

SC Tips By Ron

Wednesday, September 26 2012, 8:45 PM

Importance of Meaning in Sentence Correction & How to study SC :

You should ALWAYS check the meaning, before you look at ANYTHING in the sentence. **almost every one of the major SC error types is easier to identify if you are using the meaning of the sentence, and most of them are *impossible* to understand fully **without** the meaning.**

for instance:

verb tense -- completely impossible without meaning

verb voice -- completely impossible without meaning

modifiers -- can be *assigned* according to grammar rules, but determining whether the assignment is **correct** is impossible without meaning

pronouns -- are subject to grammar rules, but determining whether the pronoun is **correct** is impossible without meaning

parallelism -- sometimes based on grammar, but you need meaning to figure out which items **should** be parallel in the first place

etc.

this is actually *why* the GMAT SC emphasizes these particular concepts -- because it is NOT MEANT to be a test of rules that can be memorized! it's meant to be a *reasoning* test that emphasizes ... *reasoning* (which is based upon the intended meaning of the sentence).

this is also why the GMAT SC largely **avoids** testing things that ARE purely mechanical, rules-based, and subject to memorization (e.g., spelling).

if you are approaching these sentences without FIRST determining the meaning of the sentence, then you are using exactly the whole kind of reasoning for which the test *isn't intentionally designed NOT to work*.

this post may be uncharacteristically blunt, but this is a point that needs to be made over and over and over and over and over again, because way too many people on this forum approach SC as if it were a giant math puzzle that's subject to entirely arbitrary rules.

it's not -- if you start to base your thinking around *what the sentence is clearly intended to mean* (all sentences will have a common-sense interpretation, regardless of how many errors are in the original version), then you will suddenly find most SC issues much easier to identify and understand.

ACTIVE vs. PASSIVE is a MEANING ISSUE.

(VERB TENSES are also a MEANING ISSUE.)

*These are *NOT* grammar issues!*

make sure that you understand the significance of the passive voice vs. the active voice.

the **active** voice means that the subject is the **doer** or **agent** of the action.

e.g.

i moved to chicago --> i made the decision to move to chicago myself, for my own reasons.

the **passive** voice means that the subject is the **target** or **recipient** of the action -- i.e., that the action is **done to** the subject.

e.g.

i was moved to chicago --> someone else, e.g., my employer, *made* me move to chicago; it wasn't my decision.

How to Study SC :

for EVERY SC problem,

* you should be able to go through the **CORRECT** sentence -- *including the non-underlined part* -- and justify EVERY construction in that sentence.

e.g.

-- if there's a modifier, you should be able to explain exactly what it modifies, and exactly why that modification makes sense.

-- if there's a pronoun, you should be able to explain exactly what it stands for, and exactly why that makes sense.

-- if there's a verb, you should be able to find its subject. you should also be able to justify the tense in which the verb is used, and/or the tense sequence of multiple verbs.

-- you should be able to explain the exact meaning of the sentence.

-- if there are parallel structures, you should be able to explain (a) the grammatical parallelism AND (b) the parallelism in meaning.

etc.

*In SC, you should be able to go through the **CORRECT** answers, and **JUSTIFY EVERYTHING** in the correct answer.* i.e., if there is an underline, substitute in the correct answer to make a complete sentence, and then make sure that you understand everything in that correct sentence.

the good thing about this sort of strategy is that you can figure out most things by yourself. for instance, even if you've never seen a particular type of modifier before, you know that it's used correctly -- so you can just *deduce* its proper use from the context. etc.

1. Myth of "One of.."

1. One of the X's that/who <plural>
2. One of the X's <singular>
3. Only one of the X's <singular>
4. Only one of the X's that/who <plural>
5. The only one of the X's that/who <singular>

2. "Would" Vs "Will":

"Would" is the past tense of "Will".

(i) If you are talking about predicting or expecting an event that still lies in the **future**, then you use **"WILL"**.

(ii) If you are talking about a PAST PREDICTION or expectation of an event whose timeframe has ALREADY

PASSED, then you use **"WOULD"**.

3. LIKE / AS RULE:

You make comparisons with **LIKE** when you compare nouns, or noun phrases (i.e., anything that doesn't have a VERB).

EXCEPTION:

Prepositional phrases take "As".

Note that there may be modifiers attached to these nouns. If there are, don't care. Modifiers are disposable.

You make comparisons with **AS** when you compare clauses (things that have real VERBS), or prepositional phrases.

NOTE: When you're deciding whether something is a clause or just a noun phrase, remember that **-ING FORMS DO NOT COUNT AS VERBS** (unless there's a helping verb attached to them).

Examples:

*"Those babies are cute, **like** little pandas sliding down rainbows"* -- CORRECT!

Note that:

* "sliding" is NOT a verb.

