

GRE Verbal Practice Test 30

Reading Comprehension

RC- 1

That placebos can cure everything from dandruff to leprosy is well known. They have a long history of use by witch doctors, faith healers, and even modern physicians, all of whom refuse to admit their efficacy. Modern distribution techniques can bring this most potent of medicines to the aid of everyone, not just those lucky enough to receive placebos in a medical testing program.

Every drug tested would prove effective if special steps were not taken to neutralize the placebo effect, so drug tests give half the patients new medication and half a harmless substitute. These tests prove the value of placebos, because approximately five percent of patients taking them are cured, even though the placebos are made from substances carefully selected to be useless.

Many feel the lucky patients in a drug test get the experimental drug, because the real drug provides them a chance to be cured. (1) Yet analysis shows that patients getting the placebo may be the lucky ones, because they may be cured without any adverse effects the drug may have.

Placebos would cure considerably more patients if the doubts associated with the tests were eliminated. Cures are principally due to the patient's faith, (2) yet since a patient knows the probability of being given a true drug is about fifty percent, the placebo cure rate would be higher by removing these doubts. This suggests that cure rates in the ten percent range could be expected if patients are given placebos under the guise of a proven cure, even when patients know their problems are incurable.

It may take a while to reach the ten percent level of cure, because any newly established program will not have cultivated the word-of-mouth advertising needed to ensure its success. One person saying “I was told that my problem was beyond medical help, but they cured me,” can direct countless people to the treatment with the required degree of faith. Furthermore, when only terminal illnesses are treated, those not cured tell no one of the failure.

Unfortunately, placebo treatment centers cannot operate as nonprofit businesses. Public health services know that medicine not paid for by patients is often not taken or not effective because the recipient feels the medicine is worth just what it cost him. Therefore, though it is against higher principles, treatment centers must charge high fees for placebo treatments. This sacrifice, however, is a small price to pay for the greater good of the patients.

1. Which one of the following best expresses the main idea of the passage?
 - (A) Placebo treatment is a proven tool of modern medicine and its expanded use would benefit society’s health.
 - (B) Because modern technology allows for distribution of drugs on a massive scale, the proven efficacy of the placebo is no longer limited to a privileged few.
 - (C) The curative power of the placebo is so strong that it should replace proven drugs because the patients receiving the placebo will then be cured without risking any adverse side effects.
 - (D) The price of placebo treatment must be kept artificially high because patients have little faith in inexpensive treatments.
 - (E) Semi-placebos—drugs that contain only a small amount of the usual dosage—are even more effective curatives than either the placebo or the full-strength drug.
2. Which one of the following is most analogous to the idea presented in the last paragraph?
 - (A) Buying a television at a discount house
 - (B) Making an additional pledge to charity
 - (C) Choosing the most expensive dishwasher in a manufacturer’s line

- (D) Waiting until a book comes out in paperback
 - (E) Contributing one dollar to the Presidential Campaign fund on your tax return
3. According to the passage, when testing a new drug, medical researchers give half of the subjects the test drug and half a placebo because
- (A) proper statistical controls should be observed.
 - (B) this method reduces the risk of maiming too many subjects if the drug should prove to be harmful.
 - (C) all drugs which are tested would prove to be effective otherwise.
 - (D) most drugs would test positively otherwise.
 - (E) the cost of dispensing drugs to all the patients is prohibitive.
4. It can be inferred from the passage that the author might
- (A) believe that the benefits of a placebo treatment program which leads patients to believe they were getting a real drug would outweigh the moral issue of lying.
 - (B) support legislation outlawing the use of placebos.
 - (C) open up a medical clinic that would treat patients exclusively through placebo methods.
 - (D) believe that factors other than faith are responsible for the curative power of the placebo.
 - (E) believe that placebo treatment centers should be tax-exempt because they are nonprofit businesses.
5. Which one of the following best describes the organization of the material presented in the passage?
- (A) A general proposition is stated; then evidence for its support is given.
 - (B) Two types of drug treatment—placebo and non-placebo—are compared and contrasted.
 - (C) A result is stated, its cause is explained, and an application is suggested.
 - (D) A dilemma is presented and a possible solution is offered.
 - (E) A series of examples is presented; then a conclusion is drawn from them.
6. Which one of the following most accurately characterizes the author's attitude toward placebo treatment?
- (A) reserved advocacy
 - (B) feigned objectivity
 - (C) summary dismissal
 - (D) perplexed by its effectiveness
 - (E) zealous promotion

RC #2

Many readers, I suspect, will take the title of this article [Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things](#) as suggesting that women, fire, and dangerous things have something in common—say, that women are fiery and dangerous. Most feminists I've mentioned it to have loved the title for that reason, though some have hated it for the same reason. But the chain of inference—from conjunction to categorization to commonality—is the norm. The inference is based on the common idea of what it means to be in the same category: things are categorized together on the basis of what they have in common. The idea that categories are defined by common properties is not only our everyday folk theory of what a category is, it is also the principle technical theory—one that has been with us for more than two thousand years.

