The Writing Section: Multiple-Choice Questions

Terms you'll need to understand:

- ✓ Verb phrase
- ✓ Verb tense
- ✓ Verb mood
- ✓ Participle
- ✓ Participial phrase
- ✓ Dangling participle
- ✓ Gerund
- ✓ Pronoun
- ✓ Antecedent
- ✓ Preposition
- ✓ Prepositional phrase
- ✓ Idiom
- ✓ Comparative adverb
- ✓ Comparative adjective
- ✓ Parallelism
- ✓ Infinitive
- ✓ Split infinitive

Techniques you'll need to master:

- ✓ Match verb and subject number and tense
- ✓ Use verb tense and mood correctly
- ✓ Use participles and participial phrases correctly
- ✓ Identify and use pronouns correctly
- ✓ Use prepositions correctly—omitting when necessary
- ✓ Recognize and use idioms correctly
- ✓ Use comparative adjectives and adverbs
- ✓ Balance phrases and clauses using parallelism
- ✓ Improve sentences and paragraphs

Grammar is the foundation of good writing. If you don't know the underlying rules, you'll find writing and reading difficult. The exam tests your grammar skills in three sections:

- You'll be asked to identify errors in a sentence.
- You'll be expected to improve poorly written sentences.
- You'll be expected to improve paragraph structure.

This section of the exam will consist of 49 multiple-choice questions on grammar and usage. The exam won't ask you to repeat grammatical terms or rules.

Each sentence will have only one error. Correcting a single underlined component should produce a grammatically correct sentence. Deleting an underlined phrase is never an option. Not all sentences will have an error.

Guidelines for Identifying Sentence Errors

You'll begin the exam by identifying errors in single sentences. The exam presents a sentence with four underlined sections. It's up to you to determine which of the underlined phrases is incorrect. A fifth response will be "No error," and you should choose that when the sentence is correct.

Before you start reminiscing through all those grammar school grammar rules, let's discuss a few pointers that you can use to help identify sentence errors:

- Always begin by reading the sentence as if it were correct. During this first reading, don't assume there's a problem. Read it, and listen to how it sounds. If something sounds bad to you, it probably is (but that's not a guarantee).
- Once you identify a phrase as not sounding quite right to you, try to identify the appropriate—and seemingly broken—grammatical rule. Don't worry if you can't recite the rule perfectly; a general understanding of the rule is enough. You don't have to explain the rule on the exam. You'll only be expected to apply it.
- At this point, if you still haven't found an error, begin eliminating the phrases that you know are correct and see what's left. Choose a response from the phrases you can't eliminate as correct. Remember, you will be penalized for incorrect answers. If you simply can't identify a best-guess response, skip the question.

During practice sessions, read the sentences aloud if possible. Often, the sound of the sentence points directly to the error. Unfortunately, you won't be able to read questions aloud during the actual exam, but practicing this way might make spotting errors easier in general.

During the exam, you'll only have to identify the error. While practicing, we recommend that you actually correct the error. Correcting the errors will help solidify the rules in your mind, making them that much easier to identify the next time.

Identifying Errors in Sentences

In this next section, you'll review common grammatical rules. You'll need to have a good understanding of the rules and how to apply the rule to correct errors in order to score well on the grammar portion of the SAT exam.

Identifying Verb Errors

When checking verb phrases, look for the following problems:

- The verb must agree with the subject in person and number.
- The verb must be the proper tense.
- The verb must be in the proper form (subjective mood).
- When a verb is a participle, it must be in the correct form.

Verb Agreement

A verb must agree in number with the subject. That means if the subject is singular, the verb must be singular. Likewise, both the subject and verb must be plural. Fortunately, there's a simple way to find subject-verb disagreement. Say the subject and the verb together—omitting everything else. You'll need to understand the following rule well enough to apply them correctly:

- Combining two subjects with the word *and* produces a plural subject.

  Plural Example: *Susan and Bill* <u>are</u> celebrating their anniversary in Hawaii.

- Use the phrases *in addition to*, *together with*, *along with*, and *as well as* to keep the subject singular. Remember, the object of the phrase is *not* the subject of the sentence. For instance, in the following sentence, Susan is the subject, not Susan and Bill.

  Singular Example: *Susan*, in addition to Bill, <u>is</u> in Hawaii.

- The following words always identify a singular subject: *each*, *anyone*, *anybody*, *anything*, *another*, *neither*, *either*, *every*, *everyone*, *someone*, *no one*,

somebody, and *everything*. Try replacing the subject with the word *it* for clarification. If the sentence works, the subject is singular. If the word *they* is a better fit than *it*, you have a plural subject.

Singular Example: *Everyone* walks to the park on nice days.

Singular Example: *It* walks to the park on nice days.

Plural Example: *They* walk to the park on nice days.

