

15 ext

Writing Unit Overview and Grammar Review

The Writing Section Isn't Just the Essay

The Writing section includes an essay and two multiple-choice sections. The two multiple-choice sections will contain three different types of multiple-choice questions: Improving Sentences, Improving Paragraphs, and Identifying Sentence Errors.

The Writing Section Questions

Type of Question	Number of Questions
Essay	1
Improving Sentences	25
Identifying Sentence Errors	18
Improving Paragraphs	6
Total	49 Multiple Choice and 1 essay

3 Writing Sections

The first section of every SAT test is a 25-minute essay. The last section of every test is a 10-minute section with 14 Improving Sentences questions. One of the sections from 2 to 7 will be a 25-minute section that will contain 35 questions: 11 Improving Sentences questions, 18 Identifying Sentence Errors questions, and 6 Improving Paragraph questions.

The Writing Section

Section	Type of Question	Duration (Minutes)	Number of Questions
Section 1	Essay	25	1 Essay
Sections 2-7	Multiple Choice (Grammar)	25	35
Section 10	Improving Sentences	10	14

What You Will Learn in This Unit

I have broken this unit on the Writing section into three chapters outlined here:

- Chapter 15: Grammar and the most common mistakes to look for
- Chapter 16: Writing your essay
- Chapter 17: The Writing section multiple-choice questions

Introduction to Grammar for the SAT

This grammar review is meant as a refresher. It is designed to remind you of the rules of grammar, not as stand-alone instruction. If you find that any of this grammar does not make sense, be sure to learn more about the topic.

Grammar is the set of rules that tells you how and when words should be used. You know most of the rules of grammar automatically. You wouldn't say, "Places I to have go" instead of "I have places to go," because you have learned the order in which words are used. That is grammar. The makers of the SAT try to find rules of grammar that you may not be familiar with, in order to trick you. In this chapter, I will go over some of the more common grammatical errors that you will find throughout the multiple-choice questions in the Writing section. You should avoid them when writing your essay, too.

How Grammar Is Tested on the SAT

The Writing multiple-choice questions will test your knowledge of grammar. The essay graders will also check for grammatical errors.

The Essay Reflects Your Use of Grammar

If an essay is well-written and with few grammatical mistakes, the reader can focus on the content of the essay. When your essay is graded, the graders will be looking to see how well you follow the rules of grammar, although a few errors are fine.

Writing Multiple-Choice Questions Involve Spotting Errors

The multiple-choice portion of the SAT primarily tests your ability to spot grammatical errors. You will have to recognize a variety of errors, and you will have to know the rules to know what errors to look for. I will teach you the most common grammatical rules you will have to know for the SAT.

General Terms to Know

Here is a basic reminder of the different terms you will need to know for this section. There will be more detailed descriptions later in the chapter when we deal with each.

Noun, Verb, Adjective, and Adverb

- **Noun** A person, place, or thing. Men, house, city, and sky are all nouns.
- **Verb** An action word or “to be.” Running, looked, to pump, and is are all verbs.
- **Adjective** Describes a noun. Funny, quick, and good are all adjectives.
- **Adverb** Describes everything else. Funnily, quickly, and well are all adverbs.

First, Second, and Third Person

- **First person** When someone is talking about themselves. I, us, me, and we are all first person.
- **Second person** The person you are talking to: you is second person.
- **Third person** Everyone else: him, he, her, them, she, and they are all third person.

Singular and Plural

- **Singular** Only one. Man, house, and city are all singular.
- **Plural** More than one. Men, houses, and cities are all plural.

Understanding the Terms

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I	we
Second Person	you	you
Third Person	he/she/ one	they

Rules to Know

Here is the list of what I will cover in this chapter:

- **Subject/verb agreement** what verb to use based on the subject
- **Verb tenses** what verb to use when, based on time and situation
- **Pronoun agreement** what pronoun to use
- **Adverbs vs. adjectives** which words describe things versus actions or descriptions
- **Conjunctions** how to properly compare and connect ideas
- **Awkwardness/Wordiness** cutting down on clutter
- **Parallelism** when elements match each other’s structure

Verbs Are Conjugated

As you'll recall, a verb is either an action word ("fly," "walking," "whistled," etc.), or it is some version of "to be." Conjugations of verbs, are different versions of a verb that let you know who is taking the action, and when it is happening. Verbs are conjugated, or changed, based on the subject that is doing the verb or is being described. They are also conjugated based on when an action occurs. Here are two examples of the conjugations of the verbs "talk" and "to be."

- **Talk:** talk, talked, talking, talks, were talking, was talking, etc.
- **To Be:** am, are, were, being, were being, was being, was, etc.

We will cover each type of conjunction separately. First, we will cover how to conjugate a verb based on the subject of the verb. Next, we will cover conjugations based on when the verb happened, or the verb "tense."

