

IX. Grammar and Usage

When you're working on the Writing portion of the SAT, the acronym PRIMPED CATS can help you answer the questions correctly. Each letter stands for a grammatical error you'll encounter on the SAT Writing test. Remember this acronym, and you're well on your way to SAT Writing success.

- P:** Pronoun errors
- R:** Redundancy
- I:** Idioms
- M:** Modification
- P:** Parallelism
- E:** Errors in adjective/adverb confusion
- D:** Diction
- C:** Comparisons
- A:** Agreement
- T:** Tense
- S:** Sentence structure

A. Types of Multiple-Choice Grammar Questions

There are three types of questions that will test your ability to recognize and correct errors in grammar and usage:

- Sentence corrections
- Find the error
- Paragraph correction

1. Sentence corrections

Sentence corrections present you with a sentence with an underlined portion; sometimes the whole sentence is underlined. Your task is to figure out whether the underlined part is correct. If you think it is correct, you'll pick Choice A. (Choice A is always the same as the sentence in the question.) If something seems wrong, read choices B, C, D, and E to find the correct revision.

EXAMPLE:

Each of the students involved in the research program brought their science project to the fair.

- A. involved in the research program brought their science project
- B. involved into the research program brought his or her science project
- C. involving in the research program brought his or her science project

- D. being involved in the research program brought their science project
- E. involved in the research program brought his or her science project

The correct answer is E.

You can eliminate Choice A because the sentence has a pronoun antecedent agreement error. The pronoun *Each* is singular and must take the singular pronoun *his or her*. Choice B corrects the pronoun error, but has an idiom error, “involved into.” Choices C and D both use the incorrect verb forms, *involving* and *being involved*.

2. Find the error

In find-the-error questions, you must identify the underlined part of the sentence that contains an error or select “No error.”

EXAMPLE:

The most delicious chocolate is made from cacao beans that are first roasted, then ground, and then you mix it with cocoa butter. No error.

A
B
C
D
E

The correct answer is D.

The underlined portion *you mix it* lacks parallelism and has a pronoun agreement error. Underlined Choice D should be *mixed*.

3. Paragraph correction

In this section, you’re presented with a draft of an essay that needs revision. Questions after the essay will ask you about organization, coherence, and revision or combination of sentences.

EXAMPLE:

(1) Making chocolate from beans is a rather complicated but rewarding experience. (2) Although not good for the inexperienced or impatient cook. (3) There are many tedious steps before you have an edible finished product.

The best way to combine sentence 1 and sentence 2 is

- A. Making chocolate from beans is a rather complicated but rewarding experience; not a good one for the inexperienced or impatient cook.
- B. Making chocolate from beans is a rather complicated but rewarding experience; though a problem for the inexperienced or impatient cook.
- C. Making chocolate from beans is a rather complicated but rewarding experience, inexperienced or impatient cooks will have a problem

- D. Making chocolate from beans is a rather complicated but rewarding experience if you are an inexperienced or impatient cook.
- E. Making chocolate from beans is a rather complicated but rewarding experience, but it is not for the inexperienced or impatient cook.

The correct answer is E.

Choices A and B use the semicolon incorrectly because the second clause is not a main clause. Choice C is a run-on sentence, and choice D changes the sense of the sentence.

Practice

1. Although my mother asked Eli and I to go to the mall with her, we were too involved with homework to leave.
 - A. Although my mother asked Eli and I to go to the mall with her, we
 - B. Although my mother asked Eli and me to go to the mall with her, us
 - C. Although my mother asked Eli and I to go to the mall with her; we
 - D. Although my mother asked Eli and me to go to the mall with her, him and me
 - E. Although my mother asked Eli and me to go to the mall with her, we

2. When we campaigned for class officers in the weeks before the election, no one will suspect that Juliet will win.
 - A. no one will suspect that Juliet will win.
 - B. no one suspected that Juliet will win.
 - C. no one suspected that Juliet would win.
 - D. no one was suspecting that Juliet will win.
 - E. no one will suspect that Juliet would win.

3. Sure that his performance was better than the singers, Clay felt confident that he would get the lead in the musical.
 - A. Sure that his performance was better than the singers,
 - B. Sure that his performance was the best of the singers,
 - C. Feeling sure that his performance was better than those of the singers,
 - D. Sure that his performance was better than that of the other singers,
 - E. Being sure that his performance was better than the singers,

4. Although dead for twenty-six years, jazz great Thelonious Monk's music is still played everywhere jazz fans gather.
- A. Although dead for twenty-six years, jazz great Thelonious Monk's music is still played everywhere jazz fans gather.
 - B. Although dead for twenty-six years, jazz great Thelonious Monk and his music is still played everywhere jazz fans gather.
 - C. Although Thelonious Monk has been dead for twenty-six years, his great jazz music is still played everywhere jazz fans gather.
 - D. Although dead for twenty-six years, and jazz great Thelonious Monk's music is still played everywhere jazz fans gather.
 - E. Even though he is dead for twenty-six years, jazz great Thelonious Monk's music is still played everywhere jazz fans gather.
5. Every summer vacation, my family and best friend's family go either camping in one of the national parks or to visit national monuments.
- A. go either camping in one of the national parks or visiting national monuments.
 - B. either camp in one of the national parks or visit national monuments.
 - C. are going either to camp in one of the national parks or visiting national monuments.
 - D. either camping in one of the national parks or visiting national monuments.
 - E. was going either camping in one of the national parks or visiting national monuments.
6. In her job as an operator for the police department hot line, Tamika discovered it was difficult to get people to speak calm and slowly in an emergency. No error.
- A B
C D E
7. Flying into the hurricane-damaged area of Costa Rica is the leaders of the United Nations Disaster Relief Agency. No error.
- A B C D
E
8. The Department of Motor Vehicles has compiled statistics that show the average age that teenagers apply for a driver's license rose dramatically since 1980. No error.
- A B
C D E
9. Before he addressed his employees honestly, the CEO felt it important to put in prospective the downturn in profits that might lead to plant closings. No error.
- A B C
D E
10. To prepare for the 2014 Olympics, the Russian city of Sochi has developed a new ski resort, built modern condominiums, and has just finished transforming the waterfront area into a glamorous recreation spot. No error.
- A B C D
E

