

Official SAT Practice

Lesson Plans

for Teachers by Teachers

LESSON 7

Writing and Language— Conventions/Sentence Formation

Subscore: Standard English Conventions

Focus: Revising a text for Standard English conventions and sentence formation

Objectives:

Students will

- understand the types of convention errors regularly addressed on the SAT®.
- identify the ways in which coordination and subordination in a sentence, as well as parallel structure, can cause errors of convention.
- recognize how end-of-sentence and internal punctuation works.

Before the Lesson:

- Review Chapter 12 of the *SAT Study Guide for Students*.
- Review the article on Writing and Language Test: Standard English Conventions at <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat/new-sat-tips-planning/about-the-sat-writing-language-test/a/writing-and-language-test-standard-english-conventions>.
- Preview the 3-minute introduction to grammar video.
- Preview and print (if necessary) the student materials.

Introductory Activity | 25 minutes

1. Start by asking students to discuss the following:
 - a. What are the expectations for grammar and spelling in typical academic writing?
 - b. How are the expectations different from when they text or post on social media?
 - c. What are the kinds of errors they need to avoid in academic writing?
 - d. What are their strengths and weaknesses in this area?
2. Consider showing the following 3-minute introduction to grammar from Khan Academy®: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/introduction-to-grammar/welcome-to-grammar-subject/v/introduction-to-grammar>. Ask students what they agree with or disagree with about the information presented in the clip and in the passage below, which is reprinted in the student materials for this lesson.

Language conventions are much like conventions in other parts of our lives. Language conventions offer a standard (typical, broadly agreed-upon) way to construct written expression in a manner that meets people's expectations and thereby helps ensure that our spoken and, especially, our written utterances are received and understood. To take a simple but important example, we commonly agree that in most cases a "sentence" in writing consists of a more or less complete thought, that a sentence will have certain parts (at least a subject and a verb), that the start of a new sentence should be signaled by a capital letter, and that the end of a sentence should be indicated with punctuation (a period, question mark, or exclamation point).

Of course, people violate conventions all the time. When the violation is against the law, there are generally clear and obvious penalties. But what's the "penalty" if you break a language convention?

Sometimes there's none at all. It could be that your reader or listener fully understands what you mean and can essentially skip over the irregularity. Sometimes you may even intentionally deviate from a convention to achieve a particular purpose.... In most cases, though, following language conventions proves highly useful. When a writer observes them, the reader's attention can be focused on the message being sent. When a writer fails to observe them, the reader is likely to be distracted, annoyed, or confused.

3. Share with students that while there are any number of aspects that relate to "conventions," the SAT will focus on the following three aspects:
 - a. Sentence structure
 - b. Conventions of usage
 - c. Conventions of punctuation
4. This lesson will focus on **sentence structure**. Two key terms you will probably want to familiarize or re-familiarize your students with are the following, which appear in their student materials for this lesson:
 1. **subordination**, which is when one clause is dependent on another and uses conjunctions such as "because," "although," "since," and others.
 2. **coordination**, which is when two independent clauses are joined by conjunctions, such as "and," "but," and "or."

5. Ask students to write sentences of their own that utilize subordination and coordination. For example:
- ◆ Subordination: *Even though she loved broccoli, Sarah chose the steak instead.* (The first clause is dependent on the main clause that follows.)
 - ◆ Coordination: *Sarah ate the broccoli, and she ate the steak.* (Both clauses are independent and can stand on their own.)

Be sure that you explain to students that if two independent clauses appear in the same sentence, they **MUST** have a conjunction that connects them or they will have created what is called a **comma splice** or run-on sentence. For example: *Tom lied to his teacher, he did not do his homework.* This can be corrected if you were make two sentences or add a subordinating conjunction like "because."

6. Additional concerns that are addressed on the SAT for sentence formation are the following, which also appear in the student materials:
3. **parallel structure**, which is when similar structures in a series are constructed the same way. Show students this sentence and explain why it is an error in conventions: *She likes running, swimming, and to go on hikes.* The pattern of gerunds ("running," "swimming") is broken by an infinitive phrase ("to go on hikes").
 4. **inappropriate shifts**, which occur when the writer is not consistent either within or between sentences. For instance, if the writer switches the tense from past to present, or if the writer changes pronouns, causing confusion or unclear references.
7. Ask students to write a sentence that correctly uses parallel structure and to check that they have not inadvertently shifted tense or created any unclear references.
8. Ask students to evaluate their own knowledge of and skill with these kinds of conventions.

Group/Pair Discussion/Activity | 15 minutes

1. Ask students to look over sections of texts they may have read for previous activities. As they read, ask them to pay close attention to parallel structure and any unclear shifts or references. They should also focus on ensuring that the sentences are properly punctuated for coordination and subordination. Working with a partner, they should try to answer Questions 3, 10, 12, and 13. Most important is that they try to identify what kind of sentence formation error is being addressed in the question.

Rationale #3: PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Explanation: Choice C is the best answer because “designing” maintains parallelism with “evaluating,” “assessing,” and “improving.”

Choice A is not the best answer because “they design” does not maintain parallelism with “evaluating,” “assessing,” and “improving.”

Choice B is not the best answer because “to design” does not maintain parallelism with “evaluating,” “assessing,” and “improving.”

Choice D is not the best answer because “design” does not maintain parallelism with “evaluating,” “assessing,” and “improving.”

Rationale #10: COORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION

Explanation: Choice A is the best answer because it uses a comma to effectively subordinate the list of varied fields in which transportation planners major.

Choice B is not the best answer because the comma and coordinating conjunction “and” results in an ungrammatical sentence.

Choice C is not the best answer because the coordinating conjunction “and” along with the subordinating conjunction “which” result in an ungrammatical sentence.

