

- **Remember the rule for guessing.** If you can't eliminate one answer, skip it. If you can eliminate one or more, guess, and move on.
- **Beware of distracter techniques.** While distracters, or traps designed to lure you away from the right answer, are more prevalent in the Critical Reading and Math sections of the SAT, they do appear in a more subtle form in the Writing section. You won't find those absolute words, such as *always*, *never*, *all*, and *none*. But you will encounter, especially with more difficult questions, answers that at first glance appear correct. For the easier questions, the answer probably is right, but for the difficult ones, think twice. We'll get more specific about distracters as we explore each type of multiple-choice question in depth.

These are the three types of multiple-choice questions you'll encounter in the Writing section:

- **Identifying Sentence Errors**

Each sentence has four underlined words or phrases, and a fifth choice, "no error." You need to determine which underlined portion, if any, contains an error in grammar or usage. If the sentence is correct, you will choose answer **e**, "no error." Approximately 25% of the multiple-choice writing questions are this type.

- **Improving Sentences**

You'll be given five versions of a sentence, and have to choose the one that is most clear and correct. Approximately 65% of the questions in the Writing section are Improving Sentences.

- **Improving Paragraphs**

These questions concern a passage of approximately 200 words. They ask about how to improve the passage on many levels, from large-scale organizational issues to word choice and grammar. Approximately 10% of the questions are this type.

► Identifying Sentence Errors

These multiple-choice questions are designed to test your knowledge of grammar and usage. Let's take a closer look at how they are structured, the types of errors you're most likely to encounter, and how best to approach Identifying Sentence Errors. At the end of this section, we've included ten practice questions (answers are at the end of the chapter).

Question Structure

Each sentence has four possible errors, underlined and marked **a–d**. There is also a choice **e** for "no error." No sentence contains more than one error. It is your task to find the error, or choose **e** if the sentence is correct. You are not asked to identify, explain, or correct it. All you must do is locate it.

Here's a sample:

Those old Atari video games in your closet are on the
a
 wish list of the Computer Museum of America, in
San Diego, California, and they hope you will donate
b **c**
 it to their holdings. No error.
d **e**

What's wrong? The plural verb *are* is correct; it expresses the action of the plural noun *games*. There's also nothing wrong with *San Diego, California* and *holdings*. The plural pronoun *they*, however, is incorrect. It replaces the noun *Computer Museum of America*, which is singular.

Errors You're Likely to See

There are many possible grammar and usage errors, and of course, *every* type is fair game. However, most of the questions will contain just a handful of common errors. In this section, we'll review the eight you're most likely to encounter. When you know what to look for, you'll find sentence errors more easily.

Grammar and Usage

The grammar and usage issues you'll most often encounter are:

- agreement
- consistency
- parallel structure
- verb form
- pronoun case
- idiom
- word choice
- adjectives and adverbs

We began this chapter with Identifying Sentence Errors for one important reason: Many of the grammar and usage issues prevalent in these questions will also come up in Improving Sentences and Improving Paragraphs questions. If the review that follows isn't enough for you to fully understand each possible error, study those you still find confusing at greater length with a grammar book such as *Goof-Proof Grammar* (LearningExpress, 2002).

Agreement

Expect at least one of your Improving Sentence Errors questions to be about *agreement*, meaning the balance of sentence elements such as subjects and verbs and pronouns and antecedents. (Recall that an **antecedent** is the noun that a pronoun replaces.) To agree, singular subjects require singular verbs, and plural subjects require plural verbs. Likewise, singular nouns can be replaced only by singular pronouns, and plural nouns require plural pronouns.

To make this type of question tricky, you'll often find a "filler" phrase between the subject and verb or noun and pronoun. The intention is to distract you; the more space between the subject and verb or noun and pronoun, the more difficult it can be to determine agreement.

Here's an example:

"Eat, drink, and be merry," is a label associated with
a b
Greek philosopher Epicurus, but like most catchy
slogans, they simplify what is actually a rich and
c d
complex message. No error.
e

Notice how the phrase *like most catchy slogans* can mislead you. If you assume *slogans* is the subject, then the pronoun *they* and the verb *simplify* seem correct—they agree with the plural subject. But subjects are never in prepositional phrases, so *slogans* can't be the subject of the verb *simplify*. Look again at the sentence. What is simplifying? Not the *slogans*, but the *label* "Eat, drink, and be merry"—a singular noun. Thus, the pronoun must be *it* and the verb must be *simplifies* to agree with the subject, so choice **c** contains the error and is therefore the correct answer.

