

**SAT TEST PREP FOR ENGLISH
LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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I. Introducing the



The SAT is a reasoning test used to determine a student's readiness for college. Your SAT scores will help you choose the college that is right for you.

The College Board designs the test to assess your literacy, writing and math skills. The questions measure your ability to comprehend language, express yourself through writing, and analyze and solve problems. The test is challenging for all students, but as non-native speakers of English, you could find the vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing portions of the test quite difficult.

High school students typically take the PSAT (a practice SAT) in the fall of the eleventh grade, and take the SAT in the spring of the eleventh grade and possibly again in the fall of the twelfth grade. As a non-native speaker of English your language skills are still developing, so you will want to wait until you have reached the transitional level or tested out of ESL before you take the test. English Language Learners (ELLs) who haven't reached that level by 11th or 12th grade should take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) in addition to the SAT. The TOEFL test is designed specifically for non-native speakers of English and tests your reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. You will find that you probably do better on the math sections of the SAT than the verbal sections, so taking both the SAT and TOEFL gives colleges the best measurement of your math and verbal abilities. You may take the SAT several times to improve your score.

- As an ELL, *what* you read and write, and *how often* you read and write will affect your potential to do well on the Critical Reading and Writing portions of the SAT. Reading and writing will also help you to develop your vocabulary. This curriculum and the referenced SAT prep books will help you prepare and practice for the Critical Reading and Writing sections of the SAT. Your commitment to preparing and practicing for the SAT are the best predictors of your success on the test.

You will:

- Use a variety of techniques to expand your vocabulary and develop your reading comprehension skills.
- Study the rules of grammar and composition to improve your writing skills.
- Learn strategies to answer questions confidently and capably.

Let's get started...

Structure of the SAT

There are three major sections of the SAT:

- Critical Reading
- Writing
- Mathematics

There are ten subsections of reading, writing, and math questions including an experimental section used to “norm” the results. The experimental section is not counted toward your final score. You won’t know which section is experimental, so treat each section equally.

Within the sections there are eight types of questions. The questions range from easy to medium to hard.

The SAT is a timed-test. Each section is allotted a specific amount of time. The total time apportioned to the test is 3 hours and 45 minutes.

Structure of the SAT Critical Reading

<u>Type of Questions</u>	<u>Number of Questions</u>
Sentence completion	19
Passage-based reading	48
<i>Total critical reading questions</i>	<i>67</i>

Time Allotted

The total time allotted for the critical reading questions is 70 minutes: two 25-minute sections and one 20-minute section.

Structure of the SAT Writing Section:

<u>Type of Questions</u>	<u>Number of Questions</u>
Identifying sentence errors	18
Improving sentences	25
Improving paragraphs	6
Essay writing	1 essay
<i>Total writing questions</i>	<i>49 + 1 essay</i>

Time Allotted

The total time allotted for the writing questions is 60 minutes: one 25-minute essay, one 25-minute section and one ten-minute section.

Scoring the SAT

The College Board uses a scoring process called “equating” to adjust for the minor differences between test forms. This process gives a range of scores that makes it possible for you to compare your results with all the other students who took the test. It also assures you and colleges that a score of 500 on a Critical Reading section of one form of the test indicates the same ability level as 500 on a Critical Reading section of another form of the test. In simple terms, it makes the scoring fair!

Scores for each of the three sections: Critical Reading, Mathematics, and Writing range from 200 (lowest) to 800 (highest).

All the Critical Reading and Writing questions are multiple-choice questions, except the essay of course. You receive one point for each correct answer. For each incorrect answer you lose $\frac{1}{4}$ point. No points are added or subtracted for omitted questions.

The essay is scored holistically on a range of 2 to 12. Of course, a blank essay, an off-topic essay, or an illegible essay (after several attempts have been made to read it) receives 0 points.

To really understand the SAT, you need to see an SAT practice test prepared by the College Board.



Let's Look It Up...