* "sliding down rainbows" is a modifier, and thus doesn't have to be considered in the grammar of the sentence.

*"Those babies are cute, **as** are little pandas that slide down rainbows"* -- CORRECT!

* "are" is a verb, so this is a clause.

* "that slide..." DOES NOT count, since it's part of a modifier.

*"Those babies are cute, **like** little pandas that slide down rainbows"* -- CORRECT!

* "little pandas" is a noun.

* "that slide..." DOES NOT count, since it's part of a modifier.

*"Our family lives on a farm now, **as** in the 19th century."* -- CORRECT! Prepositional phrases take "as"

4. Compared to/with for STATISTICS:

If you say **"compared with/to" for statistics**, you should cite **BOTH** statistics in the comparison.

The expression "compared to/with" does NOT imply any sort of direction to the comparison; i.e., it gives no hint as to greater/less/like/unlike. Therefore, you need to give both of the relevant statistics, or else the statement won't make any sense.

Examples:

*"The unemployment rate in Esteria last month was 5.3%, **compared to** the rate in Burdistan."* --

INCORRECT! This makes no sense. We have absolutely no idea what is going on with the rate in Burdistan.

*"The unemployment rate in Esteria last month was 5.3%, **compared to** a rate of 7% in Burdistan."* --

CORRECT!

Both statistics are cited.

5. "In contrast to":

If you say "**in contrast to**", then you **don't HAVE** to mention both statistics... Although you still can mention.

Examples:

*"**In contrast to** the corresponding rate in Esteria, the unemployment rate in Burdistan fell last month."* --

CORRECT! In this case, the "in contrast to" construction implies that the Esterian rate went up. We don't actually have to say this explicitly.

But, if you want, you can mention both statistics:

*"**In contrast to** the corresponding rate in Esteria, which rose by 0.5%, the unemployment rate in Burdistan fell by 0.3% last month."* -- ALSO CORRECT!

6. "By Time":

In clauses modified with "by TIME", you should use:

- i. **Past Perfect** (had VERBed) if the time marker is in the past.
- ii. **Present Perfect** (has/have VERBed) if the time marker is "by now"/current.
- iii. **Future Perfect** (will have VERBed) if the time marker is in the future.

7. Usage of "COULD":

"Could" is a modal expressing past (potential) ability.

If something is **assumed** in the PAST, then the usage of "Could" is **appropriate**. In other words, it is used to refer to the "Future in the PAST".

If it is "**ongoing**", then "Could" **CANNOT** be used.

8. "Estimate .. ":

*"**Estimate** NJ deer population **to** have grown"* is UNIDIOMATIC.

In general,

"Estimate X to have VERB'ed" is WRONG.

"Estimate that X has VERB'ed" is RIGHT.

9. "Rather than" Vs "Instead of":

"**Rather than**" is preferable to use for VERBS.

"**Instead of**" is preferable to use for NOUNS.

10. "Fish"

In general, "**FISH**" is PLURAL.

If "Fish" is attached with articles such as "a" or "the", then it is SINGULAR.

11. "Twice":

"Twice" CANNOT function as an object of the preposition such as "by".

"Twice" is an adverb.

Example:

"... increased **by** more than **twice** .." -- WRONG!

"**A substance to promote**" is UNIDIOMATIC.

Substance --> Concrete Noun

Promote --> Verb

12. " A Noun to Verb "

"**A NOUN TO VERB**" is CORRECT ONLY when Noun is **ABSTRACT**.

Examples:

"**A way to produce goods**"

"**A reason to try harder**"

"**A substance to promote X**" --> WRONG! "Substance" is a concrete noun.

"**A substance that promotes X**" --> CORRECT!

"**A tool to install the shelves**" --> WRONG! "Tool" is a concrete noun.

"**A tool with which to install the shelves**" --> CORRECT!

13. "Even as":

"Even as" is a transition used to imply simultaneity and is usually used with parallel tenses (i.e. same tense in both parts of the parallel structure).

Example:

*Even as his income **has increased**, Joe **has continued** to feel less satisfied.* -- Maintains same tenses on both sides.

14. "Namely":

"Namely" must be used either before a **noun** or before a **noun phrase/clause**.

You **CANNOT** use it directly before an independent clause such as "... *namely they vary considerably...*" -- which is absolutely **WRONG!**

However, "... *namely **that** they vary considerably ..* " and "*namely considerable variation*" are both fine.

15. "X's rate of Y"

"X's rate of Y" is better than "the rate of X's Y".

Example:

"Salesman X's rate of success" is **BETTER** than *"the rate of Salesman X's success"*.

16. Adjective of Nationality

"Mideast immigrants" is **WRONG**.

