

Book Two

Writing

Introduction

This book will take you through three sections regarding SAT writing: Simplifying Structure, Success in Strategies, and Reviewing Grammar Rules.

Simplifying Structure gives you a clear understanding of the types of questions you will see in the writing section. After giving an overall analysis of the structure of this section, it breaks the questions down into three main categories: Restructure questions, context questions, and questions about grammar rules. This section will then go in depth on the physical problem types you will encounter on the test.

Success in Strategies goes through a short list of strategies you can apply to the test to optimize for results. It is worth noting that this section relies heavily on question knowledge and understanding how to appropriately address questions. However, there are some tips I can give you that will help you accomplish this accurately.

Reviewing Grammar Rules simply shows a list of all grammar rules that will be applicable during this test. Covering topics like punctuation, parallel structure, modifiers, and more.

Simplifying structure

Time and Text

Being aware of the structure of the test can give you a better understanding of the test and what to expect going into it. The writing passage is the second section that you will encounter on the SAT and includes forty-four questions that must be completed in thirty-five minutes. There are four passages that each include eleven questions, which allows for 8.5 minutes per passage. There are four different types of passages that will appear in the writing section: Careers, History/Social Studies, Science and Humanities. Additionally, these passages have different narration styles. There is one narrative passage (story-like), one argumentative passage (persuasive), one informative passage (explaining something to the reader), and one additional passage.

In these passages there will be a selection of three main categories of questions: restructuring questions, context questions, and grammar questions.

Structure questions

Structure questions require you to correct issues in the format of the sentences. These questions come in several different forms: including or excluding a sentence (and why), rearranging a sentence in a paragraph, or substituting in a new sentence. Keep two things in mind with structure questions: the tone of the passage, and content of the passage.

A great way to measure the tone of the passage is to read the title. Unlike the reading passage, the writing titles are made of 2-3 words that hint at the tone, while still including information on the topic. A couple of examples are: “Whey to Go”, “Dark Snow”, “Coworking: A Creative Solution”, and “The Consolations of Philosophy”. The first option is lighthearted, the second is telling a story, the third is likely proposing a change, and the last is more serious.

When determining how to correctly structure these passages, you must understand the content that is in the passage. You must look at the macro-structure of the content and the micro-structure. Macro-structure defines where the passage started and where it is going. Micro-structure includes the small details that must be organized correctly.

The scientific method gives a good analogy of this concept. The macro-structure of the scientific method includes a question, a hypothesis, an experiment etc. The micro-structure of the scientific method would be the individual steps inside of the experiment. Micro is a subset of macro.

To accurately answer these problems, you must read enough of the passage to understand the macro-structure of the passage; you only need to read the specific details that are included in the question to understand the micro (the underlined portion, and maybe a sentence before and after).

Context questions

Context questions are questions that address specific words. All the information you need exists in the underlined portion, but also read a line or two before and after to understand the tense. Additionally, these questions work in congruence with grammar rules. It is important to understand and notice the tenses that are being used while working on these problems.

Grammar rules

Grammar rule questions require you to adjust words and punctuation to achieve the most accurate answer. You will be required to evaluate punctuation, modifiers, sentence fragments, parallel structure, tense, and word usage of different phrases. Learning the grammar rules are essential to the writing portion, lucky they are easy to learn and remember.

Success in Strategies

Read only what you need to.

In the writing section you only need to read the lines that pertain to the question. The error most students make is misinterpreting what they are supposed to read. You need to read enough to understand what the passage is about, the direction of the passage, and the specific information needed to understand the underlined portion. This means reading the title, and up to a paragraph before or after the underlined portion.

Read out loud and see if it sounds right.

Often a choice looks right in the text but will sound wrong when you say it. Read everything out loud to see which option sounds right. However, it is important to note that just because something sounds correct, does not mean that it is correct. So, it is important to understand proper grammatical structure and rules.