- The following words can identify a singular or plural subject: *none*, *any*, *some*, *most*, *more*, and *all*. You'll need to refer to the actual subject (noun) to determine the number.

  Plural Example: None of those *birds* are eating the seed.

  Singular Example: None of the *seed* is left.

- Verbs combined with a noun phrase using either/or and neither/nor must agree with the item that's closest to the verb. More often than not, the item will be the last item in the comparison, but not always.

  Singular Example: Neither Bill nor *Susan* spends enough time considering the consequences of their actions.

  Plural Example: Neither Bill nor the *kids* spend enough time considering the consequences of their actions.

  Singular Example: Either doughnuts or a *chili dog* entices me enough to thwart my new diet.

  Plural Example: Either a chili dog or *doughnuts* entice me enough to thwart my new diet.

When the subject follows the verb, as in sentences that begin with *here* and *there*, remember that the subject is always the word about which something is said. Inverting the sentence can simplify determining the subject, which makes it easier to check subject/verb agreement.

- Inverted Example: There are lots of *rumors* clouding the real issue.
- Uninverted Example: Lots of *rumors* are clouding the real issue.

Verb Tense

A verb's tense identifies place (or perspective) and time. There are three verb tenses: *present*, *past*, and *future*. It would be great if that short list was the gist of verb tense, but it's just the beginning. Each of the tenses comes in three forms:

- *Simple Form*—Use the *simple* form with the present form of a verb: walks, talks, sits, cries, and so on.
- *Perfect Form*—The *perfect* form uses a verb that indicates a completed action: walked, talked, sat, cried, and so on.
- *Progressive Form*—The *progressive* form uses a verb that indicates an ongoing action: *am*, *is*, *are*, and *so on*.

In all, there are nine verb tenses you should be able to use correctly. Table 1.1 lists all nine.

Table 1.1 Verb Tense

Form	Tense	Explanation	Example
Simple	Present	Indicates the current state.	Susan *walks* the dog around the lake.
	Past	Indicates the past state.	Susan *walked* the dog around the lake.
	Future	Indicates the future state.	Susan *will walk* the dog around the lake.
Perfect	Present	Implies an event that began in the past but that extends to the present. Sometimes this tense indicates an unspecified time.	Susan *has walked* the dog around the lake.
	Past	Implies that an event has been completed in the past. This tense is seldom necessary and can usually be rewritten without changing the timing.	Susan *had already walked* the dog around the lake.
	Future	Implies that something will be completed in the future.	Susan *will have walked* the dog around the lake by the time we return from shopping.
Progressing	Present	Indicates an ongoing state.	Susan *is walking* the dog around the lake.
	Past	Indicates an ongoing state in the past.	Susan *was walking* the dog around the lake.
	Future	Indicates an ongoing state in the future.	Susan *will be walking* the dog around the lake.

Most of us can use *simple* and *progressive* correctly with no trouble. The *perfect form* is the trouble spot. Unfortunately, there's no easy trick to using the perfect tenses correctly. We recommend that you spend some time working on the perfect tenses to prepare for the exam. Regardless of tense, you must keep tense consistent.

You can expect to encounter perfect tense errors in the grammar section of the exam. In addition, although you don't have to write in any particular tense in your essay, you will be expected to use tense correctly and consistently throughout your essay.

Not all verbs indicate a time, as some phrases are timeless. When this is the case, use *present tense*. In the following example, the correct tense shows that gold is a timeless entity—gold was and still is priceless. The forty-niners are our history, but the value of gold is timeless.

Wrong Example: The forty-niners knew that gold *was* a priceless gem.

Right Example: The forty-niners knew that gold *is* a priceless gem.

Verb Mood

Verbs have three moods:

➤ *Indicative* mood indicates something real or factual.

Indicative Example: Susan *left* Bill just before the holidays.

➤ *Subjunctive* mood indicates something hypothetical, conditional, wishful, suggestive, or counter to the fact.

Subjunctive Example: Bill hoped Susan *would never* leave him.

Subjunctive Example: Bill thought he *might keep* the house if Susan left first.

Subjunctive Example: We thought Susan *should leave* Bill, but he left first.

➤ *Imperative* indicates a direct command.

Imperative Example: *Get* out!

Verb Participles

Participles take on three roles:

➤ They act as part of a verb.

➤ They act as an adjective.

➤ They act as a noun in the form of a gerund (more about the gerund later).

Like nouns, verbs often come in the form of a phrase. When that's the case, you have a verb and a helping verb, known as a *participial phrase*.

There are two types of participles: *present* and *past*. Present participles end with the suffix "ing." Past participles end with the suffix "ed," "en," or "t."

Present Example: They played in the *falling* leaves.

Past Example: She liked to walk through the *fallen* leaves.