Answers

- E** Choices A and C incorrectly use the nominative pronoun *I* instead of the objective pronoun *me*. Choice B incorrectly changes the nominative pronoun *we* to the objective pronoun *us*. Choice D incorrectly changes the nominative pronoun *we* to the objective pronouns *him* and *me*.
- C** The first clause is in the past tense, so the second clause must be consistent. *Juliet will win* must be changed to *Julie would win*. Choice E incorrectly changes the tense of *suspect* to *will suspect*. Only Choice C has all consistent tenses.
- D** The sentence has an illogical comparison of *performance* to *singers* as do choices B and E. Choice C uses the plural pronoun *those* instead of the singular pronoun *that* to refer to Clay's performance.
- C** The sentence has vague modification as the introductory phrase modifies Monk's music rather than Monk. Choice B has a subject-verb agreement error ("Monk and his music *is*"). Choice D is not a complete sentence. Choice E has a tense error ("is dead") in the first clause.
- B** Parallelism is needed after the correlative pronouns *either . . . or*. *Camping* is not parallel to *to visit*. Choice C is not parallel and Choice D has no helping verb for *camping* and *visiting*. Choice E has an agreement error: *was going*.
- C** The adjective *calm* must be changed to the adverb *calmly* to modify the verb *speak*.
- C** The subject *leaders* (which comes after the verb) needs a plural verb *are* rather than the singular *is*.
- D** The past-tense *rose* should be the present participle *has risen* to show that the change in age has taken place over time (since 1980).
- C** The word *prospective* is incorrectly used in place of the word *perspective*.
- C** *Has just finished transforming* is not parallel to *developed* and *built*. It should be changed to *transformed*.

B. Pronoun Errors

1. Pronoun antecedent agreement errors

Pronouns are words that are used to replace nouns. The noun that the pronoun replaces is called the *antecedent*. Usually, but not always, the antecedent comes before the pronoun.

A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in gender and number. If the antecedent of a pronoun is singular, the pronoun must be singular; if the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural. If the antecedent is feminine, the pronoun must be feminine; if the antecedent is masculine, the pronoun must be masculine.

For example:

Debbie brought her laptop to the Math Challenge.

Debbie is the feminine singular antecedent for the feminine singular pronoun *her*.

The *students* brought *their* laptops to the Math Challenge.

Students is the plural antecedent for the plural pronoun *their*.

If the antecedent refers to both genders, the phrase *his or her* is acceptable to avoid sexist language. When this phrasing is repeated several times in a sentence or paragraph, it may become awkward, though; you can avoid the problem by changing the sentence to the plural form:

Awkward: Each student put his or her laptop on his or her desk.

Better: The students put their laptops on their desks.

When indefinite pronouns are antecedents, determine whether they are singular or plural. Here are some singular indefinite pronouns:

each	one	no one	someone
either	everyone	nobody	somebody
neither	everybody	anyone	anybody

Here are some examples:

Each of the boys on the team took his trophy home.

Everyone chooses his or her favorite novel.

Exceptions: Sometimes, with *everyone* and *everybody*, the sense of the sentence is compromised when the singular pronoun is used. In these cases, the plural form is acceptable.

Awkward: Everyone in the crowd stood and applauded when he or she saw the float.

Better: Everyone in the crowd stood and applauded when they saw the float.

Here are some plural indefinite pronouns:

several	few	both	many
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Here are some indefinite pronouns that are either singular or plural, depending on how they're used:

some	most	any
all	none	

For example:

Some of the play has lost *its* meaning. singular in meaning

Some of the houses have lost *their* roofs. plural in meaning

Two or more singular antecedents joined by *or* or *nor* take the singular pronoun:

Either Marlee or Olivia will bring her car to the football game.

Neither Louie nor Jaxon has taken his road test.

Every pronoun must clearly refer to a specific antecedent. To avoid vague pronoun reference, be sure you can pinpoint the antecedent of the pronoun.

Vague: In the newspaper it says that more young people voted this year than last year. (The pronoun *it* has no antecedent.)

Better: The article in the *Tribune* states that more young people voted this year than last year.

Vague: Jessica wants to be a doctor because it is so rewarding. (The pronoun *it* has no antecedent.)

Better: Jessica wants to be a doctor because the work is so rewarding.

Vague: Barbara came late to every meeting, which annoyed her supervisor. (The word *which* is a vague pronoun because it has no antecedent.)

Better: Barbara came late to every meeting, a habit that annoyed her supervisor.

Or even better: Barbara's chronic lateness annoyed her supervisor.

Vague: Students are coming to school on time, bringing their books to class, and taking notes regularly. This helps the school receive federal funds. (*This* is a vague pronoun because it has no antecedent.)

