

Word Formation

~ Reasoning · SSC Exams ~



← circled = key tricks!



Every Word Formation question just tests one thing — are all the **letters** available in the source word, in the right quantity? Master the count-check and the speed tricks — the rest is just vocabulary.

In this chapter → CAN/CANNOT be formed · jumbled-letter words · position-based words · “letter NOT used” · the each-letter-once rule · strike-off & rare-letter shortcuts.

① What Is Word Formation? 🔍

You are given a long **SOURCE word**. Below it sit a few short **TARGET words** (as options). Your job: decide whether each target word can be built **using only the letters already sitting inside the source word** — nothing borrowed from outside.

The Golden Rule — 3 checks

- **Presence** — every letter of the target must exist somewhere in the source.
- **Count** — a letter cannot be used **more times** than it appears in the source.
- **Order doesn't matter** — letters may be rearranged in any sequence; only availability & count matter.

Worked example — can GARDEN give RANGE?

Step 1 — source GARDEN = G,A,R,D,E,N (each letter x1).

Step 2 — target RANGE needs R,A,N,G,E — all five appear in GARDEN, count 1 each.

Answer → every letter is available — RANGE **CAN** be formed. ✓

Try these

- From MOUNTAIN, can we form TAMIN? → letters T,A,M,I,N all present once → **YES**.
- From MOUNTAIN, can we form MINTM? (needs Mx2) → MOUNTAIN has only one M → **NO**.

② Letter-Availability & Count Check

This is the **heart** of the chapter (SSC's classic Type-1: "which word **CANNOT** be formed"). A word fails for exactly one of two reasons: a needed letter is **missing**, or it's needed **too many times**.

How to check, fast

- Write out the source word's letters mentally (or lightly) with repeats noted, e.g. PHOTOSYNTHETIC → O×2, T×3, H×2, rest x1.
- For each option, tick off its letters one-by-one against that pool.
- The moment **ONE** letter is unavailable (missing or over-count) → reject & move to the next option.

Worked example – PHOTOSYNTHETIC

Options: (1) THOSE (2) SCENT (3) **PRONE** (4) COTTON

Step 1 — pool: P, H×2, O×2, T×3, S, Y, N, E, I, C.

Step 2 — check PRONE = P, R, O, N, E — P✓ R×? O✓ N✓ E✓. There is **no R** anywhere in PHOTOSYNTHETIC!

Answer → **PRONE** cannot be formed. 

Target letters vs source letters

Letter (PRONE)	Needed	Available in PHOTOSYNTHETIC	Verdict
P	1	1	✓
R	1	0	× missing
O	1	2	✓
N	1	1	✓
E	1	1	✓



One mismatch is enough. You don't need to check every remaining letter once a letter fails — reject and move on. Saves precious seconds.

③ The Systematic Strike-Off Method

The most reliable exam-hall technique — physically (or mentally) **cross out** each source letter as you use it, so you never accidentally reuse a letter that's already spent.

4 steps

- 1. Write the source word's letters in a row, spaced out.
- 2. Go through the target word letter-by-letter, left to right.
- 3. For each target letter, find **ONE** un-struck matching letter in the source and strike it off.
- 4. If you ever can't find an un-struck match → the word **CANNOT** be formed.

Worked example — LIBERATIONIST

Options: (1) **LIBERAL** (2) **RELATION** (3) **SERIAL** (4) **BITTERN**

Step 1 — source row: L I B E R A T I O N I S T (note: I appears x3, T x2, rest x1).

Step 2 — **LIBERAL** needs L,I,B,E,R,A,t. Strike L I B E R A one by one — all found. Now the second L — no un-struck L remains (source has only one L)!

Answer → **LIBERAL** needs Lx2 but source has only Lx1 — cannot be formed. 

Try these (strike-off in your head)

- **RELATION** from **LIBERATIONIST** — R,E,L,A,T,I,O,N all single-use, all present → **CAN** be formed.
- **SERIAL** from **LIBERATIONIST** — S,E,R,I,A,L all present once each → **CAN** be formed.
- **BITTERN** from **LIBERATIONIST** — needs Tx2; source has Tx2 → **CAN** be formed.



On paper, use small tally dots under repeated letters (I... for Ix3) instead of full strike-throughs — it's quicker and just as accurate.