Go to the **College Board** web site: <http://sat.collegeboard.com>

- Set up an account. Find practice tests on the menu to see what a real SAT test looks like.
- Explore all the features of the web site. Visit the site often.
- Be sure to sign up for the *SAT Question of the Day*. You can have it emailed to you every day.
- The site offers a lot of opportunities for practice and preparation.



Your Assignment :

- Do a free practice test at sat.collegeboard.com
- Use the practice test to diagnose your strengths and weaknesses.
- Check your email daily and do the College Board's *SAT Question of the Day*.

II. The 25-Minute Essay



Section 1 of the SAT is the essay portion of the test.

“The SAT essay measures your ability to write effectively under timed conditions.” from The College Board’s *Official SAT Study Guide*

What will I write about?

The SAT will give you a topic, also called a prompt. The topic will be general so that you don’t have to have advanced knowledge about a specific subject. The topic suggests that you establish a point of view, or opinion, relative to the prompt. You may have the same point of view or a different point of view than the one provided in the prompt. There is no “correct” point of view, but you must be sure that you write on the topic that is given. You must be able to support the viewpoint you choose through an interesting, thoughtful, well developed, organized, and clearly written response.

To develop your essay and support your point of view, you can use any part of your knowledge that supports your ideas in a logical way. For example:

- your own personal experiences
- observations of other people’s experiences
- current events
- what you have learned in school
- books you have read
- subjects you have studied in school - history, science, literature

Be sure to read the prompt carefully so that you *understand* and write about the topic given. It is important that you stay on topic, are not repetitive, and that you write legibly.

How can I do all this in 25 minutes?

Don’t panic! Practice! Through practice and preparation, you will feel confident and capable on the day of the test. Most of the SAT essay questions require you to write a persuasive essay. Practice by reading and responding to editorials and debate articles in newspapers and magazines. Listen to editorial comments on news programs. Sources listed at the end of this section will help you learn to think critically, form a point of view, and support your opinion.

The key to every effective essay is taking some time to plan before you write. On the day of the SAT, you should take about 5 minutes to plan your essay.

- Write a thesis statement that clearly states *your point of view* on the topic/prompt.
- Think of *two examples or reasons* that support your point of view. Write two topic sentences - one for each of your examples or reasons.
- Write a conclusion sentence that reinforces and summarizes your points at the end of the essay.

Stay focused and keep writing for about 15 minutes.

Allow yourself 5 minutes to go back and proofread what you wrote; make corrections, and additions if necessary. Even native speakers make some errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar so don't expect perfection! As ELLs, you should use simple sentences that you can write correctly. The most important thing is that you have made strong points in a logical, organized and comprehensible way. Content matters much more than mechanics.

What's my grade?

This section counts 30% of the SAT Critical Writing score. The essay is scored holistically. This means that the essay is considered as a whole instead of in parts. The SAT scoring guide on the *College Board* web site will make this clearer. Using the scoring guide, two readers will read the essay independently and score it according to their overall impressions of the entire essay. Since the possible scores range from 1 to 6, an essay score from the two readers can be any combination of those numbers. The highest possible score from each reader is a 6, so the highest possible score for an essay is a 12. Experienced high school teachers and college professors who have had a lot of training and practice score the SAT essays. They are trained to score fairly and look for the positive elements of your essay. Their goal is to reward you for what you've done well rather than penalize you for what you did poorly. The two readers must not have more than a one-point difference in their scores. If there is a larger difference, a third reader will read the essay. This happens in very few of the essays because the readers are well trained.



Let's Look It Up... See the SAT Scoring Guide, an SAT Essay Prompt, and a Sample Essay on pp. 105, 196, 200-201 in *The College Board's Official SAT Study Guide*, listed in the suggested SAT Prep textbooks at the end of this curriculum.



Skills Practice: Writing *Paragraphs and Essays*

Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is like a topic sentence for a whole essay; it presents the main idea of the essay. A thesis statement has one topic, but two or more controlling ideas that will be developed in each of the body paragraphs. The topic and controlling idea for each body paragraph are derived from the thesis statement. The body paragraphs develop the thesis through definition, description, explanation, example, anecdotes, statistics, or quotations.

