# Correction Problem, Part 1

Stacey Koprince — September 23, 2013 — Leave a comment

For the past six months, we've been developing a new process for Sentence Correction. Some beta students and classes have seen it, but this is the first time we're debuting it publicly! Read on and let us know what you think. The final details aren't set in stone yet, so your comments could actually affect the outcome!

## The 5 Steps for Sentence Correction

I'll go into more detail on all of these below.

1. Take a *First Glance*

2. *Read* the Sentence

3. Find a *Starting Point*

4. *Eliminate* Answers

5. Repeat steps 3 and 4

As with any process, there are times when you will decide to deviate for some good reason. For most questions, though, you'll follow this same basic process.

## 1. First Glance

When a new problem of any type first pops up on the screen, what do you do? Of course, you need to read the problem—but that's actually your second step, not your first!

First, take a "holistic" glance at the entire screen: let your eyes go slightly out of focus (don't read!), look at about the middle of whatever text is on the screen, and take in 3 things:

- the problem type

Right now, you might be thinking: well of course, the first thing you would notice is the problem type. A colleague of mine recently put this to the test with a series of students. She put a quant problem in front of them and, after a few seconds, she suddenly covered it up. Then she asked "Was that DS or PS?"

Prepare to have your mind blown: most of the time, they didn't know! DS and PS are immediately and obviously different if you're looking for the clues at first glance. People are so stressed about starting to solve, though, that they myopically focus on the first word of the problem and are "blind" to the full picture right in front of them.

- the length of the whole sentence

- the length of the underline (or the length of the answers)

How does this help? If the answer choices are really short (around 5 words or fewer), then you might actually choose to read and compare them before you read the full sentence up above. If the underline / answers are very long, there's a good chance the question will test Structure, Meaning, Modifiers, or Parallelism.

You won't always spot a good clue during your First Glance, but most of the time you will—especially when you practice this skill!

# 2. Read the Sentence

Next, read the sentence as a complete sentence, not just a collection of potential grammar issues. Pay attention to the *overall meaning* that the sentence is trying to convey.

In addition, if your first glance gave you a clue, then think about that issue as you read. If you spot a new issue, but you're not sure what to do with it, keep reading the original sentence.

# 3. Find a Starting Point

# 4. Eliminate Answers

At some point, either you're going to spot something that you know is wrong or you're going to reach the end of the sentence.

If you spot something you know is wrong, then immediately cross off answer (A) on your scrap paper. Check that same issue (and only that issue!) in the remaining answer choices; eliminate any answers that repeat the error.

If you can't find a starting point in the original sentence, then start comparing the answer choices. Compare the first word of each answer choice, as well as the last word: do the differences give you an idea of what topic might be at issue?

If not, then compare answer (A) to answer (B); do the differences give you any clues?

# 5. Repeat steps 3 and 4

SC is a bit annoying in that your first starting point often won't allow you to cross off all four wrong answers. You usually have to find multiple starting points.

Once you've dealt with one issue, return either to the original sentence or to a comparison of the answer choices, wherever you left off.

Whenever you spot a difference that you know how to handle, address it, crossing off any other answers that repeat that error.

If you spot a difference that you don't know how to handle, then ignore it—even if it's the last possible difference there! If you don't know it, you don't know it. Don't waste time staring at it.

At some point, either you will have one answer left or you'll get stuck. Pick

and move on!

# What do you do when you're stuck?

This can happen at any stage of the game, even at the beginning. You might read the original sentence and not be able to understand what the sentence is trying to say in the first place. If this happens, you can try substituting in another answer (try one that's quite different, if possible) to see whether that helps you to understand. If not, you're stuck; guess and move on.

If you get down to 2 answers, do compare them to look for differences, but do this just once. Do *not* go back and forth multiple times. If you don't know it at the first look, the solution won't suddenly hit you on the third or fourth look. Don't waste a second longer; guess and move on.

In general, once you get stuck, give yourself one shot to "unstick" yourself. Try comparing different answers to see whether anything new pops out at you. If not, guess and move on.

Half of the battle on the GMAT is knowing when to *stop* trying. Set explicit "cut-offs" for yourself—rules for when to let go—and stick to them!

# Next Steps

Got all of that? Good!

In the second half of this article, I'll give you some drills that you can use to build the different skills needed to get through a sentence correction problem. Until then, go ahead and practice the overall process until you internalize the different steps. Good luck!

