

CAT IDIOMS & PHRASES MOCK PRACTICE PAPER

Advanced Verbal Ability & Reading Comprehension (VARC) Focus Pack

Total Questions: 20

Target Exam: CAT / XAT / GMAT

Time Recommended: 30 Mins

Part 1: The Question Bank

QUESTION 1 • SUB-TOPIC: **COMMON IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **EASY**

In the wake of intense regulatory scrutiny, the pharmaceutical startup realized it could no longer afford to *cut corners* during the clinical trial documentation process if it wished to secure FDA approval.

Which of the following options best captures the meaning of the italicized phrase in the given context?

- (A) To minimize expenditure by reducing workforce sizing.
- (B) To perform a task quickly or cheaply by ignoring standard procedures or safety rules.
- (C) To redefine strategic targets in response to highly volatile market parameters.
- (D) To bypass bureaucratic bottlenecks by establishing direct lines of communication.

QUESTION 2 • SUB-TOPIC: **BUSINESS & WORKPLACE IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **EASY**

When the core algorithm failed just forty-eight hours prior to the product launch, the engineering lead called an emergency meeting and told the development team that everyone needed to *put their shoulders to the wheel* to deploy a stable patch.

Which of the following options best describes what the engineering lead meant?

- (A) The team needed to delegate tasks to external consultants to reduce cognitive overload.
- (B) The team needed to shift the blame to systemic network errors rather than human fallibility.
- (C) The team needed to work under strict shifts to ensure the office remained occupied around the clock.
- (D) The team needed to exert significant, concerted, and determined effort to overcome the crisis.

QUESTION 3 • SUB-TOPIC: **PHRASAL EXPRESSIONS** • DIFFICULTY: **EASY**

Despite the macroeconomist's detailed presentation outlining the structural vulnerabilities of the banking system, most financial analysts ***brushed aside*** his warnings, dismissing them as undue alarmism.

Which of the following options is closest in meaning to the italicized phrasal expression?

- (A) Refused to consider or pay attention to something deemed unimportant.
- (B) Systematically archived data sets for long-term historical reference.
- (C) Publicly contested the structural assumptions underlying an empirical model.
- (D) Elaborated upon a minor variable to gain a localized competitive advantage.

QUESTION 4 • SUB-TOPIC: **FIGURATIVE MEANINGS** • DIFFICULTY: **EASY**

After two fiscal quarters of stagnant user engagement and intense board pressure, the CEO realized that the company's outdated media strategy was ***dead in the water***.

The phrase ***dead in the water*** implies that the strategy was:

- (A) Highly dependent on external liquidity pools to remain functional.
- (B) Subject to heavy ocean-bound logistical delays beyond administrative control.
- (C) Completely stalled, showing no progress, and devoid of any realistic prospect of success.
- (D) Secretly operational but temporarily obscured from public view to minimize competitive copying.

QUESTION 5 • SUB-TOPIC: **CONTEXT-BASED IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **EASY**

The initial revenue projections provided by the corporate strategy division were so speculative that the chief financial officer advised the executive board to take the numbers ***with a pinch of salt***.

Which of the following options best represents the CFO's advice?

- (A) To accept the projections with absolute confidence, recognizing the team's historical analytical precision.
- (B) To reject the data immediately and initiate a formal audit into corporate malfeasance.
- (C) To view the projections with skepticism or reservation, rather than accepting them as entirely accurate.
- (D) To adjust the mathematical scale of the model by integrating a constant risk premium factor.

QUESTION 6 • SUB-TOPIC: **ADVANCED IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

Academic sociologists argue that the modern state's attempt to impose uniform cultural norms onto highly pluralistic provincial communities is akin to **putting the cart before the horse**, as institutional cohesion should naturally emerge from organic local consensus rather than legislative fiat.

The idiom **putting the cart before the horse** in this context highlights:

- (A) A tendency to choose costlier logistical vectors ahead of more economical public alternatives.
- (B) An inversion of the natural or logical order of cause, effect, or chronological priority.
- (C) A deliberate political strategy to delay structural transformation in favor of cosmetic updates.
- (D) The systemic failure to provide basic transportation infrastructure to marginalized agrarian sectors.