Consistency

Just as sentences must be balanced, they must also be consistent. And like errors in agreement, errors in consistency involve verb and pronoun usage. For example, if a sentence begins in the past tense, it must stay in the past tense. Pronouns need to be consistent in person and number. A shift from the singular *I* to the plural *we*, for example, can leave the reader wondering just who is doing what in the sentence.

Here are two examples of errors in consistency from the practice tests:

Keeping your room uncluttered is easy when you
a
make it a habit to spend ten minutes a day just
b c
 putting things back where they belonged. No error.
d e

Think twice before sending potentially computer-
a
 clogging e-mail attachments such as pictures and
b
 videos; if the recipient is low on disk space, or uses a
c
 dial-up service to get their e-mail, he or she won't
d
 appreciate the gesture. No error.
e

The first sentence is in the present tense as evidenced by the present participles *keeping* and *putting*, and the present *make*. But it ends with the past tense *belonged*. To be consistent, that last verb needs to be changed to the present tense *belong*. In the second sentence, the author correctly uses the singular pronoun *he or she* to replace the singular noun *recipient*. But she then incorrectly uses the plural pronoun *their* to refer to the same antecedent. The use of *his or her* would correct the error.

Parallel Structure

Parallel structure involves pairs and lists of words and phrases. Both items in a pair, and all items in a list

need to follow the same grammatical pattern. If you're writing about your friend's favorite leisure activities, you wouldn't say, "Juan loves skating and to read." It sounds awkward because the items in the pair aren't the same grammatically. The first is a participle (*skating*), and the second is an infinitive (*to read*). Even if the names of the verb tenses aren't familiar to you, you can see that one of the two needs to be changed in order to maintain parallel structure. You could change *skating* to *to skate*, or *to read* to *reading*. Either way, you'll get parallel structure.

Here, again, are examples from the practice tests:

One of the best ways to prepare for a career in
a
 journalism is to become an informed citizen by
b
 reading a variety of newspapers, watching
 documentaries and televised news programs, and
c
you should read books about world leaders, politics,
d
 and grassroots movements. No error.
e

This sentence offers a list of three things one can do to become an informed citizen: *reading*, *watching*, and *you should read*. Notice how the third item does not follow the same grammatical pattern as the first. It should begin with a verb in participial form, *reading*. *You should* is unnecessary and should be eliminated.

The more I read about deep sea fishing, the more
a b
it makes me want to get out there and try it. No error.
c d e

In this example, the phrases after the words *the more I read* are not grammatical equivalents. *It makes me* should be matched with *I want to*.

Verb Form

Verbs are the “meat” of a sentence—they express what the subject is doing, thinking, or feeling. Correct verb form is essential to sentence clarity, and you can expect to find at least one question with a verb form issue. Here are some of the common verb errors found on the SAT.

- **Incorrectly conjugated irregular verbs.** About 150 English verbs are *irregular*; that is, they do not follow the standard rules for changing tense.

We can divide these irregular verbs into three categories:

- irregular verbs with the same *past* and *past participle* forms
- irregular verbs with three distinct forms
- irregular verbs with the same *present* and *past participle* forms

The following table lists the most common irregular verbs.

PRESENT	PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
SAME PAST AND PAST PARTICIPLE FORMS:		
bite	bit	bit
dig	dug	dug
bleed	bled	bled
hear	heard	heard
hold	held	held
light	lit	lit
meet	met	met
pay	paid	paid
say	said	said
sell	sold	sold
tell	told	told
shine	shone	shone
shoot	shot	shot
sit	sat	sat
spin	spun	spun
spit	spat	spat
swear	swore	swore
tear	tore	tore
creep	crept	crept

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

PRESENT	PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
deal	dealt	dealt
keep	kept	kept
kneel	knelt	knelt
leave	left	left
mean	meant	meant
send	sent	sent
sleep	slept	slept
spend	spent	spent
bring	brought	brought
buy	bought	bought
catch	caught	caught
fight	fought	fought
teach	taught	taught
think	thought	thought
feed	fed	fed
flee	fled	fled
find	found	found
grind	ground	ground

