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 Haifeez, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alumnus/alumna</td>
<td>alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antenna</td>
<td>antennae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criterion</td>
<td>criteria</td>
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<td>datum</td>
<td>data</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>phenomenon</td>
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<td></td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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)

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.

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.

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 **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)

**IV. Sentence Structure and Punctuation**

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

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 causes 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)

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)

*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. (correct)
- We decided not to go out tonight; instead, we are going to save our money. (incorrect)
- Sarah is normally clumsy, however she is a good skater. (incorrect)
- Sarah is normally clumsy; she is, however, a good skater. (correct)

**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)

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.

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

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
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