Topic Sentences

An effective topic sentence introduces the topic and tells what the paragraph will be about. The sentence also contains an idea or opinion about the topic called a controlling idea. The topic sentence introduces the general topic and the controlling idea makes a specific point about the topic.

the topic (what) + the controlling idea (so what? what about it?)

The controlling idea determines the focus of the paragraph. A paragraph can have only one controlling idea.

The topic sentence also suggests the purpose of the paragraph: to explain, to narrate, to compare, to describe, tell cause of effect, demonstrate, persuade, or tell the steps in a process.

Supporting Sentences

An effective paragraph has unity. To maintain unity, all sentences must support the controlling idea. Supporting sentences must support, demonstrate, prove or develop the main idea in the topic sentence. Sentences that do not, will be off-topic, irrelevant, and will disrupt paragraph unity.

Supporting sentences must be coherent - organized in a logical way to maintain focus and achieve the purpose of the paragraph. The supporting sentences in a paragraph may be organized according to: time, space, importance, or relationship.

Concluding Sentences

An effective paragraph usually ends with a conclusion. A concluding sentence should restate the topic and reinforce the controlling idea of the paragraph.

Examining sentences in an essay

Let's take another look at the sample essay from The College Board's *Official SAT Study Guide*. Can you identify the thesis sentence, the topic sentence in each of the three body paragraphs, and the concluding sentence?

The assignment asked, "Is deception ever justified?" The student used personal experience, the experience of others, and a hypothetical situation to support the thesis statement about deception.

- Thesis Statement: *"In most situations, one will find that deception does not offer the same long-term benefits that honesty does."*
- Topic Sentence: *"Sometimes deception occurs in the form of white lies."*
- Topic Sentence: *"With regards to more serious matters, however, deception can lead to more dire consequences."*
- Topic Sentence: *"Despite the advantages to telling the truth, deception can still be rather tempting."*
- Concluding Sentence: *"Similarly, deception appears to be justifiable and sometimes even compassionate, but it only holds future problems."*

Does the thesis statement tell the writer's position on the topic?

Do the topic sentences introduce examples that support the thesis?

Does the conclusion restate and reinforce the writer's position?



Your Assignment:

Read the debate article, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" from *The New York Times Upfront* magazine:

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront/debate/index.asp?article=pastdebates>

Think about the arguments made on each side of the issue. What is your position on this topic? Write a thesis statement in which you clearly state your position and defend it. Write two or three topic sentences to introduce the body paragraphs that will support your position through explanation/example. Write a strong concluding sentence. How much time did it take to write your sentences? With practice, you will be able to plan and write your sentences in about 5 minutes. Use other debate articles at the following suggested websites for more practice. Practice writing a complete essay in 25 minutes.

Sources for ELLs to develop critical thinking and practice persuasive writing skills:

Advanced Composition for Non-Native Speakers of English - online at

<http://www.eslbee.com>

Debate articles in *New York Times Upfront* Magazine - online at

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront/debate/index.asp?article=pastdebates>

News broadcasts, opinions, and the youth radio series on NPR radio - online at

<http://www.npr.org>

III. Vocabulary for the SAT



Critical Reading

1. Sentence Completion Questions

The first part of the SAT Critical Reading section tests your reading comprehension and vocabulary through sentence completion questions.

The sentence completion questions are multiple choice questions. Each question has five possible choices.

Sentence completion questions contain one or two blanks. Each blank indicates a missing word in the sentence. Below the sentence are five words (for single blank questions) or five pairs of words (for double blank questions).

It is very important that you understand the question before you look at the answer choices. If you don't understand the question, you will waste time looking back and forth between the sentence and the vocabulary words. Students who read the vocabulary words before they really understand the sentence risk making the wrong answer choice.