Verbs are conjugated based on:

- The subject of the verb
- The tense of the verb

Subject/Verb Agreement

What Is a Verb?

You should know what a subject is from your study of The Anatomy of an Idea on page 441, but we have yet to examine verbs. A verb is either an action word like “fly,” “walking,” or “whistled,” or it is some version of “to be.” Recall that an idea has a subject and an action or description. This means that every idea has a subject and a verb. If the idea has an action, the verb will be an action verb: flying, breathing, watching, etc. If the idea has a description, the verb will be some form of to be: am, are, is, was, wasn’t, were, etc. Either way, every idea, and therefore every sentence, must have a verb.

Verbs and Subject Agree?

What does it mean that a verb and a subject must agree? It means that different versions of a verb are used for different subjects. For example, “a cat runs,” but “many cats run.” Both of these phrases mention running, but for a single cat we use “runs” and for many cats we use “run.” This works with “to be” as well. “One cat is hungry,” but “many cats are hungry.” Notice that when we go from one cat to many cats, we have to switch from “is” to “are.”

EXAMPLE

Subject/Verb Agreement

Correct:

The man is happy.
One dog barks.
Many dogs bark.

Wrong:

The man are happy.
One dog bark.
Many dogs barks.

Singular Verbs Have an “s”

One thing that might be a bit confusing is that verbs that go with singular nouns have an “s” on the end, and those that go with plural nouns do not. Notice in Example B, one single dog “barks.” Now look at Example C: we have many “dogs,” and they “bark.”

REMEMBER

Notice, when the noun has an “s,” the verb does not.

Understanding “to Be”

Any time there is a description in an idea, there will be some form of the verb “to be.” You use this verb all the time, even if you don’t know it. Words like “is,” “are,” “was,” “will,” “am,” and “were” are all conjugations of the verb “to be.” Like every verb, “to be” must be conjugated to agree with the subject. Below are some tables that give you the proper conjugation of “to be” in the present and past. You will learn more about tenses in the section on Verb Tenses, on page 495.

DEFINITION

To conjugate is to change forms.

To Be—Present

	Singular	Plural
First Person	am	are
Second Person	are	are
Third Person	are	

To Be—Past

	Singular	Plural
First Person	was	were
Second Person	were	were
Third Person	was	were

Subject/Verb Agreement Questions

Here are the questions you should ask yourself when looking at a verb to make sure that it is correctly conjugated:

- What is the subject for this verb? What is doing the action or being described?
- Is the subject singular or plural?
- Is the subject first person, second person, or third person?
- What is the proper conjugation for this type of subject?

How the SAT Will Try to Trick You

If a verb and its subject are right next to each other, it is generally pretty clear if they agree. So the SAT is going to try to trick you by putting other nouns around the verb in order to confuse you into thinking that the verb goes with a different noun. They do this in two different ways: they will place some other noun in between the verb and its subject, or they will make sure that a verb has a subject that is different than the subject of the sentence.

EXAMPLE

Groups: Singular or Plural

If a group is specifically defined as a group by being called “group,” “team,” “partnership,” “committee,” etc. then the group is treated like a single thing and is singular. If the members of the group are simply named, then they are treated as many things, and are plural. “We” is plural, too.

- **Singular groups** “The committee of nurses, dentists, and doctors is meeting.”
- **Plural group** “The nurses, dentists, and doctors are meeting.”
- **Plural we** “We are meeting.”

You can avoid being fooled by taking the time to ask yourself your subject/verb agreement questions and by remembering how verbs are conjugated.

EXAMPLE

Groups: Singular or Plural

For each of the following examples, determine the proper conjugation of the bolded verb.

A. The farmer, drained from planting hundreds of acres, **were** ready to nap.

What You Think

What is the subject of the verb?
"The farmer" (not "the acres")

Is the subject singular or plural?
"the farmer" is singular

Is "the farmer" first, second or third person? **Third Person**

What is the proper conjugation for this type of subject? **Was**

The farmer, drained from planting hundreds of acres, was ready to nap.

B. A critic of the reforms **argue** that the changes are not enough.

What You Think

What is the subject of the verb?
"A critic" (not "the reforms")

Is the subject singular or plural?
"the critic" is singular

Is "the critic" first, second or third person? **Third Person**

What is the proper conjugation for this type of subject? **Argues**

A critic of the reforms argues that the changes are not enough

C. I was sure that the experiment would succeed, but only later **was** the fatal flaws discovered.

What You Think

What is the subject of the verb? **the flaws**

Is the subject singular or plural? **plural**

Is "the flaws" first, second or third person? **Third Person**

What is the proper conjugation for this type of subject? **Were**

I was sure that the experiment would succeed, but only later was the fatal flaws discovered

Check Your Understanding: Subject/Verb Agreement

For the following examples, determine if the bolded verb matches its subject. If it does not, state the subject and the correct conjugation.