Better: Students are coming to school on time, bringing their books to class, and taking notes regularly. The improved attendance helps the school receive federal funds.

2. Pronoun case errors

If you've ever wondered whether to write *I* or *me*, you've encountered a pronoun case problem. Pronouns change their form depending on how they're used. The different forms of the pronouns are called *cases*. Pronouns have three cases:

- **Nominative:** The nominative case of pronouns is used when the pronoun is the subject or the predicate nominative.
- **Objective:** The objective case is used when the pronoun is the object of a verb or the object of a preposition.
- **Possessive:** The possessive case is used to indicate possession.

Nominative	Objective	Possessive
I	me	my, mine
we	us	our, ours
you	you	your, yours
he	him	his
she	her	her, hers
it	it	its
they	them	their, theirs
who	whom	whose

First, look at the whole sentence and determine what role the pronoun plays in the sentence. Is it the subject? Then use the nominative case. Is it an object of a verb or the object of a preposition? Then choose the objective case. Is the pronoun showing ownership? Then use the possessive case.

Nominative case:

- The pronoun as subject:
 - *He* and *I* want to be lab partners in chemistry.

- Judy and *she* went shopping for decorations for the prom.
- *Who* is going to be class president next year?
- The pronoun as *predicate nominative* (a word in the predicate part of the sentence that is linked to the subject):
 - The winners must have been *they*.
 - The team captains are Sophie and *she*.

Objective case:

- The pronoun as *object of a verb* (direct object or indirect object):
 - Alexis gave *her* the gift. (*Her* is the indirect object of the verb *gave*.)
 - Hayley invited Juan and *him* to the dance. (*Juan* and *him* are the direct objects of the verb *invited*.)
- The pronoun as object of a preposition:
 - The head of the committee wanted to share the responsibility with *them*. (*Them* is the object of the preposition *with*.)
 - To *whom* should I address the letter of recommendation? (*Whom* is the object of the preposition *to*.)

Possessive case:

- Use the possessive case to show ownership and before a *gerund* (*-ing* form of a verb used as a noun):
 - The director appreciates *your* being prompt for all rehearsals. (*Your* is the possessive pronoun used before the gerund *being*.)
 - *His* quick thinking saved the day. (*His* is the possessive pronoun used before the gerund *thinking*.)

Practice

Directions: Select the correct pronoun.

1. This birthday present is from Cindy and (I, me).
2. The Intel Corporation awarded Julia and (she, her) the prize.
3. No one objected to (he, him, his) bringing a date to the prom.
4. Neither the seniors nor (us, we) have won the play contest.
5. Neither of these journals has all (its, their) entries.
6. Each of the participants presented (his or her, their) experiments to the panel.
7. Joe and Mark brought (his, their) calculators to the exam.
8. It is silly to let this disagreement come between you and (she, her).
9. I can't wait to find out if the champion is (her, she).
10. (Who, Whom) do you think should lead the group?

Answers

1. **me** The pronoun *I* is incorrect because the nominative pronoun is used for the subject or the predicate nominative. In this sentence, the pronoun *me* is the object of the preposition *from*.
2. **her** The pronoun *she* is incorrect because the nominative form is used for the subject or the predicate nominative. In this sentence, the pronoun *her* is the object of the verb *awarded*.
3. **his** The pronoun *he* is incorrect because the nominative form is used for the subject or the predicate nominative. The pronoun *him* is incorrect because the objective form is used for an object of a verb or an object of a preposition. The pronoun *his* is correct because the possessive pronoun is used before a gerund (the *-ing* form of a verb used as a noun).
4. **we** The pronoun *us* is incorrect because the objective form is used for an object of a verb or an object of a preposition. The pronoun *we* is correct because the nominative pronoun is used for the subject or the predicate nominative. In this sentence, *we* is part of the compound subject *the seniors and we*.
5. **its** The pronoun *neither* (the antecedent) is singular. The singular pronoun *its*, not the plural pronoun *their*, must be used to refer to a singular antecedent.
6. **his or her** The pronoun *each* (the antecedent) is singular. The singular pronouns *his or her*, not the plural pronoun *their*, must be used to refer to a singular antecedent.
7. **their** The compound subject *Joe and Mark* (the antecedents) is plural. The plural pronoun *their*, not the singular pronoun *his*, must be used to refer to a plural antecedent.
8. **her** The pronoun *she* is incorrect because the nominative pronoun is used for the subject or the predicate nominative. In this sentence, the pronoun *her* is the object of the preposition *between*.
9. **she** The pronoun *her* is incorrect because the objective form is used for an object of a verb or an object of a preposition. The pronoun *she* is correct because the nominative pronoun is used for the predicate nominative.
10. **Who** The pronoun *whom* is incorrect because the objective form is used for an object of a verb or an object of a preposition. The pronoun *who* is correct because the nominative pronoun is used for the subject. In this sentence, *who* is the subject of the verb *should lead*.

C. Redundancy

In standard written English, conciseness is a goal. It is best to express your ideas in as few well-chosen words as possible. Always be alert for such repetitive and wordy expressions as:

true fact

important essentials

two equal halves

consensus of opinion

unexpected surprise

various different

extreme in degree

large in size

round in shape

close proximity

new innovations

the future to come

due to the fact that

ten years in age

problem that needs a solution

For example:

At the present time, the problem the community is currently facing must be addressed.

At first reading, you may think the sentence is grammatically correct. You'd be almost right. However, if you reread the sentence from the beginning, you'll see the phrase *At the present time*. This phrase makes the word *currently* redundant. You'll have to find a choice that eliminates this redundancy.

