

WRITING SKILLS STRATEGIES

The multiple-choice writing skills sections are comprised of three question types: improving sentences, identifying sentence errors, and improving paragraphs. All three question types test your ability to recognize correct English grammar and usage. The third additionally tests your ability to organize a paragraph.

For all question types, it is important to identify a specific error and come up with *your own* solution. The answer choices are designed to confuse you. For each question, run through a mental checklist of the most common issues: errors with nouns, pronouns, verbs, sentence structure, sentence logic, and diction (word usage). All of these issues are explained in detail in the Basic SAT Grammar section.

Improving Sentences

- Read the entire sentence and try to spot the error. Think of how you might re-write the sentence before you look at the answer choices.
 - Read each choice along with the *entire* sentence. Some choices may look fine on their own, but do not fit grammatically with the rest of the sentence.
 - Scan each choice for the most common grammatical mistakes. Errors most commonly found in these questions involve verbs, sentence structure and punctuation, sentence logic, and diction.
 - Cross out any choice that repeats the mistake in the original sentence or introduces a new error.
 - If you can't find an error in the sentence, let the choices guide you: scan each option to see what aspect of the original sentence is changed and how. The way the choices are written will often reveal the type of error in the original sentence.
 - Look for the core structure of the sentence: the main subject(s) and the main verb(s). Don't be distracted by "filler."
 - Pay particular attention to shorter answer options. More concise is better, as long as all the necessary information is conveyed.
 - Remember that the original sentence may be grammatically correct, even if it has unusual wording.
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Identifying Sentence Errors

- Only look for errors in the underlined portions of the sentence. Scan each underlined word and eliminate the ones you know are correct.
- Trust your instinct. Pay attention if something sounds wrong.

- To be confident in your answer choice, know how you would correct the error.
 - Run through your mental checklist of common grammar errors. Errors most commonly found in these questions involve nouns, pronouns, verbs, and diction. Pay particular attention to pronoun and verb agreement.
 - Don't be afraid to choose "no error": about 1 in 5 sentences will be right.
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Improving Paragraphs

- Read or skim the paragraph in full before answering the questions. For these questions, understanding context is important.
- This portion of the test asks you to consider not only grammatical errors but also overall paragraph organization. As you read the passage, look for both grammatical and structural errors and think about how you would fix them.
- Underline sentences that are grammatically incorrect, stylistically awkward, too wordy, or misplaced. If a sentence seems misplaced, where would you move it to make the sequence of ideas in the essay more logical? Or would it be better to delete it?
- Pay attention to the introduction and conclusion of the paragraph. Do they outline the main points of the essay and state the thesis? The transitions between different paragraphs are also important. If they don't flow, how could the ideas be better connected?
- When considering the questions, tackle more specific questions about single sentences before tackling more general questions about the whole paragraph.
- Read each answer choice in context with the rest of the paragraph, and make sure your answer makes sense.