

PUNCTUATION

When you are linking ideas,

STOP

- Period
- Semicolon
- Comma +
FANBOYS
- Question mark
- Exclamation Mark

HALF-STOP

- Colon
- Long dash

GO

- Comma
- No punctuation

FANBOYS stands for **F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et, and **S**o.

STOP punctuation can link *only* complete ideas.

HALF-STOP punctuation must be *preceded* by a complete idea.

GO punctuation can link anything *except* two complete ideas.

Jonah, the valedictorian of his senior class, believes that only one factor contributed to his success in **1** school; his commitment to hard work.

- 1**
- A) NO CHANGE
 - B) school; and it was
 - C) school:
 - D) school: being

As always, check what's changing in the answer choices. In this case, the words vary somewhat, but notice the types of punctuation that are changing: STOP and GO.

Now, when you see STOP punctuation changing in the answer choices, you can do a little something we like to call the Vertical Line Test.

Draw a line where you see the punctuation changing—in this case, between the words *school* and *his*. Then, read up to the vertical line: *Jonah believes that only one factor contributed to his success in school*. That's complete. Now, read after the vertical line: *his commitment to hard work*. That's NOT complete.

So let's think; we do not have two complete ideas here. What kind of punctuation is WRONG? STOP. Eliminate (A) and (B). In (D), the word *being* is unnecessary and wordy. Choice (C) is the correct answer.

Let's try another:

It was a top priority for Jonah to do well in **2** school by his love of friends, family, and sports were just as important.

2

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) school, but his
- C) school: his
- D) school, whereas

Check the answer choices. What's changing? Punctuation, except this time it does not appear in the original sentence. Sometimes we need to consider the meaning of the sentence in addition to STOP and GO.

It was a top priority for Jonah to do well in school is complete. Then, *his love of friends, family, and sports were just as important* is complete, too. Therefore, because we have one complete idea (the first) and another complete idea (the second), we can use STOP or HALF-STOP punctuation. (Remember the FANBOYS!)

So, what's the real difference between the answers? Notice that the two ideas in this sentence are competing (school vs. other pursuits). So we need a word that provides a clear transition between the two concepts. Only (B) does this.

Let's see one more:

Admittedly, advanced planning and time management, two necessary characteristics of high **3** achievers, have also been the cornerstones of Jonah's high school success story.

3

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) achievers—
- C) achievers;
- D) achievers

The punctuation is changing in the answer choices, and there's some STOP punctuation, so let's use the Vertical Line Test. Put the line between *achievers* and *have*. The first idea, *Admittedly, advanced planning and time management, two necessary characteristics of high achievers*, is incomplete, and the second idea, *have also been the cornerstones of Jonah's high school success story* is incomplete. Therefore, we can't use STOP (which needs two complete ideas) or HALF-STOP (which needs a complete idea before the punctuation), thus eliminating (B) and (C). Do you need the comma after *achievers*? Since *achievers* is part of the phrase *two necessary characteristics of high achievers* and that phrase is NOT necessary to the sentence, you'll need commas surrounding it. When ideas do not add necessary meaning to the sentence, always separate them with two commas or dashes. Therefore, (A) is the correct answer.

COMMAS

On the SAT, there are only four reasons to use a comma:

- in STOP punctuation, with one of the FANBOYS
- in GO punctuation, to separate incomplete ideas from other ideas
- in a list of three or more things
- in a sentence containing unnecessary information

If you can't cite a reason to use a comma, *don't use one*.

We've already seen the first two concepts, so let's look at the other two.

Try this one.

Environmentalists, **4**
consumers; and government officials
are all working together to develop new
solutions to pollution problems.

4

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) consumers: and
- C) consumers, and
- D) consumers, and,

First, check what's changing in the answer choices. It looks like punctuation is changing. Hopefully you used the Vertical Line Test to rule out (A) and (B).

The grammatical rule you need to know here is that the SAT expects a comma after every item in a series. That's because there is a potential for ambiguity when this punctuation isn't used:

I went to the park with my parents, my cat Violet and my dog Stuart.

If there's no comma, how do we know that this sentence isn't supposed to say his parents are *my cat Violet and my dog Stuart*? The only way to clear things up would be to add a comma like this:

I went to the park with my parents, my cat Violet, and my dog Stuart.

Keep that in mind as we try to crack number 4. In this problem, *Environmentalists, consumers, and government officials* form a list, so they should be set off by commas as they are in (C). You almost never use a comma after *and*, so eliminate (D).



Let's try another:

5 Jonah, the valedictorian of his senior class believes that only one factor contributed to his success in school: his commitment to hard work.

- 5**
- A) NO CHANGE
 - B) Jonah the valedictorian of his senior class,
 - C) Jonah, the valedictorian of his senior class,
 - D) Jonah, the valedictorian, of his senior class

First, check what's changing in the answer choices. Just commas, and those commas seem to be circling around the words *the valedictorian of his senior class*. When you've got a few commas circling around a word, phrase, or clause like this, the question is usually looking to see if there's unnecessary information.