The classical view that categories are based on shared properties is not entirely wrong. We often do categorize things on that basis. But that is only a small part of the story. In recent years it has become clear that categorization is far more complex than that. A new theory of categorization, called prototype theory, has emerged. It shows that human categorization is based on principles that extend far beyond those envisioned in the classical theory. One of our goals is to survey the complexities of the way people really categorize. For example, the title of this book was inspired by the Australian aboriginal language Dyirbal, which has a category, *balan*, that actually includes women, fire, and dangerous things. It also includes birds that are not dangerous, as well as exceptional animals, such as the platypus, bandicoot, and echidna. This is not simply a matter of categorization by common properties.

Categorization is not a matter to be taken lightly. There is nothing more basic than categorization to our thought, perception, action and speech. Every time we see something as a kind of thing, for example, a tree, we are categorizing. Whenever we reason about kinds of things—chairs, nations, illnesses, emotions, any kind of thing at all—we are employing categories. Whenever we intentionally perform any kind of action, say something as mundane as writing with a pencil, hammering with a hammer, or

ironing clothes, we are using categories. The particular action we perform on that occasion is a kind of motor activity, that is, it is in a particular category of motor actions. They are never done in exactly the same way, yet despite the differences in particular movements, they are all movements of a kind, and we know how to make movements of that kind. And any time we either produce or understand any utterance of any reasonable length, we are employing dozens if not hundreds of categories: categories of speech sounds, of words, of phrases and clauses, as well as conceptual categories. Without the ability to categorize, we could not function at all, either in the physical world or in our social and intellectual lives.

1. Consider all three answer choices and select all that apply.
The author probably chose Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things as the title of the article because
 - (A) he thought that since the Dyirbal placed all three items in the same category, women, fire, and dangerous things necessarily had something in common.
 - (B) he was hoping to draw attention to the fact that because items have been placed in the same category doesn't mean that they necessarily have anything in common
 - (C) he wanted to use the Dyirbal classification system as an example of how primitive classifications are not as functional as contemporary Western classification systems.
2. Consider all three answer choices and select all that apply.
According to the author,
 - (A) categorizing is a fundamental activity of people.
 - (B) whenever a word refers to a kind of thing, it signifies a category.
 - (C) one has to be able to categorize in order to function in our culture.
3. Which one of the following facts would most weaken the significance of the author's title?
 - (A) The discovery that all the birds and animals classified as balan in Dyirbal are female
 - (B) The discovery that the male Dyirbal culture considers females to be both fiery and dangerous
 - (C) The discovery that all items in the balan category are considered female
 - (D) The discovery that neither fire nor women are considered dangerous

- (E) The discovery that other cultures have categories similar to the balan category
4. If linguistic experts cannot perceive how women, fire, and dangerous things in the category balan have at least one thing in common, it follows that
- (A) there probably is something other than shared properties that led to all items in balan being placed in that category.
 - (B) the anthropologists simply weren't able to perceive what the items had in common.
 - (C) the anthropologists might not have been able to see what the items had in common.
 - (D) the items do not have anything in common.
 - (E) the Australian aboriginal culture is rather mystic.
5. Which one of the following sentences would best complete the last paragraph of the passage?
- (A) An understanding of how we categorize is central to any understanding of how we think and how we function, and therefore central to an understanding of what makes us human.
 - (B) The prototype theory is only the latest in a series of new and improved theories of categorization; undoubtedly even better theories will replace it.
 - (C) The prototype theory of categories has not only unified a major branch of linguistics, but it has applications to mathematics and physics as well.
 - (D) An understanding of how the prototype theory of categorization evolved from the classical theory is essential to any understanding of how we think and how we function in society.
 - (E) To fully understand how modern Australian society functions, we must study how it is influenced by aboriginal culture—most specifically how aborigines organize and classify their surroundings.