

This packet contains a series of crucial writing and language strategies, as well as questions to reference in the Official Study Guide for the New SAT (2016 Edition).

#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.

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

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:

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 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.

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

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

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.

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."

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

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.

#5 - Relevance Lesson

Making sure that content is relevant to the text is very important. It is obviously a waste of time and text to state things that are unnecessary or completely unrelated. Anytime you see anything that seems out

of place, and you are given the option to remove it, do so. As long as there are no other grammatical errors, simpler and more direct answer choices are ALWAYS better answer choices.

Test your skills with this example:

The intrepid duo faced great peril and danger.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. peril
- C. obstacles
- D. OMIT the underlined portion.

The correct answer is B. "Peril" and "danger" mean the same thing. Thus, "danger" is redundant so choice A is not correct. Choice C is not correct because "obstacles" is not the same as danger. Choice D is not correct because omitting the underlined portion leaves the sentence incomplete.

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

Pg. 351 #2, 351 #5, 352 #6, 359 #28, 363 #42, 469 #4, 470 #9, 471 #11, 473 # 15, 473 # 17, 475 # 22, 477 # 26, 478 # 31, 479 #37, 480 # 42, 481 #43, 578 # 2, 579 #3 579 # 6, 582 # 13, 583 # 17, 584 # 20, 584 # 22, 590 # 37, 591 #39, 592 #42, 593 #43, 691 #4, 693 #10, 693 #11, 695 #18, 696 #20, 698 #25, 699 #27, 700 #33, 701 #37, 702 #38, 703 #44

#6 - Punctuation Lesson

Commas

The issue of comas is perhaps the most troublesome for students. This section is meant to clear up some points about commas.

When Commas Should Be Used

1. **To set off an introductory clause.** An *introductory clause* leads off a sentence, giving it context, agreement or contrast, and placing emphasis on the second part of the sentence. Some examples:

Unsurprisingly, the children all enjoy when grandmother gives them candy.

To avoid cavities, children should not eat candy too often.

All too often, people forget to eat healthier foods.

2. **To separate items in a list.** Commas should be used to separate items on a list, as in the following.

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

Pg. 351 #4, 353 #11, 355 #16, 355 #13, 359 #26, 361 #32, 363 #39, 470 #7, 472 #13, 472 #14, 474 #18, 477 #27, 478 #33, 479 #35, 579 #4, 582 # 14, 584 #21, 587 #29, 590 #34, 590 #35, 592 #41, 691 #3, 697 #22, 699 #26, 699 #29, 701 #35, 701 #36

My favorite colors are blue, orange, and green.

The recipe calls for flour, sugar, salt, milk, eggs, and water.

3. **To set off non-essential clauses or appositives.** A *non-essential clause* or *appositive* is a word or phrase that further describes a noun or phrase before it. These are meant to give more detail. Two clues that you're dealing with a non-essential clause or appositive :

- You can take the word or phrase out of the sentence, and the sentence remains complete
- You can put the word or phrase in parentheses, and the structure seems correct.

Here are some examples.

Bob, our sales manager, handles all high-priority deals on the company floor.

Joe Smith, a student athlete, earned a scholarship for great grades and athletic achievement.

The crowd cheered joyfully as the town president, a very popular man, rode down the street.

Notice that here, the non-essential clauses are all set off by two commas. Try taking them out to prove to yourself that the sentences make sense without them.

4. **To separate the first part of a continuing idea.** When the first part of a sentence is the start of an idea, the second is separated by a comma, as in the following.

The sun was shining, though there were some clouds in the sky.

He thinks we should've turned right, but I think we should have turned left.

Even though most of the wood had burned, the fireplace continued to give off plenty of heat.

When Commas Should NOT Be Used

Using too many commas or placing them incorrectly produces awkward pauses, sentence fragments, or comma splices.

1. **In the middle of an idea.** Don't break an idea in strange spots. In all of the following, note how the sentences sound fine if the commas are removed.

