Comprehensive Drill: Module 2, Set 1

Now the hardest version. Here are twenty Words in Context questions at the level of the harder Module 2, built the same way as the Module 1 drill: each one starts from an official question, the official answer appears as a wrong choice, and one of the official wrong choices is the answer. Knowing that won't help you much. Many of the right words are rarer, the clues often sit a sentence away from the blank, more of the wrong answers fit half of the clue, and two questions ask what a word in an older text most nearly means. Use the same three steps: find the clue, predict, match. When you meet a word you don't know, test the ones you do. Give yourself 18 minutes, about 54 seconds a question.

Question 1

To swimmers, the smooth patch of water that often marks a rip current can be _____. Waves break less over the deeper channel the current has carved, so the spot looks calmer than the water on either side of it, yet the current there can pull a swimmer away from shore faster than most people can swim.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) deceptive — *misleading; giving a false impression*
B) innocuous — *harmless*
C) turbulent — *rough; moving violently*
D) stagnant — *not flowing; still*

Question 2

The catalog for a museum's exhibition of one painter's late work offers only _____ treatment of her final decade: it lists all forty canvases she completed after 1950 but devotes barely a sentence to any of them, and it never asks why her style changed so abruptly in those years.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) a tendentious — *slanted to push a point of view*
B) a superficial — *shallow; lacking depth*
C) an exhaustive — *complete; thorough*
D) an effusive — *gushing; lavish in praise*

Question 3

The following text is adapted from T. Gilbert Pearson's 1917 book *The Bird Study Book*. Pearson, an ornithologist who refers to himself as "the writer," is discussing birds that do not find mates.

Just what percent of the bird life is unmated in any one season it would, of course, be impossible to tell. The information which the writer has gathered by a careful census of a certain species in a given limited territory enabled him to determine that in this particular case only about three-fifths of the individuals are mated any one season.

As used in the text, what does the word "determine" most nearly mean?

A) Ordain — *decree; order officially*
B) Dictate — *control; command*
C) Conclude — *decide by reasoning from evidence*
D) Intend — *plan; mean to do*

Question 4

When the first preserved platypus reached Britain from Australia in 1799, some European naturalists _____ the evidence of their own eyes: suspecting that a prankster had attached a duck's bill to the skin of a furry mammal, one examiner even searched the specimen for stitches before accepting that the creature was real.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) discounted — *dismissed as unreliable*
B) heeded — *paid attention to; took into account*
C) embellished — *added details or decoration to*
D) exploited — *used for one's own gain*

Question 5

Researchers who study animal cognition have found domestic cats to be _____ subjects. In several recent studies, a large share of the cats tested refused to take part, hid, or lost interest in the experimenter's cues, so the researchers ended up with usable data from only about half of the animals.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) skittish — *nervous; easily frightened*
B) recalcitrant — *stubbornly uncooperative*
C) sanguine — *cheerfully optimistic*
D) truculent — *aggressively defiant*

Question 6

In news reports, tsunamis were long _____ tidal waves, although a tsunami has nothing to do with the tides: it is set off by an earthquake, a landslide, or a volcanic eruption beneath the sea, while tides are raised by the gravitational pull of the Moon and the Sun.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) demarcated from — *clearly set apart from*
B) precipitated by — *suddenly caused by*
C) juxtaposed with — *placed side by side with*
D) conflated with — *mistakenly treated as the same as*

Question 7

When chemists Martin Fleischmann and Stanley Pons announced in 1989 that they had achieved nuclear fusion at room temperature, the news caused a sensation. The claim soon collapsed, however, because the results were not _____: laboratory after laboratory followed the pair's procedure and detected none of the excess heat they had reported.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) falsifiable — *capable of being proven false*
B) replicable — *able to be reproduced*
C) latent — *present but hidden*
D) spurious — *false; not genuine*

Question 8

In a 1930 lecture later published as "The Crystal Goblet," typographer Beatrice Warde argued that the highest virtue of printed type is its _____. Just as a wine lover prefers a glass of clear crystal, which shows off the wine rather than itself, a reader is best served, Warde said, by type that carries the words to the mind without drawing attention to the letters.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) versatility — *ability to serve many uses*
B) delicacy — *fineness; fragility*
C) ambiguity — *unclear or double meaning*
D) inconspicuousness — *not attracting attention*

Question 9

The search for the sunken steamer was at first _____. For years, divers checked whichever sites local fishermen happened to mention, keeping no record of where they had already looked, and only after a survey team divided the seabed into a numbered grid did the effort begin to make steady progress.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) protracted — *drawn out; lasting a long time*
B) notional — *existing only in theory*
C) desultory — *aimless; lacking a plan or method*
D) methodical — *orderly; systematic*

