
Mastering Difficult Vocabulary

“Too many students do not possess the vocabulary and do not understand the various nuances of language to be able to read imaginative literature.”

—The College Board

In This Chapter

Overview

Vocabulary List

My Own Vocabulary List

OVERVIEW

The following words were chosen from AP Lit released exams because they are generally difficult, may be archaic in meaning or have a specific cultural meaning.

The purpose of this list is not to imply that these words will show up on future exams, but to suggest that in order for you to confidently deal with complex texts, you need to have a fairly extensive vocabulary, not just words you know the meanings of, but words you are comfortable using in a variety of contexts.



When you are confronted with a word you don't know on the exam, try to determine the meaning from context clues. If that does not work, it might be safe to ignore the word and focus on the overall meaning of the passage.

VOCABULARY LIST

1. adamantine (adj): (from the noun adamant, which is a hard, crystallized carbon) firm in attitude or opinion, unyielding (contemporary usage: adamant, meaning firm, unyielding)
2. admonish (verb): to scold, censor
3. amorphous (adj): without shape or form
4. animal husbandry (noun): the practice of breeding and raising livestock (also called animal science)
5. apostles (noun): the 12 men who were Jesus's "entourage"
6. austere (adj)/austerity (noun): severe or stern in disposition or appearance, having great self denial (materialistically)
7. bade (verb): to order, to instruct
8. belies (verb): contradicts
9. bellicose (adj): loud, argumentative, prone to fighting
10. benign (adj): harmless
11. bosom (noun): the chest, typically a woman's and place of warmth and love
12. chaste (adj): pure, virginal



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12. chaste (adj): pure, virginal
13. chasten (verb): to chastise, castigate, correct
14. couch, couched (verb): to word in a certain manner
15. cultivate (verb): to grow, to nurture
16. curate, curates: (noun): a clergyman; (verb): to direct or manage a museum or an exhibit
17. damask (noun): a fabric of linen or cotton or silk or wool with a reversible pattern woven into it
18. degenerate (verb): to degrade or lessen in value; (noun): a morally bankrupt person, a profligate
19. deity (noun): a god
20. din (noun): loud, raucous noise
21. dumb (adj): mute, unable to speak
22. effeminate (adj): having feminine qualities, generally only used to describe men
23. eminent (adj)/eminence (noun): distinguished, having high stature
24. emulate (verb): to imitate or copy (as with a role model)
25. entreat (verb)/entreaty (noun): to beg/begging
26. equinox (noun): either of two times of the year when the sun crosses the plane of the earth's equator and day and night are of equal length
27. facility (noun)/facile (adj): adeptness/with ease
28. faculty (noun): ability, power
29. homage (noun): respect, honor
30. hutch (noun): a cupboard for dishes or rabbits
31. impervious (adj): not able to be penetrated

32. impious (adj): irreverent
33. indefatigable (adj): inability to tire, tireless
34. indict (verb)/indictment (noun): to charge, to accuse/a charge or accusation
35. inherent (adj)/inherently (adverb): integral, intrinsic/in an inherent manner
36. jocund (adj): merry, mirthful, gay
37. languor (noun): state of ease, rest, even listlessness
38. lentils (noun): small split pea-like legume
39. lethargic (adj): tired, listless
40. lore (noun): traditional knowledge, passed on through fables, stories, etc.
41. mien (noun): bearing, presence, manner
42. naivete (noun)/naïve (adj): innocence, inexperience
43. nascent (adj): emerging, newly born or created
44. ordain (verb): to appoint to a clerical post (minister, priest) or to order due to superior authority
45. parody (verb or noun): to spoof, to mock; a parody is a text meant to spoof or mock (a form of satire)
46. phenomenon (noun): a remarkable development
47. piety (noun): righteousness, godliness
48. plight (noun): predicament, quandary, difficulty
49. pretense (noun): deception, deceit
50. primeval (adj): aboriginal, primordial, primal (first)
51. prodigy (noun): genius, especially a gifted child
52. proffer (verb): to suggest, to propose

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53. profundity (noun): intellectual depth; penetrating knowledge; keen insight; etc
54. promulgate (verb): to proclaim or exclaim
55. prowess (noun): special skill
56. quarry (noun): prey, victim; also a pit where gravel or ore is mined
57. raiment (noun): especially fine or decorative clothing
58. reap (verb): to gather, glean, harvest
59. reticent (adj)/reticence (noun): shyness, unwillingness
60. rheumatism (noun): painful disorder of the joints or muscles or connective tissues
61. sable (noun): as a color, dark, black-brown, fur from the animal sable
62. scourge (noun): bane, curse, affliction or a whip, lash, punishment
63. sepulcher (noun): burial chamber, tomb
64. sire (noun and verb): a father; to father, engender
65. supine (adj): lying prone, flat, especially in humility
66. suppliant (verb and noun): to petition or beseech, one who begs for intercession
67. surplice (noun): a loose-fitting white ecclesiastical vestment with wide sleeves
68. temper, tempered (verb): toughen (steel or glass) by a process of gradually heating and cooling
69. timorous (adj): timid, fearful, apprehensive
70. tinged (adj): slightly touched with
71. tumult (noun): tumultuous (adj): uproar, disturbance

- 72. vehement (adj)/vehemence (noun): marked by extreme intensity of emotions or convictions; inclined to react violently
- 73. veracity (noun): truthfulness
- 74. vocation (noun): a calling, such as the ministry; a job one seems meant to do.
- 75. Whorl (noun): swirl, ringlet, curlicue



Make learning new words a game. When you learn a new word, commit to using it at least ten times in one day in a variety of contexts. Bonus: You might have fun annoying those around you!

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