# How To Solve Any Sentence Correction Problem, Part 2

Stacey Koprince — September 30, 2013 — Leave a comment

In the first half of this article, we talked about the 5-step process to answer SC problems:

1. Take a *First Glance*

2. *Read* the Sentence

3. Find a *Starting Point*

4. *Eliminate* Answers

5. Repeat steps 3 and 4

If you haven't already learned that process, read the first half before continuing with this part.

## Drills to Build Skills

How do you learn to do all of this stuff? You're going to build some skills that will help at each stage of the way. You might already feel comfortable with one or multiple of these skills, so feel free to choose the drills that match your specific needs.

## Drill Number 1: First Glance

Open up your Official Guide and find some lower-numbered SC questions that you've already tried in the past. Give yourself a few seconds (no more

than 5!) to glance at a problem, then look away and say out loud what you noticed in those few seconds.

As you develop your First Glance skills, you can start to read a *couple* of words: the one right before the underline and the first word of the underline. Do those give you any clues about what might be tested in the problem? For instance, consider this sentence:

Xxx xxxxxx xxxx xx and <u>she xxx xxxxx xxxx xxxx xxx</u> xxx xxxxx.

I can't know for sure, but I have a strong suspicion that this problem might test parallelism, because the word *and* falls immediately before the underline. When I read the sentence, I'll be looking for an *X and Y* parallelism structure.

At first, you'll often say something like, "I saw that the underline starts with the word *psychologists* but I have no idea what that might mean." (Note: this example is taken from OG13 SC #1!) That's okay; you're about to learn. Go try the problem (practicing the rest of the SC process as described in the first half of this article) and ask yourself again afterwards, "So what might I have picked up from that starting clue?"

The word *psychologists* is followed by a comma… so perhaps something will be going on with modifiers? Or maybe this is a list? The underline is really long as well, which tends to go with modifiers. Now, when you start to read the sentence, you will already be prepared to figure out what's going on with this word. (In this case, it turns out that *psychologists* is followed only by modifiers; the original sentence is missing a verb!)

# Drill Number 2: Read the Sentence

Take a look at some OG problems you've tried before. Read only the original sentence. Then, look away from the book and articulate aloud, in your own words, what you think the sentence is trying to convey. You don't need to limit yourself to one sentence. You can also glance back at the problem to confirm details.

I want to stress the "out loud" part; you will be able to hear whether the explanation is sufficient. If so, try another problem.

If you're struggling or unsure, then one of two things is happening. Either you just don't understand, or the sentence actually doesn't have a clear meaning and that's why it's wrong! Decide which you think it is and then look at the explanation. Does the explanation's description of the sentence match what you thought—the sentence actually does have a meaning problem? If not, then how does the explanation explain the sentence? That will help you learn how to "read it right" the next time. (If you don't like the OG explanation, try looking in our OG Archer program or on the forums.)

# Drill Number 3: Find a Starting Point

Once again, open up your OG and look at some problems you have done before. This time, do NOT read the original sentence. Instead, cover it up.

Compare the answers and try to articulate all of the things that the problem is testing. Note that you can tell *what* is being tested even if you can't tell *how* to answer. For example, you might see a verb switching back and forth between singular and plural. If the subject isn't underlined, then you have no idea which verb form is required, because you haven't even seen the subject. You do, though, know that subject-verb agreement is at issue.

# Drill Number 4: Eliminate Answers

Once again, this drill involves problems you've already done. (Sensing a pattern? We learn the most when we're reviewing things we've already done!) This time, though, you're going to get to use the whole problem.

Right after you finish a problem, add the following analysis to your review:

(1) Why is the right answer right? Why are each of the four wrong answers wrong?

(2) How would you justify *eliminating* the right answer? What is the trap that would lead someone to cross this one off?

(3) How would you justify *picking* any of the wrong answers? What is the

trap that would lead someone to pick a wrong answer?

You're probably already doing the first one, but most people don't do the second or third at all. The first is important, but you're leaving a lot of learning on the table if you skip the others. When you learn how you (or someone) would fall into the trap of thinking that some wrong answer looks or sounds or feels better than the right one, you'll be a lot less likely to fall into that same trap yourself in future.

# Next Steps

Practice until these steps start to feel like second nature to you. At the same time, of course, learn the grammar rules that we all need to know. Put both pieces together and you'll master sentence correction!

Want more? Try these exercises to help you master your First Glance.