Practice

Directions: Rewrite the following sentence to avoid redundancies and wordiness.

1. By associating and connecting together, the two teams were able to come up with a new innovation.
2. We chose a sign that was large in size due to the fact that we hoped every person and all people would be able to see it.
3. Every year the teachers do an annual review of their classroom supplies.
4. I told you the reason why you should take the SAT is because it is a good test.
5. Larry will tell you the honest truth about his past experience.
6. It is the consensus of opinion that we should advance forward and join together to solve the problems that need solutions.

Answers

Your answers might be slightly different. It isn't important as long as you eliminate the redundant expressions.

1. **By connecting, the two teams were able to come up with an innovation.** The words *associating* and *connecting* mean essentially the same thing, as do the words *new* and *innovation*. The sentence will be more concise if these unnecessary words are eliminated.
2. **We chose a large sign so everyone could see it.** The expression *large in size* is redundant; *large* obviously refers to size. *Due to the fact that* is another wordy expression as is *every person and all people*.
3. **The teachers do an annual review of their classroom supplies.** *Annual* means "every year" so it is redundant to write both.
4. **I told you to take the SAT because it is a good test.** *The reason why . . . is because* is a wordy expression.
5. **Larry will tell you the truth about his experiences.** The truth is by definition honest; it does not need to be qualified. In this sentence, the word *experience* does not need to be preceded by *past*; that point is implied by the sentence.
6. **The consensus is that together we can advance and solve problems.** The word *consensus* means "agreement of opinion," so opinion is unnecessary. An advance is always forward and problems always need solutions. Aim for conciseness and eliminate these unnecessary words.

D. Idioms

Idioms are expressions or verb phrases that are used in English. The problem arises when the incorrect preposition is used with a verb. Unfortunately, there are no rules—you just need to know what is accepted as correct. Usually, you can trust your ears—go with what sounds right.

Here are some common idioms:

abide by	conform to	opinion of
agree to (something)	consists of	participate in
agree with (someone)	depend on	prefer to
apply for	differ from	preoccupied with
approve of	discriminate against	prohibited from
argue about (something)	escape from	protect from
argue with (someone)	in contrast to	relevant to
arrived at	insensitive to	subscribe to
believe in	insight into	succeeded in
capable of	insist upon	
comment on	method of	
complain about	object to	

Practice

Directions: Correct the idiom errors in the following sentences.

1. Ignacio proved that he was capable to rebuild the engine on the '62 Chevy.
2. While I was reading *Macbeth*, I was amazed that Shakespeare had such insight on ambitious leaders who ruthlessly seize power.
3. Alex tried to get his mother's attention, but she was preoccupied on the complicated recipe she was preparing.
4. Contrasting with the ornate style of Gothic architecture, modern geometric buildings have clean lines and sharp edges.
5. Because my dad is such a great cook, my family prefers eating at home rather than eating in restaurants.

Answers

1. Ignacio proved that he was capable of rebuilding the engine on the '62 Chevy.
2. While I was reading *Macbeth*, I was amazed that Shakespeare had such insight into ambitious leaders who ruthlessly seize power.
3. Alex tried to get his mother's attention, but she was preoccupied with the complicated recipe she was preparing.
4. In contrast to ornate Gothic architecture, modern geometric buildings have clean lines and sharp edges.
5. Because my dad is such a great cook, my family prefers eating at home to eating in restaurants.

E. Modification

1. Misplaced modifiers

Modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that describe, change, or specify other parts of a sentence. Modifiers are often participial phrases. For example:

Riding on the bus, we read the article in the paper.

Riding on the bus describes *we*.

As I turned the corner, I heard my dog *barking loudly*.

Barking loudly describes *dog*.

Sometimes modifiers are infinitive phrases:

To understand English grammar, students must practice writing and speaking correctly.

To understand English grammar modifies *students*.

In English, changes in word order (syntax) lead to changes in meaning. A modifier that is misplaced can cause confusion. For example:

- **Maria spotted an orange cat sitting on a bench eating a sandwich.** In this example, the cat is sitting and eating.
- **Sitting on a bench eating a sandwich, Maria spotted an orange cat.** Here, Maria is sitting and eating.
- **Sitting on a bench, Maria spotted an orange cat eating a sandwich.** Maria is sitting and the cat is eating.

To avoid confusion, you should always place modifying phrases and clauses as close as possible to the words they modify.

2. Dangling modifiers

Dangling modifiers have no word or phrase to modify. For example, the following sentence is confusing:

Standing on the bridge overlooking the city, the buildings look like children's toys.

Who is standing? Certainly not the buildings. To correct dangling modifiers, you must add the missing words or revise the sentence. You might revise this sentence to be:

Standing on the bridge overlooking the city, George thought the buildings looked like children's toys.

Or:

As George stood on bridge overlooking the city, the buildings looked like children's toys.

Practice

Directions: Revise the following sentences to correct the modification errors:

1. Athena found her cellphone walking home from practice.
2. To order safely from the Internet, your credit card should be protected.
3. Looking up at the sky, the eclipse was both magnificent and frightening.
4. While working out in the gym, my leg muscle cramped.
5. Ashley wore her new bag over her shoulder, which she had just purchased at the mall.
6. Perhaps best known for convincing her husband to murder the king, Lady Macbeth's rampant ambition became uncontrollable.

Answers

Your answers may vary, but be sure all modification confusion is corrected.

