

Practice with Analogies

Analogies

What are they? Analogies are word relationships. They are sometimes written “water : liquid :: ice : solid” and read “water is to liquid as ice is to solid.”

The three main forms of figurative language used for comparison are analogy, metaphor, and simile. Here are the distinctions:

- An analogy says that A is to B as C is to D.
- A metaphor says that A is B, or substitutes B for A.
- A simile says that A is like B.

Analogies help us to understand new ideas in terms of familiar ideas. An analogy is based on an underlying similarity in things. Known relationships, ideas and concepts can be digested easily when an analogy is used. Sometimes analogies may not be exact parallels but are only aimed at giving the gist or a general idea of the concept. Analogies make it easier to grasp the underlying idea behind anything. The pattern of understood things in our minds is like a jigsaw puzzle. Analogies help in filling in these pieces to make things clear.

The features of a good analogy are:

- Based on an exact or similar idea
- Simplicity
- Embodies the concept or relationship between things clearly

A simile or a metaphor is related to an analogy but not exactly the same (as shown above). An analogy is an important tool in problem solving and reasoning.

There are many kinds of analogies. The five kinds of analogies listed here might be called (1) characteristic or what something is like, (2) part-to-whole, (3) member-to-group, (4) a thing and an action, (5) synonym/antonym.

The first step in solving an analogy is to decide how the first two words are related. Determine the connection between the two. Then see if you can think of a word that will create a similar connection or relationship for the other two words. Below are some examples for practice. Accept any answers that make sense.

Characteristic:

1. Elephant is to big as ant is to _____.
2. Box is to square as ball is to _____.
3. Rock is to heavy as feather is to _____.
4. Light is to day as _____ is to night.
5. Fast is to spaceship as _____ is to tricycle.

Part-to-Whole (or Whole-to-Part):

1. Feathers are to birds as fur is to _____.
2. Toes are to foot as fingers are to _____.
3. Bird is to beak as dog is to _____.
4. Grass is to blade as _____ is to petal.
5. Hand is to arm as _____ is to leg.

Member-to-Group:

1. Red is to colors as triangle is to _____.
2. Tree is to plant as giraffe is to _____.
3. Eugene is to city as Oregon is to _____.
4. Shirt is to clothes as _____ is to food.
5. Hammer is to tool as _____ is to furniture.

Thing and an Action:

1. Whale is to swim as eagle is to _____.
2. Milk is to drink as bread is to _____.
3. Game is to play as bicycle is to _____.
4. Saw is to cut as _____ is to pound.
5. Ball is to throw as _____ is to hit.

Synonym/Antonym (Similar/Opposite):

1. Dog is to puppy as cat is to _____.
2. Big is to huge as _____ is to tiny.
3. Up is to high as down is to _____.
4. Sun is to moon as _____ is to night.
5. Happy is to glad as unhappy is to _____.

Sometimes it is more effective to describe something by what it is not.

Reverse analogy (or “what I am not):

"I am to dancing what Roseanne is to singing and Donald Duck to motivational speeches. I am as graceful as a refrigerator falling down a flight of stairs."
(Leonard Pitts, "Curse of Rhythm Impairment."
Miami Herald, Sep. 28, 2009)

Another way to practice analogies is to use the card game described on the following page. The more students practice analogies and become familiar with them, the easier it will be for them to use analogies in their own learning and writing. If students have difficulty remembering important information, encourage them to get together and brainstorm some possible analogies or connections between the difficult or new material and things that are more familiar or common.

An optional activity is to have students take some new concepts and prepare analogy posters that illustrate the connections between the new and the known.