



This free study guide provides several strategies for mastering questions on the Writing and Language section of the Revised SAT. The full version of the study guide is available to all Method Test Prep subscription users through the Method Test Prep Resource Center.

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## #1 - Subject-Verb Agreement Lesson

Perhaps one of the greatest keys to success on the writing and language section is for students to be able to identify two key aspects within a sentence. Those two items are the Subject and the Verb. Because a majority of errors within the writing section stem from some form of subject-verb agreement students will immediately have a place to start once they have identified these two things.

### Singular vs. Plural

It is important to note that every verb must have a subject and every subject must have a verb. While this may sound like common sense, this idea can be key to increasing your score on the writing section.

As soon as you have identified your subject, whether you know it or not, you are recognizing whether that subject is singular or plural. You need to make sure that from here forward you are conscious of this recognition and using it to your advantage. Here's why:

- Singular subjects need singular verbs
- Plural subjects need plural verbs

Again, what sounds simple can be made more complex by those in charge of creating SAT questions.

### Consider the following sentence:

*The main explanation that the musicians gave for attending the concert are that the performer had just released a critically acclaimed album.*

- This sentence is a great example of the test makers trying to “hide” the subject. While many students will instinctively assume the subject is “the musicians,” the actual subject is “the explanation.”
- Always make sure that you are identifying both the subject and the verb! This will help you in escaping this trap.

The verb associated with “the explanation” in this sentence is the verb “are.” Because “the explanation” is singular you need to make sure that the verb is singular as well.

- As a result “are” needs to be changed to “is.”

### The Pronoun Trick

If you are struggling to identify whether or not a verb is singular or plural you can make it easier on yourself by replacing your subject with a pronoun.

Singular subject: use a singular pronoun such as “he,” “she,” or “it.”

Plural subject: use a plural pronoun such as “we” or “they.”

### Consider the following sentence:

#### Subject-Verb Agreement Examples found in the Official Study Guide for the New SAT:

Pg. 362 #36, 363 #41, 363 #40,  
469 #3, 476 #23, 480 #41, 579  
#5, 582 #15, 586 #24, 590 #36,  
591 #38, 691 #6, 696 #19, 699  
#28, 701 #34

*Studying the language and culture of a foreign country is essential to the tourist who expect to learn from his or her vacation abroad.*

- After tackling the task of identifying “the tourist” as the subject here and “expect” as the verb we can then look at the relationship between the two.
- Because “tourist” is singular replace it with the pronoun “he” and re-read your subject and verb.
- “He” does not “expect” to learn, “he” “expects” to learn. As a result we can see that the subject and verb in the original sentence do not agree.

### Groups

Dealing with a group as a subject can pose a challenge to students. Are groups singular? Are they plural?

**Consider the following sentence choices:**

*The soccer team won most of their games.*

Vs.

*The soccer team won most of its games.*

Which one is correct?

**The Rule:** When the subject of our sentence is a group of people it is treated as a singular subject. The reason being that we are only talking about ONE group. Examples of groups include:

- Team
- Family
- Club
- Organization

### Conclusion

When starting any writing question it is essential to identify the subject and the verb as quickly as possible. From here you want to identify whether your subject is singular or plural.

- Consider replacing the subject with a pronoun and check for subject-verb agreement.
- If you are dealing with an entire group as your subject always treat it as a singular noun.
- A majority of the errors on the writing section stem from some form of subject-verb agreement. This is a very, very important skill to master!

## #2 - Combining Sentences Lesson

When writing, it is worth considering how to best vary your sentences. A lot of short sentences in a row can start to sound awkward. On the test, you will often be asked to

**Examples found in the Official Study Guide for the New SAT:**

Pg. 355 #13, 363 #39, 470 #7, 474 #18, 585 #23, 692 #8

rewrite two short sentences into one that is longer and smoother while still grammatically correct.

This can be a difficult task because it is very easy to take two short sentences and turn them into a run-on sentence.

**Ask Yourself:** What's the difference between a long sentence and a run-on sentence?

- Does the sentence have two independent clauses (complete ideas) that are either separated by no punctuation or separated just by a comma?

**Here's an example of a run-on:** *The man was late for his appointment he ended up arriving at 3:05.*

Notice: There are two independent clauses there.

1. "The man was late for his appointment"
2. "he ended up arriving at 3:05."

We could turn both of those into their own sentences, but we could also keep it all one sentence. How? By using either a linking word or a semi-colon. Let's take a look:

*The man was late for his appointment and he ended up arriving at 3:05.*

By putting in "and" we made the sentence complete. Now look at it with a semi-colon:

*The man was late for his appointment; he ended up arriving at 3:05.*

So let's look at a couple of examples of short sentences that could be put together.

**Here's the first one:** *Melissa had a cold. She kept sneezing all day*

Both of those sentences are complete sentences, but we can combine them to make one thought. Let's do so with a conjunction:

*Melissa had a cold and kept sneezing all day.*

Now we have just one sentence that gets across the information in a smoother fashion. When you are in a situation where one sentence can get across the information as opposed to two sentences, go with the former.