Plug in the answers, start with the shortest answer.

Plugging in the answers is a concept that can be used throughout the SAT. There is a way you can make this system more efficient in the writing section. There is a concept discussed on the SAT called “Precision and Concision” which essentially means saying everything that is necessary the shortest way possible. Because of this concept, we know that often the answer will be concise. Plugging in the shortest answer first will often allow you to refrain from plugging in all four multiple-choice answers.

Watch for repetition.

Often the SAT will add some sneaky repetition into the SAT that you might not notice so WATCH OUT. A good example would be, “Every year the annual Chinese parade brings in thousands of tourists to see the magical dragons and fancy fireworks.” In this sentence “every year” and “annual” mean the same thing and create repetition. If you are glazing paste a sentence it is possible to miss this. Repetition generally occurs in Structure Questions where there are large sentences to plug in and you might miss the repetition.

Understand basic grammar rules.

Understanding grammar rules is the cornerstone of the writing section. If you struggle with understanding concepts, this should be your number one priority.

Easiest to increase your score.

The writing section is the easiest section to increase your score. If you are a student who performed the worst in this section, put 90% of your focus into improving your writing score. The other 10% should only be allocated to other subjects only when you need a break from writing related subjects.

Grammar Rules

Independent Clause:

- A group of words that contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.
- Ex: Josh worked all day, but he was still unable to complete the project.

Commas:

- Use commas after introductory: clauses, phrases, or words that come before the main clause. Commas can also be used to separate nonessential elements apart from the rest of the sentence. Lastly, commas are used for: items in a series, nonrestrictive clauses, appositives, direct addresses, and direct quotations.

Semicolons:

- Semicolons are used between closely related independent clauses which are not joined by a coordinating conjunction.
- Ex: I order a cheeseburger for lunch; life is too short to count calories
- Ex: Martha has gone to the store; her sister has gone to play soccer.

Colons:

- A colon is used to give emphasis, present dialogue, introduce a list or a text, and clarify compositions.
- Capitalize the first letter following a colon only if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence.
- Ex: I have a few favorite foods: chicken, broccoli, and rice.
- Ex: We knew who would lose: The Cowboys

Parentheses:

- Parentheses are used to enclose incidental or supplemental information. Also used to clarify, illustrate, or serve as a digression or afterthought.
- In context of the SAT, they are used to enclose parenthetical elements.
- Parenthetical element: a word or group of words that interrupts the flow of a sentence and adds additional (but nonessential) information to that sentence.

Dashes

- Use a dash to: set off material for emphasis (think the opposite of parentheses), and to break up dialogue.

Modifiers and Modifier Placement:

- Modifier: words, phrases, and clauses that affect and often enhance the meaning of a sentence.
- Ex: I am going to Sonic for a **cherry limeade** slushy.
- Modifier placement: assigning the correct modifier to the word that is modified.
- Make sure the modifier actually modifies the correct word in the sentence.

parallel structure

- Parallel structure: using a pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance.
- The black-necked Aracari is a small toucan with a red stripe across its **yellow belly**, a **healthy appetite for fruit**, and **has a large beak**.
- The black-necked Aracari is a small toucan with a red stripe across its **yellow belly**, a **healthy appetite for fruit**, and a **large beak**.

Tense:

- Tense: a set of forms taken by a verb to indicate the time (and sometimes also the continuance or completeness) of the action in relation to the time of the utterance.
- Ex: is, was, are, etc.

Logical comparison:

- Logical comparison: a sentence that makes a comparison that is structurally and grammatically correct.
- Ex: you have higher odds of being injured by a dog than a shark.
- You want to remember that while a question might sound good when you say it out loud, that does not mean it is structurally correct.
- Ex: If I had to compare **the plays of Arthur to Shakespeare, I would say Shakespeare's is better**.
- Ex: If I had to compare the plays of Arthur to **those of Shakespeare**, I would say Shakespeare's is better.