1. **Walking home from practice, Athena found her cellphone.** The original sentence implies that the cellphone was walking home from practice.
2. **To order safely from the Internet, you should be sure your credit card is protected.** The original sentence implies that the credit card was ordering from the Internet.
3. **Looking up the sky, we discovered the eclipse was both magnificent and frightening.** The original sentence implies that the eclipse was looking up at the sky.
4. **While I was working out in the gym, my leg muscle cramped.** The original sentence implies that the leg muscle was working out in the gym.
5. **Ashley wore her new bag, which she had just purchased at the mall, over her shoulder.** The original sentence implies that Ashley had purchased her shoulder at the mall rather than her new bag.

6. Perhaps best known for convincing her husband to murder the king, Lady Macbeth allowed her rampant ambition to become uncontrollable. The original sentence implies that Lady Macbeth's ambition was best known, rather than Lady Macbeth herself.

F. Parallelism

Parallel ideas should be in the same grammatical form.

When you join ideas using conjunctions, nouns should be joined with nouns, prepositional phrases joined with prepositional phrases, and clauses joined with clauses.

	Unparallel	Parallel
Nouns	Martin Luther King, Jr., was honored for his courage, faith, and he had a willingness to stick to his beliefs.	Martin Luther King, Jr., was honored for his courage, faith, and perseverance.
Verb phrases	I like to ski, to hike, and swimming.	I like to ski, to hike, and to swim. I like skiing, hiking, and swimming.
Prepositional phrases	We left the party early because of the inclement weather, and it was late.	We left the party because of the inclement weather and the lateness of the hour.
Clauses	Hamlet found it difficult to believe that his father had died of natural causes and in the innocence of his uncle.	Hamlet found it difficult to believe that his father had died of natural causes and that his uncle was innocent.

Correlative conjunctions (such as *both . . . and*, *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor*, and *not only . . . but also*), which always occur in pairs, can be tricky: Be sure what comes after the first conjunction is parallel to what comes after the second conjunction.

Unparallel: The car wash *not only* did a great job on my car, *but also* on my brother's.

Parallel: The car wash did a great job *not only* on my car, *but also* on my brother's.

Unparallel: The general had *neither* the support of his troops *nor* did he have the loyalty of his officers.

Parallel: The general had *neither* the support of his troops *nor* the loyalty of his officers.

Practice

Directions: Revise the following sentence to correct the errors in parallelism.

- Julius Caesar could not be sure that he had the support of the common people or if the other senators would stand by him.
- Brutus was ambitious, gullible, and he thought a lot about his own motives.
- I either want to do my English research paper on Ernest Hemingway or F. Scott Fitzgerald.

4. Galileo not only believed that the Earth was round but also that it rotated around the sun.
5. Those who try skydiving both know the thrill of weightlessness and the excitement of flying.

Answers

Your answers may vary slightly.

1. **Julius Caesar could not be sure that he had the support of the common people or the other senators.**
2. **Brutus was ambitious, gullible, and introspective.**
3. **I want to do my English research paper on either Ernest Hemingway or F. Scott Fitzgerald.**
4. **Galileo believed not only that the Earth was round but also that it rotated around the sun.**
5. **Those who try skydiving know both the thrill of weightlessness and the excitement of flying.**

G. Errors with Adjectives and Adverbs

1. Comparisons

Use the comparative form of the adjective to compare *two* nouns or pronouns. The comparative form is formed in two ways:

- **One-syllable adjectives:** Add *-er*. (This ending is also used for some two-syllable adjectives.) For example:
 - Of the two boys, Troy is the younger.
 - Samantha is the funnier of the two sisters.
- **Most two syllable adjectives:** Put the word *more* in front of word. For example:
 - My computer is more efficient than Herb's.

Use the superlative form of the adjective to compare *three or more* nouns or pronouns. The superlative form is formed in two ways:

- **One-syllable adjectives:** Add *-est*. (This ending is also used for some two-syllable adjectives.) For example:
 - Amy is the youngest girl in the class
 - The happiest teacher in the district is Sarah.
- **Most two syllable adjectives:** Put the word *most* in front of word. For example:
 - Dina won the award for the most cautious driver.

Here are some irregular comparison forms:

	Comparative	Superlative
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst
little	less or lesser	least
much	more	most
far	farther or further	farther or furthest

Some adjectives, such as the following, are absolute values and cannot be intensified with *more* or *most*:

complete	round	totally
correct	square	unique
perfect	superior	
preferable	supreme	

2. Adjective/adverb confusion

Use an adjective to modify a noun or a pronoun, and use an adverb to modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

Incorrect: In the short story “The Minister’s Black Veil,” the main character walks about the town heavily-veiled. (This sentence uses the adjective *heavy* instead of the adverb *heavily*.)

Correct: In the short story “The Minister’s Black Veil,” the main character walks about the town heavily veiled.

Practice

Directions: Correct the errors in the following sentences:

1. Of the jaguar and the hyena, the jaguar is the fastest.
2. When she won the lottery, my neighbor was the most happiest woman in town.
3. The fire chief was impressed by how speedy we all exited the building during the fire drill.
4. I thought the stuffed animal I bought for my little sister was more cuter than then one she has on her bed.
5. When we measured all ten basketball players, Jamal was the taller.
6. Among all the pottery on display, Russell’s was the most unique.

