Essential SAT Writing Principles ✏

1   Parallelism

- Here is an example of a grammatically correct sentence that the SAT would not consider correct:

  He likes reading, track, and to dance.

  ◇ This violates the concept of <u>Parallelism</u>, because the three closely-connected ideas are grammatically expressed in different ways.

  ◇ Some "correct" ways of restructuring the sentence are as follows:

  He likes reading, running track, and dancing.

  He likes to read, run track, and dance.

- Lists of things/ideas are a key tell to look for parallelism.

2   Comma Splices

- A comma splice has three conditions:

  1. There are two independent clauses
  2. They are linked together by a conjunction
  3. There is no comma before the conjunction

- Comma splice examples:

  He said that his tie ripped this morning so he was a half-hour late to work.

  She went to the zoo to see the bears but they were all hiding in a bush.

  Most academic journals require expensive memberships to read although there are some exceptions.

3   Commas and "Essential Elements"

- Phrases whose deletion would not change the overall idea of a sentence should be split off with commas. There are several different kinds of phrases.

- Adjective Phrases:

  Kate, <u>walking briskly</u>, continued her final lap around the track.

  ◇ Whether or not Kate was walking briskly doesn't change the fact that she's continuing the lap around the track; therefore, this phrase is nonessential.

  The students <u>wearing letter jackets</u> are varsity athletes.

  ◇ Removing the underlined phrase would imply that all the students are varsity athletes and change the sentence's meaning.

  ◇ Adjective phrases can also be introduced with a preposition:

  The guy <u>with the crazy hat</u> needs to be escorted off the premises.

- Adjective Clauses:

  ◇ Different from adjective phrases, these are usually introduced with <u>which</u> or <u>that</u>.

  ◇ When using the word <u>that</u>, the information is essential.

  ◇ When using relative pronouns such as <u>who</u>, <u>which</u>, <u>where</u>, or <u>when</u>, the information is not essential.

  The hat <u>that she gave me five years ago</u> is one of my favorites.

  The ancient sculpture, <u>which sold for \$20,000,000 last year</u>, depicts a long-forgotten king.

- Appositive:

  - ◇ Appositives (from Latin apponere, meaning to place beside) is a word or phrase that clarifies the meaning of a noun.

  - ◇ Appositives can be both essential and non-essential depending on the context. If you can distinctly identify the noun without the appositive, then the appositive is not essential.

    The author's book <u>Life and Consequences</u> is a treasure trove of wisdom.

    The author's latest book, <u>I'm the Problem</u>, describes the troubles of a tenuous relationship.

    My relative <u>Oliver</u> just started his own company.

- Leading Dependent Clauses:

  - ◇ Commas are also used anytime a sentence begins with a dependent clause.
    <u>Despite the influx of grain</u>, the settlers were still hungry.

    <u>Running to the edge of the store</u>, Marcus frantically grabbed the last box of toilet paper.

  - ◇ Beware using a semicolon after an introductory dependent clause.
  - ⚠ *Hoping to quell the rumors of rebellion; the empress gave a fantastic speech.*

4   Semicolons

- Semicolons can be used to separate two <u>closely-related</u> independent clauses. They are weaker than a period but stronger than a comma.

  Yesterday I saw Elise at the library; she was studying for her Kinetics exam.

  The blue whale is the largest known animal; it can reach a maximum length of 100 ft.

  ⚠ *One day I would like to visit the Taj Mahal; This morning I woke up with a crick in my neck.*

- Semicolons can also be placed before a conjunctive adverb. Conjunctive adverbs include words like <u>therefore</u>, <u>nevertheless</u>, <u>indeed</u>, <u>consequently</u>, <u>however</u>, <u>otherwise</u>, etc.

  I needed to take the mayor out to lunch to get my business permit; moreover, I had to donate to his "Lamborghini fundraiser."

  The town isn't nearly as prosperous as it once was; indeed, the mechanization of farming has decreased the population by almost 50 percent.

5   Colons

- Colons are often used to introduce lists, but they can also provide explanations and separate two closely-related independent clauses (with emphasis on the second clause).

- The key to using colons is that you <u>must</u> have a complete sentence before them.

  The forecast for this week isn't looking too good: rain on Monday, hail on Wednesday, and snow on Saturday.

  Tess always complains when we walk by that restaurant: they never get her order right.

  A square is a rectangle: a rectangle is not a square.