**Here's another example:** *The dog kept barking at Miguel. Miguel put the dog outside.*

Now I bet we could combine those two sentences into just one and end up with a stronger sentence. Let's use a conjunction again:

*The dog kept barking at Miguel and he put it outside.*

Let's take a look at one that can be changed by inserting a semi-colon: *I ran down the block. The run only took me twenty seconds.*

Here's the rewrite:

*I ran down the block; it only took me twenty seconds.*

## Conclusion

The SAT will always have a question on combining sentences, perhaps even more than one, so be on the lookout for ways to use this strategy!

## #3 - Proper Verb Tense Lesson

Perhaps one of the greatest keys to success on the writing and language section is for students to be able to identify two key aspects within a sentence. Those two items are the Subject and the Verb. Because a majority of errors within the writing section stem from some form of subject-verb agreement students will immediately have a place to start once they have identified these two things.

### Verb Tense

Once students have successfully identified the verb within the sentence they are dissecting the next step is to ensure that it agrees with the remainder of the sentence. One manner in which the exam will test your knowledge of verb agreement is by altering the tense of the verb.

#### Examples found in the Official Study Guide for the New SAT:

pg. 351 #3, 352 #8, 356 #18, 363 #40, 469#3, 475 #20, 480 #41, 579 #5, 583 #19, 586 #28, 591 #38, 590 #36, 691 #6, 694 #13, 696 #19, 701 #34

Tense: refers to the time in which the action is occurring

- Past
- Present
- Future

**Note:** When analyzing the tense of a verb it is important to note what aspects of the sentence you can and cannot change to determine the “dominant tense”

For example: Consider the following sentence

*As soon as the musicians arrived at the concert hall, they begin to rehearse immediately.*

- Because the question is drawing our attention to the verb “begin” we need to utilize another verb within the sentence to identify the proper tense. In this instance the answer lies in the first portion of the sentence where we see the verb “arrived.”
- The fact that the verb “arrived” is in the past tense, and we cannot change it, the remaining verbs must follow suit and be in the past tense as well.
- As a result the verb “begin” needs to be changed to “began.”

### Present Perfect Tense

A less common, but equally important, verb tense distinction that you must make in the writing section is past tense vs present perfect tense. This distinction refers to actions (verbs) that began in the past but are still going on today. Consider the following examples:

**Past Tense**

*Environmental regulations attempted to protect various aspects of the natural world after it became clear that certain resources were being destroyed.*

**Present Perfect Tense**

*For the past ten years, environmental regulations have attempted to protect various aspects of the natural world.*

Note: While both sentences are similar in structure and content, the tense of each of these sentences is different.

- The “Past Tense” sentence implies that these regulations were attempted at some point in the past and are either completed or no longer ongoing.
- The “Present Perfect Tense” sentence implies that these regulations have been attempted for the last ten years and, more importantly, are continuing to be attempted.
- The key addition to the “Present Perfect Tense” is the word “have.” Either “have” or “has” is necessary in order to correctly utilize the present perfect tense. The nature of the subject as either singular or plural will determine which word is appropriate.

**Conclusion**

When you look to determine which tense is appropriate in a given situation, there will often be key words in the sentence that will give you important hints about which tense is necessary. For example, key words and phrases such as “since” and “throughout” suggest a sentence that calls for the present perfect tense because they are used in situations in which action that began in the past is being continued in the present.

## #4 - Parallel Sentence Structure Lesson

One of the question types that falls outside the realm of basic subject-verb agreement on the test is the idea of parallel sentence structure. When we say that the structure of a sentence must be parallel what we mean is that the manner in which information is presented remains consistent.

**Typical Example:**

*Yesterday I went running, swimming, and took a walk.*

This is perhaps the most basic example of parallel sentence structure that you will see, and don’t expect it to be this apparent on the test!

**Examples found in the Official Study Guide for the New SAT:**

Pg. 469 #6, 471 #10, 578 #1, 702 #40

The issue with this particular sentence is the fact that two of our verbs, “running” and “swimming,” end in “-ing;” whereas, “took a walk” does not.

In order to correct this sentence “took a walk” needs to become “walking.” This creates what we call parallelism amongst the verbs.

**Example:**

*Jonny was at once annoying because of his unpredictability, and his imagination was a delight.*

On the new format for the SAT you will often see a question structured as shown above. If you see a large portion of the sentence underlined this should be an indicator to you that you may need to look for something beyond simple subject-verb agreement.

This particular question is a classic example of parallel sentence structure.

How to tell:

- The phrase “at once” implies that we will be comparing multiple items. Anytime we are listing multiple items we need to make sure of parallelism.
- There are multiple adjectives associated with the same subject. Anytime we see this we need to check for parallelism!

How to correct it:

- When looking to correct issues with parallel sentence structure you want to try and make your sentence essentially a repeating format
- Look at the –ing, -ing, -ing example from earlier! All of our verbs follow the same formula

**For this example:**

*Jonny was at once annoying because of his unpredictability, and delightful because of his imagination.*

Look at how similar that sentence is to itself! We have an adjective followed by “because of his” and a character trait. Then we have another adjective followed by “because of his” and another character trait.

That is the core of parallel sentence structure. Always be on the lookout for agreement within a sentence! Identifying your subject and your verb will always help you, but remember; sometimes you will have to go beyond just the basics! This is a higher level skill and may take some time to recognize, but it can gain you valuable points on the writing section.