

GMAT





We're an education technology company out of MIT set on making standardized test prep accessible, adaptable and mobile. To create this guide, we've worked with some of the foremost GMAT tutors who've helped countless students master the GMAT's verbal section as well as drawn on the knowledge we've gained creating the top GMAT app and studying for the exam ourselves.

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Hacking the GMAT: Sentence Correction

Hacking was originally a negative term: *Computer hackers* illegally broke into computer systems; a *hack*, often a writer or artist, produced shoddy work; and *to hack* conveyed mismanaged action. But in our current world where computer hackers can also be activists and disruption is a standard business model, *hacking* is positive: a clever shortcut, a better way of doing something.

It is in the vein of this second definition that we wrote this guide and that we created the Prep4GMAT mobile study app. There's a better way to study for standardized tests like the GMAT, and it involves accessible and adaptive tools such as apps and digital guides like this one. While technology cannot replace the hard, and at times, grueling work of studying, it can make studying more efficient and responsive to an individual's needs. This is what we hope to achieve with our app and guides.

About this guide:

GMAT sentence correction (SC) questions bewilder and frustrate non-native and native English speakers alike. The myriad rules of grammar – not to mention conventions such as idioms and style – make even the most confident speakers and writers second-guess themselves.

At their core, however, SC questions, like all GMAT questions, test reasoning abilities, and you do not have to become grammarian or even the best English speaker to score highly. What *is* needed to master sentence correction questions are a firm grasp of grammar and style fundamentals and a familiarity with how sentence correction questions are designed to trick you.

This guide gives you the foundations for mastering sentence correction questions. In each chapter, our GMAT experts have examined a major grammar topic and broken it down into the fundamental rules and concepts you will encounter in SC questions. At the end of each chapter, a set of practice questions allows you to test your understanding of the topics you just studied and compare your answers to the detailed explanations of the questions that follow.

Reading this guide is not enough to master SC questions. The knowledge the guide contains is most useful when you also know how to apply it on actual questions, and the best way to learn how to apply it is through practice: answering questions and carefully reviewing your answers.

For GMAT prep you can take anywhere, try the hundreds sentence correction practice questions on the Prep4GMAT app, available free for download on the iTunes App Store. The app makes studying both convenient and potent with comprehensive answer explanations for each practice question and analytics that track your strengths and weaknesses. You can download Prep4GMAT [here](#).

Who this guide is for:

Whether you're about to take your first GMAT or your third, if you struggle with, are confused by or need a refresher on the grammar and style rules that sentence correction questions test, this guide will help you. However, there are few things you should know in order to get the most out of the guide.

Since each chapter dives right into the important grammar topics, you should already know the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) and basic sentence terminology (phrases, clauses, etc.) in order to fully understand the material. If you're unfamiliar with these terms or need to brush up on

their definitions, the Internet has many excellent resources you can consult. Check out Purdue University's English website the [OWL](#) for an in-depth explanation of these terms or download the Prep4GMAT app and select Sentence Correction Lesson 1 for a quick overview.

If you're new to sentence correction questions or have questions about how the GMAT is structured, check out the GMAC [website](#). Here you can find introductions to each question type and the organization of the exam. You can also see examples of sentence correction questions in chapter 1 of this guide on how to approach sentence correction questions and at the end of each chapter in the practice sets.

How to *hack* sentence correction questions:

As mentioned above, mastering sentence correction questions require both an understanding of grammar and style rules and how questions test these rules. You can think of the first as *factual* knowledge and the second as *tactical* knowledge. To illustrate how these two sets of knowledge create mastery, let's compare the GMAT to chess.

To play chess, you first need to know the rules of the game: how each piece moves, the terminology of the game and the sequence of turns. This is the factual knowledge of the game. To play chess like a master, on top of the fundamentals, you must also possess tactical knowledge: strategies of attack and defense, and most importantly, superb pattern recognition.

Pattern recognition allows a chess player to compare the arrangement of the pieces on the board to the arrangements of pieces in previous games played or studied. By recognizing similarities with other game situations, the player can quickly perceive possible opportunities and threats and place his or her pieces in the best position for victory. Many patterns repeat in chess, and a player attuned to common patterns has an edge.

Like chess, GMAT questions abound with repeated patterns, patterns that through practice you can recognize and take advantage of. By patterns, we mean the way questions are designed: how the sentences and answer choices are constructed to test your knowledge of grammar and style.

For example, sentence correction questions that test the subjunctive mood will often feature answer choices with the words *should*, *would* or *could* – words that cannot be combined with a verb in the subjunctive mood. These errors repeat on most questions that feature the subjunctive mood, so once you notice this pattern, you'll immediately know which answer choices you can eliminate.