QUESTION 7 • SUB-TOPIC: **BUSINESS & WORKPLACE IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

The senior partner noted that while the associate possessed brilliant technical legal acumen, she often **missed the forest for the trees** during complex corporate restructuring negotiations by focusing exclusively on minor punctuation clauses in the non-disclosure agreements.

Which of the following behavioral patterns best describes the associate's limitation?

- (A) She prioritized ecological preservation over corporate profitability metrics.
- (B) She allowed emotional distractions to undermine her professional neutrality.
- (C) She became so consumed by micro-details that she failed to grasp the overall strategic objective.
- (D) She systematically ignored explicit technical instructions provided by her directing managers.

QUESTION 8 • SUB-TOPIC: **CONTEXT-BASED IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

For decades, the publishing house relied on its legacy encyclopedias to generate steady revenue; however, the rapid democratization of digital wikis caught the management off guard, forcing them to acknowledge that they had completely **lost their touch** in predicting media consumption paradigms.

The expression **lost their touch** indicates that the management:

- (A) Suffered an immediate and unrecoverable drop in physical cash flow reserves.
- (B) Surrendered their controlling majority stake to an aggressive venture capital consortium.
- (C) Suffered a decline in an ability, talent, or skill they once possessed naturally or effectively.
- (D) Terminated all physical sensory feedback experiments in their human-computer interaction labs.

QUESTION 9 • SUB-TOPIC: **PHRASAL EXPRESSIONS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

Although the public relations department managed to **gloss over** the manufacturing defect during the initial press conference, investigative journalists quickly unearthed the internal quality control reports, forcing a massive automobile recall.

The phrase **gloss over** is used in the passage to mean:

- (A) To completely eliminate a technical error through precise architectural redesign.
- (B) To deliberately treat or describe a serious problem briefly or superficially to conceal its gravity.
- (C) To translate highly technical data into an accessible format for mainstream consumption.
- (D) To calculate the exact financial cost of an operational risk before it manifests in the market.

QUESTION 10 • SUB-TOPIC: **FIGURATIVE MEANINGS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

The political commentator remarked that the legislative branch's attempt to regulate decentralized global crypto networks via localized municipal laws was a classic case of **barking up the wrong tree**.

The use of **barking up the wrong tree** implies that the legislative approach was:

- (A) Pursuing a mistaken line of thought or course of action that would not lead to the desired result.
- (B) Relying on overly aggressive verbal rhetoric instead of establishing empirical legal definitions.
- (C) Directly threatening the foundational environmental sustainability initiatives of forestry sectors.
- (D) Initiating a highly successful prosecution by targeting the apex organizers of financial fraud.

QUESTION 11 • SUB-TOPIC: **COMMONLY CONFUSED IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

Given the extreme volatility of the options market, the novice day trader realized he was **skating on thin ice** by allocating more than seventy percent of his capital pool to speculative weekly derivatives contracts.

The idiom **skating on thin ice** communicates that the trader was:

- (A) Operating with elite, frictionless logistical efficiency relative to institutional competitors.
- (B) Taking massive risks that placed him in a highly precarious, dangerous, or vulnerable position.
- (C) Intentionally exploiting regulatory loopholes to secure tax-free asset appreciation.
- (D) Demonstrating complete indifference to the emotional pressures of macroeconomic cycles.

QUESTION 12 • SUB-TOPIC: **ADVANCED IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

When the sovereign fund manager decided to liquidate all high-yield tech equities right before the sectoral market correction, many asset managers wondered if she possessed insider knowledge, or if she simply had an uncanny ability to **read between the lines** of macro indicators.

In this context, **reading between the lines** signifies:

- (A) Deciphering explicit text that has been redacted or hidden by sovereign regulators.
- (B) Discovering a hidden, underlying, or implicit meaning that is not explicitly stated on the surface.
- (C) Memorizing extensive chronological datasets across multiple non-correlated industries.
- (D) Intentionally overlooking mathematical anomalies in order to maintain structural harmony.

QUESTION 13 • SUB-TOPIC: **BUSINESS & WORKPLACE IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

During the corporate retreat, the VP of Product Design emphasized that if the enterprise wanted to outpace its nimble Silicon Valley rivals, it had to stop imitating existing applications and start **breaking new ground** in artificial intelligence integration.