A good way to test whether an idea is necessary to the meaning of the sentence is to take it out. Read the original sentence again. Now read this one: *Jonah believes that only one factor contributed to his success in school: his commitment to hard work.*

Is the sentence still complete? Yes. Has the meaning of the sentence changed? No, we just lost an extra detail. Therefore, the idea is *unnecessary* to the meaning of the sentence and should be set off with commas as it is in (C). Answer (D) has an unnecessary comma. Remember, if you can't find a reason to use a comma, don't!

APOSTROPHES

As with commas, if you can't cite a reason to use an apostrophe, don't use one. There are only two reasons to use apostrophes on the SAT:

- Possessive nouns (NOT pronouns)
- Contractions

Let's see some examples.

Commercial farming often results in excess fertilizer use, which **6** can pollute nearby ponds, resulting in an overgrowth of algae.

- 6**
- A) NO CHANGE
 - B) can pollute nearby pond's,
 - C) could have polluted nearby ponds,
 - D) has polluted nearby pond's,

Check what's changing in the answer choices. There are a few shifts in tense, but for the most part, the apostrophes are what are changing. Remember: We don't want to use apostrophes at all if we can't cite a good reason to do so.

Does anything belong to *ponds*? No! Is this supposed to be a contraction, like *pond is*? No! Therefore, there's no reason to use apostrophes, so eliminate (B) and (D). Choice (C) changes the tense, and thus the meaning, of the sentence, so it's also wrong, leaving (A) as the correct answer.

In this case, the College Board is testing whether you can spot unnecessary punctuation. Sometimes they will check the opposite: that is, when apostrophes are necessary.

The first time I visited the
museum, I couldn't wait to view
7 painter, Andrew Wyeth's,
Christina's World.

7

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) painter, Andrew Wyeths
- C) painter Andrew Wyeths
- D) painter Andrew Wyeth's

Check what's changing in the answer choices. The main changes have to do with apostrophes and commas.

Andrew Wyeth's needs an apostrophe: It's his painting. So, get rid of (B) and (C). As for the comma, remember the rule about necessary information. If *Andrew Wyeth's* is removed from the sentence, we lose a crucial part of the meaning. Therefore, do NOT use commas around this phrase. Choose (D).

Transition Words

When the College Board underlines a conjunction, they are testing you on the meaning of two different sentences or clauses and are expecting you to choose the transition word that best joins the two ideas together, either by keeping the ideas similar or showing a contrast. Here is a list of some common conjunctions:

<i>Keeps the ideas similar:</i>	<i>Shows a contrast:</i>
And	Although / Though / Even though
Since	However
In fact	Yet
Therefore	But
Thus	Rather
So	In contrast to
Also	Despite
As well as	Unlike
Moreover	Instead
Consequently	Nevertheless
Hence	Nonetheless
Finally	Notwithstanding
Subsequently	Alternatively
In addition	
Likewise	

Try this example:

- Dark chocolate contains less sugar and fewer calories than milk chocolate.
- 8** Also, because it contains more antioxidants, it may help to prevent heart disease.
- A) NO CHANGE
B) However,
C) Although,
D) For example,

It sounds like dark chocolate is pretty wonderful, right? Less sugar and fewer calories are both positive things. Reading what comes after the conjunction, we see that dark chocolate also contains antioxidants that may prevent heart disease, another positive. We need something that keeps the flow of ideas similar. Both (B) and (C) would indicate a shift or contrast, and (D) doesn't make sense, so eliminate those three and you're left with the correct answer, (A).

NUANCES

The College Board may also test your knowledge of a few other grammatical instances. If you don't spot a pronoun, verb, or punctuation error, check for the following.

Idioms

Idioms are specific arrangements of words that convey a certain meaning. For example, the phrase "responsible for" is an idiom; you wouldn't say "responsible of." If you see a preposition underlined, check to see if it's used idiomatically.

Diction

Diction errors are errors in word choice. These are not hard to spot, because you will see single words with similar meanings. Your job is to choose the word with the best **precision** given the meaning of the sentence.

Commonly Misused Words

Their is possessive (*their* house).

There indicates location (my cat is over *there*).

They're means *they are*.

Its is possessive (the dog wags *its* tail).

It's means *it is*.

Than is used for comparison (greater *than*, less *than*).

Then is used for time (and *then* we).

Concision

If you were to ask for directions, which answer would you rather receive?

Turn right at Main Street and walk four blocks.

or

Since this street, Elm Street, is facing in a northerly direction, and your destination is due northeast, go east when you arrive at the intersection of Elm and Main. Going east will entail making a right turn in quite that easterly direction. After having made this turn and arrived on the perpendicular street...

The first one is obviously preferable. That's because concision is key when you want to communicate meaning. Really, as long as everything else is in order—as long as the grammar and punctuation are good to go—the best answer will almost always be the shortest.



For a specific list of tricky words and phrases to look out for, please see the Appendix on Prepositions and Idioms at the back of the book.