

SAT GRAMMAR REVIEW

I. Nouns

- **Error in subject-verb agreement**
- **Error in noun agreement**

These errors occur frequently in Identifying Sentence Errors questions.

The **subject** is the noun that is “performing” the verb. The verb must agree with the subject in number. Singular subjects take singular verbs, and plural subjects take plural verbs.

- Your cat *bites* me. (singular)
- Your cats *bite* me. (plural)

Sometimes multiple subjects perform the verb together. This is called a **compound subject**. A compound subject is joined together by the word ‘*and*’, and takes a plural verb.

- *Tony and I* went to the store.
- *Peter Petrelli and Hiro Nakamura* travelled together through time.

If the word ‘*and*’ is not present, you have a subject plus one or multiple **tag-alongs**. Tag-alongs often occur with the words and phrases *of, in, as well as, with, along with, together with, in addition to, no less than, rather than, and like*. These do not change the relationship between the true subject and the verb.

- The juice *in those bottles* has expired.
 - The house *made of bricks and cement* was built by my grandfather.
 - Robert *along with Hafeez, Michael, and John* is going to see the new Judd Apatow movie.
 - My mother, *like your parents*, enjoys gardening.
 - The farmer *together with the milkman* has gone to visit my grandmother.
 - Alice *as well as Gregory* enjoys mathematics.
-

In addition to subjects, any other corresponding nouns in the sentence must agree in number.

- *Parker and Hanley* studied hard to become *a great lawyer*. (incorrect)
- *Parker and Hanley* studied hard to become *great lawyers*. (correct)

It is easy to confuse the singular and plural forms of certain nouns. Here are some to keep straight:

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| <i>Singular</i> | • alumni |
| • alumnus/alumna | • antennae |
| • antenna | • criteria |
| • criterion | • data |
| • datum | • phenomenon |
| <i>Plural</i> | • medium |

- millennium
- symposium
- phenomena

- media
- millennia
- symposia

II. Pronouns

- **Error in pronoun case**
- **Error in pronoun-antecedent agreement**
- **Error in pronoun-verb agreement**
- **Error in pronoun consistency**

These errors occur frequently in Identifying Sentence Errors questions.

Pronouns are words that take the place of and refer back to previously mentioned **antecedent** nouns. Like their noun counterparts, pronouns can take a subject or object role in the sentence. Each personal pronoun has a **nominative** (subject) and **objective** (object) case.

- *She* and *I* went to the store. (nominative)
- Jerry took *him* and *me* to the dance. (objective)

Nominative	Objective
I	me
we	us
you	you
he	him
she	her
it	it
they	them
who	whom

If you're unsure, test with a single pronoun.

Who is a subject pronoun, and **whom** is an object pronoun.

- *Who* went to the store? (nominative)
- *Whom* did Jerry take to the dance? (objective)

Pronouns that come after a preposition (*by, of, for, after, with, between, except, without, etc.*) are considered **objects of the preposition** and take the objective case.

- Everyone did well on the exam except *him* and *her*.
- Sarah left without John and *me*.
- Please keep this between *you* and *me*.
- By *whom* was this wonderful short story written?

Constructions with **than**: whenever a pronoun follows *than*, it should be in the subjective case. A following verb is always understood, if not always articulated.

- I am taller than *he* (is).
- Sarah is better at math than *I* (am).

Pronouns must agree in number with their antecedents. If the antecedent is singular, the pronoun must be singular. If the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural.

- A student will catch *their* mistakes if *they* proofread. (incorrect)

- A student will catch *his or her* mistakes if *he or she* proofreads. (correct)
- Students will catch *their* mistakes if *they* proofread. (correct)

Verbs must agree in number with subject pronouns. It is easy to make a mistake with some of the less basic pronouns. When in a subject position, some of these pronouns always take a singular verb and others always take a plural verb.

- *Each* of the apples you bought *is* bruised.
- *Everything* that my uncle does *turns* out to be *a success*.
- *Neither* of the twins *knows* how to cook.
- *Nobody* *is* at home.
- *Many* *are* cold, but *few* *are* frozen.

Singular Pronouns	
each	either
neither	someone
anyone	everything
somebody	nobody
anybody	everyone

Exception! In ***neither ... nor*** and ***either ... or*** constructions, the verb agrees in number with the *closest* noun or pronoun.

- *Neither* the twins *nor* Laura *was* willing to take the blame.
- *Either* Mary *or* her parents *are* responsible for the flood.

