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# ANALOGIES: WORD ATTACK & READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN A THINKING CONTEXT

*Jerome Axelrod*

Few cues give a teacher a more valid or quicker insight into her students' thinking abilities than analogies. The pupils' mental manipulations—or lack thereof—reveal to the aware and perceptive teacher a usually-accurate idea of the extent to which her pupils will be able to perform. Picture analogies for non-readers and word analogies for literate pupils can be used informally by the classroom teachers to approximate just how much pupils, individually, are capable of learning in an academic situation.

Yet, as important as being able to understand relationships is, there appears a dearth of literature on the subject either in classic texts in reading psychology and intellect or in recent journals indexed in *Education Index and Current Index To Journals In Education*. William James (1890), for example, admits to the importance of this subject but nonetheless dismisses it in a couple of lines: "A native talent for perceiving analogies . . . (is) the leading fact in genius of every order . . . people (who) are sensitive to resemblances, and far more ready to point out wherein they consist are . . . the writers, the poets, the inventors, the scientific men, the practical geniuses." Considering the apparent importance of analogies, it is hard to understand why so many scientific men and practical geniuses are mum on the subject.

Turner (1973) lists and exemplifies fifteen kinds of relationships:

Purpose	glove: ball
Cause – Effect	race: fatigue
Part – Whole	snake: reptile
Part – Part	gill: fin
Action to Object	kick: football
Object to Action	
Synonym	
Antonym	
Place	Miami: Florida
Degree	Warm: Hot
Characteristic	Ignorance: Poverty
Sequence	Spring: Summer
Grammatical	Restore: climb

Numerical	4:12: 9:27
Association	devil: wrong
Maney (1961) lists and classifies relationships in much more specific ways:	
Association	Shoe: sock
Association – function	fork: spoon
Association – where worn	glove: wristwatch
Association – specialized containers	pliers: tool box
Association – organ and instrument	eye: camera shutter
Association – target and projectile	bowling pin: bowling balls
Association – degree	broom: vacuum cleaner
Apparel – wearer	bow tie: father
Article – holding device	shirt: hanger
Associated Ideas	laugh: funny
Associated Sense	Color: saw: call: heard
Classification	ladder: elevator
Classification as to Constituents	balloon: boot (rubber)
Classification as to Common Locale	helicopter: air
Characteristic – Sound	Snow: white
Characteristic – Sound	bell: peel
Color – associated meaning	red: stop
Cutting Tool – specific use	razor: father
Complete Reversals	1-2-3: 3-2-1
Clothing – Function	pajamas: bed
Container: Content	cash register: money
Caution Sign For Specific User	lighthouse beam: ship
Covering	corn: husk
Degree	warm: hot
Degree – Size	farm: garden
Description	cloud: white
Direction – Indicator	wind: vane
Effect – Cause	
Equipment – Accessory	TV: antenna
Function	purse: money
Food	cat: milk

## 16 – *rh*

Homonyms	bow: bough
Home	bird: nest
Insect – construction	spider: web
Intensity	may: must
Indexing	shape: square
Levels of Abstraction	King: god
Liquid – consumer	Pepsi: boy
Meaning	under: where: never: when
Multimeaning of Label	(ice cream) cone: (pine) cone
Movement	wheel: turn
Numerical Ratio	2:1: 3:2
Number – person	they: I
Object Turned	screw: screwdriver
Object – Specialized Motion	rabbit: hopping: frog: jumping
Object – Use	train: ride
Opposite	
Object to Insert	coin: parking meter
Outside Inside	camera shutter: film
Product	hen: egg
Product Related to Utensils	sweater: knitting utensils
Purpose	starch: stiff
Place	grass: ground
Packaging	hay: bale
Preferred Food	rat: cheese
Part – Whole	
Person – Equipment	soldier: rifle
Position	hat: head:: lid: container
Referent	Mrs.: she
Sequence – progression	February 29: Leap Year Day
Shelter	garage: car
Sports Equipment	football: helmet
Synonym	
Source – Product	mink: fur coat
Stages of Evaluation	tadpole: frog
Specific User	saddle: horse
Subject – Verb Agreement	I: have: she: has

Singular – Plural	is: are
Time order	morning: midnight
Trap	fish: hook
Unit	ton: weight
Usage	pair: several
Used together	hammer: nail
Verb Tense	go: went
Where Runs	Train: tracks
Where Worn	shoulders: shawl
Young – old	Tot: mother

(Scrutiny reveals many of these classifications overlap, are identical, are subclassifications of other categories or just generally suffer from over-specificity.)