1. The men **are** hungry.
2. Jason **be** happy.
3. My whole family, including my parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, **enjoy** gatherings.
4. Without their leader, many of the men, feeling helpless, **retreated** to their one safe place.
5. Marc and Irene **is** reflecting on their wonderful wedding.
6. The businessman **sleeps** after a long flight.

Answers

- | | | | | |
|------------|--------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Correct | 2. Jason; is | 3. Family; enjoys | 4. Correct | 5. Mark and Jane; reflected |
| 6. Correct | | | | |

Verb Tenses

The tense of a verb is the conjugation of the verb with regards to the time at which the action took place. The two statements, “Freda is eating” and “Freda ate” both note that some person named Freda is eating, but the first statement denotes that it is happening now, while the second denotes that the eating already happened. You know this based on the “tense” of the verb. The following five sentences all describe a woman walking, but during different times.

- **She walks** – Happens in general, no specific time or event is specified
- **She walked** – Happened in the past
- **She will walk** – Will happen in the future
- **She is walking** – Is happening right now
- **She has walked** – At some unspecified time in the past

How Common Are They

Between 10 and 15 multiple choice questions will errors involving incorrect verb tense. In addition, you will be expected to use proper verb tense in your essay

Notice that you can sometimes determine when she walked - past, present, or future - based on how the verb “to walk” is conjugated: For other tenses, the when it happened is unclear, or no specific time or single event is specified.

The Main Tenses

There are six tenses that you will likely deal with on the SAT: simple present, present continuous, past tense, future tense, present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect. You definitely know the first three, and are at least familiar with the last three.

REMEMBER

It’s not the names of the tenses you need to know, it’s how verbs change depending on when they happen.

The point of this whole exercise is to make sure that you know what version of a verb should be used in any given situation, so that you can spot mistakes. You don’t have to focus on knowing the names of the tenses, just note how verbs change based on either the tense, or the time that things are happening.

- **Simple** - Happens in general (no specific time)
- **Present continuous** - Happening now
- **Past** – Already happened at a specific time
- **Past continuous** – Was happening in the past
- **Past unspecified “present perfect”** - in the past at an unknown or unspecified time
- **Future** - Will happen later

Happens in General – Simple

Some statements are not about a particular incident within an action or description, but about actions taking place in general. If you want to say that your friend plays drums you are not talking about one time that she played the drums. You are saying that it happens, but you are not saying how often it happens, or exactly when it did, is, or will happen. All you want to say is that it is something that does happen. “Juanita plays the drums,” specifies only that she does play the drums at some times.

Here are some examples of the verbs that do not specify a particular time or place for the actions:

Happens in General (Simple)

- John runs to the store.
- Harlan is nice.
- Birds fly.

Happens at a Specific Time

- John ran to the store.
- Harlan is being nice.
- The birds will fly.

Notice that for the Simple statements, you are not told anything about a specific time or how often the event happens. “John runs to the store” just tells you that John runs when he goes to the store. There is not specific time that he ran to the store. “John ran to the store” tells you that at some point earlier John ran to the store.

Can Be a Repeating Action

This tense can also be used to express an action that occurs regularly. The key is that you are not specifying a specific action or event, but a series of events or occurrences. Look at these examples:

- John runs every morning.
- Harlan is nice when he has eaten.
- Birds fly south in the winter.

In these examples, it is not specified if the event happened in the past, is happening now, or will happen in the future. “Birds fly south in the winter” implies that during every winter, previous ones, one happening now, and ones in the future, birds will fly south.

How the SAT Can Trick You

One of the ways that the SAT can trick you with these is to give you a sentence in which a time frame is specified, but then use the simple tense. Look at these sentences:

Correct:

I play in the park

Wrong:

I play in the park yesterday

Notice that in the correct example, the sentence gives no indication of time, so “play” is the correct conjugation. In the wrong example, the sentence tells you when the event happened, yesterday. Therefore, “play” is not the correct conjugation to use.

Happening Now (Present Continuous)

This tense specifies that the action is taking place right now. It is different than the simple tense in that it is telling you when the action is happening. It is happening now. Look at these examples:

Happening Now (Present)

- John is running to the store.
- Harlan is being nice.
- The birds are flying.

Not Happening Now

- John ran to the store
- Harlan is nice
- The birds will fly

Notice that in the Present examples, the events are happening at the time that the statement is being made. John is running now. Harlan is being nice right now. The birds are flying now.

Will Happen Later (Future Tense)

Some actions and descriptions are going to happen later. Verbs describing future actions are in the future tense. For example:

- John will run to the store.
- Harlan is going to be nice.
- The birds will fly.

Past Tenses

There are two common past tenses, both of which tell you that something has happened in the past, but one is used to state that something happened in the past while the other is used to state that something was happening when something else happened.