I know, that we need to go to the supermarket,

Her house was remodeled, several years ago.

Physics teaches you, how to problem solve effectively.

She enjoyed the class, even though she didn't understand all of the material.

2. **Inside a non-essential clause.** Don't break up a non-essential clause. Don't break up a non-essential clause with unnecessary commas. In all of the following, note how the extra comma makes the sentence sound choppy.

The Arctic, Portrayed as a barren, and depressing place, is actually full of natural beauty.

Tomorrow, as suggested, by the board, an open discussion about company policies will be held,

The men on the construction team, worn and weary, after the day's work, returned home.

3. **To separate independent clauses.** Independent clauses are statements that don't depend on one another. Think of them as a polar opposite of the "continuing idea" sentences discussed above. Splitting them up with a comma creates a *comma splice*, as in the following. In every case, the piece of separated by a , should be made into separate sentences, or is he at the very least with a semicolon (;).

It was very cold outside, I needed to wear my coat.

My Grandfather fought in the war, he was in Europe from 1943 to 1945.

Listening to music is his favorite pastime, he really loves jazz

Example 1. Comma usage.

In the following passage, indicate whether the comma is acceptable or should be changed.

One morning,(1) I awoke to find a large box by the side of my bed. "This is odd," I thought,(2) and I jumped,(3) out of bed to open the box. I was excited,(4) to see what was inside the box,(5) I wondered if it was a present from my brother. I took out a pair of scissors,(6) with the intention of cutting carefully along the taped edges. When I looked inside the box,(7) I couldn't believe my eyes: it was a new video game system!

Solutions:

1. Correct: This comma is used to set off the introductory clause "One morning"
2. Correct: this comma is used to separate the first part of a continuing idea. Take it out, and the sentence is a run-on.
3. Incorrect: this comma improperly breaks up the second idea of the sentence. The sentence sounds fine without it.
4. Incorrect: this comma breaks up the first point of the sentence ("I was excited to see what was inside the box...")
5. Incorrect: this comma created a comma splice, because it separates two complete ideas ("I was excited to see what was inside the box" and "I wondered if it was a present from my brother.") A

comma should *never* be used to separate independent ideas. There should be a period or semicolon here.

6. Incorrect: this comma created an unnecessary pause; the sentence sounds fine without it.
7. Correct: this comma properly sets off the introductory clause, "When I looked inside the box."

In general, if a comma isn't *absolutely necessary*, avoid using it.

Semi-Colons

Put simply, semi-colons behave similarly to periods. Most students are aware that commas and periods are not "interchangeable" punctuation marks, meaning that using a comma where a period belongs can create a grammatical error called a comma splice that leads to a run-on sentence.

While there are small differences between periods and semi-colons, these small differences are not tested on the SAT. For the purposes of success on the SAT, students should view a semi-colon as they view a period: something that separates two independent clauses (complete sentences).

Example:

The bus got a flat tire and had to pull over, it took the tow truck over an hour to arrive.

In the case of this example, both of the clauses on either side of the comma are independent. This means that they both function as full and complete sentences. The two clauses have been listed below. Read them individually to tell that they are complete sentences.

- *The bus got a flat tire and had to pull over.*
- *It took the tow truck over an hour to arrive.*

Since both of these clauses are independent, it is improper to separate them with a comma. These two clauses must, instead, be separated by a semi-colon or by a period. The corrected sentence is listed below.

The bus got a flat tire and had to pull over; it took the tow truck over an hour to arrive.

7 - Opening Clause without a Subject Lesson

If a sentence begins with a clause set apart from the sentence and does not have a clear subject, then the subject of this clause must immediately follow the comma. Here's an example:

Example: *Driving down the street, the tree looked beautiful to me.*

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

Pg. 358 #24, 470 #8, 480 #39

This sentence is incorrect because the opening clause (which is set apart from the sentence by a comma and does not have a clear subject) is not followed by the subject of the clause. After reading “driving down the street,” the first question we could ask is, “who was driving down the street?” The tree could not have driven down the street; thus, we need to rearrange the sentence to make it clear and correct. It should read: “Driving down the street, I saw a beautiful tree.” “I” is the subject of the opening clause. Spotting these clauses and realizing that the subject of these clauses must immediately follow can help you narrow down answer choices very quickly.