A *participial phrase* is simply a modifying phrase that begins with a participle. Similarly to the participle, the participial phrase acts as an adjective to modify a noun. Usually, a participial phrase is separated from the main clause by one or two commas. A properly placed participial phrase clarifies who or what is acting. The following five sentences are examples.

Bad Example: The mud-covered players scrambled for the ball, *running quickly*.

Better Example: *Running quickly*, the mud-covered players scrambled for the ball.

Best Example: The mud-covered players, running quickly, scrambled for the ball.

Bad Example: The excited children tried to burst the piñata, *laughing and squealing*.

Better Example: *Laughing and squealing*, the excited children tried to burst the piñata.

Best Example: The excited children, *laughing and squealing*, tried to burst the piñata.

Most problems occur when you position the participial phrase improperly. This can happen easily enough when the sentence assumes a subject. The following examples demonstrate this:

Bad Example: *Laughing and squealing*, the piñata burst open.

Surely the piñata was not laughing and squealing just before it burst.

Better Example: *Laughing and squealing*, the excited children rushed forward to collect the piñata's treasures.

The following are a few rules and guidelines to help you identify and use participial phrases correctly:

➤ When using a participial phrase to begin a sentence, you must follow the phrase with a comma and then the word it modifies. Note the following examples.

Bad Example: *Standing in the rain* for the bus, she waited.

Better Example: *Standing in the rain*, she waited for the bus.

➤ When correcting a dangling participle, place the subject or noun next to the participial phrase.

Bad Example: She waited for the bus *standing in the rain*.

She was not waiting for the bus that was standing in the rain.

Better Example: *Standing in the rain*, she waited for the bus.

➤ If the subject is assumed, adding a subject might help you identify a dangling or misplaced participle.

Bad Example: *Standing in the rain*, the bus left.

The bus did not leave standing in the rain.

Better Example: The bus left her *standing in the rain*.

Better Example: *Standing in the rain*, she watched the bus leave.

It's easy to confuse a present participle with a gerund because they seem so similar in syntax. A present participle acts as an adjective; a gerund acts as a noun. Note the following examples:

Present Participle Example: *Smiling*, the young girl opened her present.

Gerund Example: *Smiling* is infectious.

On the grammar section of the exam, watch for participial phrases that have no subject.

Identifying Pronoun Errors

Pronouns identify proper nouns in a generic way. At some point, the actual noun (using concrete language, as defined in Chapter 2, "The Writing Section: Student-Written Essay") must be known. The pronoun is just another way to refer to the subject.

There are two types of pronouns:

➤ *Definite*: Refers to a specific person, place, or thing. These pronouns include *it*, *you*, *she*, *he*, *him*, *her*, *who*, *I*, and so on.

➤ *Indefinite*: Does not refer to a specific person, place, or thing. These pronouns include *anyone*, *neither*, *those*, and so on.

The SAT exam probably won't contain any questions that confuse the use of *who* and *whom*. We seem to be slowly dropping the pronoun whom from common speech. For instance, the question, "For whom did you baby-sit?" is grammatically correct, but it is too formal. The question, "Who did you baby-sit for?" is common and acceptable.

If you face a who/whom question, don't despair. There's an easy trick for determining the grammatically correct example. Replace the who/whom pronoun with he/him. If him works, then use whom. Just remember that both whom and him end with the letter "m." For instance, you would say, "I baby-sat for him." You would not say, "I baby-sat for he." After running this quick check, you know that "For whom did you baby-sit?" is the most grammatically correct option.

Pronoun Agreement

The noun that a definite pronoun refers to is called the *antecedent*. These two components—the noun and the antecedent—must agree both in number and kind. By *number*, we mean the number of entities (singular or plural). The term *kind* refers to a personal or impersonal entity. The following examples demonstrate incorrect and correct pronoun/antecedent number agreement:

Incorrect Number: *Everyone* should be in <u>their</u> seats by the time the bell rings.

Correct Number: *Everyone* should be in <u>his or her</u> seat by the time the bell rings.

Correct Number: *They* should be in <u>their</u> seats by the time the bell rings.

Incorrect Person: *Mark* was the one <u>that</u> started the whole thing.

Correct Person: *Mark* was the one <u>who</u> started the whole thing.

Pronoun Clarity

Another pronoun/antecedent problem is *clarity*. The antecedent should always be clear. This problem crops up when a pronoun could refer to more than one noun, as seen in the following examples.

Ambiguous Antecedent Example: *Bill* passed the mashed potatoes to *Mark*, but <u>he</u> didn't want any.

Who didn't want mashed potatoes?

Clear Antecedent Example: <u>Bill</u> passed the mashed potatoes to <u>Mark</u>, but <u>Mark</u> didn't want any.