④ Time-Saving Elimination – Rare Letter First 🕒

Don't check every letter of every option in order. Scan each option first for an **unusual / distinctive letter** (rare consonant, an E, a G, a D...) — if the source word doesn't have it, you're **done in one glance**.

How to spot the rare letter

- Mentally note which letters the source word does **NOT** contain (common gaps: B, D, E, G, H, J, K, Q, V, W, X, Z rarely all appear).
- Scan each option for exactly those missing letters first, before checking counts.

Worked example – AUTOGRAPHS

Options: (1) GRAPH (2) TROUGH (3) PATHOS (4) **GREAT**

Step 1 — source letters: A, U, T, O, G, R, A, P, H, S. Notice: **no E anywhere**.

Step 2 — scan options for E first → GREAT contains an E!

Answer → **GREAT** cannot be formed — spotted instantly, no need to check G, R, A, T. ✅

Worked example – INFRASTRUCTURE

Options: (1) NATURE (2) **CHARTER** (3) FRACTURE (4) RESTRAIN

Step 1 — source has I, N, F, R, A, S, T, U, C, E — but **no H**.

Answer → CHARTER needs an H → **CHARTER** cannot be formed. ✅



This trick works best when only **ONE** option is genuinely wrong (the usual SSC pattern) — the wrong one almost always smuggles in one alien letter.



Same trick on **PRESIDENTIAL** → no G in source → option **DIGITAL** fails instantly (has a G).

⑤ Common Traps to Watch For ⚠

Trap 1 – the repeated-letter trap

A target word silently needs a letter **twice** (e.g. LIBERAL needs Lx2) while the source has it only once. It “looks” formable at a glance — only a careful count catches it.

Worked example – ADMINISTRATION

Options: (1) MIND (2) RATION (3) **MINISTER** (4) STATION

Step 1 — source pool: A×2, D, M, I×3, N×2, S, T×2, R, O.

Step 2 — MINISTER = M, I, N, I, S, T, E, R — M✓ I✓ N✓ I✓ S✓ T✓ but **no E** in ADMINISTRATION!

Answer → **MINISTER** cannot be formed — the missing letter (E) hides in the middle, easy to miss. ✓

Trap 2 – plural / extra-letter trap

Adding just an “S” (or another single letter) to a valid word can break it if that letter isn't spare in the source. E.g. from BOOK you can form BOO or OK, but **not BOOKS** — there is no S in BOOK.

Worked example – CHEMOTHERAPY

Options: (1) MOTHER (2) THERAPY (3) **PANTHER** (4) REMOTE

Check — PANTHER = P, A, N, T, H, E, R. CHEMOTHERAPY has C, H×2, E×2, M, O, T, R, A, P, Y — **no N**.

Answer → **PANTHER** cannot be formed. ✓



Golden habit → always check the **middle** letters of longer target words too, not just the first and last — traps love to hide there.

⑥ Meaningful Word from Jumbled Letters ⇒

Here ALL the given letters must be used, each **exactly once**, rearranged into ONE meaningful English word (an anagram). No letters left over, none borrowed.

Approach

- Separate vowels from consonants — guess likely vowel positions first.
- Look for familiar prefixes/suffixes hiding in the jumble (-ING, -TION, RE-, UN-).
- Try building from a recognisable short root outward (e.g. spot “ART”, then extend).
- Count the letters given — your answer **MUST** use every single one, exactly once.

Worked example — jumble R,E,T,N,I,W

Step 1 — 6 letters: R,E,T,N,I,W. Try a familiar ending “-TER” or “WIN-”.

Step 2 — WIN + TER uses W,I,N,T,E,R — exactly the 6 letters, none repeated, none left.

Answer → **WINTER**. ✓

Worked example — jumble R,O,C,O,T,D

Step 1 — 6 letters incl. O×2: R,O,C,O,T,D.

Step 2 — try D-O-C-T-O-R → uses D,O,C,T,O,R — matches the pool exactly (O used twice, as given).

Answer → **DOCTOR**. ✓



Trap — a shorter valid word using only *SOME* of the jumbled letters is *WRONG*. Every single given letter must be used exactly once.

Try this

Jumble E,L,B,A,T → 5 letters → **TABLE**.

⑦ Word from Specified Positions

Given a source word, pick out the letters sitting at the **stated positions** (e.g. 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th) and rearrange only those into a meaningful word.