The expression **breaking new ground** implies:

- (A) Constructing physical real estate facilities to expand structural operational scale.
- (B) Doing something innovative, pioneering, or completely unique that uncovers fresh paradigms.
- (C) Reducing entry-level subscription prices to gain temporary market share from incumbents.
- (D) Terminating legacy contracts with independent vendors to centralize creative design control.

QUESTION 14 • SUB-TOPIC: **CONTEXT-BASED IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

The union leader understood that threatening an immediate strike during a severe macroeconomic recession was a double-edged sword that could easily **backfire** if the manufacturing plant decided to declare bankruptcy instead of negotiating.

The contextual meaning of **backfire** denotes an outcome where an action:

- (A) Yields an identical result to historical patterns under completely different market variables.
- (B) Progresses at a rate far exceeding the expectations of the executive committee.
- (C) Produces an unexpected, undesired, and opposite result that harms the person who initiated it.
- (D) Resolves a long-standing structural dispute through an independent third-party arbitrator.

Environmental policy experts warn that unless urban developers drastically limit groundwater extraction, major coastal metropolises will face severe systemic water scarcity, meaning that cities are essentially ***borrowing on time***.

The phrase ***borrowing on time*** (or ***living on borrowed time***) underscores that the cities are:

- (A) Securing low-interest international climate loans to build advanced desalination networks.
- (B) Postponing an inevitable disaster or collapse through temporary measures, surviving precariously.
- (C) Demonstrating exceptional long-term ecological resilience relative to historical civilizations.
- (D) Intentionally accelerating infrastructure projects ahead of scheduled monsoon patterns.

In his philosophical critique of Enlightenment rationalism, the professor noted that while modern empiricists successfully dismantled medieval superstitions, they simultaneously ***threw the baby out with the bathwater*** by discarding the rich ethical and community frameworks built around historical traditions.

Which of the following statements best explicates the idiom ***threw the baby out with the bathwater*** in this philosophical framework?

- (A) They prioritized the physical well-being of future generations over immediate economic concerns.
- (B) They accidentally eliminated an essential, valuable, or desirable element while trying to clear away unwanted material.
- (C) They failed to maintain hygienic standards in early scientific laboratory environments, leading to systemic contamination.
- (D) They purposefully retained outmoded, obsolete concepts while rejecting progressive empirical discoveries.

QUESTION 17 • SUB-TOPIC: **CONTEXT-BASED IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **HARD**

The diplomatic correspondent reported that the peace negotiations had stalled indefinitely because both nation-states were waiting for the other to make the initial concession, resulting in a classic game of **chicken** where neither side wanted to be seen as blinking first.

The idiomatic situation described as a **game of chicken** reflects:

- (A) A highly collaborative, cooperative framework where mutual wins are mathematically guaranteed.
- (B) A strategic deadlock where two parties engage in a dangerous showdown, each waiting for the other to back down out of fear.
- (C) A structural imbalance where a resource-rich entity easily dominates a small, localized adversary.
- (D) An academic debate focusing on the evolutionary chronological sequencing of biological organisms.

QUESTION 18 • SUB-TOPIC: **COMMONLY CONFUSED IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **HARD**

While the junior research fellow claimed that his radical thesis on dark matter distribution was **on the anvil**, the department chair noted that the lack of peer-reviewed preprints indicated the project was still largely speculative and far from structural realization.

The idiom **on the anvil** means that the thesis was:

- (A) Undergoing intense hostile critique and facing immediate institutional rejection.
- (B) Completely finalized, published, and widely accepted by the international physics community.
- (C) In a state of active discussion, preparation, or formation, but not yet completed.
- (D) Being systematically plagiarized by competing research consortiums across Europe.

QUESTION 19 • SUB-TOPIC: **BUSINESS & WORKPLACE IDIOMS** • DIFFICULTY: **HARD**

The startup's decision to build its proprietary software stack entirely on top of an unproven open-source protocol proved to be an **albatross around their neck** during the Series-B funding round, as risk-averse venture capitalists refused to inherit the underlying security vulnerabilities.

