



SAT Writing Packet- Grammar Rules

The writing section of the SAT is extremely repetitive. The test makers ask the same grammar mistakes on every test. Master these grammar rules and feel confident on test day.

For students using The Official SAT Study Guide, 2nd Edition by the College Board: next to each rule you will see a list of page and question numbers that coincide with this book.

p. 602 #27, p. 659 #19, p. 660 #26, p. 721 #24, #26, #29, p. 776 #19, p. 777 #24, #27, p. 839 #20, #27, p. 894 #14, p. 895 #18, #21, #23, p. 956 #12, #14, #16, p. 957 #29

Subject-Verb Agreement

The most common grammar mistake that students are tested on is subject-verb agreement. Here is an example:

The committee, made up of several women, are deciding on the school budget next week. No error.
A B C D E

The mistake is choice "C".

The subject of this sentence is "committee", which is singular and therefore needs a singular verb. "Is" should replace "are" in this sentence.

This sentence contains a clause. The clause is the fragment of the sentence between the two commas, and it separates the subject from the verb. Therefore, you are tricked to think that the verb ("are") should agree with "women". In this case, read the sentence and eliminate the clause, so that the subject and the verb come directly after each other. By doing this, you will be able to tell if the subject does not agree with the verb.

Here is a second example:

We enjoyed the brilliant sunshine of the beach so much that day that when
A B
we left there was only one couple and one lifeguard still there. No error.
C D E

The mistake is in choice "C".

"One couple and one lifeguard" is an example of a compound subject. A compound subject is when there is more than one person in the subject. A compound subject must always go with a plural verb. "Was" is a singular verb; "were" is a plural verb and should be used instead.

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Subject-Pronoun Agreement

Another grammar mistake they ask about constantly is subject-pronoun agreement. This is a lot easier to understand than it sounds. An example will help you understand exactly what to look out for:

A smart tennis player such as Samantha is someone who knows how to
move around the court, can hit winners at the net, and controls their emotions. No error.
A B C D E

The mistake is in choice D.

“Their” is a plural pronoun. The antecedent, and subject in the sentence, “player”, is singular. Instead of using “their”, the sentence should have used “her” as the pronoun.

p. 601 #15, p. 602 #28, p. 659 #20, p. 660 #28, p. 720 #15, p. 721 #20; p. 839 #25, p. 895 #19, p. 957 #19

Parallel Sentence Structure

A third grammar concept that is commonly tested on the SAT writing section is called parallel sentence structure. Here is an example of a sentence with a mistake in parallel sentence structure.

In a survey of the school’s fifth graders, playing in gym class, painting in art
class, participating in science labs and lunch time were all mentioned repeatedly as
favorite activities in school. No error.
A B C D E

In this sentence, “lunch time” should be changed to “eating lunch.” Each of the items that the fifth graders mentioned start with an “-ing” word. This is called parallel sentence structure. Each item in a series should be written in the same grammatical form.

p. 600 #6, #9, p. 602 #20, #22, p. 720 #18, p. 777 #23, p. 838 #19, p. 895 #22

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Proper Verb Tense

The SAT also tests students on proper verb tense. Here is a sentence that contains an improper verb tense:

The three coaches decided not to pick the team right after practice
that day, but they do talk on the phone and made the final
decisions that night. No error.

Choice C contains the mistake because “do” is in the present tense. “Do” should be changed to “did.”

This entire sentence is written in the past tense. For example, “decided” is a verb used when something happened in the past.

p. 601 #12 #18, p. 658 #12 #16, p. 659 #22, p. 777 #21, p. 838 #13, p. 839 #21, p. 894 #12, p. 895 #20, #25, p. 956 #13, #17, p. 957 #20, #24

Incorrect Comparisons

The SAT loves to test students on incorrect comparisons. Here is an example:

Sam felt extremely confident going into the final round of interviews, because his list of credentials
was far more impressive than his competitor. No error.

The mistake here is in choice D because Sam’s list of credentials is being compared to his competitor rather than his competitor’s list of credentials. Even though we may understand the sentence, “his competitor’s” or “his competitor’s list” needs to be used so that there is a proper comparison.

p. 410 #21, p. 660 #27, p. 720 #14; p. 777 #28

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p. 659 #18 #24, p.
660 #29, p. 896 #27

Comparative/Superlative

When comparing **two** things, use what's called the comparative: **more** or a word that **ends in -er**, such as smarter:

Example: Of the two runners, he was the faster.

When comparing **three or more than three** things, use what's called the superlative: **most** or a word that **ends in -est**, such as smartest:

Example: Of the three runners, she was the fastest.

Diction Error

Another grammar concept that is repeatedly asked on the SAT is called diction. Diction basically means word choice. Here is a sentence that contains a diction error:

When the opera finally came to a conclusion at nine, we still had not eaten dinner
A
and wanted to decide quick what type of food everyone would be happy with. No error.
B C D E

The mistake here is in choice B.

"Quickly" should be used instead of "quick." If a verb, such as decide, is used in a sentence, an adverb is needed to describe how somebody is going to decide. "Quickly" is an adverb. Adverbs very frequently end in "-ly." In this example, an adjective, "quick," was used in a place where an adverb should have been. This is a common mistake used on the SAT that students should really look out for.

A second type of diction error is when a slang type of expression is used instead of a more formal type of expression. Since there is some gray area between what is considered slang and what is considered formal, the SAT tends to stick to fairly cut and dry examples. Here is a sentence with an error of this type:

The reason for the poor attendance at today's annual party is because the weather has been
A B C
highly unpredictable all week. No error.
D E

The mistake here is in choice C.

The phrase "is because" is not grammatically correct in this sentence. The word "because" should not be used after the word "reason." Instead, the phrase "is that" should be used.

p. 721 #22, p. 776 #13, p.838 #12, #14, p. 956 #15



Proper Number Agreement

p. 409 #19

The mistake in this sentence is choice "C" because it is unclear as to whether the pronoun "she" is referring to Sarah or Karen.

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