

Subject-based Strategy: English Language – Comprehension Cloze

On average, Comprehension Cloze is the section in which candidates find most difficult, and hence, score the lowest. The steps below represent a suggested guide which will hopefully benefit the candidate and unlock his/her potential to ace this much feared section.

1. Read the passage once through **WITHOUT** attempting to fill in any blanks. This first reading is vital in figuring out the essential/main ideas of the passage i.e. the text type of the passage (which will determine the consistent tense of the verbs); the plot (for recounts) or subject matter (information texts) of the passage.
In addition, candidates tend to 'commit' to an answer immediately as the passage is being read the first time. This will come back to bite them as due to this 'committed' answer, a candidate will refuse to think of other alternative words, especially the most appropriate word to use.
2. During the first reading, pay special attention to unfamiliar words and highlight (or underline) words and phrases which you think are contextual clues. This step ensures that active reading is happening and that you are not merely going through the motions of skimming the text.
REMEMBER! Contextual clues for each blank is not necessarily found in the sentence itself, i.e. the clue for a blank at the end of the text may actually be found near the beginning of the text.
3. Begin to fill in the blanks on the second reading. For slower readers, this might only be done during the third reading. It is imperative the candidate, regardless of his/her ability level, truly understand the text and not be hasty about filling in the blanks!
Use the contextual clues highlighted in your previous reading to aid you in this. Remind yourself to reread not just the sentence in which the blank is, but also the sentences around that sentence.
4. After all the blanks have been filled, read through the text once more. The focus of this step is to critically analyse your chosen word – accuracy in spelling, tense or verb form, subject-verb agreement, etc.

The list below is not exhaustive, but here are some common 'methods' to find contextual clues:

+ Same Word or Direct Answers:

These are blanks where the answer has already been used in the passage!
e.g. We were given plenty of **assignments** over the June holidays. One of the _____ (assignments) was to write a book review.

+ Phrasal Verbs:

The blank can either test the verb or the preposition. So you would do well to brush up on them!
e.g. They worked tirelessly to **put** the flames _____ (out)

+ Contrasting Words:

Often, the correct word to fill a blank in with is the opposite of a word already found. Do be careful to use the contrast word to fit the context.

e.g. Allowing girls to go to school was a big issue in the **past**. But as we notice _____ (today – instead of 'present' which is the direct contrast word to 'past' but which does not fit the context), girls are academically equal, if not more inclined, than boys.

+ Common Phrases or Idiomatic Expressions:

Comprehension Cloze is also a test of a candidate's vocabulary, so the more you read, the more phrases you will know and the more familiar you are with them!

e.g. Dylan's grandfather gave him an old Rolls Royce as a wedding gift, but it has proven to be a real _____ (white) elephant. He has nowhere to park it and cannot afford the petrol for it.

Hopefully, through reading this, you are much clearer with what is expected out of you and the strategies you can use and a better understanding on how to source for clues in cloze passages to achieve a higher score. Best regards and all the best!