The phrase **albatross around their neck** signifies that the decision was:

- (A) An unexpected competitive advantage that accelerated their product-market fit.
- (B) A highly lucrative intellectual property asset that magnified their market capitalization.
- (C) An ongoing, heavy burden or encumbrance that caused persistent distress and impeded progress.
- (D) A temporary logistical delay that was easily resolved by updating the API documentation.

Literary critics assert that the novelist's attempt to reconcile gritty postmodern nihilism with a saccharine, fairytale ending was an architectural failure, as the final chapter felt entirely like **a square peg in a round hole**.

The idiom **a square peg in a round hole** indicates that the final chapter was:

- (A) Uniquely ahead of its time, presenting a highly innovative structure that defied traditional genres.
- (B) Inherently mismatched, ill-suited, or fundamentally incompatible with the established narrative context.
- (C) Mathematically precise, offering a symmetrical resolution to the plot's primary conflict.
- (D) Explicitly derived from classical geometry textbooks to serve as a complex meta-textual allegory.

Part 2: Answer Key

Question	Correct Option	Sub-topic	Difficulty
Q1	B	Common Idioms	Easy
Q2	D	Business & Workplace Idioms	Easy
Q3	A	Phrasal Expressions	Easy
Q4	C	Figurative Meanings	Easy
Q5	C	Context-based Idioms	Easy
Q6	B	Advanced Idioms	Medium
Q7	C	Business & Workplace Idioms	Medium
Q8	C	Context-based Idioms	Medium
Q9	B	Phrasal Expressions	Medium
Q10	A	Figurative Meanings	Medium
Q11	B	Commonly Confused Idioms	Medium
Q12	B	Advanced Idioms	Medium
Q13	B	Business & Workplace Idioms	Medium
Q14	C	Context-based Idioms	Medium

Question	Correct Option	Sub-topic	Difficulty
Q15	B	Figurative Meanings	Medium
Q16	B	Advanced Idioms	Hard
Q17	B	Context-based Idioms	Hard
Q18	C	Commonly Confused Idioms	Hard
Q19	C	Business & Workplace Idioms	Hard
Q20	B	Advanced Idioms	Hard

Part 3: Detailed Solutions

Question 1 Correct Option: (B)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The context describes a pharmaceutical startup facing "intense regulatory scrutiny" and needing "FDA approval." It states they can no longer afford to *cut corners* in clinical trial documentation. This implies they were skipping strict procedures or rules to move faster or save money—a practice that regulatory scrutiny will penalize.

MEANING & USAGE:

To *cut corners* means to do something in the easiest, cheapest, or fastest way, often by sacrificing quality, safety, or standard procedures.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B accurately matches this definition. Option A narrows the meaning down incorrectly to workforce sizing. Options C and D introduce irrelevant corporate jargon ("strategic targets," "bureaucratic bottlenecks") that do not represent the idiom.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The construction company faced severe penalties after investigators discovered they had cut corners on foundational materials to meet the deadline.

Question 2 Correct Option: (D)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The sentence depicts a crisis: an algorithm failed 48 hours before a product launch. The leader demands that everyone *put their shoulders to the wheel*. This context requires a collective, intense work effort to fix the mistake before the public launch.

MEANING & USAGE:

To *put one's shoulder to the wheel* means to start working hard, apply significant effort, or cooperate energetically to accomplish a task or overcome a difficulty.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option D perfectly captures this idea of concerted, determined effort. Option A (delegating) and Option B (shifting blame) run counter to taking direct action. Option C focuses too literally on desk occupancy rather than the dedication of effort.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

If we are going to finish this database migration by Monday morning, every engineer must put their shoulder to the wheel.

Question 3 Correct Option: (A)**STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:**

The text uses the contrast indicator "Despite." *Despite* the detailed warnings about structural vulnerabilities, most analysts *brushed aside* his warnings, dismissing them as "undue alarmism." This means they ignored or undervalued his warnings.

MEANING & USAGE:

To *brush aside* means to dismiss, ignore, or reject something casually or impatiently without giving it serious consideration.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option A matches this definition perfectly. Option B (archiving), Option C (contesting/arguing against), and Option D (elaborating) all describe active engagement with the data, whereas "brushed aside" implies passive dismissal.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The manager brushed aside the safety concerns raised by the floor workers, calling them minor inconveniences.