Question 10

The ocean sunfish, a giant, flattened fish of temperate and tropical seas, is remarkable for its _____: a single female has been found carrying an estimated 300 million eggs, more than any other known vertebrate.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) fecundity — *ability to produce many offspring*
B) ubiquity — *presence everywhere*
C) longevity — *long life*
D) voracity — *huge appetite*

Question 11

Although they were written in London during the bombing raids of 1940 and 1941, one garden writer's diaries seem strangely _____ the war. Page after page records her plantings, her reading, and her quarrels with her publisher, while the air raids that shook the city night after night go almost unmentioned.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) ambivalent about — *having mixed feelings about*
B) manifest in — *clearly visible in*
C) insensible to — *unaware of; unaffected by*
D) interrupted by — *broken off by*

Question 12

The following text is from Samuel Butler's 1872 novel *Erewhon* (revised in 1901). The narrator has been presenting, in translation, a treatise by an Erewhonian writer who warned that machines would one day become more powerful than the people who made them.

This was the conclusion of the attack which led to the destruction of machinery throughout Erewhon. There was only one serious attempt to answer it. Its author said that machines were to be regarded as a part of man's own physical nature, being really nothing but extra-corporeal limbs. Man, he said, was a machinate mammal.

As used in the text, what does the word "answer" most nearly mean?

A) Acknowledge — *admit; recognize*
B) Rebut — *argue against; try to disprove*
C) Fulfill — *satisfy; carry out*
D) Obey — *do as commanded*

Question 13

Common vampire bats often share regurgitated blood with roostmates that have failed to find a meal. In a 2013 study, Gerald Carter and Gerald Wilkinson found that how much one bat gave a hungry partner depended less on how closely the two were related than on how much food that partner had given it in the past: the bats, it seems, tend to _____ the generosity they have received.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) reciprocate — *return in kind*
B) buttress — *support; strengthen*
C) squander — *waste*
D) exploit — *take unfair advantage of*

Question 14

Barred from university work by Italy's antisemitic laws, neurobiologist Rita Levi-Montalcini _____ a laboratory in her own bedroom during the Second World War: she sharpened sewing needles into surgical tools and studied chick embryos under a microscope.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) commandeered — *seized for one's own use*
B) surmised — *guessed*
C) envisioned — *imagined; pictured in the mind*
D) contrived — *devised or built cleverly*

Question 15

Whether the Parthenon Sculptures in the British Museum should be returned to Greece has long been _____ question. Greek governments have formally requested the sculptures' return since 1983, while the museum has maintained that they were acquired legally in the early 1800s and belong in a collection that tells the story of the whole world.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) a rhetorical — *asked for effect, not for an answer*
B) an arduous — *very difficult and tiring*
C) a contentious — *causing disagreement; disputed*
D) an academic — *scholarly; purely theoretical*

Question 16

Though their rivalry over how to classify a group of tropical orchids was intense, the two botanists never sought to _____ each other's work in print; each praised the other's field studies as the most careful of their time, even while disagreeing sharply about what those studies showed.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) lionize — *treat as a celebrity; praise highly*
B) disparage — *belittle; speak of as worthless*
C) stymie — *block; hinder*
D) replicate — *reproduce; repeat*

Question 17

For centuries, the low, droning hum that some desert dunes give off when sand slides down their slopes struck travelers as _____; Marco Polo, finding no natural cause for such sounds, attributed them to spirits. Only in recent decades have physicists begun to account for the phenomenon, many of them linking it to grains of sand moving in step as they avalanche downhill.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) melodious — *tuneful; pleasant to hear*
B) inventive — *creative; original*
C) deafening — *extremely loud*
D) inexplicable — *impossible to explain*

Question 18

Seeking _____ the dioramas he conceived for the American Museum of Natural History's Hall of African Mammals, taxidermist Carl Akeley developed a method of sculpting each animal's body from measurements taken in the field, and he brought artists to Africa to paint studies for the backgrounds at the very places the scenes would depict.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) grandeur in — *magnificence; splendor*
B) paucity of — *scarcity of*
C) verisimilitude in — *the appearance of being real*
D) novelty in — *newness; originality*

Question 19

During Prohibition, when the sale of alcoholic drinks was banned throughout the United States from 1920 to 1933, some Americans found a legal way to _____ the ban: the law still allowed doctors to prescribe whiskey as medicine, and many pharmacies did a brisk trade in filling such prescriptions.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) ratify — *formally approve*
B) flout — *openly disregard (a rule)*
C) corroborate — *confirm with evidence*
D) circumvent — *find a way around*

Question 20

Because the length of daylight in Singapore, which lies just north of the equator, varies by less than ten minutes over the course of a year, the city's location has long _____ any need for daylight saving time: there is no long summer day whose extra light could be shifted into the evening.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) obviated — *made unnecessary*
B) precipitated — *caused suddenly*
C) superseded — *replaced; taken the place of*
D) abrogated — *formally abolished; repealed*