Plural Pronouns	
many	few
several	

Keep pronouns consistent. Don't change between "we," "you," "they," "he or she," and "one" in a single sentence.

- If *one* doesn't study, *your* grade will drop. (incorrect)
- If *one* doesn't study, *one's* grade will drop. (correct)

III. Verbs

- ***Error in verb tense***
- ***Error in verb form or conjugation***
- ***Misuse of passive voice***
- ***Error in gerund usage***

These errors occur frequently in both Identifying Sentence Errors and Improving Sentences questions.

The tense of a verb indicates when the action of the sentence takes place. Use the **present tense** for action that is currently occurring, action that generally occurs, and action that takes place in literature (novels, movies, comics, short stories, poetry, non-fiction books, etc).

- I always *eat* breakfast at home.
- In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth *murders* Duncan after he *hears* the prophecy.

There are several ways to indicate action that occurs in the past. Use the **regular past tense** for completed actions in the past. Use the **imperfect past tense** (*was* + present participle) for actions that were continuous in the past.

- I *ran*.
- He *drank*.
- She *swam*.
- I *was running*.
- He *was drinking*.
- She *was swimming*.

Both the regular and imperfect past tense can be combined for actions that were **simultaneous** in the past. Connect these with words like *as*, *when*, and *while*.

- I *was swimming* when my cell phone *rang*.
- She *broke* her arm while *skating*.

The **perfect tense** (*have* + past participle) describes an action that you have done in the past, but are talking about in the present.

- Yes, she *has seen* that movie.
- I *have walked* one hundred miles and I will walk one hundred more...

The **pluperfect** or **past perfect tense** (*had* or *had been* + past participle) describes action that occurred before another action in the past. Do not leap into the past perfect tense when one of your actions occurs in the perfect, present, or future tense.

- I *will not go* with Sohana because I *had already seen* the movie. (incorrect)
- I *didn't go* with Sohana because I *had already seen* the movie. (correct)
- Chris *had already read* the book, but he *will read* it again. (incorrect)
- Chris *had already read* the book, but he *decided* to read it again. (correct)

To describe a **hypothetical** action in the past tense, use *would* rather than *will*.

- I *knew* that I *will win* the game. (incorrect)
- I *knew* that I *would win* the game. (correct)

Use the **subjunctive tense** (formed by the past tense *were*) to express wishes, particularly with the word *if*.

- If I *was* you, I would take a vacation. (incorrect)
- If I *were* you, I would take a vacation. (correct)

Transitive verbs take a direct object. **Intransitive verbs** take an indirect object or no object at all. Certain verbs can be both transitive and intransitive without changing form or conjugation:

- I am reading *a book*. (direct object)
- He made *an error*. (direct object)
- I am reading. (no object)
- He made *the man* cry. (indirect object)

Certain verbs look similar, but have very different forms depending on whether they are transitive or intransitive. **Raise** and **lay** (present tense) take direct objects. **Rise** and **lie** do not take direct objects. However, *lay* can also be the past tense of *lie*. The past tense of *lay* is *laid*.

- Jill *raises* her hand.
- They *raised* their children well.
- I *lay* my coat on the bed.
- I *laid* my coat on the bed.

- The sun *rises* in the east.
 - The farmers *rose* at dawn.
 - I think I should *lie* down.
 - I *lay* down immediately.
-

The **passive voice** is not a verb tense but an inverted sentence order. In this construction, the noun performing the action does not appear in the normal subject position. Passive construction often leads to wordiness and lack of focus; re-write passive sentences in the active voice.

- Another helping *was asked* for *by* my friend. (passive)
 - My friend *asked* for another helping. (active)
 - Three finalists for the open position *have been selected* by the administration. (passive)
 - The administration *has selected* three finalists for the open position. (active)
-

Gerunds are *-ing* verb forms that act as nouns. Nouns or pronouns preceding gerunds should be in the possessive case, as they technically *modify* the gerund rather than act as a subject to a verb. Gerunds are required in certain idiomatic phrases.

- *He* constantly *babbling* drives me crazy. (incorrect)
 - *His* constant *babbling* drives me crazy. (correct)
 - The *tiger* *growling* frightens the small animals. (incorrect)
 - The *tiger's* *growling* frightens the small animals. (correct)
 - Experts suggest *to water* your garden later when the sun is less intense. (incorrect)
 - Experts suggest *watering* your garden later when the sun is less intense. (correct)
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IV. Sentence Structure and Punctuation

- ***Sentence fragments***
- ***Run-on sentences***
- ***Error in conjunction usage***
- ***Error in punctuation: commas, semicolons, colons, apostrophes***

*These errors occur most frequently in **Improving Sentences** questions.*

Clauses come in two forms: **independent** and **dependent**. Independent clauses can stand alone as sentences.