Question 4 Correct Option: (C)**STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:**

The context outlines "stagnant user engagement" and "intense board pressure," leading the CEO to realize the strategy was *dead in the water*. A strategy under these negative conditions is non-functional and going nowhere.

MEANING & USAGE:

Dead in the water means unable to function, progress, or succeed; completely stalled and without any forward momentum.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option C directly aligns with this meaning. Option A introduces liquidity, which is not the primary meaning of this idiom. Option B takes the word "water" too literally (logistical ocean paths), which is a common CAT distractor type. Option D suggests secret success, which contradicts the failure implied by the context.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

Without the initial seed funding from our angel investors, our new software venture is dead in the water.

Question 5 **Correct Option: (C)**

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The CFO describes the revenue projections as "so speculative" that the board should take them *with a pinch of salt*. Speculative data should not be fully trusted, indicating a need for caution and skepticism.

MEANING & USAGE:

To take something with a pinch (or grain) of salt means to view a statement or piece of information with skepticism, reservation, or doubt, not accepting it blindly as literal truth.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option C perfectly captures this sense of reservation. Option A is the exact opposite (absolute confidence). Option B is too extreme (immediate rejection and legal audit). Option D misinterprets the idiom as a formal mathematical or financial risk adjustment.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

I take all the viral marketing statistics published on social media with a pinch of salt.

Question 6 **Correct Option: (B)**

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The text discusses sociologists arguing that trying to impose uniform cultural norms *before* having an organic consensus is an inversion of how things should happen. They argue cohesion should emerge naturally first, then be formalized. Therefore, doing it the other way around reverses the logical sequence.

MEANING & USAGE:

To put the cart before the horse means to reverse the proper, logical, or natural order of things, or to handle cause and effect in the wrong sequence.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B directly captures this inversion of cause/effect or priority. Option A takes "cart" and "horse" too literally (logistics/transport). Option C introduces a deliberate strategy of delay, which misses the structural sequencing error. Option D also falls into the literal trap of agrarian transportation infrastructure.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

Buying a fleet of luxury delivery vans before you have designed a functional product is putting the cart before the horse.

Question 7 **Correct Option: (C)**

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The associate focuses intensely on "minor punctuation clauses" in NDAs, causing her to lose sight of the "overall strategic objective" during complex negotiations. She is obsessing over tiny elements at the expense of the big picture.

MEANING & USAGE:

To miss the forest for the trees means to become so focused on small details that you fail to understand or appreciate the larger situation, problem, or overall context.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option C matches the detail-oriented blindness described. Option A takes "forest" and "trees" literally as ecological preservation. Option B introduces emotional distractions, which is unsupported. Option D implies defiance, whereas the text implies a cognitive or strategic error in perspective.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The developers spent three weeks optimizing a single button animation, missing the forest for the trees while the app's core database was still crashing.

Question 8 Correct Option: (C)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The publishing house was caught off guard by digital wikis because they failed to predict media consumption patterns. This implies they used to be excellent at predicting trends but have now lost that capability.

MEANING & USAGE:

To lose one's touch means to lose a specific skill, talent, or ability that one used to possess or execute with high proficiency.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option C explicitly defines the loss of an innate ability or talent. Option A shifts the meaning to immediate cash flow metrics. Option B focuses on equity stakes, which is a business distractor. Option D is a literal trap playing on physical "sensory touch."

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The veteran filmmaker's latest box-office flop suggests he has finally lost his touch with modern young audiences.

Question 9 Correct Option: (B)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The PR department tried to minimize the impact of a "manufacturing defect" during a press conference, but investigative journalists exposed the gravity of it later. The PR team was attempting to minimize or hide the problem.

MEANING & USAGE:

To gloss over means to treat, explain away, or deal with an embarrassing, incorrect, or serious issue quickly or superficially in order to make it seem less important than it actually is.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B matches this deceptive, superficial treatment. Option A implies fixing the error, which did not happen. Option C describes making data accessible (simplifying jargon), which misses the negative intent of concealment. Option D describes risk calculation, which is irrelevant.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The annual financial report attempted to gloss over the company's massive quarterly losses by highlighting minor increases in social media followers.

