



Test Prep

W&L 101



1. Grammar/Punctuation

Semi-Colon (;)

On the SAT, a semi-colon can only be used to separate 2 independent clauses. Remember that an independent clause can be its own sentence.

- John went to the mall; he bought a pair of Jordans.

Colon (:)

For a colon to be correct on the SAT, the 1st part must be an independent clause and the 2nd part must be anything that describes the 1st part.

- John went to the one place where he felt comfortable: the mall.
- Amy handed out three crayons: red, blue, and yellow.

Long Dash (-)

The long dash can be used in one of two ways on the SAT. One long dash is identical to a colon, and two long dashes function the same way as a set of parentheses.

- There was only one thing Scooby could do— run!
- John – who had an extensive collection of classic Air Jordans – went to the mall looking for a new pair.

Run-On Sentence (aka Comma Splice)

A run-on sentence (or comma splice) occurs when 2 independent clauses are separated only by a comma. This is a grammatical error and will always signal a wrong answer choice on the SAT. Make sure you are aware of run-ons on the SAT.



- John went to the mall, he bought Jordans. **RUN-ON/COMMA SPLICE**

Clauses

The SAT will never explicitly ask about clauses, however having knowledge of them is essential if you want to correctly apply the rules listed here.

In basic terms, a clause has a subject and a verb, and an independent clause can be its own sentence.

A dependent clause, on the other hand, cannot stand alone as its own sentence. We can usually identify a dependent clause by the presence of a subordinating or “weak” conjunction (e.g. *after, although, because, since, unless, when, whenever, while, etc.*) at the start of it.

- Independent: John went to the mall.
- Dependent: *Since* John went to the mall.
- Independent: Amy ate some fries.
- Dependent: *Because* Amy ate some fries.
- Independent: Jim bought a car.
- Dependent: *When* Jim bought a car.

Modifiers

A modifier is a clause that is missing the subject, the verb, or both. Here are 4 things you need to know about modifiers that will help you identify them on the SAT:

1. The information contained within a modifier is just extra and optional.
2. If we delete a modifier from a sentence, what we have left is still a complete sentence and makes sense.
3. Modifiers are surrounded by commas.
4. When a modifier is placed at the beginning or end of a sentence, we omit the first or last comma, respectively.



- John, who dates Tina, went to the mall.
- Sad about Tina, John went to the mall.
- John went to the mall, thinking about Tina.

(*modifiers)

Commas

Here are the 6 reasons for comma usage on the SAT:

1. Modifiers
 - My friend Tim, who is really funny, lives in Minnesota.
2. When a dependent clause is followed by an independent clause
 - Since he got a dog, John needed dog food.
3. To separate 2 independent clauses aka Comma + FANBOYS conjunction (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So)
 - John went to the mall, and Bill stayed at home.
4. A list of 3 or more things
 - I like apples, oranges, and bananas.
5. To set up a quotation
 - John said, "I hate when it rains."
6. For 2 consecutive adjectives whose order can be reversed
 - They entered the dark, gloomy house./They entered the gloomy, dark house.



'Has, Have, Had'

There are only 2 reasons to use 'has, have, had' on the SAT:

1. If there are 2 events at different moments in the past. In this case, the older event gets 'had'
 - I liked watching basketball because I *had* played in college.
2. If something is still occurring
 - I played basketball for 5 years. (meaning you do not play anymore)
 - I *have* played basketball for 5 years. (meaning you still play)

Less vs Fewer

Less: Used for uncountable nouns

Fewer: Used for countable nouns.

- I had *less* time to complete the exam than John did.
- John scored *fewer* points than Sam in the basketball game.

Illogical Comparisons

We can only compare things with other things that are actually comparable. For instance, you cannot compare a person to a thing or a thing to a company. In addition, proper comparisons must be the same in terms of singularity and plurality.

- **Wrong:** The Mets' pitching is better than the Yankees.
- **Right:** The Mets' pitching is better than the Yankees'.
- **Right:** The Mets' pitching is better than the Yankees' pitching.

In the above example, the wrong sentence is comparing 'Mets' pitching' to 'Yankees', which doesn't make sense. The right sentences address this problem.



- **Wrong:** Positions in accounting and finance offer much more lucrative salaries and benefits than healthcare or education.
- **Right:** Positions in accounting and finance offer much more lucrative salaries and benefits than positions in healthcare or education do.

Here, 'positions in accounting and finance' are being compared to just 'healthcare or education' in the wrong answer choice, which, once again, is illogical.

- **Wrong:** The effects of television violence on brain chemistry are similar to that of video game violence.
- **Right:** The effects of television violence on brain chemistry are similar to those of video game violence.