THREE DISTINCT FORMS:

begin	began	begun
ring	rang	rung
sing	sang	sung
spring	sprang	sprung
swim	swam	swum
do	did	done
go	went	gone
am	was	been
is	was	been

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

PRESENT	PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
see	saw	seen
drink	drank	drunk
shrink	shrank	shrunk
sink	sank	sunk
stink	stank	stunk
swear	swore	sworn
tear	tore	torn
wear	wore	worn
blow	blew	blown
draw	drew	drawn
fly	flew	flown
grow	grew	grown
know	knew	known
throw	threw	thrown
drive	drove	driven
strive	strove	striven
choose	chose	chosen
rise	rose	risen
break	broke	broken
speak	spoke	spoken
fall	fell	fallen
shake	shook	shaken
take	took	taken
forget	forgot	forgotten
get	got	gotten
give	gave	given
forgive	forgave	forgiven
forsake	forsook	forsaken

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

PRESENT	PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
hide	hid	hidden
ride	rode	ridden
write	wrote	written
freeze	froze	frozen
steal	stole	stolen

SAME PRESENT AND PAST PARTICIPLE FORMS:

come	came	come
overcome	overcame	overcome
run	ran	run

In English, as in many other languages, the essential verb *to be* is highly irregular:

SUBJECT	PRESENT	PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
I	am	was	have been
you	are	were	have been
he, she, it	is	was	has been
we	are	were	have been
they	are	were	have been

Here's an example of an irregular verb question:

Eliza laid down on her bed to rest while the rest of
a b c
her family enjoyed the appetizing meal prepared by
d
her grandmother. No error.
e

Lay and *lie* are commonly confused. *To lay* means to place something down, and *to lie* means to recline. Obviously in this sentence, the latter verb is required; however, to make things even more confusing, the correct past tense form of *to lie* is *lay*.

- **Incorrect tense.** If there's an error in tense, the sentence will provide enough context for you to determine the tense the verb(s) should be in. For example:

From 1947 to 1956, thousands of scrolls and fragments of ancient manuscripts has been found in caves on the shore of the Dead Sea, including early copies of biblical books in Hebrew and Aramaic.

a
b c
d

No error.
e

Has been is the present perfect form of the verb *is*. However, the first phrase, *From 1947 to 1956*, tells us that the action took place in the past. This sentence requires the simple past tense, *were*.

- Missing subjunctive.** Most verbs are in the indicative mood, meaning that they simply *indicate* an action, thought, or feeling. The subjunctive mood is used to express something that is wished for or that is untrue. It is formed with the past tense or past perfect tense (using the helping verb *were*). But we often forget to use it, both in speech and in writing. When a sentence starts with *if*, *I wish*, or *It would have been*, it's probably in the subjunctive mood.

It would have been nice if you brought more money with you because these tickets are very expensive.

a b
c d

No error.
e

The clause *it would have been* tells us that the money isn't there, it's just wished for, so the verb needs to be subjunctive: if you *had* brought.

Pronoun Case

Personal pronouns have two main forms: the subjective and objective cases. This simply means that we use one form when the pronoun is acting as a subject and another form when the pronoun is acting as an object. Expect to see a couple of sentence errors involving confusion of subjective and objective cases.

PERSONAL PRONOUNS	
SUBJECTIVE CASE	OBJECTIVE CASE
I	me
you	you
he, she, it	him, her, it
we	us
they	them
who	whom

Here's an example that uses a distracter:

The difference between you and me is that you get your best work done in the morning while I perform better in the evening. No error.

a b
c
d e

You and me is not the subject of the sentence (*difference* is), but rather the object of the preposition *between*. Even if it might sound wrong, *me*, the objective form of *I*, is correct.

Another common sentence error involves a pronoun following the word *than*. Because the *than* + (*pro*)*noun* construction requires a verb (even if that verb is not articulated), you must use the subjective form of the pronoun: I am taller *than he [is]*.

You'll probably find at least one multiple-choice question that tests your ability to differentiate between *who* and *whom*. *Who* is the subjective form, and *whom* is the objective. If you're unclear about which to use, substitute the words *he* and *him* for *who* or *whom*. If *he* is correct, you need *who* (both subjective case) and if *him* is correct, you need *whom* (both objective case).