"Immigrants from the Mideast" is **BETTER**. "Mideast" **CANNOT** be used as an adjective of nationality. For the same reason, you **CANNOT** say "Asia People" in place of "People from Asia".

17. " The Law "

"The new law makes it a crime to <do>".

"The new law makes it a crime for <someone> to <do something>".

"The new law makes <something> a crime".

are **ALL CORRECT**.

18. " Projected decline "

We can say "*a projected decline of..*".

Also, "*.. is projected to decline by ..* ".

But **NOT**, "*a projected decline at ...* ".

19. " Making do "

"**Making do without**" is correct English. One would use the phrase when speaking in the past continuous.

Example:

*"We were **making do without** power during the blackout".*

It's a bit more common to use "**made do without**".

Example:

*"My family was quite poor, so we **made do without** luxuries".*

20. Useful Tips for SC by RON :

" If you're a q50 level student who's having trouble with verbal, my no. 1 advice to you is to concentrate on sentence correction.

you see, sentence correction is the most "quant-like" of the three verbal areas, in that many of the errors are mechanical and black-and-white, requiring the same sort of reasoning that solves quant problems. "

--

Here is a listing of the sentence correction error types that are most like "quant" in the type of reasoning required to resolve them:

* pronouns: pronoun usage is VERY mechanical; finding the antecedent for a pronoun is not unlike finding a value for a variable. in particular, pronoun usage is based almost entirely on binary concepts such as singular/plural, subject/object, and so on.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE: for pronoun issues, at least the recognition part is easy: if you see a pronoun, you should consider pronoun issues.

* parallel structure: parallelism is, again, VERY mechanical. you can resolve the vast majority of parallelism issues using completely mechanical concepts such as parts of speech, although there are the occasional problems that depend upon more abstract notions, such as "logical parallelism".

HOW TO RECOGNIZE: recognizing parallel structure is a bit trickier than recognizing pronoun issues. here are a couple of hints, though:

(1) long sentences more often than not involve parallelism, because there are relatively few ways to lengthen a sentence without the use of parallel structure. therefore, if you see a longer sentence, you shouldn't be intimidated; instead, you should just keep an eye out for parallel structure.

(2) the OG has "parallelism" as an explicit label on problems that include parallelism. therefore, if you're having extreme trouble locating parallelism in problems, you should consider going to the problems that are labeled "parallelism" in the back of the book, studying their form, and learning to recognize that they involve parallelism. you should do this before you concentrate on actually solving those problems, because knowing how to solve a problem is useless unless you can actually recognize the problem in the first place.

Certain modifiers: modifiers are diverse, but there are 2 kinds that are easier to recognize, instantly, than others.

(1) initial modifiers without subjects:

"coming home from school, the wind blew me off my bike."

this sentence is incorrect, because, taken literally, it says that the wind was coming home from school. you can't hide modifiers like this one; they appear at the very beginning of the sentence, every time. if there's no subject, then the modifier automatically refers to whatever noun immediately follows the comma. if that noun is incorrect, then you can kill that answer choice without even looking any further.

(2) relative pronouns following commas:

..., which
..., whom
..., where/when
..., of which
..., to whom
etc.

(this is not a complete list; it's just a collection of samples. similar constructions behave similarly.)

when these pronouns follow a comma, they automatically refer to the immediately preceding noun -- i.e., the noun that touches the comma.

again, they can't hide these. they're easy to recognize, and they're not dependent on the rest of the context.

therefore, you should learn to hit them up first.

21. " Usage of Which"

#Q1

Can Which" modify the immediately preceding noun only ?

OR

Is it that if i have a sentence of the form "A of B,which".. The "which" may refer to either A or B depending on the context ?

from what we've seen, the gmat is actually pretty consistent on this issue.

what we've seen, so far, is:

the gmat tends to write sentences in which "which" stands for the ELIGIBLE noun that's closest to the comma.

by "eligible", i mean that the noun has to AGREE IN TERMS OF SINGULAR/PLURAL with the FOLLOWING VERB.

here's an example:

*the box of nails, which **is** on the counter, is to be used on this project.*

in this case, "which" CANNOT refer to "nails", since the verb "is" is singular. therefore, the nearest eligible noun is "box (of nails)". so, "which" unambiguously stands for that.

in our observation, the gmat has been VERY good about this.

whenever i've seen a "which" that refers to "X of Y" rather than just Y, it has ALWAYS been the case that X was

singular and Y was plural (or X was plural and Y was singular), and the verb had a form that matched X and didn't match Y.

hope that helps.

22. Than/as in parallel comparisons

In general,

1 * if you have *than/as* + subject + FORM OF "TO BE" as the second half of a comparison, then you must have another form of "to be" in the first half of the comparison.