  - ◇ A colon <u>cannot</u> separate a noun from its verb, verb from its direct object, preposition from its object, or subject from predicate.
  - ⚠ *The four kinds of ice cream flavors at the local shop are: chocolate, strawberry, vanilla, and mint.*
  - ◇ Again, just remember that it must be a complete sentence.

6   Idioms for Conjunctions and Prepositions

- Certain conjunctions follow specific formats. Here are some that commonly show up:

  ◇ not only...but also

  ◇ either...or

  ◇ both...and

  ◇ neither...nor

  ◇ whether...or

  ◇ as...as

- Some verbs also take specific prepositional phrases given the context. Here are some:

  ◇ as
     * view as
     * see as
  ◇ about
     * ask about
     * anxious about
     * curious about
  ◇ at
     * arrive at
     * succeed at
  ◇ by
     * accompanied by
     * amazed by
     * struck by
  ◇ for
     * advocate for
     * responsible for
     * pay for
     * strive for
  ◇ from
     * abstain from
     * protect from
  ◇ of
     * approve of
     * deprive of
     * fan of
     * model of
     * take advantage of
     * source of
  ◇ to
     * oblivious to
     * able to
     * in addition to
     * adhere to
     * partial to
  ◇ with
     * interfere with
     * agree with
     * sympathize with

- There are much better uses of your time than memorizing lists like these. The main tell that a question is testing this concept is when all four of your answer choices are prepositions. If the phrasing sounds off to you then it probably is.

7   Dashes

- Dashes can be used to introduce a list/explanation, hyphenate adjectives, or mark off a nonessential clause.

- Introducing Lists/Explanations:

  - ◇ Much like a colon, a dash can introduce a list or add an explanation.
  - ◇ In this sense it follows the same rules; that is, the sentence must be complete before the dash.

    Take the new dogs for a walk—Draco, Ozzy, and Rosie.

    The vassal was furious—the peasants were partying too hard.

- Hyphenation:

  - ◇ Hyphenation occurs when two or more words that act as a single idea modify a noun.

    six-year-old son

    long-haired Athenian

    on-campus dining hall

- Mark off Nonessential Clauses:

  - ◇ These follow the same rules as commas. <u>Do not</u> mix a dash on one side and comma on the other.

    The thieves—steeling themselves—got ready for the big heist.

    ⚠ *The thieves, steeling themselves—got ready for the big heist.*

8   Possessive Determiners

- Contrary to how possession is usually expressed in English (with an apostrophe), *it's* is a <u>contraction</u> meaning it is, and *its* is a <u>possessive adjective</u>.

- Examples:

  Its color is green. It's green.

  It's raining outside.

  The pressure was too much for its load-bearing column to handle.

  It's pretty tough to read since its letters are so faded from acid rain.

- There are other words to look out for, too: *their there they're* and *your you're.*

- *Their* and *your* are also possessive adjectives. *They're you're* are contractions meaning they are and you are, respectively.

- Finally, *there* is an adverb that means in or at a specific place.

9   Effect vs Affect

- <u>Affect</u> is a verb. <u>Effect</u> is a noun.

  - ◇ You do not *effect* something, you *affect* something.
  - ◇ You do not feel the *affects*, you feel the *effects*.
  - ◇ The hurricane greatly affected those who were unable to evacuate.
  - ◇ The effects of the hurricane were felt for months after it initially hit.

- If you are stuck, try swapping different words in that are either verbs or nouns.

  - ◇ In the first example: The hurricane harmed those, hurt those, drenched those, etc.
  - ◇ In the second: The aftermath of the hurricane, tremors of the hurricane, results of the hurricane, etc.

10   Concision

- The goal of the Concision Principle is to eliminate redundancy.

- A sentence should not have two words competing to fulfill the same purpose.

- There are five common scenarios where you will be asked to use Concision:

  1. Redundant verb phrases: *Refrigerators <u>cool and chill</u> food you would like to store.*
  2. Redundant adjectives: *Illuminated by the flashlight, the <u>swift and quick</u> raccoon scampered away.*
  3. Redundant adverbs: *The bomb-defusal technician <u>cautiously and carefully</u> clipped the green wire.*
  4. Redundant nouns: *This <u>home and dwelling</u> was where I grew up.*
  5. Redundant implied descriptors: *I wanted to speak with the <u>tall giant</u>.* The word "giant" already implies that the person is tall.

- The phrase "in order that they may" also sometimes appears. This can be rephrased to "in order to" or even just "to."