Already Happened (Past Tense)

This specifies that an action took place in the past at a specific point in time. For example:

- John ran to the store.
- Harlan was nice.
- The birds flew.
- We fished at the harbor.

Happened at Some Unknown or Unspecified Time

Unlike the past tense, which says something happened at some specific time in the past, this tense indicates that something did happen, but does not say exactly when. It is the difference between “John ran yesterday” and “John has run.” When you say, “John has run,” you are only implying that John has, at some point in his entire life, run. You are not saying exactly when this running took place.

To indicate that something happened at an unspecified time, put “has” or “have” before the past tense of a verb. We refer to this as the “has/have verb” tense. For example:

- The crater has been created.
- Dinosaurs have died off.
- Malcolm has won games before.

Notice in each example that “has” or “have” is placed before the past tense of the verb and no specific time is mentioned.

How the SAT Will Trick You

The SAT will try to trick you by putting a time frame with has/have verb conjugated verbs. Remember, any sentence that uses this has/have structure may not have a specific time frame.

Correct:

John has run to the store.

Wrong:

John has run to the store yesterday.

What You Think

The second sentence is saying exactly when in the past John ran, so it cannot use the “has” verb structure.

Will Happen Later, but Before Something Else

With this tense, you place “will have” before the past tense of a verb. You do this to indicate that something will happen in the future, but before something else. For example:

- Charlie will have studied before he takes the test next week.
- Everyone will have pitched their tents before the rally tomorrow.
- She will have enjoyed her nap by the time the guests arrive.

Check Your Understanding: Verb Tense

For each of the following determine which verb is in the correct tense.

1. A) John liked to go to the movies when he was a kid.
B) John likes to go to the movies when he was a kid.
2. A) She tried to fool him, but Manuel had seen that trick before.
B) She tried to fool him, but Manuel sees that trick before.
3. A) The building has been torn down yesterday.
B) The building has been torn down.
4. A) Without telling anyone, the manager is closing the store.
B) Without telling anyone, the manager closed the store.
5. A) Jamie and her daughter play fun games together.
B) Jamie and her daughter playing fun games together.
6. A) The horses will have practiced before the race begins tomorrow.
B) The horses had practice before the race begins tomorrow.
7. A) Brendan had sold the house in no time, even though the real estate market was bad.
B) Brendan sold the house in no time, even though the real estate market was bad.
8. A) The film students will enjoy next semester.
B) The film students enjoyed next semester.

Answers

1. A 2. A 3. B 4. B 5. A 6. A 7. B 8. A

Pronouns Replace Nouns

Pronouns take the place of nouns. They really are nouns, almost. The difference between pronouns and nouns is that pronouns do not name things specifically. While a noun names a specific person, place, or object (“Frank,” “tractor,” “mountains”), a pronoun refers more generally to a thing (“he,” “it,” “them”).

EXAMPLE

Nouns and Pronouns

In the sentence “Mike ran the race,” “Mike” and “race” are both nouns.

In the sentence “He ran the race,” “Mike” the noun has been replaced with “He” the pronoun.

Common Pronouns

Here is a list of the more common pronouns that you will see:

- | | | |
|--------|---------|-------|
| • he | • us | • him |
| • she | • those | • her |
| • it | • these | |
| • them | • they | |

Why We Use Pronouns

We use pronouns because it is awkward to use the same noun or name over and over. Look at the following two sentences:

- A. After Mike ran the race Mike went to the store.
B. After Mike ran the race he went to the store.

Sentence A sounds strange, almost as if it should be two sentences. This is where a pronoun comes in. In sentence B, the second use of “Mike” is replaced by the pronoun “he.” Sentence B sounds better.

Check Your Understanding: Pronouns Replacing Nouns

In the following sentences, replace the *redundant* noun with the proper pronoun.

DEFINITION

Redundant means used too much, repeated when it need not be.

1. Vanda packed her belongings because Vanda was moving to Montreal.
2. Yun studied the textbook so much that the textbook was falling apart.
3. Fed up with her job, Jennifer quit and decided Jennifer would go back to school.

ANSWERS

Pronouns are in bold.
1. Vanda packed her belongings because **she** was moving to Montreal.
2. Yun studied the textbook so much that **it** was falling apart.
3. Fed up with her job, Jennifer quit and decided **she** would go back to school.

How Nouns and Pronouns Agree

It is crucial that the pronoun matches the noun it replaces. They need to agree. You wouldn't want to replace "Sally" with "he," "them," or "it." You would replace "Sally" with "she" because she is a female and singular.

Different Pronouns for Subjects and Objects

Remember that a noun can do something or can have something done to or for it. A noun can also be described or it can be part of a description. If a noun does the thing or is described, it is a subject. If the noun has something done to it, it is an object. It is not important that you memorize these names, just recognize their different position in a sentence. It is important to know whether a pronoun is a subject or an object because we use different pronouns depending on which role the pronoun is playing in the sentence.