Choice D is not the best answer because it is unclear from this construction to what exactly the subordinating conjunction “which” refers.

Rationale #12: INAPPROPRIATE SHIFTS

Explanation: Choice D is the best answer because the simple present tense verb “watches” is consistent with the tense of the verbs in the rest of the sentence and paragraph.

Choice A is not the best answer because “watched” creates an inappropriate shift to the past tense.

Choice B is not the best answer because “had watched” creates an inappropriate shift to the past perfect tense.

Choice C is not the best answer because “would watch” creates an inappropriate shift that suggests a habitual aspect (other verbs in the sentence and paragraph, indicate that a specific instance is being narrated).

Rationale #13: COORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION

Explanation: Choice B is the best answer because it provides punctuation that creates two grammatically complete and standard sentences.

Choice A is not the best answer because it results in a comma splice as well as some confusion about what the prepositional phrase “from just a few primary colors” modify.

Choice C is not the best answer because it results in a run-on sentence as well as some confusion about what the prepositional phrase “from just a few primary colors” modify.

Choice D is not the best answer because it results in a comma splice.

Independent Practice | 10 minutes

1. Ask students to correct the sentences on their student materials page for the kinds of errors they have been examining in this lesson.
2. Review possible corrections to their independent practice here:
<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat/new-sat-tips-planning/sat-writing-and-language-test-strategies/a/solving-standard-english-conventions-questions-on-the-sat-writing-and-language-test>.
3. Ask students to reflect on their current abilities with conventions around sentence formation.

Homework | 20 minutes

- As students continue to practice on Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy, they should make note of questions that ask about sentence formation and punctuation.
- Ask students to make a note of their skill level in each of the three Writing areas. The skill levels correspond with the complexity of the passages. As students successfully answer questions, they will be able to “level up” and practice with more complex passages.
- Students may also want to read the Writing and Language: Standard English Conventions article in the Tips and Strategies tab.
<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat/new-sat-tips-planning/about-the-sat-writing-language-test/a/writing-and-language-test-standard-english-conventions>

Student Materials—Lesson 7

Introductory Activity

Language conventions are much like conventions in other parts of our lives. Language conventions offer a standard (typical, broadly agreed-upon) way to construct written expression in a manner that meets people’s expectations and thereby helps ensure that our spoken and, especially, our written utterances are received and understood. To take a simple but important example, we commonly agree that in most cases a “sentence” in writing consists of a more or less complete thought, that a sentence will have certain parts (at least a subject and a verb), that the start of a new sentence should be signaled by a capital letter, and that the end of a sentence should be indicated with punctuation (a period, question mark, or exclamation point).

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Key Terms for Sentence Structure:

1. **subordination**, which is when one clause is dependent on another and uses conjunctions such as “because,” “although,” “since,” and others.
2. **coordination**, which is when two independent clauses are joined by conjunctions, such as “and,” “but,” and “or.”
3. **parallel structure**, which is when similar structures in a series are constructed the same way. Show students this sentence and explain why it is an error in conventions: *She likes running, swimming, and to go on hikes.* The pattern of gerunds (“running,” “swimming”) is broken by an infinitive phrase (“to go on hikes”).
4. **modifier placement** errors occur when a word, phrase, or clause doesn’t modify what it’s supposed to. For example, the sentence “Even after paying for costly repairs, the car still broke down,” has a dangling modifier because presumably a person, not the car, paid for the repairs.
5. **inappropriate shifts** occur when the writer is not consistent either within or between sentences. For instance, when the writer switches the tense from past to present, or when the writer changes pronouns, causing confusion or unclear references.

Pair/Group Activity

Read the following and look carefully for errors in parallel structure and inappropriate shifts.

The work of transportation planners generally includes evaluating current transportation needs, assessing the effectiveness of existing facilities, and improving those facilities or **3** they design new ones. Most transportation planners work in or near cities, **4** but some are employed in rural areas. Say, for example, a large factory is built on the outskirts of a small town. Traffic to and from that location would

9 People who pursue careers in transportation planning have a wide variety of educational backgrounds. A two-year degree in transportation technology may be sufficient for some entry-level jobs in the field. Most jobs, however, require at least a bachelor's degree; majors of transportation planners are **10** varied, including fields such as urban studies, civil engineering, geography, or transportation and logistics management. For many positions in the field, a master's degree is required.

Dong Kingman: Painter of Cities

A 1954 documentary about renowned watercolor painter Dong Kingman shows the artist sitting on a stool on Mott Street in New York City's Chinatown. A crowd of admiring spectators **12** watched as Kingman squeezes dollops of paint from several tubes into a tin watercolor **13** box, from just a few primary colors, Kingman creates dozens of beautiful hues as he layers the translucent paint onto the paper on his easel. Each stroke of the brush and dab of the sponge transforms

What type of error in sentence formation is each question raising?**3**

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) to design
- C) designing
- D) design

10

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) varied, and including
- C) varied and which include
- D) varied, which include

12

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) had watched
- C) would watch
- D) would watch

13

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) box. From just a few primary colors,
- C) box from just a few primary colors,
- D) box, from just a few primary colors

Independent Practice

Correct the following sentences with the errors you have been examining in this lesson and identify the kind of error each sentence contains.

1. Unable to keep her eyes open, Sarah fell asleep in the passenger seat.
2. Although he loves ice cream, Bert tried every flavor at the new dessert shop downtown.
3. In her spare time, Renata spoke to the iguanas, ran with the wild boars, and was climbing coconut trees.
4. Speechless, it was hard for Margo to believe that her friends had forgotten their beach towels on their beach trip.
5. Until yesterday, Ana has never been to the zoo.
6. I bought a crate of oranges and delivered them to my grandmother's house.