Strategies for Answering Sentence Completion Questions

- Cover up the answers so that you are not tempted to look at the vocabulary before you read and understand the question.
- Read the sentence carefully, saying “blank” for the missing word.
- If you encounter complicated names or words that you can't pronounce, move on and stay focused on the rest of the sentence.
- Read for the overall meaning of the sentence.
- Look for clue words and punctuation marks(; - ,) in the sentence.
- Use the clue words to help you predict the missing word.
- Clue words may be synonyms, defining phrases, descriptions, or transition words: *but, yet, although, despite, furthermore, because, rather, instead of.*

- Punctuation marks may signal a definition, an example, or a phrase that explains the meaning of the missing word.
- Look at the answer choices to see if there is a word that matches or is a synonym for your “prediction word.”
- Check your choice by reading the sentence with your answer choice in the blank.
- If you cannot decide on the correct answer, use process of elimination. Cross out words that you know are not correct. Choose from the remaining words.

For double-blank questions:

- Use all the same strategies as above, but work on one side of the sentence at a time.
- After you know the overall meaning of the sentence and have made a prediction, look at the answer choices.
- Look at the words on the left side of the pairs, and then on the right side of the pairs.
- Work on the side - left or right - that has the most words you understand.
- Does the word match your “prediction word?” If the answer is *yes*, keep that answer choice. If the answer is *no*, cross out the word and its pair.
- Look over the remaining answers and choose the best pair of words.

What if I cannot predict an answer choice?

Once you are sure you understand the sentence, look at the answer choices. Look at the relationship between the pairs of words and try to determine their relationship. Are they similar in meaning, opposite in meaning, a cause and effect? Make sure that the relationship between the words, matches the relationship in the sentence.

CONFUSED???



Let's Look It Up... Use *Sample Sentence Completion Practice Set* Explained in your workbook McGraw-Hill's *Conquering SAT Critical Reading* pp. 44-48 and p. 49 for some real practice. Practice makes perfect!

Part II - *The Essay* Lessons 3 - Lesson 8 in McGraw-Hill's *Conquering SAT Writing*

How did you do? If you're thinking...YIKES!!! I didn't know a lot - a *plethora* - of those words...

GOOD NEWS! For the SAT sentence completions, you need to recognize and comprehend a word, but you don't have to be able to define it or use it.

CAUTION! You cannot commit new words to your *long-term memory* if you just memorize definitions.

ADVICE: Put new vocabulary words *in a context*. Here's how to do it.

Strategies for Learning New Vocabulary Words

Making Index Cards is a great way to learn vocabulary, BUT ...

A vocabulary card is most useful if it contains the following:

1. the vocabulary word written clearly and spelled correctly
2. contains a clue, not only a definition
3. uses the vocabulary word in a meaningful context
4. relates the word to a person, picture or a mental image
5. uses rhyme or alliteration
6. includes synonyms (similar words) antonyms (opposite words)

Examples:

copious: (syn.) plentiful, ample, abundant, generous, a whole lot of
(ant.) scarcity, lack, deficiency, shortage, just not enough



a copious cup of latte

deleterious: (syn.) damaging, injurious, detrimental, harmful, really bad
(ant.) beneficial, benign, innocuous, non-toxic, healthy



Smoking is deleterious to your health.

philanthropist: (syn.) humanitarian, altruist, generous, *Bill Gates*

(ant.) miser, spendthrift, tightwad, selfish, *Scrooge*

Look at Prefixes and Suffixes – clues to the meaning of words

A *prefix* is a letter or group of letters added to the beginning of a word.

mal- bad *bi-* two *sub-* under *multi-* many

Can you think of any words that begin with these prefixes?

A *suffix* is a letter or group of letters added to the end of a word.

phone- sound or audio *scope-* see or range

Source for ELLs:

- to learn more about prefixes and suffixes - online at <http://www.esl-galaxy.com/prefixsuffix.html>
- to have fun developing vocabulary *Synonym Toast* - online at http://www.scholastic.com/wordgirl/synonym_toast.htm

Play Vocabulary Games

Boggle *Crossword Puzzles* *Scattergories*

Make Friends with the Dictionary!

