

SAT/ACT GRAMMAR

Success on Section 2 SAT Writing and Language Test and on Section 1 ACT English Test involve familiarizing yourself with a specific set of grammar rules which are regularly tested on both of these standardized exams.

On the SAT, there are four passages with 11 questions per passage. On the ACT, there are five passages with 15 questions per passage. On both the SAT/ACT, the passages get a bit harder towards the end of the test section.

Similar to the use of proper methods to procure all correct answers on both SAT/ACT, you must always do what you need to do to procure the correct answer. If the question asks you to insert a sentence into the text, read the end of sentence appearing before the proposed insertion to try and match with the start of the sentence in the insertion and the end of the insertion to match with the start of sentence coming after the insertion. Also, use this method for the proper placement of a sentence within the passage or for sentences at the start of a new paragraph you must read the last sentence in the preceding paragraph and the start of the second sentence in the

new paragraph. For a sentence at the end of a paragraph, read end of sentence before this sentence and the start of the sentence after this sentence.

The main point is that all the sentences in the paragraph need to be linked together, just as the end of the preceding paragraph must be linked to the start of the subsequent paragraph. In this regard, always carefully evaluate both the traditional—he, she, it, etc.—and the non-traditional pronouns—such, this, that, etc.—remembering that the SAT/ACT likes to hide the correct answers inside of pronouns. To get around this, recall that all pronouns have a noun antecedent—a proper noun—that the pronoun substitutes for; once you unmask this proper noun, the correct choice will become apparent.

Formal/Informal Tone: Typically, all passages, except one, will have a formal tone. (Think of what you read in your textbook.) Informal tone is conversational in nature, but, you can never use slang on SAT/ACT.

Combination of Sentences: Here is a trick: ALWAYS GO TO SHORTEST SENTENCE FIRST.

Delete as an answer choice: Always go to Delete as first choice.

Do not be surprised on SAT/ACT to have two/three NO CHANGE answers in a row.

Definition of a Sentence

The first step in this inquiry requires the test-taker to deconstruct the sentences into their respective Independent Clause(s) (“IC”), clauses which can exist as their own sentences, and Dependent Clause(s) (“DC”), clauses which cannot exist as their own sentences.

In order to be a grammatically correct, proper sentence, said sentence must contain at least one independent clause. The proper definition of an independent clause (proper sentence) is a completed thought.

Even if a clause contains a noun and a verb, that does not automatically transform the clause into an IC—into a proper sentence. For example, “When Sam visited Portugal last summer.” Even though “Sam” is a noun, and “visited” is a verb, this clause is not an independent clause because this clause is not a completed thought; instead, this clause is a dependent clause. As a dependent clause, this clause, standing alone on the SAT/ACT would be labeled a grammatically incorrect “sentence fragment.”

Finally, once a sentence contains at least one independent clause, any number of other grammatically correct constructions—dependent clauses, prepositional phrases, other independent clauses, etc.—can be placed before, after, or in the middle of the original independent clause.

All clauses in a sentence must be separated by different types of punctuation marks. On the SAT/ACT, it is important to be able to correctly identify each portion of the sentence. This skill will enable the test-taker to

properly punctuate the sentence.

Punctuation Marks

The most common punctuation mark used in the English language is the comma. Commas are used to separate all dependent clauses placed before, after, or, even in the middle of independent clauses.

For example: “Tony Lux, a legendary actor, originally from the Bronx, recently won the Oscar for Best Actor.” When you properly deconstruct this sentence, we see: “Tony Lux recently won the Oscar” (Independent clause) “a legendary actor” (Dependent clause) “originally from the Bronx” (Dependent clause) “for Best Actor.” (Prepositional phrase—any phrase that starts with a preposition: with, in, along, for, etc., but here, because this prepositional phrase specifies the more general term Oscar, we do not place a comma before it.).

Commas are also used to separate items in a list.

For example, “I like pistachio, chocolate, and vanilla ice cream.”

Please Take Note, in this context, of the “Elimination Rule,” separating essential parts of a sentence from non-essential parts of a sentence, such that, any part of the sentence which is non-essential, albeit a dependent clause, or a prepositional phrase or any other grammatical construction in a sentence, must be surrounded by—separated using—commas, leaving a perfectly good sentence in its place. [Of course, this is true because when you remove all non-essential parts of a sentence, you are left with one, or more, essential independent clause(s) which comprise(s) a grammatically correct sentence.]

This rule also applies to proper names: “My history professor, Professor Morgan, is a tough grader.” This sentence is grammatically incorrect because, using our Elimination Rule, we are left with “My history professor is a tough grader.”