- I saw a movie with Danny.
- We meet for coffee once a week.

Dependent clauses do not stand alone. Instead, they provide extra interest in the sentence.

- *After I completed my homework*, I saw a movie with Danny.
- *In our efforts to be good friends*, we meet for coffee once a week.

A dependent clause on its own is a **sentence fragment**, and needs to be altered to make a complete sentence.

- When I finished this slice of pizza. (sentence fragment)
- I finished this slice of pizza. (complete sentence)
- Because I detest Sarah. (sentence fragment)
- Because I detest Sarah, I try to avoid her whenever I can. (complete sentence)

Independent clauses can be separated by periods, connected by semicolons, or joined by **coordinating conjunctions**. If you try to connect two independent clauses with only a comma, you have a **comma splice**. If you try to connect them with nothing, you have a **run-on sentence**.

- The teacher is very angry I think he is going to call my friend's parents. (run-on sentence)
- The teacher is very angry; I think he is going to call my friend's parents. (correct)
- It was a beautiful day outside, I didn't want to stay in and do homework. (comma splice)
- It was a beautiful day outside, so I didn't want to stay in and do homework. (correct)
- I finished the slice of pizza, I felt my stomach turn. (comma splice)
- After I finished the slice of pizza, I felt my stomach turn. (correct)

Coordinating Conjunctions	
and	or
but	nor
so	for
yet	

An independent and a dependent clause can be joined together using a **subordinating conjunction**. In this construction, one idea *depends* on the other. Coordination and subordination test our ability to see logical relationships between ideas. Thus, we must understand and determine how the ideas in the clauses work together: does one give supporting or contrasting information? Is there a progression in time and sequence? There might be two or more ways to express the relationship, but often only one will be correct, clear, and concise.

- It was snowing, *but* I wore my boots. (incorrect)
- *Because* it was snowing, I wore my boots. (correct)
- Henry tried to read *War and Peace* in the original Russian, *and* it was too difficult. (incorrect)
- Henry tried to read *War and Peace* in the original Russian, *but* it was too difficult. (correct)
- *Although* Henry tried to read *War and Peace* in the original Russian, it was too difficult. (correct)

Subordinating Conjunctions	
after	rather than
although	since
as	so that
as if	than
as long as	that
as though	though
because	unless
before	until
even if	when
even though	whenever
if	where
if only	whereas
in order that	wherever
now that	while
once	

However, consequently, furthermore, therefore, instead, thus, as a result and similar words are **conjunctive adverbs** and cannot be used in the same way as coordinating or subordinating

conjunctions. They can be used to introduce an independent clause following a period or a semicolon. They can also act as interrupters, separated from the main sentence with commas.

- John didn't read the assigned homework, *consequently* he failed the exam. (incorrect)
 - John didn't read the assigned homework. *Consequently*, he failed the exam. (correct)
 - We decided not to go out tonight, *instead* we are going to save our money. (incorrect)
 - We decided not to go out tonight; *instead*, we are going to save our money. (correct)
 - Sarah is normally clumsy, *however* she is a good skater. (incorrect)
 - Sarah is normally clumsy; she is, *however*, a good skater. (correct)
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Semi-colons are used in only two contexts: to join two independent clauses with or without a conjunctive adverb, or to *separate* very lengthy items in a list. Use a **colon** to *introduce* examples or items in a list.

- Four people worked on the project; only one received credit for it. (correct)
 - Victoria was frequently tardy; therefore, she received a low grade. (correct)
 - Elaine has three daughters; Amy, Michaela, and Christine. (incorrect)
 - Elaine has three daughters: Amy, Michaela, and Christine. (correct)
 - Elaine has three daughters: Amy, who is studying law at Harvard; Michaela, who is working as a masseuse; and Christine, who is still in high school. (correct)
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As we have seen, **commas** are used to join together two clauses with a conjunction. Commas are also used after introductory phrases and around **interrupters** (words, phrases, and clauses that interrupt and are not essential to the core meaning of the sentence). Commas should *never* come between a subject and its verb.