Note: Sometimes the makers of the test will try to trick you by including a possessive form of the subject.

Example: *After shopping at the mall, Theresa's shopping bags were full and her purse was empty.*

This sentence is incorrect because it makes it sound as if the "shopping bags" were the ones shopping at the mall. Instead, Theresa needs to be the subject. One helpful way to recognize this is that "Theresa's shopping bags" can be re-worded as "the shopping bags of Theresa." This re-wording helps us see that then the sentence would read: After shopping at the mall, the shopping bags of Theresa were full and her purse was empty. The latter sentence is, of course, incorrect; the "shopping bags" were not "shopping at the mall." The sentence should read: After shopping at the mall, Theresa had filled her shopping bags and emptied her purse. This way the subject of the opening clause, "Theresa," immediately follows the opening clause.

8 Pronoun Antecedent Agreement Lesson

Another grammar rule that is tested on the test is Pronoun Antecedent Agreement. This just means that when you have a pronoun (a word that replaces a noun), the pronoun needs to agree with the word that it represents.

For example, it is incorrect to say:

The football team was ready for their game.

In this case the pronoun “their” is plural and the subject “football team” is singular. Remember that even though the football team is made up of several players, the sentence is only discussing the single team and not the many players. In this case you would need to change “their” to “its” to ensure proper agreement.

Fortunately, the test occasionally leaves clues on the test to help you recognize when a sentence exhibits disagreement. These are called “red flag” words because when you see them, they should put up a red flag in your brain. Take the following example:

After it recruited many top athletes, the football team was ready for their game.

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

Pg. 356 #17, 360 #30, 364 # 44,
477 #29, 480 #39, 581 #10,
582 #15, 582 #12, 586 #26,
586 #27, 691 #7

The two underlined pronouns both refer to the football team, but clearly disagree with each other. If you ever see two disagreeing pronouns in a sentence, especially if one is underlined, you need to take a hard look at the underlined pronoun to make sure that it exhibits proper agreement in the sentence.

Use the following example to practice what you have learned.

Carla wants to ace all of the sections; to do well on it she has been taking many practice tests.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. math
- C. their challenges
- D. them

The correct answer here is D, "them." The subject, "sections", is plural so the pronoun must be plural as well. "Them" is a plural pronoun. "It" is a singular pronoun so Choice A can't be correct. By the way, another word for the subject of a pronoun is "antecedent." A good strategy is to draw an arrow from the pronoun to the proper antecedent (noun that comes before a pronoun) right on your test.

The following chart details a list of words to look out for called "Red Flag Words". If you ever see these words in an underlined portion on your test, make sure to realize that the SAT is most likely testing you on pronoun use, and adjust your approach accordingly.

Remember that to identify a subject, ask yourself either of two questions: "What's being described?" or "What's doing the verb?". The subject is always the thing being discussed or the thing doing the action at a particular part of the sentence. Also note that subjects often appear before prepositions (of, for, in, on, from). For example, consider the following sentence:

The number of students are growing each year.

Here, the subject is "the number", (not "students"!) because it is the thing growing each year. Notice how it appears before the preposition. This is a common occurrence, so look out for it! One technique to use in this situation is to take everything from the preposition to the verb out of the sentence. Here, that would transform the sentence to the following:

The number of students are growing each year.

Because "number" is singular (if it were plural, it would be "numbers") it's now obvious that the "are" should be changed to "is".

Red Flag Pronoun Words

- it, its
- he, him, his
- she, her, hers
- they, them, their
- I, me, one

#9 Proper Number Agreement Lesson

Another rule that is frequently tested on the test is that of Proper Number Agreement. What this means is that related pieces of sentences all must have the same number (singular or plural). Take the following example:

The five swimmers had waited all season to shave their head for the championship meet.

