SAT Grammar Rules and Vocabulary Packet

The writing section of the SAT is extremely repetitive. The test makers ask the same grammar mistakes on every test. Master these grammar rules and feel confident on test day.

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Subject-Verb Agreement

The most common grammar mistake that students are tested on is subject-verb agreement. Here is an example:

The committee (A), made up of (B) several women, are (C) deciding on (D) the school budget next week. No error. (E)

The mistake is choice "C".

The subject of this sentence is "committee", which is singular and therefore needs a singular verb. "Is" should replace "are" in this sentence.

This sentence contains a clause. The clause is the fragment of the sentence between the two commas, and it separates the subject from the verb. Therefore, you are tricked to think that the verb ("are") should agree with "women". In this case, read the sentence and eliminate the clause, so that the subject and the verb come directly after each other. By doing this, you will be able to tell if the subject does not agree with the verb.

Here is a second example:

We enjoyed the brilliant (A) sunshine of the beach (B) so much that day that when we left there was (C) only one couple and one lifeguard (D) still there. No error. (E)

The mistake is in choice "C".
"One couple and one lifeguard" is an example of a compound subject. A compound subject is when there is more than one person in the subject. A compound subject must always go with a plural verb. "Was" is a singular verb; "were" is a plural verb and should be used instead.

Subject-Pronoun Agreement

Another grammar mistake they ask about constantly is subject-pronoun agreement. This is a lot easier to understand than it sounds. An example will help you understand exactly what to look out for:

A smart tennis player such as Samantha is (A) someone who knows (B) how to
move around the court (C), can hit winners at the net, and controls their (D) emotions. No error (E).

The mistake is in choice D.

"Their" is a plural pronoun. The antecedent, and subject in the sentence, "player", is singular. Instead of using "their", the sentence should have used "her" as the pronoun.

Parallel Sentence Structure

A third grammar concept that is commonly tested on the SAT writing section is called parallel sentence structure. Here is an example of a sentence with a mistake in parallel sentence structure.

In a survey of (A) the school's fifth graders, playing in gym class, painting in art
class, participating in science labs and lunch time (B) were all mentioned repeatedly (C) as
favorite activities in school (D). No error (E).

In this sentence, "lunch time" should be changed to "eating lunch." Each of the items that the fifth graders mentioned start with an "-ing" word. This is called parallel sentence structure. Each item in a series should be written in the same grammatical form.

Subject/Object of Sentence

This is an important grammar rule, because it consistently appears on the SAT.

The teacher asked Harry and I (A) if we could, due to (B) the upcoming
exams, attend her (C) review class after (D) school. No error. (E)

The mistake in this sentence is choice "A". In this sentence, "Harry and I" is the object of the sentence, which means "Harry and I" should be changed to "Harry and me". If this was the subject of the sentence, then "Harry and I" would be correct

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Proper Verb Tense

The SAT also tests students on proper verb tense. Here is a sentence that contains an improper verb tense:

The three coaches decided not (A) to pick the team right after (B) practice
that day, but they do (C) talk on the phone and made the final
decisions that night (D). No error (E).

Choice C contains the mistake because "do" is in the present tense. "Do" should be changed to "did."

This entire sentence is written in the past tense. For example, "decided" is a verb used when something happened in the past.

Incorrect Comparisons

The SAT loves to test students on incorrect comparisons. Here is an example:

Sam felt (A) extremely confident going into (B) the final round of interviews, because his list of credentials
was far more impressive (C) than his competitor (D). No error (E).

The mistake here is in choice D because Sam's list of credentials is being compared to his competitor rather than his competitor's list of credentials. Even though we may understand the sentence, "his competitor's" or "his competitor's list" needs to be used so that there is a proper comparison.

Comparative/Superlative

When comparing **two** things, use what's called the comparative: **more** or a word that **ends in –er**, such as smarter:

Example: Of the two runners, he was the faster.

When comparing **three or more than three** things, use what's called the superlative: **most** or a word that **ends in –est**, such as smartest:

Example: Of the three runners, she was the fastest.