DEFINITION

A **subject** refers to what does something or is described. An **object** refers to what has things done to or for it, or is part of the description.

Subject and Object Pronouns

	Subject	Object
Male singular	he	him
Female singular	she	her
Person singular	one	one
Object singular	it	it
Plural	they	them

How the SAT Will Try to Confuse You

If you read a sentence such as “Mike went to the store and then she had soup,” you will usually notice immediately that something is wrong. “She” has replaced Mike, and the pronoun and the noun do not agree. So the SAT has to come up with other ways to try and trick you. They might make it unclear what noun the pronoun is supposed to be replacing. Take the time to stop and determine exactly what noun your pronoun is replacing. They also might put some other nouns in between the pronoun and the noun it is replacing to try to confuse you. This can make it difficult to determine what noun your pronoun connects to. Again, be sure to take the time to see the connection. Finally, they might try to use “you” when referring to people in general. Grammatically, “you” only works in the second person. For example, the correct wording is, “One should always use proper grammar” unless you are telling a specific person what to do.

DYSLEXIA, MEMORY DIFFICULTIES, or ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFICULTIES

Be sure to write down the noun and the pronoun, and then ask your questions.

Checking Pronoun/Noun Agreement

When you are trying to figure out if a pronoun agrees with its noun, first ignore everything in the sentence other than the pronoun and the noun it replaces, and then ask yourself the following questions to check the connection between the pronoun and noun:

- Is the noun a person? If it is a person, is it a man or woman? For a man, use “he” or “him.” For a woman, use “she” or “her.”
- Is the noun a thing? If it’s an object, use “it.”
- Is the noun a place? If it’s a place, use “it.”
- Is the noun plural? If it’s plural, use “them” or “they.”
- Is the pronoun a subject or an object in the sentence? If it’s a subject, use “I” or “he.” If it’s an object, use “me” or “him.”

EXAMPLE

Groups: Singular or Plural

For each of the following examples, determine if the bolded pronoun is correctly used.

A. Mary Jo, Regina, and Tommy were playing cards when, turning quickly to the left, **she** knocked a glass of water over, which shattered on the floor.

What You Think

What is the pronoun? She.

What noun does she replace?

It's unclear in this sentence.

It could be either of the women, Regina or Mary Jo.

The problem with this pronoun is that it is unclear which noun the pronoun is replacing.

C. To become a published author like J.D. Salinger, one must be so dedicated that **you** will write every day of the week.

What You Think

What is the pronoun? You.

What noun does you replace?

It is replacing "one".

The problem with this pronoun is that "you" does not replace "one". The use of "you" is specific to a person and "one"

B. Psychosomatic medicine focuses on the mind-body connection, where **they** use the bio-psycho-social model.

What You Think

What is the pronoun? They. What noun does they replace?

It is replacing "medicine."

Is "medicine" singular or plural? Singular.

"They" is not singular, it is plural, so "they" is the wrong pronoun.

Check Your Understanding: Noun/Pronoun Agreement

In each of the following sample problems, identify the error in pronoun use and replace it with the correct answer.

- 1. Kelly, Joanna, and Julie were at the mall shopping when, suddenly, she remembered that the debate was
- 2. The Great Lakes in North America are five freshwater lakes on the United States–Canadian border, and it form the largest group of freshwater lakes on the planet.
- 3. Although usually consisting of several adjoining cities, metropolitan areas often have one major city that serves as its hub.
- 4. To promote international exchange of thought, like former United States Senator J. William Fulbright did, you must set up an exchange program.
- 5. The anchorman was tired from covering news on the election, so when it was over, there was no question they would take a long vacation.

ANSWERS

1. incorrect: she; replace with: one of the girl's names

2. incorrect: it; replace with: they

3. incorrect: its; replace with: their

4. incorrect: you; replace with: one

5. incorrect: they; replace with: he.

Descriptions: Adjectives and Adverbs

There are two types of description words: adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives describe things (people or objects), and adverbs describe actions and other descriptions.

Adverbs = Adjectives + *ly*

Generally, you create an adverb by adding “ly” to the end of an adjective. A man is “quick,” but he runs “quickly.” Notice when we described the “man,” a noun, we described him as “quick,” but when we described his running, we said he runs “quickly.” We added “ly” to the end of “quick” when we want to use it to describe an action.

REMEMBER

For most adjectives, an adverb is an adjective + “ly.”

Adjectives Describe Feelings

When you are describing someone or something’s feelings, condition, appearance, mood, etc., you are describing the person or the thing, so you use an adjective, not an adverb. You would not say that a person appears handsomely, you would say that he appears handsome.

Look at these two sentences:

- A. Marta looks quick.
- B. Marta looks quickly.