- Mary, decided to relax with a good book. (incorrect)
 - Mary decided to relax with a good book. (correct)
 - After a long day at work, Mary decided to relax with a good book. (correct)
 - Mary a paediatrician really enjoys her work. (incorrect)
 - Mary, a paediatrician, really enjoys her work. (correct)
-

Apostrophes are used to form *contractions* by taking the place of a missing letter or number; to form *plurals* of letters, figures, and numbers; and to indicate *ownership* with an 's. To form a possessive for a noun already ending in *s*, add 's if the noun is singular; add only an apostrophe if the noun is plural. Keep in mind that not all plural nouns end in *s*. Show possession in the last word for names of organizations and businesses, for hyphenated words, and for cases of joint ownership.

- *We're* going out of town next week. (contraction)
- My husband was in the class of '89. (contraction)
- My street address contains three 5's. (plural of a number)
- She has a hard time pronouncing *r's*. (plural of a letter)
- The *drummer's* solo was fantastic. (singular possessive)

- *Mr. Perkins's* persuasive essay was very convincing. (singular possessive)
- The *customers'* access codes are confidential. (plural possessive)
- *Men's* shirts come in a variety of neck sizes. (plural possessive)
- *Brad and Janet's* graduation was three months ago. (joint ownership)
- I went to visit my *great-grandfather's* alma mater. (hyphenated word)
- *The Future Farmers of America's* meeting was moved to Monday. (name of organization)

Possessive pronouns never use apostrophes. A pronoun with an apostrophe always signifies a contraction with the word *is* or *are*.

- | | |
|--|--|
| • <i>Its</i> fur is thick. | • <i>It's</i> a beautiful day. |
| • <i>Whose</i> book is this? | • <i>Who's</i> in charge here? |
| • <i>Your</i> shirt is a great color. | • <i>You're</i> in a great mood today. |
| • I enjoyed <i>their</i> presentations. | • <i>They're</i> horrible players. |
| • Is this sandwich <i>yours</i> or <i>theirs</i> ? | |

V. Sentence Logic

- **Misplaced modifiers**
- **Error in parallel structure**
- **Faulty comparisons**

*These errors occur most frequently in **Improving Sentences** questions.*

A **modifier** is a word, phrase, or clause that modifies or describes a noun or action in the sentence. Modifiers need to be placed as close as possible to the word they are modifying.

- *Walking to the store*, the street seemed so quiet and peaceful to Laura. (incorrect)
- *Walking to the store*, Laura thought the street seemed so quiet and peaceful. (correct)
- *Unable to beat the enemy through brute force alone*, deception seemed necessary. (incorrect)
- *Unable to beat the enemy through brute force alone*, the army decided that deception was necessary. (correct)
- *Although a small dog*, my sister found her new puppy a big responsibility. (incorrect)
- *Although her new puppy was a small dog*, my sister found him a big responsibility. (correct)

When you have multiple items in a list or in a comparison, these must be stated in a similar—or **parallel**—manner.

- Andrew enjoys *swimming, skating, and to play golf*. (incorrect)
- Andrew enjoys *swimming, skating, and playing golf*. (correct)
- Kate *is more ambitious*, but Emily *shows more patience*. (incorrect)
- Kate *is more ambitious*, but Emily *is more patient*. (correct)

Comparisons must be complete and logical. Always compare similar items.

- The rooms on the second floor are larger than the first floor. (incorrect)
- The rooms on the second floor are larger than *those on* the first floor. (correct)
- Jackson Pollack's paintings are better than any other painter. (incorrect)
- Jackson Pollack's paintings are better than *paintings by* any other painter. (correct)
- Some students prefer watching videos to textbooks. (incorrect)
- Some students prefer watching videos to *reading* textbooks. (correct)
- David Letterman is the best talk show. (incorrect)
- David Letterman's *talk show* is the best talk show. (correct)

Use the comparative '*er*' ending to compare two items. Use the superlative '*est*' ending to compare three or more items.

- There are two children in the family. Jo is the *elder* and Paul is the *younger*. (comparative)
- There are four children in the family. Jo is the *eldest* and Paul is the *youngest*. (superlative)
- Of the couple, Eric is the *better* cook. (comparative)
- Of all of his siblings, Eric is the *best* cook. (superlative)

Avoid **double comparisons** and **double negatives**.