[Grammatically correct sentences distinguish between essential and non-essential parts of the sentence. Using this rule: Between ‘history professor’ and ‘Professor Morgan’ the specific name of the history professor is clearly more essential than the more general ‘history professor.’ In order to correct this sentence, change it to: “My history professor Professor Morgan is a tough grader.” Or “Professor Morgan, my history professor, is a tough grader.”

But also take note of the difference with this sentence: “My two best friends, Patty and Tom, both got into Penn.” Here, ‘two best friends’ is essential because the emphasis in the sentence is on ‘two best friends’ whereas the individual names of the two best friends is non-essential in this sentence because the emphasis in this example sentence is not on the individual names of the two best friends.

In a similar manner, when punctuating prepositional phrases, use Elimination Rule to determine whether the prepositional phrase should be separated with a comma. In the example sentence “for Best Actor” cannot be eliminated, and therefore no comma is used. However, “Paul, along with his two close friends, loves to camp in Yosemite National Park.” Here, “along with his two close friends” is a non-essential prepositional phrase, properly surrounded

by commas. Also, typically we separate prepositional phrases, at the start of a sentence, with a comma: At the play last evening, Meryl Streep gave a phenomenal performance.

In summary, when evaluating any sentence, your first job is to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential parts of the sentence, identifying the independent clause(s) in the sentence, defined as the main subject(s) of the underlying sentence.

Semicolons

Semicolons are used to separate two independent, related clauses. [Another reason why it is crucial for you to be able to distinguish between dependent and independent clauses in the sentence.]

A comma splice involves the grammatical error of placing a comma to separate two independent clauses in the sentence instead of a semicolon, or a colon, where applicable. Please Note: When you see a pronoun in the middle of a sentence, after a comma, be on the look out for the need to replace the comma with a semicolon or a colon. For example, “Charlie is an avid rare coin collector, he recently purchased a safe to contain this collection.” This is a comma splice. In this sentence, you must replace the comma with a semicolon because there are two independent, related clauses in this sentence.

One notable exception is when you have two independent, related clauses joined by a conjunction (and, but, or, etc.). In this instance, the rule is to separate the two independent clauses with a comma. For example: “Beth loves downhill skiing, but she dislikes cross-country skiing.”

Another method used to avoid a comma splice error is to convert the second clause of the sentence into a dependent clause. You can do this by placing an -ing verb at the start of the second clause. For example, “Patty is an avid angler, she prefers lake fishing to ocean fishing.” This sentence is a grammatically incorrect comma splice. You can correct this sentence in several ways: Replace the comma with a semicolon, or keep the comma and change “she prefers” to “preferring” or keep the comma and change “she” to “who.”

Please note: An -ing verb at the start of a second clause in a sentence will always transform an independent clause into a dependent clause.

Finally, please note that the two clauses must be related to each other; otherwise, you have a grammatically incorrect run-on sentence. For example, “Patty is an avid angler; she resides in Sausalito, California.” These two clauses are not related to each other; therefore, a semicolon cannot be properly employed in this sentence.

Colons

Colons are used to expand upon the information immediately preceding the colon. Going back to our earlier example sentence: “Charlie is an avid rare coin collector: he spends most of his free time attending local rare coin collecting conventions.”

Please note that both of these clauses are independent, related clauses, which would normally require the use of a semicolon; however, English grammar dictates that more specific punctuation marks, such as colons, will always take precedence over more general punctuation marks, such as semicolons.

Dash(es)/Parentheses

Dashes/Parentheses indicate an aside to the main point you are making in the sentence. The information located inside the dashes or parentheses does relate back to the main sentence, albeit in a tangential manner. Please note: The information contained within the dash(es) is more closely related to the information contained in the main sentence than the information contained within the parentheses. More often than not, the information contained within the dashes is a list, whereas, the information contained within the parentheses is typically the definition of a technical term or the birth/death of a famous individual. Finally, the information outside the dash(es)/parentheses must be an independent clause. In a sentence, there can be one dash at either end of the sentence or two dashes in the middle of the sentence.

Common Grammatical Errors

Redundancy—“Since Palm was already late for the play, she swiftly made her way to her seat in an expeditious manner.” “Swiftly” and “expeditious” both mean “in a quick manner,” and, as such, are redundant.