Sentence A is describing Marta because it describes how she appears. That is, she appears to be someone who is quick, as in someone who moves quickly. Sentence B is describing the manner in which Marta looks at things. She does not stare for a long time at things, she looks at them quickly, which means she looks at them and then quickly looks away.

Good and Well

“Good” is an adjective and “well” is an adverb. “Well” can also be an adjective that means “in good health.”

From Adjective to Adverb

In the following table, notice how adjectives become adverbs.

Described Noun	Described Action	Described Description
amazing view	fish swim amazingly	it is an amazingly blue view
the terrible man	fish swim terribly	the terribly humid day
a <u>good</u> book	the fish swam <u>well</u>	

How the SAT Will Try to Trick You

The only way that you can get fooled is if you think something is describing a noun when it is really describing an action or a description, or the other way around. To avoid this, when dealing with a description, take the time to find out exactly what that description is describing. If it is describing a noun, you know to use an adjective, and if it is describing an action or another description, you need to use an adverb.

DYSLEXIA,
MEMORY DIFFICULTIES, or
ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFICULTIES

Be sure to write down the description and what it is describing, and then figure out if you need an adverb or an adjective.

Description Questions

If you are trying to figure out the right description to use, ask yourself: What is the description describing?

- If it is describing a noun, you use an adjective.
- If it is describing an action or description, you use an adverb.

Awkwardness and Wordiness

Some of the sentences in the SAT do not actually violate any actual rules of grammar, they are simply awkward or too wordy.

Awkwardness

When a sentence is written in a way that makes its meaning unclear because of the placement of the words, it's considered awkward. To determine if a sentence is awkward, ask yourself the following questions:

- Could the sentence be written in a way to make its meaning more clear?
- Are there any parts of the sentence that should be grouped together but are not?
- Are there descriptions that are not as near to what they describe as they could be?

Compare the following sentences:

- A. Miltings Company is buying a company that makes auto parts, Nanto.
- B. Miltings Company is buying Nanto, a company that makes auto parts.

Notice that both sentences use the same number of words, and the exact same words, but the order of information in sentence A is awkward. Sentence B is clearer.

Wordiness

Wordiness is a very simple thing to notice. The best way to say something is with the fewest words possible. The Improving Sentences questions in the Writing multiple-choice section often have sentences that are wordy. When comparing sentences, the one that uses fewer words is generally the better version. This is true for your writing as well. If you can come up with a way to say the same thing using fewer words, use that version.

Compare these two sentences:

- A. Lee is not in a position to pay the majority of his bills until such time as he gets paid, which won't be until next week.
- B. Lee can't pay most of his bills until he gets paid next week.

Both of these examples are saying the same thing, but sentence B does it using the fewest possible words.

Comparisons and Connections

Many sentences compare or connect ideas. The following are some of the more common terms used to connect or compare ideas:

- and
- but
- however
- although
- indeed
- either/or
- neither/nor
- in addition
- regardless
- thereafter
-

Either/Or and Neither/Nor

These two express very different relationships. Either/Or states that one thing, or the other is possible. Neither/Nor expresses the idea that two things are both unacceptable or not true. It is important to remember that “or” follows “either” and “nor” follows “neither”.

EXAMPLE

Either/Or and Neither/Nor

Watch Out!

either/and is grammatically incorrect.

Correct

We went to the movie with neither William nor Frank.
We can go to the movie with either William or Frank.

Wrong

We went to the movie with neither William or Frank.
We can go to the movie with either William and Frank.

It is most likely that you will see the grammar error of using “or” with “neither” in the multiple choice questions.

How the SAT Will Trick You

The Sat will try to trick you by using “neither” with something other than “nor” or by using “either” with something other than “or”.

Wrong

We went to the movie with neither William or Frank.
We can go to the movie with either William and Frank.

Either and Neither Can Be Used On Their Own

Do not think that you cannot use “either” or “neither” without “or” and “nor” respectively. The point is that if you are using “or/nor” with “neither,” you must use “nor” and if “or/nor” is used with “either,” “or” must be used.

Conjunctions Expressing Agreement

Certain conjunctions express that two ideas are similar or agree. This does not mean that they are saying the exact same thing, only that they are saying similar things or have the same point of view. Here are some conjunctions which express agreement:

- and
- plus
- in addition
- as well as
- indeed

Conjunctions Expressing Causation

Certain conjunctions express that one idea is caused by the other. This is a very specific type of agreement. The following conjunctions express a causative relationship:

- because
- therefore
- due to
- since
- so
- hence
- thus
- accordingly

Conjunctions Expressing Disagreement

Certain conjunctions express that two ideas disagree. This does not mean that they say the exact opposite things, just that what is implied by the first is not the second. The following conjunctions imply that two ideas disagree.