Someone who scores in the top percentile on the GMAT tackles GMAT questions in much the same way a chess master approaches each turn. A high scorer can quickly compare a question to one he or she has practiced before and (with this reference in mind) recall what he or she needs to do to find the correct answer while watching out for possible traps.

You cannot gain this tactical knowledge without a firm grasp of the factual knowledge – for sentence correction questions, the rules of grammar tested on the GMAT. Use *Hacking the GMAT: Sentence Correction* to learn these rules or refresh your memory, and use the Prep4GMAT app to build your mastery of GMAT questions.

While practicing questions on the app, you can press the Prep4GMAT X-ray button, which highlights

keywords in each question. These keywords clue you in to the grammar rules tested on the question and help you develop pattern recognition.

Our app is the only study app that trains you to master GMAT questions by visualizing the important patterns in each question. Highlighted keywords help you see the structure of a question, which primes your memory to recognize patterns and helps you figure out how to solve the question. It's test prep made smarter.

Intro: How to *hack* a sentence correction question

Recognizing the grammar rules tested in a sentence correction question helps you build mastery and allows you to work through questions efficiently. The best way to recognize rules is to notice the differences between answer options.

Let's use an example to demonstrate this approach:

After winning the World Cup this year, the German team were touted as the world's best soccer team; no coach or critic had anything but praise for the young sportsmen.

- (A) the German team were touted as the world's*
- (B) the German team was touted as the world's*
- (C) the world touted the German team like the*
- (D) touting the German team as the world's*
- (E) they were touting the German team as the world's*

Step 1: Scan the answer choices for differences

When presented with a sentence correction question, look first for what changes in the answers. What words, phrases or clauses change from one answer choice to the next? These differences are clear-cut signs of the grammar style rules being tested by the question. This method also saves you from wasting time comparing each answer choice to the original sentence.

Let's look at the major differences among answer choices in the example. In choices A and B, the number of the verb changes from the plural *were* to the singular *was*, and in choices C, D and E, the tense of the verb changes from *touted* to *touting* to *were touting*. Also, in option E, the plural pronoun *they* is introduced.

The other major difference among answer choices appears in choice C. Unlike the other options, choice C uses *like* instead of *as* to compare the German team. After studying comparisons in chapter 8, you'll know that *like* means "similar to." In the next step, you'll check whether this meaning makes sense in the context of the non-underlined parts of the sentence.

Just from briefly looking at the answer choices, you already know that the grammar rules being tested in this question include verb tense and number, comparisons (specifically *like* vs. *as*), and pronouns.

- (A) the German team **were touted** as the world's*
- (B) the German team **was touted** as the world's*
- (C) the world **touted** the German team **like** the*
- (D) **touting** the German team as the world's*
- (E) **they** **were touting** the German team as the world's*

When you need a hint on an SC question, selecting Prep4GMAT's X-ray button highlights the keywords you should focus on in order to help uncover the grammar rules behind the question.

Step 2: Read the original sentence for context and meaning

By reading the original sentence, you see that there's a time indication *after* that begins the sentence and that the other verb in the sentence *had* is in the past tense. Since you noticed that the plural pronoun *they* was introduced in option E, you should check to make sure it has a plural antecedent somewhere in the non-underlined part of the sentence, which it doesn't, so you can automatically mark E as incorrect.

Given the context of the sentence, the use of *like* instead of *as* is illogical in option C. It doesn't make sense to say the world touted the team *similar to* the world's best. Instead, the World Cup winners are equivalent to the world's best, so *as* should be used instead of *like*. You can eliminate option C.

After winning the World Cup this year, the German team were touted as the world's best soccer team; no coach or critic had anything but praise for the young sportsmen.

- (A) the German team **were touted** as the world's
- (B) the German team **was touted** as the world's
- ~~(C) the world **touted** the German team **like** the~~
- ~~(D) **touting** the German team as the world's~~
- ~~(E) **they** **were touting** the German team as the world's~~

Step 3: Eliminate incorrect answers and choose the best remaining answer

We've already eliminated two options, so that leaves us with A, B or D as possible correct answers. The differences among these options lie in the verbs they use. *Touting* in option D is a participle, so the clause that *touting* begins (*touting the German team as the world's soccer team*) has no true verb, which makes this option grammatically incorrect.

This leaves us with option A and B whose verbs differ in number. If you know that subject-verb agreement dictates that a verb and subject must agree in number (chapter 2), then you see that option A is incorrect. *Team* is the subject, and it is a collective singular noun, so it requires a singular verb, *was*.

