

# USAGE OF 'LIKE'

'Like' is a comparison marker that often causes confusion in terms of its usage on the GMAT. Let's understand how to use 'like' correctly. We'll start with a few simple examples and then discuss some official questions.

The correct usage of 'like' in a sentence ensures that the following four conditions are met:

- 'Like' shows similarity between two noun entities.
- 'Like' presents a logical comparison.
- 'Like' is followed by a noun/pronoun. (It cannot be followed by a clause)
- The sentence conveys the meaning clearly. There should be no ambiguity in the meaning.

Let's have a look at a few questions. In the following sentences, try to identify:

- Which of these sentences are correct/incorrect?
- What are the meanings conveyed by these sentences?
- Which entities are being compared?

1. *The US needs a president like Lincoln.*
2. *Mike can play the guitar like a professional guitarist.*
3. *Tom needs a gym instructor like James.*
4. *Like my brother, I want to be an investment banker.*

Now, let's discuss the above sentences one by one:

## **1. The US needs a president like Lincoln.**

This sentence tells us that the US needs a president similar to Lincoln. The comparison is between 'president' and 'Lincoln'. So, the compared entities are logically parallel. The sentence conveys perfectly clear meaning without any ambiguity.

Let's take one more example:

- *India needs an opening batsman like Sachin Tendulkar.*

Here the comparison is between 'opening batsman' and 'Sachin Tendulkar'. The meaning is that India needs an opening batsman who is similar to Sachin Tendulkar: i.e. the comparison is between "an opening batsman" and "Sachin Tendulkar". There is no ambiguity here.

## **2. Mike can play the guitar like a professional guitarist.**

This sentence compares 'Mike' with 'a professional guitarist'. It conveys the meaning that Mike is as good at playing the guitar as a professional guitarist is.

### 3. Tom needs a gym instructor like James.

This sentence presents two possible comparisons and hence it has two possible meanings.

- *Tom needs a gym instructor like James.*

**Meaning 1:** Tom needs a gym instructor who is like James: i.e. a gym instructor similar to James. Here, the compared entities are 'gym instructor' and 'James'.

- *Tom needs a gym instructor like James.*

**Meaning 2:** Tom needs a gym instructor as James does. Here, the compared entities are 'Tom' and 'James'. So, this meaning indicates that both Tom and James need gym instructors.

Since this sentence does not convey one clear meaning, it is incorrect.

Why does this sentence convey an ambiguous meaning? What is the difference between this sentence and the first two sentences?

In the first sentence there is only one logical comparison possible i.e. between 'president' and 'Lincoln'.

The comparison between 'the US' and 'Lincoln' is not possible so there is no ambiguity.

Similarly, in the second sentence there is only one logical comparison possible i.e. the comparison between 'Mike' and 'a professional guitarist'. Since neither of them can be compared with 'guitar', there is no ambiguity.

Now, in the third sentence both the comparisons are logically possible, and hence it presents an ambiguous meaning.

### 4. Like my brother, I want to be an investment banker.

In the above sentence, the comparison is between 'I' and 'my brother'. My brother wants to be an investment banker, and so do I. This same meaning can be conveyed if we say:

- I want to be an investment banker, like my brother. ('I' compared with 'investment banker')

Let's take a couple more examples:

- *Unlike the honey bees, the masonry bees prefer to live in solitude.*

Here, the comparison is between 'honey bees' and 'masonry bees'. While 'like' shows similarity between two noun entities, 'unlike' shows the dissimilarity.

This sentence tells us that the masonry bees prefer to live in solitude. This characteristic is unlike the honey bees i.e. the honey bees don't prefer to live in solitude.

- *Lisa takes care of her siblings like a mother does.*

This sentence is incorrect since 'like' is followed by a clause (a mother does). The correct way to write this sentence using 'like' is:

- Lisa takes care of her siblings like a mother.

'Lisa' is compared to 'a mother'. Lisa takes care of her siblings in the same way a mother does.

Now, try to apply this learning on the following official questions:

- Like Auden, the language of James Merrill is chatty, arch, and conversational- given to complex syntactic flights as well as to prosaic free-verse strolls.

- A. Like Auden, the language of James Merrill
- B. Like Auden, James Merrill's language
- C. Like Auden's, James Merrill's language
- D. As with Auden, James Merrill's language
- E. As is Auden's the language of James Merrill

- Unlike auto insurance, the frequency of claims does not affect the premiums for personal property coverage, but if the insurance company is able to prove excessive loss due to owner negligence, it may decline to renew the policy.

- A. Unlike auto insurance, the frequency of claims does not affect the premiums for personal property coverage,
- B. Unlike with auto insurance, the frequency of claims do not affect the premiums for personal property coverage,
- C. Unlike the frequency of claims for auto insurance, the premiums for personal property coverage are not affected by the frequency of claims,
- D. Unlike the premiums for auto insurance, the premiums for personal property coverage are not affected by the frequency of claims,
- E. Unlike with the premiums for auto insurance, the premiums for personal property coverage is not affected by the frequency of claims,

## TAKE AWAYS

1. When 'like + noun' is separated from the sentence by a comma, the comparison is between the subject of the sentence and the noun following 'like'.
2. When 'like + noun' is not separated from the sentence by a comma, the comparison is between the object of the sentence and the noun that follows 'like'. Note that this usage is correct only when there is no ambiguity about which two nouns are being compared.