



SAME (SAME) BUT DIFFERENT



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What does this image tell you about the temperature outside?

A: The person is freezing. **X**

B: The temperature is low. **✓**

If I could use colloquial Singapore English to provide feedback on some of my students' answers to comprehension questions, it would be 'same, same but different.' They may understand the general idea that is being tested in the question, but when it comes to expressing it accurately, they do not answer according to what the question requires.

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Many a times I have encountered students who despite having a general idea of the answer to a comprehension question, are unable to attain the mark because they miss... the mark (pun intended). Today we will look at one common pitfall students face when answering comprehension questions, and how they can avoid stepping into it.

Some students may perfectly understand the portion of the comprehension passage being tested, but their answer fails to reflect that understanding. Why? It's because they are not paying close attention to the demands of the question. Let's consider the following example:

James spun the ball in his left hand, took a deep breath and exhaled. He launched it in the air, and in three quick steps, leapt, and struck the ball. He sighed as the ball went out of bounds on the other side of the court. "Serve again!" His volleyball coach bellowed.

What does 'bellowed' tell you about the coach's temper?

Now, if you knew the meaning of 'bellowed', this would be easy, right? My students thought so too. They would answer, 'It tells me that the coach is angry', but this answer goes out of bounds. Why? The coach is indeed angry, that is a given. To 'bellow' is to shout with a deep voice. The students could make that connection. However, are they truly answering the question? 'The coach is angry' tells us how he is *feeling*, not what *temper* he has. The question is specifically looking for answers that describe the coach's temper. Same (same), but different. In this case, the acceptable answer would be 'The coach has a fiery/hot temper.'

The thing about reading comprehension is that students pay so much attention to understanding the passage that they may overlook the importance of also analysing the demands of the questions. This is a common pitfall. Some students may think the bare minimum is enough and therefore, only provide a short answer, expecting the examiner to make the connections.



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For instance, an angry person would probably have a hot temper; the examiners/ markers would know this! Unfortunately, the examiners are not being assessed for their reading comprehension. The onus, therefore, is on the students to demonstrate their understanding and competence by showing the connections and answering the questions accurately based on the question requirements.

Question: What does 'bellowed' tell you about the coach's temper?

Answer: It tells me that the coach's temper is... <insert answer here>

At this point you must be thinking, the writer has rambled on for long enough about the problem, where is the solution? A quick tip I give my students is to highlight what the question is asking for, and use that part of the question as the first part of their answer. To give a visual example:

In doing so, they are restricting themselves to answer only within the confines of the question's demand, which is about temper. From here, they would then need to think of suitable words for temper that fit the context.

'Same (same), but different' no more.

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