Here's an example:

The physical and psychological unrest of the working class was explored often in the plays of Arthur Miller, for who the subject of the American Dream, and its achievability for ordinary Americans, never got stale.

a
b
c
d
e

No error.

Who is the object of the preposition *for*, but it is in the subjective case. Correct it by changing it to the objective form *whom*. If you were unclear about whether this was the error, you could have recast the sentence to try *he* or *him* in place of *who*:

The subject of the American Dream never got stale for (*he/him*).

Obviously, *him* is correct.

Idiom

Idioms are expressions peculiar to a particular language, whose meanings cannot be discerned by defining them word for word. What downward movement, for example, happens when one "falls in love"? On what is one perched on when "sitting pretty"? There are thousands of English idioms, most of which are very familiar to you, even though you may not have known they were idioms. The two most common errors you're likely to encounter are those involving **prepositional pairs** (e.g., take care *of*, according *to*) and the use of **infinitives** and **gerunds** (e.g., want *to meet*, practice *swimming*).

Since idioms are typically learned through conversation, you'll probably be able to *hear* idiom errors in the Identifying Sentence Errors multiple-choice questions. Listen carefully to each sentence as you read it, and identify the error.

1. This year's model is different than last year's.
2. She has difficulty in the Advanced Placement History class.
3. The color choices are typical for that artist.

These errors should have sounded wrong to you: (1) *different than* should be *different from*, (2) *difficulty in* should be *difficulty with*, (3) *typical for* should be *typical of*. If the subject of prepositions is confusing, you'll need to do some memorizing. Idioms are idiosyncratic—there are no easy rules for remembering them! Following is a list of idiomatic preposition uses that often appear on the SAT.

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

agree *on* an amendment
 agree *to do* something
 agree *with* someone
 argue *about* or *for* a proposal
 argue *with* a person
 apologize *for* an error
 approve *of* a change
 bored *with* small talk
 compare *to* (when you are showing the likes of two things or putting them in same category)
 compare *with* (when highlighting similarities or differences)
 concerned *about* or *with* an issue
 contrast *with* (when noting differences)
 correspond *to* or *with* something (meaning to relate)

correspond *with* a person (meaning to communicate)
 differ *from* something
 independent *of* someone or something
 interested *in* a subject
 interfere *in* someone's business
 interfere *with* an activity
 similar *to* something
 stand *by* or *with* someone
 stand *for* a cause
 stand *on* an issue
 succeed *in* an endeavor
 wait *at* a place
 wait *by* the phone
 wait *for* someone
 wait *in* the snowstorm
 wait *on* a customer
 work *with* me

The other type of idiom error you're likely to see is the improper use of infinitives (*to* + verb: *to water*) and gerunds (verb + *ing*: *watering*). Some verbs must take one or the other, and a small handful take both. Your ear will probably hear this type of error. Listen for the non-idiomatic usages in the following sentences:

Here are the errors you should have heard: (1) *practicing to swim* should be *practicing swimming*, (2) *pretending being* should be *pretending to be*, and (3) *resents to be* should be *resents being*. As with prepositions, if you're confused about when to use gerunds and infinitives, you'll need to do some memorizing.

1. I spend two hours each day practicing to swim.
2. We had fun pretending being rock stars.
3. My father resents to be asked for money all the time.

VERBS THAT TAKE INFINITIVES	VERBS THAT TAKE GERUNDS	VERBS THAT TAKE EITHER INFINITIVES OR GERUNDS
afford	admit	attempt
agree	adore	begin
aim	appreciate	bother
ask	avoid	cannot bear
appear	consider	cannot stand

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

VERBS THAT TAKE INFINITIVES	VERBS THAT TAKE GERUNDS	VERBS THAT TAKE EITHER INFINITIVES OR GERUNDS
be determined	deny	cease
beg	detest	continue
care	discuss	hate
claim	dislike	hesitate
decide	enjoy	intend
expect	escape	like
have	finish	love
hope	imagine	prefer
learn	keep	start
manage	mind	
mean	miss	
need	postpone	
offer	practice	
plan	put off	
pretend	quit	
promise	recall	
refuse	recollect	
say	resent	
tend	resist	
try	risk	
wait	suggest	
want	tolerate	
wish	understand	

Word Choice

Many students breathed a sigh of relief when the College Board announced that it was dropping Analogy questions from the SAT. These questions appraised vocabulary, and were thought to be among the hardest on the test. However, they’ve been replaced by a handful of Identifying Sentence Errors questions involving word choice. Here’s where you’ll need to show you know the difference between *affect* and *effect*, *whether* or *weather*, and *fewer* and *less*.