2 * if you have *than/as* + subject + HELPING VERB as the second half of a comparison, then you must have the SAME helping verb (perhaps in a different tense) in the first half of the comparison.

3 * if you have *than/as* + subject + FORM OF "TO DO" as the second half of a comparison, then you must have an ACTION VERB (or another form of "to do") in the first half of the comparison.

here are some examples:

#1

see the post directly above this one.

also

*parking spots **are** disappearing much more *quickly* today than they **were** yesterday.*

#2

*james **can** negotiate with salespeople more effectively than stephanie **can**.*

*i **can** run much faster than i **could** before my most recent knee operation.* (note that "could" is the past tense of "can", so these are the same helping verb.)

#3

*parking spots **disappeared** much faster today than they **did** yesterday.*

*tanya **eats** more slowly than she **did** when she was a teenager.* (note that "did" doesn't have to have the same tense as the action verb)

24. When is "Being" correct ?

When the use of "being" is correct?

the short answer to this question: basically, "being" is ok *when there are no acceptable alternative formulations that DON'T use it.*

from what we've seen, "being" can be ok as long as at least one of the following 2 conditions obtains:

(1) **it is part of a PASSIVE-VOICE construction** (note that such constructions require a form of "to be", so, if the passive voice is in the -ing form, that form will manifest as "being");

or

(2) **it is used as a GERUND** (i.e., the action of "being something" is treated as a NOUN in the sentence).

most, but not all, of these gerunds will be the gerund form of a construction in the *passive voice*.

Examples: (the first one i made up; the other three are correct answers to official problems)

Being followed by paparazzi 24 hours a day has caused many celebrities to become extremely hostile to strangers. (source: i made this up on the spot)

(note that this is both --> it's a passive-voice gerund!)

During the 1950s, as part of their therapy, young polio victims learning to live with their disabilities were helped to practice falling, so that they could learn to fall without being hurt. (source: gmat prep)

(again, passive voice gerund)

According to one expert, the cause of genetic irregularities in many breeds of dog is not so much that dogs are being bred for looks or to meet other narrow criteria as that the breeds have relatively few founding members. (source: gmat prep)

(passive; not gerund)

Being heavily committed to a course of action, especially one that has worked well in the past, is likely to make an executive miss signs of incipient trouble or misinterpret them when they do appear. (source: gmat prep; also in the OG verbal supplement)

(gerund; not passive)

25. Usage of certain words :

Here is a brief summary. i'm going to avoid using grammatical terms (mostly because i can't remember them); i'll just give examples instead.

a) Because

"because" connects two complete sentences (clauses). the sentence coming after "because" should actually be the cause of what is described in the other one.

e.g.

Because the bridge was closed, the morning rush hour lasted two extra hours.

The morning rush hour lasted two extra hours because the bridge was closed.

b) Since

one usage of "since" is basically identical to "because" (described above).

"since" can also be used with a noun that represents a starting time: *Barack Obama has been president since 2009.*

c) Due to

should be followed by a noun.

also, this must DESCRIBE a noun. it is commonly used in speech to describe entire clauses/sentences/ideas, but that usage is wrong in the written language.

e.g.

unemployment due to offshoring is rising in factory towns. <-- here, "due to..." describes "unemployment"
much of the unemployment in factory towns is due to offshoring.

BUT

**James was late due to the traffic* <-- this is incorrect; you can't use "due to..." to describe an entire sentence/clause (such as "James was late").

d) because of

should be followed by a noun.

james was late because of the traffic.

e) for - (as per its usage in OG12 #59)

this usage of "for" is a lot like "because", except in the sense that it suggests a slightly less direct causation.

here's an example: lots of people get sick in the winter. but that's not direct causation -- i.e., the winter weather doesn't directly cause people to become sick. instead, because it's cold outside, people tend to cluster together indoors, thus allowing increased transmission of germs.

for this sort of indirect causation, it's more appropriate to say *Many people are sick around here, for it is winter.*

nobody will ever say this out loud, though -- it's strictly written language -- so you probably won't be familiar with it unless you read a fair amount of (decently formal) written english.

f) in that - (OG12 says that 'in that' means 'in as much as' - #59)

X is Z because Y --> this must actually mean that there is a literal cause-and-effect relationship. in other words, this sentence claims that "Y" is actually the reason why "X" is "Z".

X is Z in that Y --> this is a qualifier; it implies that "Y" is the only certain way in which X is Z.

two examples:

My brother and I are like each other in that we both have quirky senses of humor

--> CORRECT

this sentence means that my brother and i share the same quirky sense of humor, but that we may (or may not) differ in any other aspect of our personalities.

My brother and I are like each other because we both have quirky senses of humor

--> UNREASONABLE MEANING

this sentence implies that our similar senses of humor have CAUSED our personalities to become alike. that's nonsense.