Lack of Parallelism—Proper writing requires consistency. Therefore, any list—even a list of two items—must be written in the same manner. For example, “Last summer, Adrien toured through Monaco, and he went to parties in Nice.” This sentence is grammatically incorrect because the sentence lacks parallel construction. To make the sentence parallel, you must write: “Last summer, Adrien toured through Monaco and partied in Nice.” Parallelism rules are unforgiving: You must employ the same construction in all parts of the sentence. Another example, “Yesterday, Erica went for a hike, a late evening swim, and she went horseback riding.” This sentence is grammatically incorrect because the sentence lacks parallel construction. To fix the sentence, you need to write: “Yesterday, Erica went for a hike, a late evening

swim, and a horseback ride.” [Please note: Here, the preposition “for” is inferred throughout the list.]

Faulty Comparison—You must compare like with like: “Martha Graham’s dancing technique is more nuanced than Isadora Duncan.” This sentence is grammatically incorrect because we are comparing Martha Graham’s dancing technique to the modern dancer Isadora Duncan. Instead, you need to write: “Martha Graham’s dancing technique is more nuanced than that of Isadora Duncan.” [Please note the use of the non-traditional pronoun “that,” comprehending the fact that all pronouns—traditional and non-traditional—must have a noun antecedent, which is a proper noun the pronoun substitutes for in the sentence. Here, the non-traditional pronoun “that” is substituting for the proper noun “dancing technique.”]

Lack of Subject Noun/Verb Coordination—You must identify the subject noun (main noun) and subject predicate (main verb) and make sure they align with regard to singular/plural. Often, to make the question more challenging on the SAT/ACT, the main noun and main verb will be far apart from each other in the sentence. For example, “Marin, along with Viggo and Andreas, is/are preparing for the SAT.” The main noun is singular: Marin; therefore, the correct verb must be singular: is. [Please note: The only word that will require

the plural version of the verb is the word “and.”] Marin and Viggo are preparing for the SAT.

Adjective/Adverb Error—Adjectives modify (describe) nouns; whereas, adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. When you have a list of adjectives/adverbs, use the switch around rule—meaning if you can switch around the list of adjectives/adverbs, use commas to separate the adjectives/adverbs; however, if you cannot switch around the list of adjectives/adverbs, do not use commas to separate the adjectives/adverbs. For example: Mary bought a shiny, new, luxury hybrid vehicle. Here, since we can switch around shiny, new, and luxury, we separate these three adjectives with commas. However, “Martin received an expensive, eco-friendly birthday present.” Here since we can switch around expensive and eco-friendly we use commas. However, since we cannot switch around the adjective birthday, no comma between eco-friendly and birthday.

Active/Passive Voice—On SAT, the active voice is always preferred over the passive voice. For example: Tennis is the sport Adrien played on Saturday. Switching subject noun and object noun is passive voice. To correct write: Adrien played tennis on Saturday.

Diction Error—Wrong word—For example: imminent v eminent, affect v effect, etc.

Idiom Error—Wrong Preposition—of, into, in, etc.

Punctuation Mistake—Properly deconstruct sentence in order to properly punctuate.

Verb Tense Error—Identify the verb tense of each passage, then make sure all the verbs in the passage align with the identified verb tense.

Present/Past Participle—Present participle uses has (singular) / have (plural) plus third declension verb. Present participle expands time from the past to the present: For the last three years, Claire has studied the violin. Past participle uses had plus third declension verb. Past participle expands time from past to past. Also, past participle involves two actions in the sentence, the action that comes before, uses the past participle: Trey left the party because he had drunk too much alcohol. Here, Trey's drinking too much alcohol preceded his leaving the party and therefore need past participle verb.

Number Agreement—The noun and verb must align in number: When the children grow up, they want to be a doctor or a lawyer. This sentence is grammatically incorrect. Change to: When the children grow up, they want to be doctors or lawyers.

Faulty Coordination—Look for opening descriptive dependent clause; you must make sure the noun that follows the comma coordinates with this descriptive dependent clause: Running through the airport, the luggage slipped out of Mark's hands. This is grammatically incorrect because the luggage was not running through the airport, Mark was. Running through the airport, Mark dropped his luggage.

Misplaced Modifier—A modifier is a descriptive term or phrase that needs to be as close as possible to the noun it modifies: The court only hears civil cases on Tuesdays. This is incorrect. Change to: On Tuesdays, the court hears only civil cases.

Infinitive/Gerund Confusion—A gerund is when you take the infinitive version of a verb—to dance—add -ing and convert it into a proper noun. Gerunds are always singular nouns: Dancing is fun.

Comparison Error—Jon is a very unique individual. The problem is that a person cannot be more unique than unique. To fix, eliminate the word very.

Double Negative—Recall that scarcely and hardly are already negative so you cannot say: Paul hardly never goes to the cinema. Instead, write: Paul hardly ever goes to the cinema.