In this final example, the wrong sentence has the right comparison but uses the wrong word (singular vs plural) to compare the two things.

Location Creates Relationships

Bad location puts words near each other that create false relationships and change the meaning of a sentence in unwanted ways.

For example, take the following sentence:

- We talked just as easily as we had in the past, when we would sit **in the field behind Joan's house atop the rabbit hutch** and discuss our friends and our hopes for the future. (**Incorrect:** This answer suggests that the house is atop the rabbit hutch)
- We talked just as easily as we had in the past, when we would sit **in the field atop the rabbit hutch behind Joan's house** and discuss our friends and our hopes for the future. (**Incorrect:** This answer suggests that the field is atop the rabbit hutch)
- We talked just as easily as we had in the past, when we would sit **atop the rabbit hutch in the field behind Joan's house** and discuss our friends and our hopes for the future. (This answer is **correct**)
- We talked just as easily as we had in the past, when we would sit **behind Joan's house in the field atop the rabbit hutch** and discuss our



friends and our hopes for the future. (**Incorrect:** This answer suggests that the house is in the field)

Effect vs Affect

Effect: Functions as a noun

Affect: Functions as a verb

- The movie had great sound *effects*.
- Tina was *affected* by the noise during her test.

Possessives

Its = Possessive form of a singular noun

Their = Possessive form of a plural noun

- The dog wagged *its* tail.
- The children did not want to share *their* toys.

*It's = a contraction of *It is*, They're = a contraction of *They are*, There = to indicate a place

Here are some examples of possessives for singular and plural nouns:

- My friend's boat (1 friend, 1 boat)
- My friend's boats (1 friend, more than 1 boat)
- My friends' boat (more than 1 friend, 1 boat)
- My friends' boats (more than 1 friend, more than 1 boat)

Redundancy

Sentences will be incorrect on the SAT if they contain redundancy. Redundancy occurs when you have more than one word (or phrase) meaning the same thing contained within the same sentence.



- The innovations saved the firm an **annual** amount of \$1.5 million **per year**.

(**annual* and *per year* mean the same thing, therefore one of them needs to be deleted for the sentence to be correct)

Special Sentence/Dangling Participle

***starts with a modifier that's missing the subject (sometimes a participle aka an ing word)...the subject must lead the 2nd part of the sentence

Idioms

Idioms are common phrases that exist in the English language and that don't necessarily have any rules. For SAT purposes, you just need to know them. If English is not your first language, then idioms can be difficult for you. In that case, try to learn as many idioms as you can but do not fret too much: idioms are not the most frequently tested concept and you can still get a very high score without them.

- Kick the bucket.
- Spill the beans.

Who/Whom

Who (They, We, She, He) is a subject pronoun and appears before a verb.

Whom (Them, Us, Her, Him) is an object pronoun and does not appear before a verb.

- Who passed the football to whom
- They passed the football to them.
- He passed the football to him.
- She passed the football to her.
- We passed the football to us.



Conjunction Pairs

The following words are conjunction pairs, meaning they must always appear together.

- Either...or
- neither...nor
- not only...but also
- not...but
- both...and
- whether...or



2. W&L Concepts & Questions

A String of Nouns Joined by Prepositions

When the SAT is testing the number (singular or plural) of a noun contained within a string of nouns joined by prepositions, the rule is to judge singularity or plurality based on the first noun in the string.

- The keys on the table of my cousins in college for agricultural sciences in Canada are/is gold.
- **The keys** on the table of my cousins in college for agricultural sciences in Canada **are/is** gold.

Adding or Deleting Sentences

When you need to consider adding or deleting a sentence from a paragraph, all you need to do is answer the following question:

The single thing the paragraph is saying is: _____?

Whatever we are considering adding or deleting needs to be in line with the paragraph's main focus, which is what the above question allows you to determine. If the sentence in question is not in line with the paragraph's main focus, then you should delete it. If it is, then you need to carefully consider the appropriate reason for adding it.

'An Excuse for The Main Idea'

When a question asks about some aspect of the passage, it is often an *Excuse for the Main Idea*. Examples of this type of question are:



Which of the following sets up the examples that follow?

Which answer ties into the main point of the last paragraph?

On these questions, you need to announce the main idea to yourself. If the question is asking about a specific paragraph, then you need to announce the main idea of that paragraph. Similarly, when it is asking about the passage as a whole, then you need to announce the main idea of the entire passage.

Being & Having as Throwaway Answers

In the pre-2016 SAT English section, as many as 1 in 6 wrong answer choices just randomly (and pointlessly) contained the words being or having. It is almost as if the College Board ran out of ways to make the wrong answers wrong. Knowing that, we should be aware that those two words tend to be used in the same way (although far less often) on the current SAT. Here are some examples from the old SAT:

Here, D is a throwaway wrong answer:

Direction-Based Questions

On questions that are giving you specific directions to follow, the rule is very simple:

Follow them!