Answers

1. **Of the jaguar and the hyena, the jaguar is the faster.** When you're comparing two things, use the comparative form (in this case, *faster*) rather than the superlative form (in this case, *fastest*).
2. **When she won the lottery, my neighbor was the happiest woman in town.** Don't modify the superlative form of an adjective (in this case, *happiest*) with *most*.
3. **The fire chief was impressed by how speedily we all exited the building during the fire drill.** Use an adverb (in this case, *speedily*) rather than an adjective (in this case, *speedy*) to modify a verb (in this case, *exited*).
4. **I thought the stuffed animal I bought for my little sister was cuter than then one she has on her bed.** Don't modify the comparative form of an adjective (in this case, *cuter*) with *more*.
5. **When we measured all ten basketball players, Jamal was the tallest.** When you're comparing three or more things, use the superlative form (in this case, *fastest*).
6. **Among all the pottery on display, Russell's was unique.** The word *unique* is an absolute and should not be modified with *more* or *most*.

H. Diction

Diction means “word choice.” A diction error occurs when a word is used incorrectly or inappropriately.

On the SAT, diction errors often occur with words that look alike such as *refer/infer*, *prospective/perspective*, *formally/formerly*, *defensible/defensive*, or *reliable/reliant*. Be alert and careful as you read the sentences.

Here are some commonly misused words:

- *among/between*: Use *between* for two people or things (“between my brother and me”). Use *among* for three or more (“among all my friends”).
- *fewer/less*: Use *fewer* for anything you can count (“fewer times at bat”). Use *less* for whole quantities (less pain).
- *amount/number*: Use *amount* for whole quantities (“amount of homework”). Use *number* for things you can count (“number of math problems”).

Practice

1. The choice for the lead in the play is (between, among) Ella and Sophie.
2. The Battle of the Classes will be (between, among) all four grades in the high school.
3. Because of budget cuts, (less, fewer) awards will be given to athletes this year.
4. When he was accused of plagiarism, the student became quite (defensible, defensive), claiming his work was completely original.

5. A large (amount, number) of students attended the pep rally on the football field.
6. From the (perspective, prospective) of an incoming freshman, the high school may seem overwhelming.

Answers

1. **between** Use *between* to refer to two people or things.
2. **among** Use *among* to refer to more than two people or things.
3. **fewer** *Fewer* refers to a number of individual things. (You can count awards.)
4. **defensive** You're defensive when you try to avoid or deflect criticism. *Defensible* means capable of being explained or protected from attack.
5. **number** Number refers to individual things (such as students) that can be counted.
6. **perspective** *Perspective* refers to one's viewpoint or outlook; *prospective* refers to something likely to occur.

I. Comparisons

1. Illogical comparisons

Use the word *other* or the word *else* to compare one thing or person to the rest of the group.

Illogical comparison: Our debate team won more prizes than any team. (This is illogical because your team is a team.)

Logical comparison: Our debate team won more prizes than any *other* team.

2. Unbalanced comparisons

Comparisons must be balanced and parallel. Use the words *than* or *as* to balance the sentence.

Unbalanced: The mathletes won as many points if not more than their opponents.

Balanced: The mathletes won *as* many points *as*, if not more *than*, their opponents.

3. Faulty comparisons

You must compare like things—apples to apples, not apples to oranges.

Faulty: After tasting all the exotic dishes at the ethnic food fair, I found I like the foods from India better than China. (In this sentence, you're comparing *foods* to *China*.)

Correct: After tasting all the exotic dishes at the ethnic food fair, I found I like the foods from India better than the foods (or those) from China. (Here you're comparing *foods* to *foods*.)

Faulty: Our track star was more dominant than the previous years. (This sentence compares the *track star* to *years*.)

Correct: Our track star was more dominant than those in previous years. (Here you're comparing *star* to *those*, which is a pronoun referring to *track stars*.)

Practice

Directions: Correct the comparison errors in the following sentences.

1. The music of Rascal Flats is as good as Sugarland.
2. Rachel felt her poetry was better than any student in the writing class.
3. My car is cleaner than any car in the parking lot.
4. It was clear that the flowers from the local garden shop were fresher than the florist.
5. The movie *Diehard 3* was as suspenseful, if not more suspenseful than the prequel.
6. The Spanish restaurant on South Street is better than any restaurant in town.

Answers

1. The music of Rascal Flats is as good as **that of** Sugarland.
2. Rachel felt her poetry was better than **that of** any student in the writing class.
3. My car is cleaner than any **other** car in the parking lot.
4. It was clear that the flowers from the local garden shop were fresher than **those** from the florist.
5. The movie *Diehard 3* was as suspenseful **as**, if not more suspenseful than, the prequel.
6. The Spanish restaurant on South Street is better than any **other** restaurant in town.

J. Agreement

1. Agreement of subject and verb

A verb must agree with its subject in number. A singular subject takes the singular form of a verb; a plural subject takes the plural form of the verb.

Singular: My **answer agrees** with yours. one answer

Plural: My **answers agree** with yours. more than one answer

Note: While most nouns form the plural by adding the letter *s*, most verbs in their plural form do not end in the letter *s*.

Phrases may intervene between the subject and the verb. In most cases, ignore the intervening phrase:

My answers **on the test** agree with yours.

On the test is a prepositional phrase.

Intervening prepositional phrases do not affect agreement of subject and verb, so the best approach is to cross out or bracket intervening phrases. This will avoid confusion.

Note: The subject of a sentence is *never* part of a prepositional phrase.

The sleeping **cabin** with a bathroom and two beds **is** available.

The sleeping **cabin** [with a bathroom and two beds] **is** available.

Be sure to find the subject and match it with the verb:

Studying for final exams helps me do well on the test.

Bracket the intervening phrases:

Studying [for final exams] **helps** me do well on the test.