- but
- nevertheless
- contrarily
- though
- although
- however
- unlike
- in contrast
- as opposed to
- while

How the SAT will Trick You

The SAT will try to trick you with by having using a conjunction that does not fit the relationship between two ideas. For example, one idea might agree with the other, but a sentence will use a conjunction which implies some other relationship.

EXAMPLE

Incorrect Conjunctions

The following are examples of proper and improper uses of conjunctions based on the expressed relationship.

A)

Correct - They wanted to be famous, but had no chance of becoming famous.

Wrong - They wanted to be famous, in addition had no chance of becoming famous.

In this example the ideas conflict; they want one thing but will not get it. Therefore, the conjunction should express disagreement. "But" expresses disagreement, so it works in the sentence. "In addition" expresses agreement, so it does not fit in the sentence.

B)

Correct – We wanted to win so we trained extra hard.

Wrong – We wanted to win even though we trained extra hard.

In example B, the first idea was the cause of the second idea. The reason that they trained hard is because they wanted to win. The wanting to win caused the extra hard training, therefore the conjunction should imply causation. "So" expresses the correct causation, so it works in the sentence. "Even though" expresses disagreement, so it does not fit in the sentence.

C)

Correct – I enjoy fishing and I enjoy hiking.

Wrong – I enjoy fishing therefore I enjoy hiking.

In example C, the two ideas agree, but neither one causes the other. Hiking and fishing are both things that the speaker enjoys, but enjoying fishing does not cause the enjoyment of hiking. Therefore, "and" works in the sentence, while "therefore" does not, so "therefore" is the wrong conjunction.

Check Your Understanding: Conjunctions

In the following sentences, pick the conjunction with fits in the sentence.

1) I really wanted to go to the party (and/therefore/but) my mother would not let me.

2) Mikhael finished every bit of food on our plate (plus/because/even though) he was really hungry.

3) The host family got the room together the day before my arrival. (Additionally/Hence/In contrast), when I arrived the room was splendid.

Answers

1. But 2. Because 3. Hence

Parallelism

The elements in either a list or a comparison must have the same structure. We call this similarity in structure “parallelism.” This means that verbs in a list or comparison must be conjugated in the same way, clauses must be structured in the same way, and elements in a list should be the same part of speech.

Here is what you need to remember about the elements of a list for the SAT:

- verbs must be conjugated the same way
- clauses must have the same structure
- elements must be the same part of speech (thing, action, description, etc...)

Similar Conjugation

If the elements of a list are verbs, or verbs are being compared, it is important that they are conjugated in the same way. If they are conjugated differently, then they are wrong.

A) Correct: We learned to paint, to dance, and to sing.

Wrong: We learned to paint, dancing, and to sing.

In the correct example, all of the verbs are conjugated the same. They are all in the format “to verb”: “to paint”, “to dance” and “to sing.” Notice in the wrong example how “to dance” has been changed to “dancing.” This is a different conjugation than “to paint” and “to sing.” That is what makes the wrong example wrong.

B) Correct: I painted more than I danced

Wrong: To paint is more expensive than hiking

In the correct comparison, “painted” is compared to “danced.” They are both conjugated in the same way, so the example is correct. In the incorrect comparison, the verbs are in different tenses, so they are not parallel.

Similarly Structured Phrases

In a list of phrases, or when phrases are compared, the phrases must have the same structure. This means that the patterns and placements of *articles*, adjective/adverbs, verbs and nouns must be the same in all of the phrases. Look at the following examples to see how phrases need to be structured.

Definition

An **article** is “the,” “a” or “an.” It functions like an adjective except that it does not describe as clearly as an adjective.

A) Correct: Haley’s article mentioned the quality of the art, care of the presentation, and cleanliness of the building

Wrong: Haley’s article mentioned the quality of the art, how careful was the presentation, and that they had cleaned.

In the correct example, all of the phrases have the same structure, “thing of the **thing**”:

- quality of the **art**
- care of the **presentation**
- cleanliness of the **building**

In the wrong example, the phrase regarding the presentation, “how careful was the presentation” does not follow the “thing of the thing” structure, so the list is not grammatical.

B) Correct: He was impressed by how careful the presentation was less than how talented the artist was.

Wrong: He was impressed by how careful the presentation was less than the artist’s talent.

In the correct comparison, both phrases have the structure “how description the thing was.” In the wrong comparison, the second phrase changes to a structure of “thing’s thing.” The compared things are not put in similar phrases, which is what makes the wrong example wrong.

You Must Compare Similar Things

When making a comparison, it is important that the things being compared are similar.

Correct: Our players are different than other teams’ players.

Wrong: Our players are different than other teams.

In the correct example, players are compared with players, but in the wrong example, players are compared with teams. People cannot be compared with teams. While the intention of the wrong example is to compare “Our players” with those of other teams, it is not OK to leave off “players” from the end of the sentence.