Sentence Fragment—Not a completed thought: When Sam traveled to Thailand. You must finish your thought to form a proper sentence: When Sam traveled to Thailand, he visited The Emerald Temple.

Run-On Sentence—Two, or more, completed thoughts not related to each other: Sam enjoyed his visit to The Emerald Temple in Thailand; in college, Sam majored in Math. Inappropriate run-on sentence.

Possessives—In a sentence, a possessive acts as an adjective: Josh's teacher is very strict. Because Josh's describes who the teacher is, Josh's is an adjective. For all singular nouns, even those ending in 's' to transform into a possessive you must add apostrophe s: My boss's new office is spectacular. [Notice no comma between

these two adjectives—boss’s and new—because you cannot reverse the order of these adjectives.].

For regular plural nouns, ending in ‘s’ simply add an apostrophe at the end of the word: A fire destroyed the bees’ hive. For irregular plural nouns, add apostrophe s: The children’s teacher was very nice.

Pronouns

All pronouns need a noun antecedent: A proper noun the pronoun substitutes for.

Vague Pronoun—When the proper noun in the sentence is vague: On the news last night, they said it would rain today in Texas. But, which proper noun does ‘they’ substitute for? To correct: On the news last night, the meteorologist said it would rain today in Texas. [Recall prepositional phrases at start of sentence as well as non-essential prepositional phrases in middle of the sentence are separated from the rest of the sentence with comma(s): “On the news last night,”]

Ambiguous Pronoun—When there are two proper nouns in a sentence, and you are unsure which proper noun the

pronoun substitutes for in the sentence: Jack told his dad he was tired. But who does 'he' substitute for—Jack or his dad?

Pronoun Number Agreement—Where the pronoun is disconnected from the proper noun because one is singular, the other plural: Each of the children should return to their desks. Problem is that each is singular, to correct: Each of the children should return to his or her desk.

Case Error—Pronouns are broken down into Subjective (he, she, they, etc.) and Objective (him, her, them, etc.) Case. Subjective case means the pronoun is substituting for a subject noun; objective case means pronoun is substituting for an object noun: “Do not ask for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” Here who is subjective case, whom objective case. We use whom in this quote because whom is the object of the preposition for.

Pronoun Shift—You cannot switch pronouns in the middle of the sentence: One should always carefully look both ways when you cross the roadways in England. Either use one and one or you and you.

SAT/ACT PRACTICE WORKSHEET

BREAK UP THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES INTO INDEPENDENT CLAUSE (IC), DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC) AND PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE (PP). PROPERLY PUNCTUATE AND NAME THE SPECIFIC GRAMMAR ERROR, IF ANY, THAT IS BEING TESTED.

BETH AND REY OWNERS OF V MOTORS PURCHASES USED CARS, THEREAFTER THEY SELLS THEM AT EXORBITANT RATES.

WHOMEVER/WHOEVER STOLE MY CALCULATOR WILL BE PERSECUTED TO THE FULLEST EXTENT OF THE LAW.

DRIVING AT SPEEDS EXCEEDING 120 MPH THE CAR TREY DROVE HAD SMASHED INTO A BRICK WALL.

THE TWIN BROTHERS — MICHELLE AND LUZERNE — MISBEHAVED SO OFTEN AT SCHOOL, THAT THE PRINCIPLE FINALLY EXPELLED THEM.

PATRICE LOVES ART; HE TYPICALLY SPENDS TWELVE HOURS EACH DAY HONING HIS DRAWING SKILLS.

AFTER ADOPTING A FEMALE SHELTER DOG SHE NAMED MIRACLE SHE BROUGHT HER TO HER HOME BUT SADLY MIRACLE DID NOT GET ALONG WITH HER SIX YEAR OLD CAT, NAMED GRUMPY, SO SHE HAD TO RETURN MIRACLE TO THE PET SHELTER.

OUT OF ALL THE STUDENTS ONLY ANTONIO AS WELL AS FIDO LIKE THE NEW ART TEACHER.

AT THE GRAMMY AWARDS BEYONCÉ WHO EARLIER TRIPPED ON THE RED CARPET SWEEPED THE AWARDS.

MAINTAINING A STOIC FIRM COMPOSURE ALL THROUGHOUT HIS FATHER'S MEMORIAL SERVICE THE FOUR YEAR OLD BOY FINALLY BROKE DOWN EMOTIONALLY A WEEK LATER.

NO ONE KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS
THEREFORE ALL OF US NEEDS TO BE PREPARED FOR
WHATEVER COME OUR WAY.