Studying is the singular subject; *helps* is the singular form of the verb.

Sometimes multiple phrases intervene:

The photographs of the family taken in the field beyond the house show a group of smiling people of all ages.

Follow the same procedure and reread the entire sentence bracketing the phrases:

The **photographs** [of the family taken in the field beyond the house] **show** a group of smiling people of all ages.

Photographs is the plural subject; *show* is the plural form of the verb.

Intervening parenthetical or explanatory phrases also do not affect agreement of subject and verb, so the best approach is to cross out or bracket intervening phrases. This will avoid confusion.

Example 1: My cousin, along with ten of her closest friends, volunteers in a hospital.

Bracket the intervening phrase or phrases and match the subject with the verb:

My **cousin**, [along with ten of her closest friends,] **volunteers** in a hospital.

Example 2: Our chapter of DECA, like all the others chapters in the surrounding districts, attends the state competition.

Our **chapter** [of DECA,] [like all the others chapters][in the surrounding districts,] **attends** the state competition.

Example 3: Julius Caesar, accompanied by many of the deceitful senators, was approached by a soothsayer who warned him of danger.

Julius Caesar, [accompanied by many of the deceitful senators] **was** approached by a soothsayer who warned him of danger.

2. Agreement problems with indefinite pronouns

Singular indefinite pronouns take the singular form of the verb; plural indefinite pronouns take the plural form of the verb.

Each of the games on the computer *requires* skillful manipulation. singular

Both of the games on the computer *require* skillful manipulation. plural

Singular subjects joined by the correlative conjunctions *either . . . or* and *neither . . . nor* are singular.

Either the *novel* or the *play is* acceptable.

Plural subjects joined by these correlative conjunctions are plural.

Neither the *trees* nor the *bushes were* damaged by the fire.

When one subject is singular and one subject is plural, the verb agrees with the closer subject:

Neither the *parents* nor the little *girl is* afraid of spiders.

Either the *coach* or my *parents are driving* to the game.

3. Agreement problems with inverted sentences

These sentences will be tricky because you'll encounter the verb before the subject. Again, the key to success is to find the subject, wherever it is in the sentence.

Note: The words *here* and *there* are never subjects.

Two months before the hurricane there **were** warning **signs**.

The plural subject *signs* agrees with the plural form of the verb *were*.

There **are** many **problems** with the economy today.

The plural subject *problems* agrees with the plural form of the verb *are*.

Be sure to read the whole sentence through to find the subject:

Onto the field **march** the **band** and the **color guard**.

The plural subject *band* and *color guard* agrees with the plural form of the verb *march*.

Over the trees **flies** a small **bird**.

The singular subject *bird* agrees with singular form of the verb *flies*.

4. Noun agreement

Use a singular noun to refer to a singular noun and a plural noun to refer to a plural noun. Sounds logical, right? Yet, problems do arise:

People who wish to be a teacher should apply here.

This sentence is incorrect because the plural noun *people* requires the plural noun *teachers* to be logical.

Correct: **People** who wish to be **teachers** should apply here.

Incorrect: Tourists with a visa must sign in at Passport Control.

Correct: **Tourists** with **visas** must sign in at Passport Control.

Practice

Directions: Select the best word in the following sentences.

1. Into every life (come, comes) some issues that perplex us.
2. A carton of books (is, are) ready to be opened and stacked on the shelves.
3. Neither the cats nor the dog (is, are) in the house.
4. Each of the sentences on the bulletin boards (is, are) written by a student.
5. (Does, Do) either of the maps show the Himalayan Mountains?
6. One of the puzzling aspects of the physics equations (is, are) the vector analysis.

Answers

1. **come** The subject of the verb *come* is the plural noun *issues*.
2. **is** The subject of the verb *is* is the singular noun *carton*.
3. **is** With two subjects joined by *neither . . . nor*, use the subject closer to the verb (*the dog is*).
4. **is** The singular indefinite pronoun *each* is the subject of the verb *is*.
5. **Does** The subject of the verb *does show* is the singular indefinite pronoun *either*.
6. **is** The subject of the verb *is* is the singular indefinite pronoun *one*.

K. Tense

Verbs tell the action or state of being in a sentence. They are also the time words, the principal indicators of tense. As you read, be aware of the tense of the passage and note any inconsistencies.

The six tenses in English are

- **Present:** Action taking place in the present
- **Past:** Action that has already taken place in the past
- **Future:** Action that will take place in the future
- **Present perfect:** Action that began in the past and continues into the present
- **Past perfect:** Action that began in the past and was completed before some other action
- **Future perfect:** Action completed in the future, before some other action in the future

Present Tense		
	Singular	Plural
First person	I walk.	We walk.
Second person	You walk.	You walk.
Third person	He/she/it walks.	They walk.

Past Tense		
	Singular	Plural
First person	I walked.	We walked.
Second person	You walked.	You walked.
Third person	He/she/it walked.	They walked.

Future Tense		
	Singular	Plural
First person	I will walk.	We will walk.
Second person	You will walk.	You will walk.
Third person	He/she/it will walk.	They will walk.

Present Perfect Tense		
	Singular	Plural
First person	I have walked.	We have walked.
Second person	You have walked.	You have walked.
Third person	He/she/it has walked.	They have walked.

Past Perfect Tense		
	Singular	Plural
First person	I had walked.	We had walked.
Second person	You had walked.	You had walked.
Third person	He/she/it had walked.	They had walked.