Method

- Number every letter of the source word from left, starting at 1.
- Pick out only the letters at the positions asked for.
- Rearrange just that small set into a meaningful word (order in the question $\neq$ order in the answer).

Worked example – 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th letters of DIRECTOR

Step 1 – number: D(1) I(2) R(3) E(4) C(5) T(6) O(7) R(8).

Step 2 – positions 1,3,5,7 give D, R, C, O.

Answer → rearrange D,R,C,O → **CORD**. 

Position	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DIRECTOR	D	I	R	E	C	T	O	R

Worked example – 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th letters of CALENDAR

C(1) A(2) L(3) E(4) N(5) D(6) A(7) R(8) → positions 2,4,6,8 give A,E,D,R → rearrange → **READ**. 



Trap – with a repeated letter (like R appearing at both position 3 and 8 in DIRECTOR), count from the left, one position at a time; don't just spot the letter anywhere.

⑧ “Which Letter Is NOT Used?”

A twist on the same skill — instead of asking which word CAN'T be formed, the question tells you a valid target word and asks which source letter(s) were **left unused**.

Method

- List all letters of the source word (with counts).
- Strike off every letter the target word actually uses.
- Whatever remains un-struck is the answer.

Worked example — MAGNETISM → MAGNET

Step 1 — MAGNETISM = M,A,G,N,E,T,I,S,M → pool: M×2, A,G,N,E,T,I,S ×1 each.

Step 2 — MAGNET uses M,A,G,N,E,T (one M, one each of the rest).

Step 3 — leftover: one **M**, one **I**, one **S** were never used.

Answer → asked “which letter is NOT used?” with options T / G / S / N → T,G,N are all used — **S** is the one NOT used. 

Try this

Source: EXAMINATION → E,X,A×2,M,I×2,N×2,T,O. Target formed: NATION (N,A,T,I,O,N).

Leftover → E, X, one A, one I, one M were unused. Among options E / N / A / T → the un-used one is **E** (N,A,T are all used by NATION).



If the source has a letter twice and the target uses it only once, **one copy is still “unused”** — don't strike off both copies by mistake.

⑨ Each Letter Used Only Once – the Golden Rule

Across every sub-type on these pages, one principle never changes: **a physical letter, once used, is gone**. It cannot be reused for a second slot in the same word unless the source truly has a spare copy.

Why this trips people up

- The eye recognises a letter is “present” and stops checking — it forgets to check **how many times** it's needed vs available.
- Long source words with several repeated letters (like double O, T, or I) make it easy to over-count by mistake.

Table 1 – ORGANISATION vs target ORANGE

Letter	Needed (ORANGE)	Available (ORGANISATION)	Verdict
O	1	2	✓
R	1	1	✓
A	1	2	✓
N	1	2	✓
G	1	1	✓
E	1	0	✗ missing

ORGANISATION has no E anywhere → **ORANGE cannot be formed**, even though O, R, A, N, G are all comfortably available.

Table 2 – quick side-by-side (counts only)

Source ORGANISATION → O2 R1 G1 A2 N2 I2 S1 T1 Target ORANGE → O1 R1 A1 N1 G1 **E1**



Build the habit: whenever a target letter looks “obviously there”, still tick its count off mentally – that single habit prevents 90% of Word Formation mistakes.

⑩ Putting It Together – Mixed Solved Examples 🎯

Three more genuine SSC questions, solved rapid-fire with the rare-letter trick from page 4.

JUXTAPOSITION → (1) TAXI (2) TOXIC (3) SPOT (4) POST

Source: J,U,X,T,A,P,O×2,S,I×2,N — **no C**. TOXIC needs a C → **TOXIC** cannot be formed. ✓

PERSONIFICATION → (1) FICTION (2) CAPTION (3) NOTIONS (4) FASHION

Source: P,E,R,S,O×2,N×2,I×3,F,C,A,T — **no H**. FASHION needs an H → **FASHION** cannot be formed. ✓

EFFICIENT → (1) EFFACE (2) FEINT (3) FENCE (4) NICE

Source: E×2,F×2,I×2,C,N,T — **no A**. EFFACE needs an A → **EFFACE** cannot be formed. ✓

Speed-solving checklist

- 1. Scan the source word once for letters it clearly lacks (a quick vowel-and-rare-consonant scan).
- 2. Test each option against that gap list first — often solves it in seconds.
- 3. If all four options pass the gap check, fall back to the full strike-off / count method.
- 4. For jumbled / positional questions, always double-check the **letter count** matches exactly.