Interrogative Pronouns

Interrogative pronouns, such as *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why*, ask a question. When an interrogative pronoun refers to a definite pronoun, make sure that the antecedent matches the question as follows:

- Use *what* to refer to a thing.
- Use *where* to refer to a place.
- Use *when* to refer to a time.
- Use *why* to refer to a reason.
- Use *who* to refer to a person.
- Use *how* to refer to an explanation.

Note the use of the interrogative pronoun "when" in the following sentences:

> Wrong Example: An *allergic reaction* is when you suffer a sensitivity to a specific thing.

An allergic reaction isn't a time; in this context, it is a thing.

> Better Example: You suffer an *allergic reaction* when you come into contact with something to which you are sensitive.

One way to catch these pronoun errors is to watch for commas following an interrogative pronoun. When you follow an interrogative pronoun with a comma, the preceding noun must be the antecedent. Note the following examples:

> Wrong: The *children* wrote their own lines, who are in the play.

This syntax requires that who defines lines, and that's incorrect. By repositioning the pronoun (and often removing the comma), you can rewrite the sentence correctly:

> Right: The *children* who are in the play wrote their own lines.

Identifying Preposition Errors

Prepositions show position or direction. Prepositional phrases are phrases that consist of a preposition and an object that modifies the preposition in some way.

There are two common prepositional errors:

- Including unnecessary prepositions
- Using the wrong preposition

Unnecessary prepositions are hard to find, mostly because we're just so used to hearing them. Identifying unnecessary prepositions might take a little practice.

> We watched the squirrel climb ~~up~~ the tree.
>
> Please close ~~down~~ that office—it's losing money.
>
> While cleaning, she found lots of dirt ~~in~~ between the stove and the refrigerator.

Each of the previous examples uses an unnecessary preposition. None of the sentences suffer when you omit the prepositions. In fact, eliminating the preposition makes each sentence smoother.

Often, the preposition is necessary, but you use the wrong one. You might just have to memorize the appropriate prepositions because there's no concrete rule you can apply. The following is a list of prepositional mistakes you might encounter:

- Concerned ~~with~~/about
- Different ~~than~~/~~to~~/from
- Plan to/~~on~~
- Prefer ~~more than~~/to/~~over~~
- Agree on/~~with~~/~~about~~/to

This list is by no means comprehensive. Awareness is the key to identifying these mismatches.

You may see prepositional errors referred to as *idiom errors* on the exam. An *idiom* is a common phrase that doesn't translate literally. For instance, come on strong, get your feet wet, all ears, got your goat, get on board, and so on are all idioms. Notice that most come with a preposition. It can be difficult to distinguish between an idiom and a cliché. (You can read about clichés in Chapter 2.) A cliché is a phrase that's overused. An idiom does not express the literal meaning of the words.

In addition, authorities no longer enforce the old rule that you can't end a sentence with a preposition. The exam will not use a preposition at the end of a sentence as a grammatical error. There's no reason to avoid the sentence-ending preposition in your essay either.

Identifying Adjective and Adverb Errors

Adjectives and adverbs are both modifiers, but they modify different things. An *adjective* modifies a *noun* or a *pronoun*; an *adverb* modifies a *verb*, an *adjective*, or another *adverb*. Adjectives and adverbs aren't interchangeable.

You probably learned to identify adverbs by looking for the "ly" suffix on the end of an adjective.

Adjective: Get that *gross* sushi out of my sight.

Adverb: Sushi is *grossly* overrated.

Although this clue can help, it isn't an absolute rule. Not all adverbs end in "ly," as seen in the following example.

Adverb: She talks so *fast* I can't understand her.

In addition, not all adjectives can be used as an adverb by adding the "ly" suffix.

Adjective: The *brown* fence obstructed our view of the lake.

Note in the preceding example that there's no way to turn brown into an adverb by adding "ly"—the result would be totally illogical.

Furthermore, some adjectives can serve as an adverb without adding the "ly" suffix, as seen here:

Adjective: I am *well* today.

Adverb: She embroiders *well* for a beginner.

The correct use of bad/badly and good/well probably won't show up in the grammar portion of the essay. The following sentences are all correct as far as the SAT exam is concerned:

- She feels good today.
- She feels well today.
- She feels bad today.

As long as you use the word feel/feels as a linking verb, it's fine to use good, well, and bad as an adjective. If you truly mean to use one of these words to modify the verb, you might find a different way to express that particular thought. The following sentence actually means that she is not very good at feeling: She feels badly. Such a sentence would be confusing, even if grammatically correct.

Comparative adjectives and adverbs create another problem. First, a comparative adjective or adverb is exactly what it sounds like: It's an adjective or adverb that expresses a difference.

Comparative adjectives and adverbs come in two forms:

- Add the suffix "er" to the adjective, as in cold and colder.
- Precede the adjective or adverb with the word "more," as in more likely. (You would not use the word likelier.)