Lists vs. Comparisons with Leading Terms

If there is a leading term that can be applied to all of the members of a list or to both members of a comparison, you have more freedom with the list than with the comparison. With a list you can use the word either with the first term only, or with all of the terms of the list. With a comparison, you must use the term with both elements being compared.

First Correct: She loved their stories, plays, and poems.

Second Correct: She loved their stories, their plays, and their poems.

Wrong: She loved their stories, plays, and their poems.

If there is a word that can begin every element of a list, it can be used just in the first element (first correct), or in every element (second correct), but it cannot be used in only some of the elements.

Correct: She loved their stories more than their plays.

Wrong: She loved their stories more than plays.

When making a comparison, the beginning word must be in both elements of the comparison. In the incorrect example, “their” has been left off of the second element of the comparison.

Watch Out!

A contradiction must have the same parallel structure as a comparison.

Check Your Understanding: Parallelism

Correct the following sentences, or state that they are already in proper parallel form.

1. The mission of the group is to help students, improve education, and to be an example of stewardship.
2. Some people's opinions are more important than other people.
3. You are likely to see squirrels, raccoons, and otters.
4. He came with a book, a pencil, and an eraser.
5. Craig wanted some games not books.
6. Even though most of the class liked his work, it was not enjoyed by others.

Answers

1. The mission of the group is to help students, improve education and be an example of stewardship.
2. Some people's opinions are more important than other people's opinions.
3. correct
4. correct
5. Craig wanted some games not some books.
6. Even though most of the class liked his work, some did not enjoy it.

Advice for Specific Word Types

Here I am going to give you a series of things to look for when you encounter different types of words. You will also be given a list of questions that you can ask and answer when you come across a certain term.

Verb Advice

A verb is either an action word or a form of “to be.” Verbs must be conjugated with regard to the time of the action (verb tense) and with respect to the subject that is doing the action or being described. So checking to see if a verb is properly conjugated means checking that it is both in the right tense and that it fits with its subject.

Check Subject/Verb Agreement

- What or who is doing the action?
- What or who is being described (if the verb is “to be”)?
- Ignoring everything else in the sentence, does the verb fit with the subject?

Check Tense

- When is the action or description happening?
- Is the action or description happening before something?
- Is the verb properly conjugated for the time that it is happening?

Check for Similar Actions

If a verb is part of a series of actions, it must be in the same tense as all of the other verbs.

- Is the verb part of a series of actions?
- Is the verb conjugated in the same way as all of the other verbs in the series?

Pronoun Advice

A pronoun takes the place of a noun. The proper use of a pronoun requires that it be the correct pronoun to replace the noun, and that it's clear which noun it is replacing. If you are trying to determine whether a pronoun is being properly used, ask yourself the following questions.

Check Pronoun/Noun Agreement

- What noun is the pronoun replacing?
- Is this the correct pronoun to replace that noun?

Subject/Object Pronouns

Remember that you use different pronouns for the subject (thing doing the action) and object (thing the action is done to or for).

- Is the pronoun doing the action (subject), or having the action done to it (object)?
- Is the pronoun the correct form of subject/object?

Check Pronoun Placement

- Is it clear what noun the pronoun is replacing?
- Is there somewhere else that the pronoun could go that would make it clearer what noun it is replacing?

Adjective and Adverb Advice

If you see that something is a description, you must figure out what it is describing. If it is describing a thing, it is an adjective and does not need an “ly” at the end. If it is describing anything other than a thing, it is an adverb. Adverbs look just like adjectives except that they often have an “ly” on the end.

Description Questions

- Is it describing a thing?
- Is it describing anything but a thing?
- If it needs an “ly,” does it have one?
- Remember that “things” are “good,” and everything else is “well.”

Conjunction Advice

We have covered two situations in which conjunctions can give you problems. First, the conjunction must express the correct relationship between the ideas that it connects. Next, if a sentence included either/neither and or/nor, it must use the correct combination.

If you see any of these conjunctions, ask yourself and answer the questions the corresponding question:

Either/Or and Neither/Nor Questions

- Does the sentence include neither?
Does some conjunction other than “nor” follow? If so, it is grammatically incorrect.
- Does the sentence include either?
Does some conjunction other than “or” follow? If so, it is grammatically incorrect.

Relationship Questions

- Is there a conjunction which expresses a relationship?
- What relationship does the conjunction express?
- What is the relationship of the ideas being connected?
- Does the conjunction express the correct relationship between the ideas?

Parallelism Advice

Remember that when things are being compared, or when you have a list, the elements must be the same. This means that verbs must be similarly conjugated, phrases must have the same structure, and leading term use must be used similarly.

List/Comparison Questions

- Is there a list or comparison? If so ask yourself the following questions
- Are the verbs in the list conjugated in the same way?
- Are the structures of the phrases the same?
- Are there leading terms of just some of the elements of a list?
- Are there leading terms on only one of the elements of a comparison?