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Diction Error

Another grammar concept that is repeatedly asked on the SAT is called diction. Diction basically means word choice. Here is a sentence that contains a diction error:

When the opera finally came to a conclusion at nine, we still had not eaten dinner
A
and wanted to decide quick what type of food everyone would be happy with. No error.
B C D E

The mistake here is in choice B.

"Quickly" should be used instead of "quick." If a verb, such as decide, is used in a sentence, an adverb is needed to describe how somebody is going to decide. "Quickly" is an adverb. Adverbs very frequently end in "-ly." In this example, an adjective, "quick," was used in a place where an adverb should have been. This is a common mistake used on the SAT that students should really look out for.

A second type of diction error is when a slang type of expression is used instead of a more formal type of expression. Since there is some gray area between what is considered slang and what is considered formal, the SAT tends to stick to fairly cut and dry examples. Here is a sentence with an error of this type:

The reason for the poor attendance at today's annual party is because the weather has been
A B C
highly unpredictable all week. No error.
D E

The mistake here is in choice C.

The phrase "is because" is not grammatically correct in this sentence. The word "because" should not be used after the word "reason." Instead, the phrase "is that" should be used.

Proper Number Agreement

The writing section of the SAT will frequently test students on number agreement. This means that if a sentence has a plural subject then any phrases that describe the subject must be plural as well. Here is an example:

The travel tour through Italy is intended for families
A B C
with a young child. No error.
D E

The mistake here is in choice D because the noun in the second part of the sentence, "families," is plural and the phrase "with a young child" is singular. The phrase "with young children" should be used instead.

Unclear Pronouns

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

Sarah and Karen were (A) enjoying the hike up (B) the mountain until she (C) felt ill and they had (D) to turn back for home. No error (E).

The mistake in this sentence is choice "C" because it is unclear as to whether the pronoun "she" is referring to Sarah or Karen.

Words that go together

Here are some words that always go together:

When you use **preoccupation**, you always use **with**: "He has a **preoccupation with** something."

When you use **inconsistent**, you always use **with**: "His words were **inconsistent with** something."

When you use **regarded**, you always use **as**: "She was **regarded as** the best."

When you use **between**, you always use **and**: "She was making a choice **between** this **and** this."

When you use **either**, you always use **or**.

When you use **neither**, you always use **nor**.

When you use **each**, you always use **its**.

SAT Vocabulary Words

	Word	Type	Definition
1	abhor	v	detest, hate
2	abridge	v	shorten, condense, reduce
3	acclaim	v	approval, praise
4	accoutrements	n	equipment, provisions
5	adept	adj	skilled at
6	adroit	adj	skillful, adept
7	adulation	n	praise, respect, worship
8	adversity	n	misfortune, hardship
9	aesthetic	adj	artistic, beautiful, elegant
10	affable	adj	friendly, kind
11	ambiguous	adj	unclear, confusing
12	ambivalent	adj	undecided
13	ambivalent	adj	undecided, unsure
14	ameliorate	v	improve, make positive strides
15	amiable	adj	friendly, agreeable
16	amicable	adj	friendly
17	anachronistic	adj	misdated, having an error in time
18	antagonistic	adj	hostile, opposed
19	apathy	n	not caring
20	ardor	adj	passion, dedication
21	arrogant	adj	insulting, overconfident
22	articulate	adj	well-spoken, ability to speak well
23	assiduous	adj	hard-working, tireless
24	astute	adj	mentally sharp, skilled
25	audacious	adj	bold, daring, unafraid
26	augment	v	add to, increase
27	aversion	n	hatred, dislike
28	belligerent	adj	hostile, harsh
29	benevolent	adj	generous
30	benevolent	adj	kind , generous
31	benign	adj	harmless, mild
32	berate	v	yell at, scold
33	bereft	adj	without, deprived of
34	candor	n	honesty, truthfulness
35	capricious	adj	indecisive, fickle
36	carping	adj	finding fault in something
37	castigate	v	to punish
38	castigate	v	criticize, chastise, condemn
39	caustic	adj	harsh, bitter, severe
40	censure	v	criticize, reprimand, blame
41	charlatan	n	phony, fraud, imposter
42	circumspect	adj	careful, cautious
43	cogent	adj	logical, rational, convincing
44	coherent	adj	clear, easy to understand
45	compliant	adj	agreeable, yielding, submissive
46	conciliatory	adj	always giving in, making peace
47	concise	adj	brief, to the point
48	confounded	v	confused
49	congenial	adj	pleasant
50	contempt	n	defiance
51	conundrum	n	riddle, problem
52	convoluted	adj	intricate, involved
53	cordial	adj	gracious, kind
54	crass	adj	crude, unrefined, having bad manners
55	curtail	v	shorten, reduce
56	dearth	n	scarcity, shortage
57	decorous	adj	proper, polite, well-mannered
58	decry	v	degrade, humiliate
59	demonstrative	adj	characterized by the open expression of emotion
60	denigrate	v	to put down verbally, criticize
61	destitute	adj	extremely poor
62	devious	adj	sneaky, tricky