Note the following examples:

Comparative adjective: This morning is *colder* than I expected.

Comparative adjective: She is *more precious* than gold.

Comparative adverb: Please talk *quieter*.

Comparative adverb: My car runs *more efficiently* on the high octane gas.

Not all adjectives and adverbs can take the comparative form. Watch for illogical comparisons that seem redundant. This type of error occurs when you try to use the comparative form with an absolute. By definition, there is no comparison to an absolute. For instance, terms such as *impossible*, *final*, and *unique* are absolutes. Don't use them in the comparative form.

Wrong: The lack of an airbag made the crash more fatal.

Right: The lack of an airbag made the crash fatal.

Fatal is fatal enough by itself; more fatal is illogical.

Guidelines for Improving Sentences

The previous section was a succinct review of the most common grammatical errors. This next section, although similar to the last, deals with the sentence as a whole. The exam will present a complete sentence. A portion of the sentence or the entire sentence will be underlined. Five responses will give you the opportunity to change the underlined portion or leave the underlined component as is.

This section reviews concepts rather than actual rules. You will apply rules you learned in the last section to make the whole sentence better (or not, as the case may be). In the previous section, the emphasis was on finding errors. In the second portion of the exam's writing section, you'll be expected to fix errors. In this section, you'll find few grammar rules, but we do want to share a few guidelines for this part of the exam:

- Read the sentence completely first.
- Read each of the five possible responses along with the sentence. Don't try to choose a response on its own. You must read each response within the context of the sentence.

- ➤ Check the noun/verb agreement.
- ➤ Check modifiers.
- ➤ Check for parallelism.
- ➤ Make sure that pronouns are clear and necessary.
- ➤ Compare the underlined clause's tense to the rest of the sentence.

Applying Parallelism

Good writing isn't an exact science. Sometimes there's no absolute rule to apply. Parallelism falls into this category. There's no hard and fast grammar rule other than this: Items should have the same grammatical form. In other words, you should balance phrases and clauses on both sides of a sentence.

Fortunately, there's one simple rule to cover the subject: When combining two nouns in a series, you must balance both. If the first item in a list is an infinitive, gerund, adjective, or preposition, the other items should also be infinitives, gerunds, adjectives, or prepositions, respectively, as evidenced in the following examples.

Not balanced: Buffalo once roamed *gentle hills* and *valleys* on the prairie.

Balanced: Buffalo once roamed *gentle hills* and *rolling valleys* on the prairie.

Balanced: Buffalo once roamed *hills* and *valleys* on the prairie.

Not balanced: Buffalo once roamed *over gentle hills* and *rolling valleys* on the prairie.

Balanced: Buffalo once roamed *over gentle hills* and *through rolling valleys* on the prairie.

You already know about prepositions and adjectives, so let's review the infinitive and gerund in relation to parallelism. An *infinitive* is a verb-like phrase, such as to walk, to run, to weep, and so on, that usually acts as a noun. In addition, an *infinitive* may also act as an adjective or verb. It's a very versatile part of speech.

Not balanced: She couldn't decide whether *to walk* or *ride* her bike.

Balanced: She couldn't decide whether *to walk* or *to ride* her bike.

Gerunds are also verb-like words that act as nouns. Words, such as walking, running, weeping, and so on are gerunds.

Not balanced: She couldn't decide between *walking* or to *ride* her bike.

Balanced: She couldn't decide between *walking* or *riding* her bike.

Both the infinitive and the gerund can be a prepositional phrase or a single word. For the exam, you'll be asked to identify and correct parallelism errors. You won't have to know the definition of an infinitive or gerund to do so.

In addition, don't worry about split infinitives on the exam. A split infinitive is an infinitive that includes a modifier between the infinitive and the verb. For instance, to walk is an infinitive. The phrase to quickly walk is a split infinitive, which you might want to rewrite as to walk quickly. Although you should avoid splitting infinitives in your essay, the exam itself will not include any split infinitives.

Because infinitives are modifiers, we tend to misplace them. In this way, infinitives are similar to participial phrases. Just remember that the infinitive should be as close as possible to the noun it modifies.

Eliminating the Problems

In this section of the exam, only one part of the sentence (or the entire sentence) is underlined. You must identify what's wrong with the underlined section and then find the most correct response for correcting the error. One response will always be to leave the section just as it is, meaning there's nothing wrong with the underlined section.

Sometimes the error is obvious. That's great. Mark the correct response and move on. When the error isn't so obvious, eliminate the responses that you know are wrong. Consider the following example:

Multiculturalism is the convergence of many cultures or a culture different than your own.

(A) culture different to your own.
(B) culture which isn't your own.
(C) culture besides your own.
(D) culture different from your own.
(E) culture different than your own.