There are two categories of words that are most problematic: **confused words** (homonyms that sound the same but have different meanings and spellings) and **misused words** (pairs so often used incorrectly the errors sound acceptable to most people). Read through the lists of some of the most frequently tested words, noting any you’re not sure of.

CONFUSED WORDS	
WORD	DEFINITION
a lot (noun)	many
allot (verb)	to give or share in arbitrary amounts
accept (verb)	to recognize
except (prep.)	excluding
access (noun, verb)	means of approaching; to approach
excess (noun, adj.)	extra
addition (noun)	increase
edition (noun)	an issue of a book or newspaper
advice (noun)	a recommended opinion
advise (verb)	to give advice; inform
affect (verb)	to influence
effect (noun)	result
effect (verb)	to bring about
all ready (adj.)	completely prepared
already (adv.)	by or before a specified or implied time
all together (adj.)	in a group; in unison
altogether (adv.)	completely or thoroughly

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

CONFUSED WORDS

WORD	DEFINITION
allude (verb)	to refer to something not specifically mentioned
elude (verb)	to escape notice or detection
ascent (noun)	the act of climbing or rising
assent (verb)	to agree or accept a proposal or opinion
assure (verb)	to make certain (assure someone)
ensure (verb)	to make certain
insure (verb)	to secure from harm; to secure life or property in case of loss
beside (adj.)	next to
besides (adv.)	in addition to
bibliography (noun)	list of writings
biography (noun)	a life story
capital (noun)	money invested; a town or city where the government sits
capitol (noun)	a government building
choose (verb)	to select
chose (verb)	the past tense of <i>choose</i>
cite (verb)	to acknowledge; to quote as a reference
sight (noun)	the ability to see; vision
site (noun)	a place or location
complement (noun)	match
compliment (noun, verb)	praise; to give praise
consul (noun)	an official appointed by the government to live in a foreign city and attend to the interests of the official's country
council (noun)	a group of people called together to provide advice
counsel (noun, verb)	advice; to give advice
continual (adj.)	taking place in close succession
continuous (adj.)	without break or let up

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

CONFUSED WORDS

WORD	DEFINITION
cooperation (noun)	assistance; help
corporation (noun)	type of business organization
decent (adj.)	well mannered
descent (noun)	decline; fall
dissent (noun)	disagreement
desert (noun)	arid, sandy region
dessert (noun)	sweet served after a meal
disburse (verb)	to pay
disperse (verb)	to spread out
disinterested (adj.)	impartial; no strong opinion either way
uninterested (adj.)	don't care
elicit (verb)	to stir up
illicit (adj.)	illegal
envelop (verb)	to surround; to cover completely
envelope (noun)	flat paper container for letters or other documents
farther (adv.)	beyond
further (adj.)	additional
flack (noun, verb)	press agent (noun); to act as a press agent (verb)
flak (noun)	criticism
forth (adv.)	forward; onward
fourth (adj.)	next in number after the third
hear (verb)	to perceive by the ear
here (adv.)	in this or at this place
hoard (verb)	to collect and keep
horde (noun)	a huge crowd
imply (verb)	to hint or suggest
infer (verb)	to assume; to deduce

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

CONFUSED WORDS

WORD	DEFINITION
loose (adj.)	not restrained; not fastened
lose (verb)	to fail to win; to be deprived of
loath (adj.)	reluctant
loathe (verb)	to feel hatred for
medal (noun)	a badge of honor
meddle (verb)	to interfere
metal (noun)	a mineral substance
passed (verb)	the past tense of <i>past</i>
past (adj.)	finished; gone by
personal (adj.)	individual
personnel (noun)	employees
principal (adj.)	main
principal (noun)	person in charge
principle (noun)	standard
quiet (adj.)	still; calm
quit (verb)	to stop; to discontinue
quite (adv.)	very; fairly; positively
stationary (adj.)	not moving
stationery (noun)	writing paper
taught (verb)	the past tense of <i>teach</i>
taut (adj.)	tight
than (conj., prep.)	in contrast to
then (adv.)	next
their (pronoun)	belonging to them
there (adv.)	in a place
they're	contraction for <i>they are</i>