The related words in this sentence, which happen to disagree, are “swimmers” (plural) and “head” (singular). Once this relationship is identified it is easy to see the error. This sentence states that all five swimmers share the same single head. This is, of course, not the case, and thus to achieve proper number agreement, we would need to replace “head” with “heads”. Read the sentence through with the replaced word and listen to the difference. Once you are able to master recognition of this error,

which you can learn by taking the quiz below, you will be able to easily move through these problems on test day.

It is important to remember that this applies to related pieces of sentences only. Do not go so far as to think that if you see one plural noun/pronoun/verb in a sentence that all other nouns/pronouns/verbs need to be plural as well. Only related words need to follow this rule. This relationship can clearly be seen in the example below and the following quiz questions.

Ever since they can remember, the two friends have aspired to be a professional football player.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) aspired to professionally play football above the amateur level
- C) aspired and desired to be professional football players
- D) aspired to be professional football players

The correct answer here is D. The sentence states that the two friends (plural) have aspired to be a professional football player (singular). Since the two friends cannot be a single football player, we need to change “a professional football player” to “professional football players”. This explanation for why answer choice D is correct explains the error in answer choice A. Additionally, answer choices B and C can be eliminated because of redundancy.

#10 - Incorrect Comparison Lesson

Incorrect comparisons are one of the test's favorite topics when it comes to grammar. Tests usually feature multiple questions involving the concept. An incorrect comparison can be hard to spot at first as it's usually easy to pick up the sentence's meaning and not notice that a comparison is incorrect. However, once you get into the habit of spotting incorrect comparisons, these questions will become very easy.

An incorrect comparison involves comparing two subjects which are not comparable.

For instance:

- One cannot compare a person and a book.
- One cannot compare a movie to a director or a novel to a writer.

Let's look at a couple of examples of incorrect comparisons and break them down. Here's one:

I much prefer Star Wars to William Shakespeare.

What are we comparing?

This is an incorrect comparison because you are comparing a film, Star Wars, to a person, William Shakespeare.

Note: This can be tricky because we know that the writer means the works of Shakespeare and not Shakespeare himself, but read on a literal level, the comparison is incorrect and must be fixed.

How do we fix it?

I much prefer Star Wars to Shakespeare plays.

Now the writer has made it clear that s/he is talking about Shakespeare's plays and not Shakespeare himself.

Let's look at another incorrect comparison:

I much preferred Max's portrait to Kim.

You might've already spotted the problem. This sentence is comparing a portrait to a person. Adding an apostrophe at the end of Kim would solve this problem nicely:

I much preferred Max's portrait to Kim's.

Here's one last incorrect comparison, a type the test has used many times in the past:

The philosophers of the 1800s are much more interesting than today.

Did you spot the error? You're probably catching on now, but if not, you soon will. The error here is that the philosophers of the 1800s are being compared to a time period: today. The sentence should make it clear that the philosophers of the 1800s are being compared to the philosophers of today. Here's a better version of that sentence:

The philosophers of the 1800s are much more interesting than the philosophers of today.

There we go! The incorrect comparison has been nicely fixed. Keep an eye out for sentences like this on the SAT. At times, you'll be asked to figure out which rewrite does the best job of fixing the error while at other times you will only have to spot it. Either way, by now you will probably find these questions much easier.

● **Remember: mastering just a few grammar topics can result in huge score differences.**

#11 - Comparative Superlative Lesson

For many students the writing section of the test presents a particularly intimidating challenge. The questions in this section will test students on their grammar, something that many students across the country no longer see on a daily basis in their English classes. However, a few solid fundamentals can allow students to prepare for this section of the test. This lesson covers the difference between comparative and superlative adjectives.