In the preceding question, read the sentence, and then read all five responses within the context of the sentence. Sometimes the responses themselves will give you clues. After reading all five responses, you realize that the problem is probably the prepositional phrase. Specifically, does the preposition "than" match the phrase different? You know "different to" is incorrect; scratch response A. Response B is a possibility, but it's awkward. Wait!

There's no comma between culture and which; that can't be right either. Response C is a possibility, but, like B, it's awkward. You don't have to eliminate it yet, but continue in hopes of finding something better. But at this point, it seriously looks like D or E will be the appropriate response. You've already decided that the phrase is incorrect, so that leaves D (because E just repeats the phrase that's already there). D is the correct response. Before choosing your answer, read the sentence one last time, inserting the response you've chosen—just to check one last time. If you're curious about C, consider that the prepositional phrase besides your own really isn't the best fit for the subject. The sentence is comparing your culture to someone else's. The word different is a better choice than besides within the context of this particular sentence.

In this section, you may find two responses that correct errors in the sentence. Be careful—the exam wants only the response that corrects the underlined segment. Even though a response might correct an error, unless it corrects the underlined segment, the response is the wrong answer. In addition, a response may correct the error yet introduce a new one. When this is the case, keep shopping for a better response.

Brevity Matters

Not all errors are grammatical in nature. Remember, clarity and succinctness count—only poets and great writers have the luxury of using more words than are truly necessary. You may find a sentence that doesn't seem to have any obvious grammatical errors. When this happens, check all the responses. Do any of the responses say the same thing but use fewer words to do so? If this is the case, the shorter response is the correct answer. Let's look at an example.

> <u>The result of the situation is that</u> I am often expected to carry a heavier workload than the other employees.
>
> (A) The results is that
> (B) Consequently,
> (C) The results are that
> (D) The result of the situation is
> (E) The result of the situation is that

The only thing really wrong with the underlined phrase is that it's wordy. Depending on the context of the sentence within the paragraph, the phrase may not be necessary at all, but we don't know this to be true. Given just the one sentence, we should assume that the transition is necessary. In that case,

response B is the best choice. It uses just one word to say the same thing as the underlined phrase of seven words.

Guidelines for Improving Paragraphs

Improving an essay, sentence by sentence, is definitely part and parcel of good writing. You'll also need to understand how those sentences fit together to support the essay's thesis.

This part of the exam will provide an essay that needs work. Each sentence is prefaced by a number, and questions will refer to those numbers. In this part of the exam, you'll combine sentences and alter the general structure of the paragraph in one of three ways:

- You'll improve single sentences; these questions are similar to the questions in the last section. For that reason, we won't review single sentences in this section.
- You'll improve single sentences within the context of the entire paragraph.
- You'll organize the paragraph's structure.

Context Counts

We suggest that you begin each question by actually reading the passage or essay. Context questions will ask for improvements based on the entire passage. Sometimes this will take the guise of adding transitions or improving comparative phrases. Just remember that the point of the exercise is to consider how the sentence in question fits within the entire essay. If you don't read the actual essay, you could easily respond incorrectly to these questions. Let's work through an example to demonstrate this.

(**1**) Snowshoe Thompson negotiated a deal to deliver mail over the treacherous Sierra Nevada Pass during the harsh winters when mail service was impossible. (**2**)Using an early form of skis, he succeeded where all others had failed—he delivered mail during the winter. (**3**)He never received compensation for his efforts.

In context, which of the following improves sentence 3 the most?

He never received compensation for his efforts.

(A) As is, make no changes.
(B) He never received any
(C) He received no
(D) Despite negotiations and his accomplishments, he never received
(E) Thompson never received

Keeping in mind that the question is a context question, D is the best response. It works as a subtle transition, but it also changes the character of the paragraph.

In this section of the exam, you will be expected to choose the best or most appropriate response. More than one answer may improve the sentence. Be sure to read all of the responses and to choose the best.

Organization Counts

Each sentence should be grammatically correct, and each sentence should be appropriate within the context of the paragraph's purpose. Sometimes that means you must reorganize the existing passage in some way:

➤ You may need to move a sentence.

➤ You may need to add a new sentence.

➤ You may need to completely delete a sentence.

Consider the following example, which demonstrates this idea.

(**1**)Snowshoe Thompson negotiated a deal to deliver mail over the treacherous Sierra Nevada Pass during the harsh winters when mail service was impossible. (**2**)Using an early form of skis, he succeeded where all others had failed—he delivered mail during the winter. (**3**)Thompson learned to ski as a youngster in his native Norway. (**4**)Despite negotiations and his accomplishments, he never received compensation for his efforts.

In context, which of the following improves the paragraph the most?

Thompson learned to ski as a youngster in his native Norway.