- Try to identify repetition in the test question. If each answer choice essentially means the same thing but has a different number of words it is probably a concision question.

- The shortest choice is *usually* the correct choice, but you must be wary of shorter answer choices that actually remove important information from the sentence. So, be sure to read each answer choice first and not blindly choose the shortest one.

11   Shifts in Verb Tenses and Moods

- The main idea of these questions is to conserve the verb tense if nothing happens in the sentence that warrants a change. These questions are heavily contextual.

- When you see multi-word verbs, look to the helper verb (e.g. had, will, will have, has) to help determine the tense.

- Example*: *Michelangelo **took** on the Giant with zeal and **finished** the statue in just two years. The statue's form and poster **echoed** the proportions of classical Roman sculpture, but its expressiveness and level of detail **has reflected** Renaissance sensibilities.*

  We can tell by looking at the other bold-faced verbs that this sentence is operating in the past tense, but the verb in question ***has reflected*** is a different verb tense, so we need to correct it to just **reflected**.

- Here are some of the common pitfalls when using verb tenses:

  ◇ The pluperfect tense, e.g. "had made", is when we use "had" or "has" before a verb. This tense indicates that an action was completed in the past relative to some other event. The perfect tense, e.g. "made", indicates that something happened in the past, but we don't know relative to what exactly.

  ◇ The idea is similar for the future perfect tense, e.g. "will have made", but the action will be completed in the future relative to some other point.

  ◇ The words "could", "should", and "would" need to have a reference to a condition, e.g. *I would have won if he didn't cheat.* Imagine if someone walked up to you and said: "*You should buy this shirt.*" You would probably say: "*Why should I?*" because you're looking for that condition.

12   Subject-Verb Agreement

- The form of the subject needs to agree with the form of the main verb and vice-versa.

  The dogs bark. The dog barks.

- We don't care about any fluff between the subject and main verb for these questions.

- ⚠ *NRG Stadium, boasting a capacity of over 72,000 people, <u>were</u> the first NFL facility to have a retractable roof.*

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*taken from the khanacademy video lesson

- This is wrong because NRG Stadium is singular. If we remove the fluff clause about its capacity we can see that we're essential saying *NRG Stadium were the first*. This is grammatically incorrect and should be changed to *NRG Stadium was*.

⚠ *The most important thing we can do to mitigate the damages **are** to immediately remove the affected machines.*

- This is again wrong: our subject is "thing" and the verb is "are." We are only talking about a single "thing," so "is" should be used instead.

13   Noun Agreement

- Use the context of a sentence to determine if the noun in question should be singular or plural.

⚠ *Raising their glass, the guests proposed a toast to the new year.*

- The way this sentence is written implies that all the guests share only a single glass. We need to use the plural form of glass, i.e. glasses, to get our nouns to agree.

- Another potential scenario is to get a list of nouns.

  Dogs, cats, and platypuses are all classified as mammals. Not "mammal."

14   Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- *Antecedent* is the word used to describe what a pronoun is referring to.

  Yesterday, I sadly dropped my phone in the toilet. I had to take it to a phone repair store.

- Here, *it* is the pronoun and the antecedent is *phone*. You had to take what to the phone repair store? The phone.

- Not all pronouns can be used to refer to all nouns, however, and this is where the agreement comes into play.

⚠ *The pallet full of toilet paper reams arrived at my house yesterday, so I made sure to put them in a safe place.*

- Despite you intuitively grasping the meaning of this sentence, it is actually grammatically incorrect. The pronoun *them* is referring to the subject of the sentence – "pallet." *Them* is a plural pronoun and *pallet* is singular. We need to change *them* to *it* to fix this sentence. We could also keep *them* and change the beginning of the sentence to *The toilet paper reams*

⚠ *Robin and Alice completed we homework twenty minutes ago.*

- Obviously, this one doesn't work. Change *we* to *their*.

15   Pronoun Clarity

- The problem here is that we have either too many possible antecedents or zero possible antecedents.

⚠ *A fight ensued: Michelle and Nicole wanted her favorite hair clip.*

- Who is *her* referring to? Michelle or Nicole?

- We can replace *her* with a proper noun such as *Michelle*, *Nicole*, or even a third party yet unmentioned like *Dana*.

⚠ *The business shut down after twelve years of operation, but their owner had plans for another venture.*

- *Their* can only refer to a plural noun, but *business* is singular. Hence, there is no possible antecedent.

- We can replace *their* with *its* to properly refer to the singular noun *business*.