In order to understand how to properly use comparative and superlative adjectives, a student must first understand what they are:

- A **comparative** is used to compare two nouns. As in:
 - Mike is **taller** than me.
 - I am **faster** than Steve.
 - My grass is **greener** than yours.

- A **superlative** is used when we are comparing more than two nouns, or all nouns in a particular group. As in:
 - Between Mike, Steve, and I, Mike is the **tallest**.
 - Steve is the **fastest** person on the soccer team.
 - My grass is the **greenest** of all.

NOTICE: The comparative verbs all end in -er whereas all of the superlative adjectives end in -est. This is one way of distinguishing between comparative and superlative adjectives. There are several other methods that are equally important discussed below.

More & Most

In addition to using the –er and –est endings, it can be proper to use the words “more” and “most” in place of the –er and –est endings, respectively. The SAT does not test on whether to use, for example, an –er ending or the word “more”. That being said, it is important to recognize “more” and “most” as substitutes for the –er and –est endings in order to appropriately deal with the comparison issues stated above (and practiced below). Once again, there is no need to concern yourself with memorizing which words use the word “more” instead of –er endings (and those that use the word “most” instead of –est endings) as that will not be tested on the SAT.

Practice Questions

Despite all of the research and opinions, the committee was still at odds over how to finance the new museum. Ultimately, the committee members decided that the major banking firm offered the better (1) option because of their ability to help facilitate the contracting as well. When all of the risks and rewards were analyzed across all of their options the committee came to the conclusion that because the major banking firm was more (2) experienced than their closest competitor it was worth the additional cost to acquire their services. At the end of the day they were in a good (3) situation than when they started the meeting.

1. A) better
 B) good
 C) best
 D) more intelligent

2. A) more
 B) most
 C) as
 D) equally

3. A) good
 B) best
 C) bad
 D) better

Answers:

Question 1 is choice C because we are comparing the banking firm to ALL of its competitors so we need the superlative form of the adjective.

- ❖ A is incorrect because better is the comparative form of the adjective.

- ❖ B is incorrect because good is the regular form of the adjective.
- ❖ D is incorrect because, although intelligent may work in context of the sentence, more intelligent is the comparative form of the adjective and we need a superlative.

Question 2 is choice A because we are comparing the firm to one other competitor. As such we need a comparative form of the adjective.

- ❖ B is incorrect because most is the superlative form of the adjective.
- ❖ C is incorrect because as is neither used as a comparative nor a superlative.
- ❖ D is incorrect because equally would be grammatically incorrect within the context of the sentence.

Question 3 is choice D because we need a comparative form of the adjective. The sentence is comparing two situations.

- ❖ Choice A is incorrect because it is the regular form of the adjective.
- ❖ Choice B is incorrect because best is the superlative form of the adjective.
- ❖ Choice C is incorrect because bad is the regular form of the adjective.

#12 Redundancy and “Less is More” Lesson

Some questions on the SAT test your ability to distinguish concise language from superfluous language. If you see an answer with fewer words and says the same thing as the other choices, the shorter answer is probably the best.

Along these lines, the SAT tests eliminating *redundancy*, or saying the same thing twice. Sometimes, it’s not entirely obvious that anything is incorrect with the sentence. The tipoff: all of the answers will say the same thing, and one will be short and sweet - this is probably the correct one.

The following examples demonstrate the kinds of things you’ll need to look out for.

Example 1. Shorter is better

Having come to the realization that he was tired, Jim decided against going to see the film.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. Realizing with full knowledge
- C. Having realizing
- D. Realizing

Solution:

Choice **D** is correct. The sentence is trying to describe that Jim realized that he was tired, so he decided against seeing the movie. There’s no reason not to have just the word “Realizing” at the beginning.

Choice B is too wordy and redundant; when one realizes, it is already implied that one has knowledge of the situation. Lastly choice C sounds awkward.

Some redundancies feature straight definitions of words that need not be defined. The following example demonstrates this case. Notice how all of the answer choices in this next example say essentially the same thing, but one answer is nice and short.