Question 10 **Correct Option: (A)****STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:**

The commentator criticizes the legislative branch for trying to regulate "decentralized global crypto networks" using "localized municipal laws." Because crypto is borderless, using local laws is a fundamentally flawed approach that cannot achieve the goal of regulation.

MEANING & USAGE:

To bark up the wrong tree means to pursue a mistaken line of thought, misdirect one's energy, or follow a course of action that is fundamentally incapable of achieving the desired outcome.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option A matches this pursuit of a flawed logic path. Option B focuses on verbal rhetoric due to the word "barking." Option C takes "tree" literally (forestry/environmental sustainability). Option D implies success, whereas the idiom represents misdirected failure.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

If the authorities think that auditing the entry-level clerks will uncover the structural corporate tax evasion scheme, they are barking up the wrong tree.

Question 11 **Correct Option: (B)****STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:**

The trader is allocating "more than seventy percent of his capital pool to speculative weekly derivatives contracts" in an "extremely volatile" market. This is an extraordinarily risky move that could ruin him financially.

MEANING & USAGE:

To skate on thin ice means to take massive risks, proceed in a highly precarious manner, or place oneself in a dangerous situation where failure or collapse is an immediate threat.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B accurately captures the dangerous and precarious nature of the trader's behavior. Option A misinterprets the idiom as "frictionless efficiency" because of the word "skating." Option C introduces regulatory loopholes, which is not the core meaning of risk. Option D focuses on emotional indifference rather than situational danger.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

You are skating on thin ice with the executive board by arriving late to consecutive project presentations.

Question 12 Correct Option: (B)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The manager liquidated equities right before a major correction, implying she saw patterns or warning signs that weren't explicitly stated or obvious to others in the raw surface data.

MEANING & USAGE:

To read between the lines means to perceive or understand a hidden, unstated meaning, implication, or pattern beneath the clear, literal surface text or data.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B perfectly reflects the deduction of implicit meanings. Option A takes the idiom too literally as reading "redacted or hidden text." Option C defines memorization, which misses the analytical inference aspect. Option D implies ignoring errors, which is the opposite of gaining an insightful edge.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

Reading between the lines of the governor's highly ambiguous speech, market analysts inferred that interest rates would soon rise.

Question 13 Correct Option: (B)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The VP tells the design team to stop "imitating existing applications" and instead focus on innovative artificial intelligence integrations. This contrast requires an expression that means originating completely unique and new ideas.

MEANING & USAGE:

To break new ground means to make an innovative discovery, pioneer a completely fresh field of endeavor, or introduce highly original methods and concepts.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B aligns with innovation and pioneering. Option A falls into the literal trap of construction and real estate ("breaking ground" for a building). Option C (price cutting) and Option D (terminating contracts) describe standard business maneuvers rather than conceptual innovation.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The research institute broke new ground in oncology by developing a highly targeted mRNA cancer vaccine.

Question 14 Correct Option: (C)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The context describes a strategy (threatening a strike during a recession) that could cause the plant to declare bankruptcy, which would destroy the workers' jobs entirely. Thus, the action taken by the union would destroy the union members themselves.

MEANING & USAGE:

To backfire means to undergo a recoil or reverse outcome where an action produces an unexpected, highly undesired, and opposite result that actively damages the person who initiated the plan.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option C is a direct definition of this self-harming, unintended consequence. Option A describes historical continuity. Option B describes accelerated progress, which is positive. Option D describes a neutral third-party resolution.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The politician's aggressive smear campaign backfired when the public sympathized with his opponent, causing his own poll numbers to drop.

Question 15 Correct Option: (B)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The experts note that unless urban developers halt extreme groundwater extraction, coastal cities will face severe water scarcity. This means their current survival is temporary and unstable, relying on depleting resources that will eventually cause a collapse.

MEANING & USAGE:

To live or borrow on borrowed time means to continue existing or functioning precariously past a point where collapse, death, or disaster is inevitable, sustained only by temporary luck or fleeting resources.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B accurately captures this state of precarious survival before an inevitable crisis. Option A shifts the meaning to literal international climate banking loans. Option C incorrectly claims long-term resilience, which contradicts the warning. Option D treats "time" as project schedule management.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

With its outdated operating system and failing hardware components, the company's central server is living on borrowed time.

