

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 Parallelism, 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:

- There are two independent clauses
- They are linked together by a conjunction
- 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, walking briskly, 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 wearing letter jackets 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 with the crazy hat needs to be escorted off the premises.

- Adjective Clauses:

- ◇ Different from adjective phrases, these are usually introduced with which or that.

- ◇ When using the word that, the information is essential.

- ◇ When using relative pronouns such as who, which, where, or when, the information is not essential.

The hat that she gave me five years ago is one of my favorites.

The ancient sculpture, which sold for \$20,000,000 last year, 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 Life and Consequences is a treasure trove of wisdom.

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

My relative Oliver just started his own company.

- Leading Dependent Clauses:

- ◊ Commas are also used anytime a sentence begins with a dependent clause.

Despite the influx of grain, the settlers were still hungry.

Running to the edge of the store, 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 closely-related 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 therefore, nevertheless, indeed, consequently, however, otherwise, 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 must 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 cannot 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. Do not 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 It's vs Its

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

9 Effect vs Affect

- Affect is a verb. Effect 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.