This article will not deal with analogies as a thinking skill. Rather it will concern itself with analogies as (1) word attack and (2) comprehension skills.

Analogies deal with words not in the context of a sentence and paragraph. Therefore, if it is assumed that learning words on sight should be made in sentence-context, then the use of analogies as a word analysis skill is limited. After all, pupils can hardly rely on context clues to aid them in figuring out a word if there is no sentence-context for that word. Nevertheless, there is another type of context for words in an analogy and this context can aid the pupil in recognizing that word. The context for a word in an analogy is its companion word, such as face: head; run: walk; hit: knock, etc. For example, many pupils confuse minimal-pair words like “horse” and “house” and between “month” and “mouth.” They confuse these pairs of words for a number of reasons: they fail to use context clues; their teachers have not taught phonics elements such as “ou-ow” and “or”; pupils come across contexts suitable for both minimal pairs like “The house is white” or “The horse is white.” But whatever the reasons are for their confusion, the use of analogies can help to alleviate the problem. One suggestion would be for the teacher to teach medial vowel and consonant-controlled vowel sounds and then place on the chalkboard:

h . . se: saddle  
 h . . se: home  
 m . . th: year  
 m . . th: cavity

Have pupils first guess at the appropriate words and then at the appropriate missing letters. Ask the learners to justify their answers (e.g. “a horse goes with a saddle”; there’s an “r” sound in “horse,” etc.). Then place on the board:

horse:	home
house:	saddle
mouth:	year
month:	cavity

Ask the pupils why these responses are not congruent (e.g. “A house and a saddle aren’t related” or “A month is in a year and a mouth has nothing to do with a year,” etc.) and have them correct the analogies by juggling around the letters in the four words causing phonic confusion. The purpose of this analogy activity is to have the pupils perceive two contexts for their responses—a correct and an incorrect one. In addition to spurring them to think logically, they will have engaged in a useful phonics and word attack lesson. (It should be added, however, that in teaching words out of sentence context, the teacher may not know whether the pupil will know these words *in* sentence-context. Thus, teaching words out of sentence-context is limited in usefulness and should be supplemented by using those words to be learned in a sentence-context situation).

Concerning analogy as a reading comprehension skill, consider the following example:

up: down                      West: \_\_\_\_\_

The pupil who is able to show a pattern of correct responses to analogies like the one above is engaging in one form of reading comprehension. Not all forms or even several forms, to be sure, but in one of them. For example, a student who figures out analogies easily and thereby shows high intellectual potential may not, nevertheless, be able to tell the main idea of a story he has just read or even to reveal some important details. But analogy is not *less* than one form of reading comprehension. For when a child shows his teacher that he understands analogies he is revealing that he comprehends the meanings of the words he is able to decode and that he comprehends the relationships between them. Some might interpret the phrase “understanding the meaning of words” as a synonym for “vocabulary,” and right they would be because vocabulary is a form of comprehension. Vocabulary is comprehension on the building block level. When the blocks are put together, comprehension is the structure that stands. Comprehension is the anatomy of reading; vocabulary is its physiology. Analogy is a form of reading comprehension because it considers the meanings of words (infrastructure) and the relationships between words (interstructure).

#### *SOME WORKBOOKS THAT INCLUDE ANALOGY EXERCISES*

Continental Press, Elizabethtown, Pa.

Maney, Ethel. *Reading—Thinking Skills*—all levels pp. to 6, 1965.  
Highest recommendation. All seven booklets excellent.

Scott, Foresman & Co. , Glenview, Ill.

Gray, Williams and others. *Basic Reading Skills For Junior High School Use*, 1957. Page 127.

Monroe, Marion and others. *Basic Reading Skills For High School Use*, 1958. Page 101.

Monroe, Marion and others. *Basic Reading Skills*, 1970. Page 90.

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James, William. *Principles of Psychology, Volume One*. New York: Dover Publications, 1880 and 1950, p. 530.

Maney, Ethel. *Teachers' Guide For Reading—Thinking Skills*. All fourteen guides. Elizabethtown, Pa. Continental Press, 1965.

Turner, David, *Miller Analogies Test—1400 Analogy Questions*. New York: Arco, 1973. pp XI-XII.