Use a bilingual dictionary to understand the word in your native language. Look up new words in an English dictionary, too. Use a thesaurus - a dictionary of synonyms - to increase your vocabulary. Don't just say "good" - say "superb" or "marvelous" or "felicitous" or "expedient." Don't just say "bad" - say "malevolent" or "pathetic" or "grievous" or "nefarious."

Read Read Read!

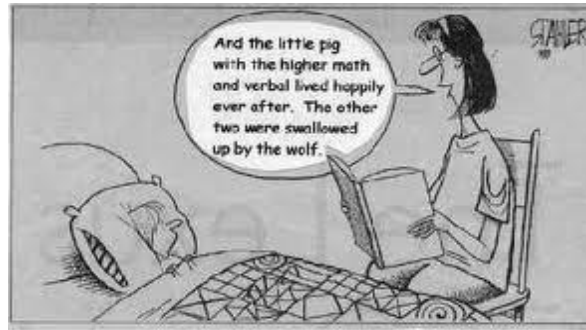
Read textbooks. Read newspapers & magazines. Read novels & biographies.

 **Your Assignment:**

Get Excited About WORDS!

Begin studying the words in your vocabulary book: McGraw-Hill's *400 Essential SAT Words*, and use some of the strategies we learned to study the words: make index cards; look for prefixes and suffixes in the words; make a game out of the words.

IV. Passage-Based Reading



Critical Reading

2. Passage-Based Reading

The Reading Passages

Critical reading skills are essential for college success. The SAT uses passage-based reading selections to evaluate your readiness for college reading. Passages are both fiction and non-fiction, and cover a wide range of topics in history, sociology, science and literature. There are long reading passages and short reading passages. Some selections may be paired passages related to a single theme or issue. Other passages are individual, unrelated selections. Both long and short passages include paired selections. The readings may be narrative, expository, persuasive or literary in style. The passages vary in length from about 100 to 850 words.

The Questions

All the passage-based reading questions are multiple-choice with 5 answer choices. There are a total of 48 passage-based reading questions: 4 questions follow each of the short reading passages and 12-15 questions follow the long passages. These passages and questions are spread out over three critical reading sections. Remember that all the critical reading sections will start with 5 to 8 vocabulary sentence completion questions, followed by passage-based reading, so the number of questions in each sections is a combination of sentence completion and passage-based reading questions.

Timing

Two of the reading sections allow 25 minutes and the third reading section allows 20 minutes to do the sentence completion questions, read the passages and answer the reading comprehension questions.

You might be thinking **THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE!** But it's not. By improving your reading speed and comprehension, you can improve your chances of a good score.



Skills Practice: Improving reading comprehension and speed

SAT Passage-based Reading Question Types

First prepare by becoming familiar with the types of questions asked on the SAT. Questions may require you to do any of the following:

- Identify the main idea.
- Determine the author's purpose and style.
- Interpret the author's tone or attitude.
- Define vocabulary in context.
- Understand use of examples.
- Compare or contrast relationship between ideas.
- Recognize figurative language in the text.
- Draw an inference or conclusion.
- Summarize details.

When you answer practice SAT questions, pay attention to which types of questions are most difficult for you. Many SAT questions are similar to Regents exam questions. When you take tests at school, think about the similarities in these questions. Complete all your assigned readings in your classes. Read both fiction and non-fiction to develop your reading, writing and vocabulary.

For most students, and especially non-native speakers, questions that require *extended reasoning* are the most challenging. Questions of this type ask about overall theme or meaning in a passage, or ask you to make an inference. The answers to these types of questions are not clearly stated and simple to find in the text. You must be very attentive and think deeply as you read to answer an *extended reasoning* question. Look for the following words in the questions: *probably, apparently, seems, suggests, it can be inferred, the author implies, according to, chiefly, mainly, primarily, best, most, only, least*

Strategies for Improving Reading Skills for the SAT

- **Understanding main ideas in a reading passage**
How to improve: Read the whole passage carefully and try to determine the author's overall message. Try to write the main idea in your own words. Notice the difference between the main ideas and supporting details.
- **Understanding tone**
How to improve: When reading, observe how an author's choice of words helps define his or her attitudes. Pay attention to the way in which tone conveys

meaning in conversation and in the media. ELLs have difficulty recognizing satire or sarcasm in reading. Listening to how certain words and phrases are used in movies and TV will help you recognize tone and mood.