SAT Vocabulary Words

63	digress	v	to stray away from a main topic in writing or speaking
64	dilemma	n	difficulty, difficult situation
65	diligent	adj	hard-working
66	disavow	v	to deny knowledge or responsibility of
67	discern	v	be aware, detect, comprehend
68	discerning	adj	observant, having an awareness of
69	discretion	n	cautious, having good judgment
70	disparage	v	belittle, show disrespect for, say unkind things about
71	disreputable	adj	shameful, disgraceful
72	divisive	adj	creating division or separation
73	dogged	adj	stubborn, persistent
74	dogmatic	adj	stubborn, absolutely sure
75	dubious	adj	doubtful, skeptical, questionable
76	dupe	v	to deceive a person
77	eccentric	adj	odd, strange
78	ecstatic	adj	very happy
79	elated	adj	overjoyed, very happy
80	eloquent	adj	well-spoken
81	embellish	v	to make beautiful by decorating; to add fictitious details to a story
82	emulate	v	try to be like, imitate
83	enervated	v	exhausted, weakened
84	enervating	adj	exhausting
85	enhance	v	improve
86	enigma	n	puzzle
87	enigmatic	adj	puzzling, strange
88	enmity	n	hatred, dislike
89	ephemeral	adj	existing for a short time, fleeting
90	eradicate	v	erase, remove
91	erratic	adj	odd, inconsistent
92	erroneous	adj	mistaken, derived from error
93	euphoric	adj	happy, overjoyed
94	evanescent	adj	fleeting, passing, short-lived
95	exacerbate	v	make something worse, anger, incite
96	extol	v	to praise highly
97	extravagant	adj	excessive, extreme
98	extroverted	adj	outgoing, sociable
99	fastidious	adj	meticulous, fussy
100	fervent	adj	passionate, intense
101	fickle	adj	indecisive
102	florid	adj	showy, ornate
103	flourish	v	thrive, bloom grow
104	fortuitous	adj	lucky, happening by chance in a positive way
105	frivolous	adj	unimportant
106	frugal	adj	thrifty, cheap, not spending much
107	galvanize	v	stimulate, energize, stir up
108	genial	adj	kind, pleasant
109	gregarious	adj	outgoing, sociable
110	hackneyed	adj	over familiar due to overuse; trite
111	haughty	adj	arrogant, overbearing
112	hedonist	n	one who is devoted to seeking pleasure
113	heinous	adj	horrible, disgusting
114	humble	adj	simple, modest
115	impetuous	adj	hasty
116	innocuous	adj	harmless, having no adverse effects
117	insipid	adj	dull, uninteresting, boring
118	insolent	adj	rude, disrespectful, snobby
119	interminable	adj	endless
120	intransigent	adj	stubborn
121	intrepid	adj	brave, fearless
122	introverted	v	shy, keeping to yourself
123	invigorated	v	energized