Question 16 Correct Option: (B)

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:

The passage states that while empiricists destroyed "medieval superstitions" (the bad, unwanted thing), they simultaneously discarded "rich ethical and community frameworks" (the good, valuable thing). This perfectly fits the idea of destroying something good while trying to remove something bad.

MEANING & USAGE:

To throw the baby out with the bathwater is an advanced idiom that means to reject or discard valuable, essential, or favorable ideas or objects along with unwanted or useless components during an aggressive cleanup or re-evaluation.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B is the exact conceptual definition of this error. Option A introduces generational resource ethics, which is a distractor. Option C falls into the literal trap of laboratory hygiene and wash water. Option D describes keeping old ideas, which reverses the direction of the idiom (which is about discarding too much).

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

In trying to eliminate corporate waste, the new executive director fired the entire creative division, throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Question 17 Correct Option: (B)**STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:**

The diplomatic correspondent notes that negotiations are stalled because both nations are waiting for the other to yield, resulting in a dangerous standoff where "neither side wanted to be seen as blinking first." This is an arena of mutual brinkmanship.

MEANING & USAGE:

A game of chicken refers to a high-stakes conflict, duel, or political scenario where two parties engage in mutual brinkmanship, moving toward a disastrous collision or deadlock, each hoping the other will panic and back down first.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B accurately details this psychological showdown and brinkmanship framework. Option A describes a collaborative win-win, which contradicts the text. Option C describes an asymmetric imbalance, whereas a game of chicken requires both sides to hold destructive power over each other. Option D is a literal distractor based on the biological animal.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The trade war escalated into a game of chicken as both economic superpowers raised tariffs, waiting for the other to capitulate.

Question 18 Correct Option: (C)**STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:**

The fellow claimed his dark matter thesis was *on the anvil*, but the department chair noted it lacked preprints and was "still largely speculative and far from structural realization." This contrast indicates that while it is actively being worked on or formed, it is not complete.

MEANING & USAGE:

On the anvil is a classic, sophisticated idiom meaning in a state of discussion, active preparation, planning, or architectural modification; currently being shaped or hammered out before finalization.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option C matches this concept of active preparation/formation. Option A mistakes it for undergoing hostile attack. Option B describes complete finalization, which contradicts the chair's note. Option D introduces external plagiarism, which is completely unsupported.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The Ministry of Finance confirmed that a comprehensive set of corporate tax reforms is currently on the anvil.

Question 19 Correct Option: (C)**STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:**

The startup built its stack on an unproven protocol, which became a severe problem during funding rounds because risk-averse investors refused to touch it due to security vulnerabilities. The decision acted as a massive obstacle to their corporate survival.

MEANING & USAGE:

An albatross around one's neck means a heavy, inescapable burden, ongoing psychological or structural liability, or a past mistake that causes persistent worry and impedes progress.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option C matches the definition of an ongoing heavy burden or encumbrance. Options A and B turn it into a positive asset or advantage, which directly contradicts the context. Option D trivializes the issue as a minor, easily fixable software documentation problem.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

The long-term lease on the massive, empty downtown headquarters became an albatross around the company's neck after all staff shifted to remote work.

Question 20 Correct Option: (B)**STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION:**

The novelist tried to attach a "saccharine, fairytale ending" to a book defined by "gritty postmodern nihilism," resulting in an "architectural failure" that felt out of place. The fairytale ending is conceptually completely mismatched with the nihilistic tone of the rest of the book.

MEANING & USAGE:

A square peg in a round hole means an individual, object, or concept that is fundamentally ill-suited, mismatched, or out of place within a specific environment, framework, or context.

WHY THE OPTIONS FIT/FAIL:

Option B perfectly explains this core structural mismatch and contextual incompatibility. Option A turns it into a positive innovation accolade. Option C misinterprets the idiom mathematically as geometric symmetry. Option D is a literal distractor playing on geometry textbook definitions.

SAMPLE SENTENCE:

Placing the highly eccentric, non-linear experimental artist into a rigid corporate data entry position was like putting a square peg in a round hole.