- **Recognizing the purpose of various writing strategies**
How to improve: Writers use a variety of tools to achieve their effects. While you read, look for such things as specific examples, quotations, striking images, and emotionally loaded words. Think about the connotations (implied, non-literal meaning) of specific words and why the author might have decided to use them. These words also affect the tone of a passage.
- **Understanding the use of examples**
How to improve: Authors often include examples in their writing to communicate and support their ideas. Read different kinds of persuasive writing (editorials, criticism, personal essays) and pay attention to the way examples are used. State the point of the examples in your own words.
- **Applying ideas presented in a reading passage**
How to improve: When you read, try to determine the author's ideas and assumptions and then think about how they might apply to new situations.
- **Determining an author's purpose or perspective**
How to improve: Authors write for a variety of purposes, such as to inform, to explain, or to convince. When you read, ask yourself *why* the author wrote what he or she wrote.
- **Making connections between information in different parts of a passage**
How to improve: Work on figuring out the relationship between the material presented in one part of a reading passage and material presented in another part. Ask yourself, for example, how facts presented in the beginning of a magazine article relate to the conclusion.
- **Comparing and contrasting ideas presented in two passages**
How to improve: Read editorials that take opposing views on an issue. Look for differences and similarities in tone, point of view, and main idea.
- **Distinguishing conflicting viewpoints**
How to improve: When reading, practice summarizing main ideas and noting sentences. You can improve your reading comprehension skills by using these strategies consistently and methodically with *everything* you read - school textbooks, newspaper and magazine articles, short stories and novels.

When you begin practicing for the SAT, don't worry about time. Read slowly and carefully. Keep the list of the strategies next to you and read them before every passage until you know and use them naturally. After you've improved your

reading comprehension skills, you'll be ready for the next step - picking up the pace and reading more quickly.

Source for ELLs:

- to practice reading comprehension skills - leveled reading online at <http://www.englishforeveryone.org>
- to improve reading skills for SAT question types - online at http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/counselors/psat/Maine.pdf

Strategies for Passage-based Reading: Skim & Scan

Skimming and Scanning are two important skills that will help ELLs save time on SAT Critical Reading. The skills are similar, but not exactly the same. When you read a newspaper or magazine you skim the headlines to find an article you are interested in. If you are looking for specific information, like a word in the dictionary, you scan the page to find the word.

Skimming - *passing your eyes quickly over the text to identify main ideas without focusing on details*

- Skim to answer questions about main ideas.
- Skim to see how the passage is organized.
- Skim to find the thesis statement and topic sentences.
- Skim to recognize repeated key words and phrases.

Scanning - *passing your eyes quickly over the text to locate key language*

- Scan the prompt that introduces long reading passages.
- Scan the questions before short reading passages.
- Scan to answer detail questions.
- Scan the passage for key language and information that specifically relates to a question you are answering.

Strategies for Answering Passage Reading Questions

- Read the italics that introduce the text to get background information.
- Skim the passage to get the “gist” - general meaning of the text. Keep reading, even if there are phrases you don't understand. Don't go back.
- Pay close attention to the first and last sentences of a paragraph.
- Read actively: ask yourself questions about what the author is saying and feeling; connect with the passage - be interested and engaged in the reading; visualize - create a picture in your mind.
- After the first quick reading, begin to answer the questions in order. Eliminate answers that do not relate to the passage; refer back to the text to answer questions that have specific line references.

- If you cannot eliminate at least two answers quickly, or if a question requires too much rereading, skip the question. Put a circle around the whole question so that you can find it quickly if you have time to go back.
- Time is the biggest obstacle for ELLs. You will need to omit some questions in order to read all the passages and attempt to answer all the questions before running out of time. Those last questions may be easier than some of the earlier questions in a section.
- If you will tend to lose focus when you read, underline main ideas and make short notes in the margins of tone etc. Don't let too much writing slow you down.