(A) As is, make no changes.
(B) Thompson learned to ski as a youngster in Norway.
(C) Thompson learned to ski in Norway.
(D) Thompson learned to ski as a child.
(E) Delete sentence 3.

There's nothing grammatically wrong with sentence 3. The problem is it doesn't add to the paragraph's purpose. Answer E is the best response.

Exam Prep Questions

Read each question carefully and choose the response that corrects the underlined portion. Remember, response A repeats the underlined section as is—the underlined segment may be correct as is.

1. Chuck Yeager, a famous aviator, he was the first to travel faster than the speed of sound.

(A) aviator, he
(B) aviator that
(C) aviator who
(D) aviator, who
(E) aviator,

2. She seeks regularly, guidance from her guardian angel.

(A) seeks regularly, guidance
(B) regularly seeks guidance
(C) seeks regular guidance
(D) seeks guidance regularly
(E) seeks guidance

3. She returned to the motel room one last time and found an angel ornament, a comb, and shampoo in the shower.

(A) an angel ornament, a comb, and shampoo
(B) an ornament, comb, and shampoo
(C) an angel ornament, a comb, and a bottle of shampoo
(D) an ornament, a comb, and a bottle of shampoo
(E) an angel ornament, a blue comb, and a small bottle of shampoo

4. Neither the hens nor the cow type mysterious notes to the farmer as the story suggests.

(A) hens nor the cow type
(B) hen nor the cows type
(C) hens nor the cow types
(D) hens or the cow type
(E) hen or the cows type

5. The owner has already accepted our offer when we arrived to plead our case.

(A) has already accepted
(B) accepted
(C) has accepted
(D) had already accepted
(E) refused

6. (**1**)Chuck Yeager, a famous aviator, was the first to travel faster than the speed of sound. (**2**)Years later, Chuck commanded the first school for astronauts. (**3**)He never realized his dream of flying into space.

In context, which of the following improves sentence 3 the most?

He never realized his dream of flying into space.

(A) As is, make no changes.
(B) However, he never realized his dream of flying into space.
(C) Despite his pioneering contributions to the aviation industry, he never realized his dream of flying into space.
(D) He never flew into space as an astronaut.
(E) Chuck Yeager never flew into space as an astronaut.

7. (**1**)Mental health experts agree that individuals who don't dream are psychopaths and unable to function in society. (**2**)If you don't remember your dreams and you're currently locked in a mental ward or you're carrying around an ax for no better reason than you like to, you might be a psychopath. (**3**)On the other hand, many seemingly normal people insist that they don't dream. (**4**)The truth is, these people are perfectly normal—they dream, they just don't remember their dreams.

In context, which of the following improves sentence 4 the most?

The truth is, these people are perfectly normal—they dream, they just don't remember their dreams.

(A) As is, make no changes.
(B) They dream; they just don't remember their dreams.
(C) The truth is, these people are perfectly normal—they just don't remember their dreams.
(D) The truth is, they dream; they just don't remember their dreams.
(E) They just don't remember dreaming.

8. (**1**)On the last day of every month, children across Great Britain end their day by saying "rabbits" three times before falling asleep. (**2**)Upon waking on the morning of the first day of the new month, they say "hares" three times. (**3**)According to the old superstition, the accommodating child will soon receive a present.

In context, which of the following improves sentence 2 the most?

Upon waking on the morning of the first day of the new month, they say "hares" three times.

(A) As is, make no changes.
(B) Upon waking the next morning, they say "hares" three times.
(C) Upon waking on the morning of the first day of the new month, these same children say "hares" three times.
(D) Upon waking, they say "hares" three times.
(E) Upon waking, these same children say "hares" three times.

9. (**1**)Susan sat on the cold, hard bench in the light winter rain. (**2**)After awhile, she spoke aloud to her dead father. (**3**)The past week had shattered her life—or at least the illusions she thought were her life. (**4**)There was no running from the truth. Her mother was certifiably insane, and no one but Susan knew the truth. (**5**)"Daddy, I need help," she said meekly.

In context, which of the following improvements would strengthen the paragraph the most?

(A) As is; make no changes.
(B) Omit 4.
(C) Position 5 between 2 and 3.
(D) Omit 3.
(E) Position 2 between 4 and 5.

10. (**1**)Rocky, a beatnik from the late '60s, took his young sons to a peaceful demonstration. (**2**)A few days before the event, he and the boys discussed the event's purpose. (**3**)Rocky also shared personal stories from his youth of protesting the Vietnam war. (**4**)Unfortunately, the event had little impact on the boys. (**5**)Being children of the new century, the boys were more interested in eating hot dogs than carrying protest signs.

In context, which of the following improvements would strengthen the paragraph the most?