Future Perfect Tense		
	Singular	Plural
First person	I will have walked.	We will have walked.
Second person	You will have walked.	You will have walked.
Third person	He/she/it will have walked.	They will have walked.

Perfect tenses are always formed by using *have*, *has*, or *had* plus the past participle form of the verb. You also have the option of using the progressive form (*-ing*) in each tense to show ongoing action:

- Present progressive: I am walking.
- Past progressive: I was walking.
- Future progressive: I will be walking.
- Present perfect progressive: I have been walking.
- Past perfect progressive: I had been walking.
- Future perfect progressive: I will have been walking.

The present participle is the *-ing* form of the verb. In the case of the verb *to walk*, it's *walking*. (These *-ing* forms cannot be verbs alone; they need a helping verb.)

The past participle is the *-ed*, *-d*, *-t*, *-en*, or *-n* form of the verb. In the case of the verb *to walk*, it's *walked*.

Many verbs have irregular forms:

Present	Past	Past Participle
arise	arose	(have) arisen
become	became	(have) become
bring	brought	(have) brought
catch	caught	(have) caught
do	did	(have) done
drink	drank	(have) drunk
drive	drove	(have) driven
eat	ate	(have) eaten
fall	fell	(have) fallen
fly	flew	(have) flown
lend	lent	(have) lent
ring	rang	(have) rung
sing	sang	(have) sung
swim	swam	(have) swum
write	wrote	(have) written

Often verbs occur in verb phrases with a helping verb and a main verb. Some verbs like *do*, *have*, and *be* can be both main verbs and helping verbs:

Roberto will **do** his homework. main verb

Roberto and Anna **do need** to practice their duet. helping verb

Watch for sentences that have illogical shifts in tense or use incorrect verb forms.

Illogical shift: He **searched** for signs of deer when he **notices** the tracks.

Correct: He **is searching** for signs of deer when he **notices** the tracks. present

Or: He **was searching** for signs of deer when he **noticed** the tracks. past

Check the tense of the context to determine whether the sentence should be in the present or past.

Incorrect verb form: We were shocked that he **had drank** all the water in the canteen.

Correct: We were shocked that he **had drunk** all the water in the canteen.

Practice

Directions: Write the correct form of the italicized verb in the blank.

1. I was pleased to discover that I had _____ a mile. *swim*
2. By the next meet, I will have _____ my own record. *beat*
3. When I woke up, I found that two inches of snow had _____. *fall*
4. At last week's meeting, I _____ a presentation. *give*
5. Joan _____ her dog to school yesterday. *bring*
6. After the bell has _____, we can leave for the beach. *ring*

Answers

1. **swum** To show action that took place before past action, use the past perfect tense.
2. **beaten** To show action that began in the present and continues into the future, use the future perfect tense.
3. **fallen** To show action that took place before past action, use the past perfect tense.
4. **gave** This is the simple past tense.
5. **brought** This is the simple past tense.
6. **rung** Use the present perfect tense to indicate an action that occurs at an indefinite time in the past.

L. Sentence Structure

1. Run-on sentences

Two or more complete thoughts joined in one sentence without proper punctuation constitutes a run-on sentence:

The lecture was on the life cycle of the frog it seemed to go on for hours.

The run-on can be corrected in several ways:

- **Break the sentence up into separate sentences:** The lecture was on the life cycle of the frog. It seemed to go on for hours.
- **Join the main clauses with semicolons:** The lecture was on the life cycle of the frog; it seemed to go on for hours.
- **Change one or more of the main clauses to subordinate clauses:** Because the lecture was on the life cycle of the frog, it seemed to go on for hours.
- **Use a comma and a conjunction:** The lecture was on the life cycle of the frog, and it seemed to go on for hours.
- **Use the semicolon and a conjunctive adverb:** The lecture was on the life cycle of the frog; consequently, it seemed to go on for hours.

The most common run-on occurs when a comma joins two sentences (in what's known as a comma splice):

Serena really likes Aaron, she thinks he can help her achieve her goals.

Correct the comma splice by any one of the run-on correction methods:

Serena really likes Aaron; she thinks he can help her achieve her goals.

2. Sentence fragments

Most sentence fragments are phrases or subordinate clauses.

Being interested in setting up a charity auction.	participial phrase
To be interested in setting up a charity auction.	infinitive phrase
Since we are all interested in setting up a charity auction.	subordinate clause

To avoid fragments, remember:

- A sentence must have subject and a verb and express a complete thought.
- No word ending in *-ing* can stand alone as a verb without a helping verb (except one-syllable verbs like *sing* and *ring*).

Practice

Directions: Correct the following sentences.

1. Raghav being the highest scoring quarterback on the football team.
2. Many people think dogs make the best pets, cats are affectionate, too.
3. Hoping to fill all the seats in the auditorium for the school musical.
4. Pearl loves to go Florida, she has so many friends and relatives to visit there.
5. Not only did the class picnic get rained out on Saturday, but cancelled forever.
6. The TV show *Lost* is filmed in Hawaii, the lucky cast gets to live there.

Answers

Answers may vary.

1. **Raghav has been the highest scoring quarterback on the football team.**
2. **Many people think dogs make the best pets, but cats are affectionate, too.**
3. **We are hoping to fill all the seats in the auditorium for the school musical.**
4. **Pearl loves to go Florida because she has so many friends and relatives to visit there.**
5. **Not only did the class picnic get rained out on Saturday, but it was also cancelled forever.**
6. **The TV show *Lost* is filmed in Hawaii; the lucky cast gets to live there.**