Examples of this

Which choice provides a supporting example that is most similar to the examples already in the sentence?

Which choice provides the most effective explanation for the action described in the sentence?



Effectively Combining 2 Sentences

On Effectively Combining questions (Which choice most effectively combines the sentences at the underlined portion?), you want to consider the following list when determining the correct answer:

1. **Flow:** Read the sentences fast to determine how well they flow.
2. **Good Transitions:** Make sure the two sentences are connected by appropriate words and/or punctuation.
3. **Good Word Order:** Words don't need to appear in the exact same order as they did originally, but they do need to appear in an order that maintains the sense of the sentence and doesn't create a new meaning.
4. **Avoid Restarting/Restating:** This is often the most violated rule and what it means is that we need to avoid sentences that restate something that could have been left out.

Parallelism (In Lists)

It is important to be aware of 'parallelism' on the SAT. 'Parallelism' is the idea of maintaining a similar style between items in a list or phrases in the same part of a sentence.

- Right: I like biking, climbing, and jogging.
- Right: I like to bike, to climb, and to jog.
- Wrong: I like to bike, to climb, and jogging.

Pronoun Ambiguity

On the SAT W&L section, pronouns can never be ambiguous. This means that if it is ever unclear who or what a pronoun is referring to, then that pronoun needs to be replaced by the subject itself.



Repetitiveness

Repetitiveness will always render an answer choice incorrect, therefore you need to be on the lookout for it. Here is an example:

He looked at it visually.

You can have either of these two words (looked and visually), but not both.

Sentence Location

For Sentence Location questions (To make the paragraph most logical, the sentence should be placed...), the first thing you must do is:

Look within and Imagine

What this means is that you must read the sentence in question very carefully (*look within*) and tell yourself where a sentence like that would logically need to appear, in a general context (*imagine*). The sentences themselves will usually contain clues as to where they would best be placed, which is why you need to take the time to analyze them before looking at the paragraph as a whole. After properly completing these steps, the appropriate placement of the sentence will usually become much clearer.

*You need to watch out 'married sentences' that may appear on these questions from time to time. Married sentences are sentences that appear one after the other and whose flow would be disrupted if a sentence were inserted between them. In this case, you would need to place the sentence after the second married sentence.

Stylish Deletion of a Word

This is when a word that was inessential from the beginning is removed from a sentence. For instance,



John was a man **who was** bent on world domination.

vs.

John was a man bent on world domination.

Gradeful proved to be the most effective test prep company in the history of the world.

vs.

Gradeful proved the most effective test prep company in the history of the world.

Transition Words

For these types of questions, you need to remember this tip:

Invent your own

Although this sounds rather basic, if you do it properly and don't just read every answer choice first, you will get these questions right more consistently.

When we say, "Invent your own," we mean that you should come up with a word (or phrase) to replace the given one, based on the sentence before and after. Doing this really forces you to read well.

Occasionally, you should be aware of when you're in the conclusion, since this might change the word you would invent.

"Undermining"

More often than not, when an answer choice contains the word "undermining" it will be wrong. This is not a rule and every answer choice should still be scrutinized, but if you keep this in mind it should help you identify wrong answers a bit more quickly.



Verb Tense Questions

On questions that are testing verb tense, you should take clues from throughout the paragraph. If there is no compelling reason to change the verb tense at the point being tested, then you should keep the same tense as the surrounding verbs.

Vocab Questions

Vocabulary questions in Section 2 of the SAT will either be testing Formality or Word Meaning. About 10% of the time, those questions come down to 'formal vs casual' and the other 90% of the time, it comes down to the environment where that word tends to get used. When they are testing formality, the correct word must be in line with the formality of the text. It is safe to assume that most SAT passages will be written in a formal tone and as such, you should be leaning toward formal words as your answer.

When they are testing word meaning, you must understand how the underlined word is being used in context and then pick the only answer choice that is suitable in that situation.

This type of question can be difficult for students who do not possess a vast vocabulary. If this is the case for you, then commit to learning all of the unfamiliar vocabulary you come across and don't get burned twice by the same word!

Wordiness/Repetitiveness vs Conciseness

Sometimes on the SAT W&L section you will be given multiple answer choices that seem to be saying the same thing, except one will be (much) shorter than the others. It's important to note that if all else is equal, then the shortest answer will always be correct.

*Beware of decoy conciseness questions. These decoys will have all the same elements as a normal conciseness question, however the shortest answer won't be equal to the other in terms of content and/or meaning.