(A) As is; make no changes.
(B) Rewrite 5: The boys were more interested in eating hot dogs than carrying protest signs.
(C) Omit 3.
(D) Rewrite 2: He and the boys discussed the event's purpose.
(E) Combine 4 and 5: Unfortunately, the event had little impact on the boys who were more interested in eating hot dogs than carrying protest signs.

Answers to Exam Prep Questions

1. Response E is the most correct response. As is, the pronoun *he* is redundant. Answer A is incorrect because the sentence is not correct as is. Response B is incorrect because *that* is the wrong pronoun; we know aviator refers to Chuck Yeager, a proper noun. Who would be the appropriate pronoun. Response C is incorrect because that would create a sentence fragment, not a complete sentence. Response D is incorrect; adding a comma doesn't help to complete the sentence.

2. Answer B is correct because regularly is a misplaced modifier. Regularly modifies the verb seek. Answer A is incorrect because the underlined section is incorrect. The adverb regularly is misplaced. Answer C is incorrect because it changes the meaning of regularly from an adverb to an adjective that modifies guidance. Answer D is incorrect because the adverb should be as close as possible to the verb it modifies. Response E is incorrect; omitting the adverb isn't the best solution because it changes the sentence's meaning.

3. Answer E is correct because it applies the rule of parallelism to the sentence. Each item should be treated the same, by adding (or deleting as the case may be) any modifiers. All items need a modifier in the form *a/an adjective*. Answer A is incorrect because shampoo is not preceded with *a*. Answer B is incorrect because neither comb nor shampoo is preceded with *a*. Answer C is incorrect because neither comb nor bottle of shampoo is modified by an adjective. Answer D is correct, but because you've deleted the adjective *angel*, the sentence isn't as strong. The noun ornament isn't as specific without the adjective.

4. Answer C is correct because the verb and noun must match in number. When using neither/nor, the verb must match the closest noun. Cow is singular, so you must use the singular form of the verb, which in this case is types. Answer A is incorrect because the underlined section isn't correct as is. When combining two subjects using nor, the verb must match the number of the nearest subject. In this case, that's cow and cow is singular. Answer B is incorrect; it is grammatically correct, but you can't arbitrarily change the noun's number without more information. Answers D and E are incorrect because or is incorrect with neither.

5. Answer D is correct because the past perfect tense of has (had) matches the verb tense (accepted). Answer A is incorrect because the underlined section is incorrect as is—the verb tense of doesn't match the second verb phrase. Answer B is incorrect because it changes the tense. Answer C is incorrect because the tense of has still doesn't match the verb tense (accepted). Answer E is incorrect because it changes the sentence's purpose.

6. Answer C is correct because the transitioning clause *Despite his pioneering contributions to the aviation industry*, pulls the sentences together to better clarify the paragraph's point. Answer A is incorrect because the sentence can be improved. Answer B is incorrect because the transition, *however*, isn't as strong as the one used in Answer C. Answer D is incorrect because the sentence isn't any better than the original.

Answer E is incorrect because there's no need to replace the pronoun *he* with a proper noun. In this case, the pronoun is clear.

7. Answer D is correct. Although there's nothing grammatically wrong with the sentence, it's wordy and the phrase *these people are perfectly normal* is unnecessary. Answer A is incorrect because the sentence can be improved. Answer B is incorrect because omitting the transition *the truth is*, weakens the paragraph. Answer C is incorrect because the very phrase *they dream* is important to the contrast drawn between the truly dreamless and those who don't remember dreaming. Answer E is incorrect because it weakens the paragraph.

8. Answer B is correct. The original sentence is wordy; the phrase *on the morning of the first day of the new month* is redundant. Within the context of the sentence, the reader can assume the child is waking on the first day of the new month, since the reader knows the child is going to sleep on the last day of the month. Answer A is incorrect because the sentence can be improved. Answers C and E are incorrect because nothing is wrong with the pronoun *they* as used. Answers D and E are incorrect because the phrase *the next morning* is relevant—the child could wake first in the middle of the night.

9. Answer E is correct because the new organization provides the best flow of thoughts from beginning to ending. Answer A is incorrect because the paragraph can be improved. Answer B is incorrect because 4 tells us the actual problem. Answer C is incorrect. Although sentence 5 does need to follow 2, putting the two sentences in the middle of the paragraph disrupts the sequence. Answer D is incorrect; that sentence establishes the severity of the problem.

10. Answer A is correct. There's really nothing wrong with this paragraph. The flow is logical, and it transitions easily. Although you might be able to improve the paragraph, none of the other responses actually strengthens the paragraph, so A is the best response. Answer B is incorrect; removing the transition *being children of the new century* weakens the paragraph. Answer C is incorrect; the sentence helps support Rocky's hopes. Answer D is incorrect; the phrase *a few days before the event* helps establish the flow of events. Answer E is incorrect. You could combine the two sentences, but the impact isn't as strong as the two separate thoughts.