This means the correct answer is B.

After winning the World Cup this year, the German team were touted as the world's best soccer team; no coach or critic had anything but praise for the young sportsmen.

- ~~(A) the German team **were touted** as the world's~~
- (B) the German team **was touted** as the world's
- ~~(C) the world **touted** the German team **like** the~~
- ~~(D) **touting** the German team as the world's~~
- ~~(E) **they** **were touting** the German team as the world's~~

Lesson 1: Subject-Verb Agreement

Every sentence must have a subject and a verb. However, not just any subject can be combined with any verb. In order for a sentence to make sense and to be grammatically sound, subjects and verbs must be logical and agree in number.

Once you understand these two basic rules, you'll be able to understand all the subject-verb agreement errors you will see on the GMAT.

Rules

The subject must be able to “do” the verb

In addition to being grammatically correct, sentences must have a logical meaning. This includes having a subject-verb pair that makes sense together. For example:

The BIRD FLEW out the open window.

Here the subject and verb, *bird flew*, makes logical sense. However, some subjects cannot “do” the action expressed by the verb, as discussed in the next section.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

This first rule is simple but a verbose or complex sentence can easily hide an error in logic. Take the following example:

The advancement of new battery technology, which will increase battery life 300 percent, will power mobile phones of the future.

At first glance, this sentence appears fine, but something sounds a little funny. When a sentence sounds off but obvious grammatical errors are absent, check to see if the subject-verb combo makes sense.

If you ask the question, “can the subject *do* the verb,” you will see that the above sentence actually does not make sense.

The subject-verb pair is *advancement* and *will power*. Can *advancement power mobile phones*? This is sloppy word choice on the author’s part, and logically it doesn’t make sense. It’s the new batteries that will power the mobile phones of the future, not the *advancement* of new batteries.

The trick to discovering this and many other errors in sentence correction questions is to strip wordy sentences down into their essential structure. Think of this technique as a way to “cut the crap.” You take out non-essential information like subordinate clauses and prepositional phrases so that you can clearly see the bones of the sentence.

“Cut the crap” in the incorrect example above by removing the subordinate clause that begins with *which* and the prepositional phrase that begins with *of*, and you get:

The ADVANCEMENT... WILL POWER mobile phones...

With the sentence stripped to its fundamental structure, the error becomes obvious.

Subjects and verbs must agree in number

Subjects can be singular or plural. If only one person, place or thing (*Allan, Atlantis, apple*) is performing the action of the verb, then the subject is singular and it must have a singular verb. If more than one person, place or thing (*Allan and Vance, Atlantis and Valhalla, apples*) is performing the action of the verb, then the subject must have a plural verb.

The WAVE TOSSES our rowboat side to side.

(singular subject wave + singular verb tosses)

The WAVES TOSS our rowboat side to side.

(plural subject waves + plural verb toss)

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

How does the GMAT make such a simple rule challenging? SC questions will often try to obscure the number of the subject by placing the subject far away from the verb. Obscuring the number of the subject through subject-verb separation looks like this:

Exemplified by Hiram Bingham III's discovery of Manchu Picchu in 1911, the exploration of ancient archaeological sites and other so-called wonders of the ancient world were a pastime of wealthy academics of the early 20th century.

The above sentence makes a subject-verb agreement error though it is difficult to spot due to all the additional information and phrases stuffed into the sentence. The subject is *exploration*, which is singular, and the corresponding verb is *were*, which is incorrectly plural.

As in the previous rule, if you “cut the crap” in this sentence, the subject-verb agreement error is exposed. This time, it is a lengthy prepositional phrase that can be removed. Taking out the prepositional phrase and the introductory phrase clearly shows the subject-verb agreement error:

The EXPLORATION... WERE a pastime...

Concepts

Collective nouns

Collective nouns refer to groups of people, places or things, such as “family”, “band” or “team.” In American English, almost all collective nouns require a singular verb; however, in contexts where individual members or items of the group are stressed, collective nouns are plural. These situations are rarely tested on the GMAT though.

A few examples of collective nouns include: *army, crowd, team, herd, swarm.*

The foreign ARMY WAS seen crossing the border.

With yesterday’s win, our hockey TEAM IS in first place.

What to look out for:

Anytime you see a collective noun used as a subject in a sentence, check its corresponding verb. Collective nouns will almost always be considered singular on the GMAT.

Incorrect: *A COLONY of ants HAVE overtaken our kitchen.*

Indefinite pronouns

Pronouns stand in for nouns. For example, *she* is a pronoun for *Sarah* or any female name. Indefinite pronouns, such as *anyone*, have no specific referent. *Anyone* does not stand in for a specific noun in the way that *she* could stand in for *Sarah*.