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

CONFUSED WORDS

WORD	DEFINITION
to (prep.)	in the direction of
too (adv.)	also; excessively
two (adj.)	the number after <i>one</i>
weather (noun, verb)	atmospheric conditions; to last or ride out
whether (conj.)	if it be the case; in either case
who (pronoun)	substitute for <i>he, she, or they</i>
whom (pronoun)	substitute for <i>him, her, or them</i>
your (pronoun)	belonging to you
you're	contraction for <i>you are</i>

MISUSED WORDS

WORD	WHEN TO USE IT
allude	used when a reference is made indirectly or covertly
refer	used when something is named or otherwise mentioned directly
amount	used when you cannot count the items to which you are referring, and when referring to singular nouns
number	used when you can count the items to which you are referring, and when referring to plural nouns
anxious	nervous
eager	enthusiastic, or looking forward to something
among	used when comparing or referring to three or more people or things
between	used for two people or things
bring	moving something toward the speaker
take	moving something away from the speaker Hint: Remember, you bring <i>to</i> , and you take <i>away</i> .
can	used to state ability
may	used to state permission

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

MISUSED WORDS

WORD	WHEN TO USE IT
each other	when referring to two people or things
one another	referring to three or more people or things
e.g.	an abbreviation for the Latin <i>exempli gratia</i> , meaning <i>free example</i> or <i>for example</i>
i.e.	an abbreviation for the Latin <i>id est</i> , meaning <i>it is</i> or <i>that is</i>
feel bad	used when talking about physical ailments
feel badly	used when talking about emotional distress
fewer	when you can count the items
less	when you cannot count the items
good	an adjective, which describes a person, place, or thing
well	an adverb, which describes an action or verb
its	belonging to <i>it</i>
it's	contraction of <i>it is</i> Hint: Unlike most possessives, <i>it</i> doesn't have an apostrophe.
lay	the action of placing or putting an item somewhere; a transitive verb, meaning something you do <i>to</i> something else
lie	to recline or be placed (a lack of action); an intransitive verb, meaning it does not act on anything or anyone else
more	used to compare one thing to another Hint: One of the two can be a collective noun, such as <i>the ballplayers</i> or <i>the Americans</i> .
most	used to compare one thing to more than one other thing
supposably	capable of being supposed
supposedly	believed to be the case
that	a pronoun that introduces a restrictive (or essential) clause
which	a pronoun that introduces a non-restrictive (or unessential) clause Hint: Imagine a parenthetical <i>by the way</i> following the word <i>which</i> . "The book, which (by the way) Joanne prefers, is her first novel," is incorrect. Therefore, it should read, "The book that Joanne prefers is her first novel." "Lou's pants, which (by the way) are black, are made of leather," is correct.

Here are some examples of word choice errors from the practice tests:

1. Many people believe that the end justifies the

means, so weather their intentions are good or

a b c

bad is irrelevant—the result is the only thing

that matters. No error.

d e

2. If you're bothered by pesky telemarketers

a b

constantly interrupting you, register with the

c

National Do No Call Registry to add you're home

d

and/or cell phone number to their list. No error.

e

3. Former actor John Robert Powers has had a

huge affect on our culture; after opening the

a b

modeling agency in 1923, he began the first

practice of selling everything from magazines

c

to food items to vacation destinations with

d

the help of beautiful people. No error.

e

Did you spot the errors? In sentence 1, *weather* is used incorrectly. It is a noun referring to atmospheric conditions, and should be replaced by the conjunction *whether*. In sentence 2, *you're*, a contraction of the words *you are*, should be replaced by the possessive pronoun *your*. In sentence 3, *affect* and *effect* are confused. *Affect* is a verb meaning “to influence.” The correct word is *effect*, a noun referring to result of the influence.

Adjectives and Adverbs

Because adjectives and adverbs serve similar functions—they both modify or describe—they are often confused and therefore make good candidates for SAT questions. Remember that adjectives modify nouns or pronouns while adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Let's look at a simple sentence:

The dog barked.