- This is the *most longest* I've ever waited for a pizza. (incorrect)
- This is the *longest* I've ever waited for a pizza. (correct)
- This *isn't hardly* the best pizza in town. (incorrect)
- This *isn't* the best pizza in town. (correct)

VI. Diction

- **Wordiness and redundancy**
- **Adjective/adverb confusion**
- **Confused word pairs**
- **Error in idiom**

*These errors occur in both **Improving Sentences** and **Identifying Sentence Error** questions, though wordiness occurs almost exclusively in **Improving Sentences** questions.*

Wordiness is caused by unnecessary "filler" or repetition, inexact phrases, and overly complicated sentence structure. The more concise, the better, as long as all the necessary information is conveyed.

Replace the following wordy and redundant phrases with a more concise alternative:

- a lot of → many or much
- all of a sudden → suddenly
- along the lines of → like
- any and all → all
- are able to → can
- at the present time → currently/now
- basic fundamentals → fundamentals
- both of these → both

- close proximity → close
- due to the fact that → because
- end result → result
- final destination → destination
- final outcome → outcome
- first and foremost → first
- general consensus → consensus
- important essentials → essentials
- in order to → to
- in the event that → if
- in the near future → soon
- in the neighborhood of → about
- last but not least → finally
- often times → often
- on a daily basis → daily
- on account of the fact that → because
- past history → history
- rarely ever → ever
- take action → act
- the majority of → most
- the reason why → the reason
- through the use of → through
- true facts → facts
- various differences → differences
- with regard to → about/regarding
- with the exception of → except for

Avoid the following wordy phrases and “filler”:

- as a whole
- as the case may be
- as a matter of fact
- being that
- by and large
- by definition
- for all intents and purposes
- it is clear that
- the fact that
- really, totally, very

Since adjectives and adverbs serve similar functions – they both modify or describe – they are often confused. Remember that **adjectives** modify nouns or pronouns while **adverbs** modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Adverbs often end in *-ly*.

- He was a *quick* study.
- He had a *violent* temper.
- I have a *good* dog.
- He learned *quickly*.
- He was a *violently* angry person.
- My dog is *well* trained.

Use **less** and **amount** for non-countable items (water, air, intelligence, etc.). Use **fewer** and **number** for items that can be counted.

- There is *less* grass on the soccer field.
- I scored *fewer* goals than you.
- There is a greater *amount* of water in this lake.
- There is a greater *number* of ducks on this lake.

Use **between** when talking about two items only. Use **among** for three or more.

- Keep this *between* you and me.
- There was peace *among* the three countries.

Other commonly confused word pairs:

- *accept* : receive, agree to
- *adapt*: evolve
- *affect*: verb
- *allusion*: reference
- *already*: previously
- *beside*: next to
- *conscious*: aware
- *disinterested*: impartial
- *eminent*: important, esteemed
- *farther*: distance
- *latter*: second in a list of two items
- *loose*: not tight, not fastened
- *principal*: chief
- *than*: comparison
- *except*: exclude
- *adept*: skilled
- *effect*: noun
- *illusion*: false representation
- *all ready*: ready to go
- *besides*: in addition
- *conscience*: moral sense
- *uninterested*: not interested in
- *imminent*: upcoming
- *further*: quantity
- *later*: time
- *lose*: misplace
- *principle*: rule
- *then*: time

Neither is always used with **nor**, and **either** is always used with **or**. The correct structure following **not only** is **but also**.

- *Neither* Amanda *nor* Jarome received an 'A' on that assignment.
- Leave your paper *either* with me *or* with the front office.
- *Not only* did he wash the dishes, *but* he *also* walked the dog.

An **idiom** is an expression characteristic of a particular language. Many idioms involve **preposition choice**. Using the wrong preposition is a grammatical error. Be familiar with some of these:

- abide *by* the rule
- accuse someone *of* a crime
- agree *on* an amendment
- agree *to* do something
- agree *with* someone
- amazement *at* something
- appreciation *of* something
- argue *about* or *for* a proposal
- argue *with* a person
- apologize *for* an error
- approve *of* a change
- blame a mistake *on* a person
- blame a person *for* a mistake
- bored *with* small talk
- concerned *about* or *with* an issue
- comply *with* a request
- contrast *with* (when noting differences)
- correspond *to* or *with* something (meaning to relate)
- correspond *with* a person (meaning to communicate)
- differ *from* something
- independent *of* someone or something
- interested *in* a subject
- oblivious *to* an issue
- separate *from* something
- similar *to* something
- succeed *in* an endeavour