Example 2. Redundancy.

In the old days, coin counters must have seen their jobs as tedious and exceptionally boring.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. tedious
- C. tedious and very repetitive
- D. tedious and never-ending

Solution:

Choice **B** is correct. The word “tedious” means “boring, repetitive, and monotonous.” The original phrasing and other choices repeat the definition without providing new or useful information.

#13 Ambiguous Pronouns Lesson

An ambiguous pronoun refers to a pronoun found in a sentence where it is unclear as to what the pronoun is referring.

The Rule: Anytime that you notice that a pronoun's function is being tested, make sure to truly analyze the pronoun to determine if it is being used properly.

Ambiguous pronoun can be a tough concept to master, considering that it does not *sound* grammatically incorrect, but only makes the actual meaning of the sentence vague and confusing.

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

pg. 357 #21, 361 #33,
586 #8, 692 #9, 694 #12

Remember: Anytime that a pronoun is used, and it is unclear as to what noun the pronoun is referring, you have to replace that pronoun with the specific noun. Otherwise there would be no way to be sure what the author is talking about!

Take a look at a couple of examples below to get comfortable with this concept before attempting the quiz.

Sarah and Karen were enjoying the hike up the mountain until she felt ill and they had to turn back for home.

The mistake: The use of the pronoun "she"

Why? Because it is unclear as to whether the pronoun “she” is referring to Sarah or Karen. Since we do not know for sure who fell ill, we cannot use the pronoun and must either put "Karen" or "Sarah" in its place.

Example: *The company president and her coworker Linda both received credit for the completion of the project despite the fact that she did all of the work.*

The mistake: The use of the pronoun "she."

Why? Because it is unclear as to whether the pronoun “she” is referring to the company president or to her coworker Linda. Since we do not know for sure who did all of the work for the project, we cannot use the pronoun and must either put "the president" or "Linda" in its place.

#14 Subject Object Agreement Lesson

Subject Object Agreement deals with appropriate use of pronouns, specifically the use of Subject and Object pronouns.

Take a look at the following pair of sentences:

I like to eat cheeseburgers.

Me like to eat cheeseburgers.

What's wrong? The second sentence sounds ridiculous. Clearly the first sentence is written correctly while the second one has a very glaring error. In this case the pronoun "I" is the correct pronoun to use for the given sentence.

Take a look at the next pair of sentences:

My friend gave me a ride home after school.

My friend gave I a ride home after school.

What's wrong? Again, the second sentence sounds horribly wrong. Notice that in this case, the pronoun "me" is correct given the sentence.

These examples have clearly shown that there are occasions when the pronoun "I" is appropriate and others in which the pronoun "me" is appropriate. This fact extends to all sentences, even ones that have compound subjects like "my friend and I" and "my friend and me".

It may surprise you to hear that under certain circumstances the phrase "my friend and me" can be correct! Yes, you read that correctly...it is not ALWAYS appropriate to say "my friend and I".

Let's see a couple of examples:

My friend and I go to baseball games in the summer.

The teacher gave my friend and I the packet.

While both examples may sound fine, the second of the two is actually incorrect. The way to tell is to eliminate the "my friend and" part of the sentence. When that is done, both sentences look like:

I go to baseball games in the summer.

The teacher gave I the packet.

Now that we have done this, it is clear that the second sentence needs to change. By eliminating the "my friend and" part of the sentence, you will always be able to find the appropriate agreement and master this skill on the test.

Who vs. whom

Students are often tested on when to use "who" and when to use "whom." Here is an example:

I wish to know exactly who she will be seeing tomorrow.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. whom
- C. to whom
- D. the person is who

The correct answer is B. A good strategy is to change the sentence around: Would a person say "She will be seeing him" or would a person say "She will be seeing he"? Obviously, in this case, a person would say "She will be seeing him." Wherever you can substitute "him", the answer will be "whom." Wherever you can substitute "he", the answer will be "who."