We can modify or describe the noun *dog* by adding an adjective such as *brown*, *skinny*, or *annoying*. We can also describe the action of the dog, the past tense verb *barked*, by adding an adverb. *Loudly*, *softly*, and *incessantly* would all work. Notice that all three adverbs end in *-ly*; it's the most common ending for these modifiers.

Here are some examples of sentences that confuse adjectives and adverbs:

1. The game Monopoly, originally called

The Landlord's Game, was based on the

a

economic theories of Henry George, who

proposed a single federally tax based on land

b

ownership; he believed this tax would weaken

the ability to form monopolies, encourage

c

equal opportunity, and narrow the gap between

rich and poor. No error.

d

e

2. The Italian master Artemisia Gentileschi painted large-scale historical and religious scenes, which
- a
were often violently, in an era when women
- b
artists were consigned to portrait painting and
- c
imitative poses. No error.
- d e

3. Historians agree that the combat mission was a
- a b
failure because the soldiers were inadequate
- c d
armed. No error.
- e

Since you know you're looking for adjective/adverb errors, they should have been easy to find. In the first sentence, the adverb *federally* (note the *-ly* ending) is used to modify the noun *tax*, when the adjective *federal* is required. Sentence 2 also uses an adverb (*violently*) to describe a noun (*scenes*). In sentence 3, the verb *armed* is described using the adjective *inadequate*. Change the adjective to the adverb *inadequately* to correct the error.

Some of the most confusing adjectives and adverbs are included on the list of misused words on page 23. Note the differences between *good* and *well*, *feel bad* and *feel badly*, and *more* and *most*. There's a good chance you'll see them on the test.

Another frequently tested issue with adjectives and adverbs is comparisons. Recall that the comparative form (*-er*) is used to compare two things. The

superlative (*-est*) is for comparisons among three or more things. Whenever you find a sentence that includes a comparison, check to see how many items are being compared. For example:

Of the two cross-country trips I've taken, I liked the one to Santa Fe best.

Best might not jump out at first glance as an error; it doesn't necessarily *sound* wrong. But there are only two things being compared, and that means the comparative *better* is correct.

Strategies for Identifying Sentence Errors

1. Listen to the sentence. If it sounds wrong to you, and the error isn't immediately apparent, think about how you'd fix it. What change would you make to improve it?
2. This question type is presented in order of difficulty. Although each question is worth just one point, the first few will be easier than the last few. If Identifying Sentence Errors appear first in your 25-minute section, don't spend too much time on the difficult ones; it makes more sense to move ahead to the Improving Sentences section, where you'll again encounter the easiest questions first.
3. Don't look for punctuation or spelling mistakes; they're not being tested in these questions.
4. Be wary of difficult questions (those appearing last). They're usually complicated. If an answer seems obvious, it could be a trick.
5. If you've eliminated a choice or two, and still can't answer confidently, guess, and move on.

Tip

About 20%, or one in five, of sentences will be error free. If the sentence looks and sounds right to you, choice e (no error) is probably correct.

Practice Identifying Sentence Errors

Directions: Determine which underlined portion, if any, contains an error in grammar or usage. If the sentence is correct, choose answer e, "No error." Answers appear at the end of this chapter.

1. Sheila knew it was important to do well, so for weeks before the exam, she fretted, worried, and was feeling anxiety. No error.

2. Since the weather has improved, there are less people interested in whiling away the hours in the dark of the movie theater. No error.

3. After he got on the train, he realizes the report he needed to work on was still sitting on his desk back at the office. No error.

4. Only one of the students have finished the book, and it has been three weeks since it was assigned! No error.

5. Before boarding the cross-town bus, everyone must have his or her ticket. No error.

6. Trinny relented and finally gave us the recipe for that amazing dessert she made last Saturday, and we can't hardly wait to try it. No error.

7. No matter how careful the students handle the beakers, every year a few get broken. No error.

8. In contrast to the high-profile company CEO, the local business owner did not receive an honorarium for speaking at the monthly meeting of the area business leaders' society. No error.

9. After three days of heavy rain, as predicted the river overflowed its banks, and the water creeped up to our front door. No error.

10. He's doing well following the court hearing that determined whether he should face any criminal charges. No error.