Halloween Storm : wind :: swordfishing line :

- (A) hooks
- (B) heavy
- (C) swordboat
- (D) rain

D I S C U S S	<p>(A) Wind was an important <i>part of</i> the Halloween Storm. Hooks are an important <i>part of</i> swordfishing line. The relationship is the same.</p>	<p>(C) Swordfishing line is <i>part of</i> a swordboat. But look at the analogy again. The second item (wind) is part of the first (the storm), not the other way around.</p>
	<p>(B) Heavy <i>describes</i> swordfishing line. But wind is <i>part of</i> the Halloween Storm, not a description of it.</p>	<p>(D) Rain, like wind, is <i>part of</i> a storm. But that is not what the question asks for. The answer must relate to <i>swordfishing line</i>.</p>