Your Assignment:

Do the sample reading questions on pp. 56-65 in your workbook: McGraw Hill's *Conquering SAT Critical Reading*

V. Writing: Multiple-Choice Questions



The SAT multiple-choice Writing section is an area of the test that is challenging, but manageable, for non-native speakers of English. After you've taken several practice tests, you'll begin to recognize a pattern to the type of grammar and usage questions that are repeated in the writing multiple-choice questions. The more you read and study the grammar and usage rules of English, the better chance you have of improving your score on these sections of the test.

The 49 multiple-choice writing questions determine about 70% of your total writing score - the essay is the other 30%.

There are three types of questions:

- improving sentence
- identifying sentence error
- improving paragraph

The multiple-choice questions will be presented in two sections:

25 minute section includes:

- 11 improving sentence questions
- 18 identifying sentence error questions
- 6 improving paragraph questions

10 minute section includes:

- 14 improving sentence questions

Improving Sentence Questions

These questions begin with a sentence in which part of the sentence, or sometimes the whole sentence, is underlined. This is followed by five different ways of phrasing the underlined part of the sentence. You must decide if the sentence is correct as written or if it should be changed. The first choice, choice A, is *always* the same as the original sentence, so if you choose A you believe the original sentence is correct and should not be changed. If you think the sentence is incorrect, you move quickly to choices B through E to determine the best version that improves the original sentence by making it clearer, more concise, and free of errors in grammar or usage.

Identifying Sentence Errors

For this type of question, you read a sentence with four words or phrases underlined and labeled A through D. You must identify which underlined portion of the sentence is incorrect, but you don't have to correct it. Some of the sentences have no error, choice E.

Improving Paragraphs

This type of question tests your ability to proofread and revise a draft of a short essay. Questions may ask you about changing the order or location of a sentence, omitting a sentence, combining sentences, or revising a sentence to make the essay clearer, more developed, more coherent or unified.

Top 10 Most Common Errors

1. Subject-Verb Agreement
2. Pronouns
3. Adjectives/Adverbs/Quantifiers
4. Active Voice vs. Passive Voice
5. Verb Tense or Verb Form
6. Misplaced Modifiers
7. Parallel Structures
8. Wordiness or Redundancy
9. Idiom and Diction (*especially difficult for ELLs*)
10. Sentence Fragments and Run-on Sentences

Before you begin to practice answering the multiple choice writing questions, you should review some of the grammar topics that relate to the most common errors listed above. The sources below offer a complete review.

Source for ELLs to improve grammar and editing skills:

- Part IV “The Fundamental Rules of Grammar for Writing and Editing” McGraw Hill’s *Conquering the SAT Critical Writing*
- Exercises at Grammar Bytes online at <http://chompchomp.com/exercises.htm>
- Exercises to practice idioms, diction, phrasal verbs and collocations online at <http://www.eslflow.com/collocationsandphrasalverbs.html>

Strategies for Answering Improving Sentence Questions

- Although native speakers can usually “hear” a mistake in a sentence when they read it, this is not always the case for ELLs. If something “sounds” wrong in the underlined portion of the sentence you should try to identify the error. If you can find the error, cross out choice A since it’s always the same as the original sentence.
- If you think you know what kind of error is underlined, then quickly skim through the answers and cross out any answers that have not corrected the error.
- If you are not sure what the error is, then you will need to go through each choice and check it for errors. As you are checking answer choices, you may find that some errors are repeated in other choices. Recognizing those patterns will help you eliminate wrong choices quickly.
- Be careful not to read the choices too quickly. When you read too fast you might “self-correct” the sentence by reading it the way it should be written or missing a word.
- If the sentence seems awkward or wordy, cross it out. The correct answer on this type of question is usually the shortest, most concise answer.
- Passive voice vs. active voice is a common error in these questions. Remember that using passive voice often causes awkwardness and wordiness in sentences.
- If you don’t find the error quickly, read your choices one more time carefully. Think about the most common errors and take a guess. Try not to omit questions of this type. If you have studied your grammar and practiced, you can probably make a good guess between two answer choices.
- Remember that there will probably be two or three questions that have no error. So don’t be afraid to choose answer A.