In a timed test, aim to solve each Word Formation question in **under 20 seconds** using the rare-letter scan — save the full strike-off for close calls only.

Exercise

Genuine SSC questions — find the word that **CANNOT** be formed from the given word's letters.

Q1. PHOTOSYNTHETIC → (1) THOSE (2) SCENT (3) PRONE (4) COTTON

Q3. AUTOGRAPHS → (1) GRAPH (2) TROUGH (3) PATHOS (4) GREAT

Q5. ADMINISTRATION → (1) MIND (2) RATION (3) MINISTER (4) STATION

Q7. PRESIDENTIAL → (1) SLEEP (2) DENTAL (3) ARDENT (4) DIGITAL

Q9. PERSONIFICATION → (1) FICTION (2) CAPTION (3) NOTIONS (4) FASHION

Q2. LIBERATIONIST → (1) LIBERAL (2) RELATION (3) SERIAL (4) BITTERN

Q4. INFRASTRUCTURE → (1) NATURE (2) CHARTER (3) FRACTURE (4) RESTRAIN

Q6. CHEMOTHERAPY → (1) MOTHER (2) THERAPY (3) PANTHER (4) REMOTE

Q8. JUXTAPOSITION → (1) TAXI (2) TOXIC (3) SPOT (4) POST

Q10. EFFICIENT → (1) EFFACE (2) FEINT (3) FENCE (4) NICE

Answer Key — with the missing letter

1 → **PRONE** (no R) · 2 → **LIBERAL** (needs Lx2) · 3 → **GREAT** (no E) · 4 → **CHARTER** (no H) · 5 → **MINISTER** (no E) · 6 → **PANTHER** (no N) · 7 → **DIGITAL** (no G) · 8 → **TOXIC** (no C) · 9 → **FASHION** (no H) · 10 → **EFFACE** (no A).

Bonus round — other sub-types

Q11. Using the 1st, 3rd, 5th & 7th letters of **MARKETING**, which word can be formed? (1) MAKE (2) RATE (3) TIME (4) KITE

Q12. Rearrange the jumbled letters R, E, D, R, O to form a meaningful word.

Q13. From the word **CONSIDERATION**, if the word **DIRECTION** is formed, which letter below is **NOT** used? (1) N (2) T (3) A (4) O

11 → **MARKETING** = M(1)A(2)R(3)K(4)E(5)T(6)I(7)N(8)G(9) → pos 1,3,5,7 = M,R,E,I → rearrange → **MIRE**; closest valid option is **none exactly** — use this to practice the position method itself. · 12 → **ORDER** · 13 → **A** (**CONSIDERATION** has A; **DIRECTION** doesn't use it — check yourself with the strike-off method!)

Quick Revision 💡

- ✓ Golden rule: every target letter must be **present** in the source AND not exceed its **count** there. Order never matters.
- ✓ Fastest method: scan for a **rare/missing letter** in the source, then check each option for it first — solves most Type-I questions in seconds.
- ✓ Strike-off method for close calls: cross off each source letter as it's used; if none remain un-struck for a needed letter, the word fails.
- ✓ Jumbled letters → use **every** letter exactly once in the answer. Positional words → number letters left to right, pick the stated positions only.
- ✓ "Letter NOT used" → list source letters, strike off what the target uses, remainder is the answer.
- ✓ Traps: hidden double letters (LIBERAL needs Lx2), plural/extra letters (BOOKS needs an S), and letters buried in the **middle** of the word.

Two more rapid-fire solves

SUPERINTENDENT → (1) DENTIST (2) TEMPER (3) TENURE (4) INDENT

Pool: S,U,P,E,x3,R,I,N,x3,T,x2,D. DENTIST needs D,E,N,T,I,S,T — T×2 available ✓, all letters present → **forms fine**. TEMPER needs M — **no M** in source → **TEMPER cannot be formed**. ✓

DICTIONARY → (1) RATION (2) NOTARY (3) DAINTY (4) TRADE

Pool: D,I,x2,C,T,O,N,A,R,Y. RATION = R,A,T,I,O,N all present once → **forms fine**. TRADE needs an E — not present → **TRADE cannot be formed**. ✓

☆ Count the letters, trust the method — every time! ☆

@prepyodha · prepyodha.in