SAT Vocabulary Words

124	irreproachable	adj	unable to blame, innocent
125	irresolute	adj	undecided, uncertain
126	labyrinth	n	maze
127	lavish	adj	extravagant, overly generous
128	loathing	n	hatred, disgust
129	lucid	adj	clear, logical, thought through
130	machinations	n	schemes, plots
131	maxim	n	a general truth or principle; adage or saying
132	meager	adj	poor, insufficient
133	meticulous	adj	very careful, paying attention to details
134	misanthrope	n	anti-social person
135	mitigate	v	ease, soothe, soften
136	morose	adj	gloomy, sad
137	munificent	adj	generous
138	naïve	adj	simple, inexperienced
139	naïve	adj	simple-minded, trusting
140	notorious	adj	well-known, usually for a bad quality or reason
141	obdurate	adj	stubborn
142	obscure	adj	clouded, vague
143	obstinate	adj	stubborn
144	obtuse	adj	simple-minded, stupid
145	ominous	adj	threatening
146	opulent	adj	wealthy, rich, luxurious
147	ornate	adj	very fancy, decorated
148	ostentatious	adj	showy, flaunting
149	pacific	adj	peaceful, calm
150	pallid	adj	lacking color, pale
151	paragon	n	model of excellence, shining example
152	parsimony	n	stingy frugal
153	penitent	adj	being sorry for what you did, contrite
154	penurious	adj	stingy, cheap
155	peripheral	adj	not central, not very important
156	perplexed	v	confused
157	perseverant	adj	determined to finish, not to give up
158	persevered	v	held on, endured, kept at it
159	perspective	adj	aware of
160	perspicacious	adj	mentally insightful, wise, shrewd
161	philanthropist	n	generous person
162	placid	adj	peaceful, calm
163	poignant	adj	profoundly moving or touching
164	pompous	adj	arrogant
165	pretentious	adj	showy, conceited
166	prodigy	n	one with exceptional talents or powers
167	profound	adj	great, intense
168	prudent	adj	careful, wise
169	pugnacious	adj	hostile, harsh, wanting to fight
170	punctilious	adj	exact, strict, formal
171	quandary	n	a state of perplexity or uncertainty; a predicament
172	querulous	adj	inclined to complain
173	raconteur	n	storyteller, narrator
174	radiant	adj	beaming, shining, beautiful
175	ravenous	adj	hungry, starving
176	recluse	n	loner, hermit
177	reclusive	adj	living or being alone
178	refined	adj	polite, well-bred
179	reproach	v	blame, scold
180	reputable	adj	respectable, honorable
181	resolute	adj	determined
182	resolution	n	a course of action decided upon

SAT Vocabulary Words

183	revelry	n	partying, merry-making
184	revere	v	respect a great deal, to honor
185	reverence	n	respect
186	sagacious	adj	wise, shrewd
187	sanguine	adj	optimistic, cheerful
188	scrupulous	adj	conscientious, careful, rigorous
189	serene	adj	peaceful, calm
190	skeptical	adj	doubtful, questionable
191	smug	adj	arrogant, snobby
192	somber	adj	gloomy, sad
193	spurious	adj	false, bogus, fake
194	squelch	v	silence, suppress, quiet
195	steadfast	adj	loyal, faithful
196	stingy	adj	cheap, not generous
197	stoic	adj	unemotional, indifferent
198	succinct	adj	brief, to the point
199	succumb	v	to give in or to give up, yield
200	sullen	adj	gloomy, sad, down in the dumps
201	supplant	v	to substitute for another, displace
202	surfeited	v	excess, extra
203	surplus	n	extra amount, oversupply
204	surreptitious	adj	secret, sneaky
205	tactful	adj	diplomatic, courteous
206	tenacious	adj	stubborn, determined, persistent
207	tenacity	n	determination, drive
208	terse	adj	short, brief
209	theatrical	adj	emotional , dramatic
210	timid	adj	shy, bashful
211	tranquil	adj	peaceful, calm
212	transient	adj	temporary, staying for a short time
213	trivial	adj	unimportant
214	undermine	v	weaken
215	unscrupulous	adj	dishonest
216	untenable	adj	undefendable
217	utopian	adj	ideal, perfect
218	vacillating	adj	showing indecision
219	venerated	v	respected, admired
220	vignette	n	a short writing, usually very descriptive
221	vilify	v	degrade, slander
222	virtuoso	n	an expert
223	virulent	adj	extremely infectious or poisonous
224	vitriolic	adj	overly critical, scathing
225	wane	v	decrease, subside
226	wavered	v	fluctuated, shifted
227	wax	adj	increase, grow
228	zeal	n	passion, enthusiasm
229	zealous	adj	eager, enthusiastic