Strategies for Identifying Sentence Error Questions

- These questions can be a little easier for ELLs because you don’t have to correct the error; you just have to find it. Read the whole sentence slowly and carefully and if you don’t “hear” a mistake, begin checking each underlined word or phrase.
- The most common errors in these questions are (in order) subject-verb agreement; pronouns; verb tense; adjective/adverb; collocations/idiom. Check the underlined words or phrases in that specific order.

- When checking subject-verb agreement, be sure to isolate prepositional phrases as you learned to do in the McGraw Hill workbook exercises. Remember that the subject of a sentence can never be in a prepositional phrase!
- Check that pronouns agree in number (singular/plural) with their antecedent (the noun the pronoun replaces). Also check that pronouns are the correct case (subject or object). Remember that a pronoun that follows a preposition is the object of a preposition. Review pronouns in your McGraw Hill workbook.
- Be sure to study the irregular verbs, especially the past participle form. Incorrect use of the past participle is becoming a common mistake, even among native speakers of English. This error is likely to come up at least once on the test.
- Another common error is in the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. Know the rules for these forms. Remember the irregular adjective forms of *good* and *bad*; know when to use *much* or *many*, *fewer* and *less*. Know that we compare *between* two people or things, but *among* three or more people or things.
- Know when to use an adjective and when to use an adverb. He is a *careful* driver. He drives *carefully*.
- The errors in these sentences will be mistakes in “mechanics,” and “usage.” There may be an error in redundancy (repetition), but you don’t have to worry about wordiness, awkward sentence structures or run-on sentences and fragments. Every sentence will be a complete sentence with just one error.
- If you have tried all the possibilities, and still cannot find an error. Choose “No Error.” There will be two or three sentences without errors in a section of Identifying Sentence Errors.

Strategies for Improving Paragraphs Questions

- There is only one section of this type on the test. It consists of an essay followed by six questions.
- You should quickly read over the essay to understand its purpose and meaning. It’s important for you to understand the paragraphs and their relationships to each other before you answer the questions.
- After a quick reading, go directly to the questions. Some questions ask you to add, insert or remove a sentence, and require you to look back and read a few sentences again. Questions about isolated sentences or sentences in context can be answered without looking back.
- The questions deal with composition and grammar topics including subordination and coordination of ideas; correct use of transitions; unity and coherence. These are topics you practice in your ESL and mainstream English classes. Editing your own paragraphs and peer editing with classmates are the best ways to improve your editing skills.
- Be sure to practice with a timer when you do the Improving Paragraph sections of the test. They usually come at the end of the test when you are the most tired and can easily run out of time and energy. Knowing how much time you need will help you feel confident and capable.

Source for ELLs to succeed on the SAT: *Your own good study habits!*

As English Language Learners, you have had to work hard to succeed in school in a second language. You have developed good study skills, a strong work ethic, and are determined to succeed and go to college. These are the qualities that will serve you well when you begin preparing for the SAT. Start early in your high school career to begin preparing for the test. Practice on weekends and during vacations.

Suggested Texts

- McGraw-Hill’s *Conquering the New SAT Critical Reading* by Nicholas Falletta
- McGraw-Hill’s *Conquering the New SAT Writing* by Christopher Black
- McGraw-Hill’s *400 Essential SAT Words* by Denise Pivamik-Nova

References

- The College Board. The Official SAT Study Guide, 2nd edition. Plano: College Board Publications, 2009.
- Critical Reading on the SAT/PSAT skills and suggestions for improvement.
<http://www.maine.gov/education/mhsa/criticalreadingonsat.pdf>
http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/counselors/psat/Maine.pdf
- “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” *The New York Times Upfront*, Vol. 143, October 4, 2010.