When used as the subject of a sentence, most indefinite pronouns are considered singular and take a singular verb.

The following indefinite pronouns are always singular:

<i>everybody</i>	<i>anything</i>	<i>no one</i>
<i>everything</i>	<i>someone</i>	<i>nobody</i>
<i>anyone</i>	<i>somebody</i>	<i>nothing</i>
<i>anybody</i>	<i>something</i>	

SOMEONE always TELLS a joke during our Monday morning meetings.

EVERYTHING WAS in its proper place.

Some indefinite pronouns, however, can be plural or singular depending on their use in a sentence. These pronouns are known by the acronym SANAM:

some, any, none, all, most/more

To determine whether a SANAM pronoun should take a singular or plural verb, you need to check the noun object that follows. Usually this noun phrase is in a prepositional phrase that begins with *of*.

SOME of the RECRUITS WERE punished for disobedience.

(recruits = plural = were)

SOME of the FOREST WAS destroyed in the wildfire.

(forest = singular = was)

What to look out for:

When an indefinite pronoun is used as a subject, first determine whether it is a SANAM pronoun. If it is not a SANAM pronoun, then the verb must be singular. If it is a SANAM pronoun, make sure the verb agrees with the noun object of the prepositional phrase that follows the pronoun.

Incorrect: EVERYTHING the OFFICIALS said WERE wrong.

Correct: *EVERYTHING the OFFICIALS said WAS wrong.*

Incorrect: NONE of the SCHOLARS KNOWS how to explain the new theory.

Correct: *NONE of the SCHOLARS KNOW how to explain the new theory.*

Compound subjects

In English, it is possible to have two subjects in one clause. When two subjects are connected by the conjunction *and*, they always take a plural verb.

John AND David ARE working on a secret project for the government.

Authority AND domination WERE his goals.

What to look out for:

Make sure that all compound subjects are paired with a plural verb. The GMAT may use verbose sentences to hide this error.

John AND David, two computer science friends of mine, IS working on a secret project for the government.

Here again, the “cut the crap” technique would help expose this error.

Incorrect: John AND David... IS working...

Correct: *John AND David ARE working.*

Additive phrases

Additive phrases are subjects with at least two entities that use the connectors *as well as*, *along with*, *in addition to* or *together with*.

Unlike compound subjects linked by *and*, treat the first part of the additive phrase as the subject of the sentence.

Firefighters together with the mayor PRESENT the trophy to the local hero.

John along with specialists IS working on a secret project in the tech industry.

What to look out for:

Because additive phrases link two entities, it's tempting to treat them like two subjects and use a plural verb. However, only use a plural verb if the first part of the phrase is plural.

Incorrect: John along with specialists ARE working on a secret project for the government.

Practice questions

1. A new marketing gimmick, which is evident at most carnivals, are waves of street artists and roadside performers, which include jugglers and attract and fascinate pedestrians at the crossroads.
 - A. A new marketing gimmick, which is evident at most carnivals, are waves of street artists and roadside performers, which include jugglers and
 - B. Evident at most carnivals are waves of street artists and roadside performers with jugglers, a new marketing gimmick that
 - C. A new marketing gimmick evident at most carnivals is a wave of street artists and roadside performers, many of them jugglers, who
 - D. Marketing gimmicky new waves of street artists, roadside performers, and jugglers are visible at most carnival, which
 - E. A wave of street artists and roadside performers, many of whom are jugglers, are evident at the crossroads, where they are a new marketing gimmick and
2. According to the National Insurance Committee, the country's financial regulatory body, they estimate that, in comparison to last year, when only 40 percent of the nation's 1 billion population was insured, this year 75 percent will be.
 - A. they estimate that, in comparison to last year, when only 40 percent of the nation's 1 billion population was insured, this year seventy five percent will be.
 - B. compared to only 40 percent of the nation's 1 billion population being insured last year, they estimate 75 percent would be this year
 - C. only 40 percent of the nation's 1 billion population were insured last year; it estimates that this year 75 percent will be
 - D. it estimates 75 percent of the nation's 1 billion population would be insured this year; last year that was only 40 percent
 - E. only 40 percent of the nation's 1 billion population last year were insured, whereas they estimate it this year to be 75 percent
3. Although a hint of MSG or Monosodium Glutamate are fairly common in Chinese fast food; they can cause heart palpitations, affecting the respiratory system.
 - A. MSG or Monosodium Glutamate are fairly common in Chinese fast food; they can cause heart palpitations, affecting the respiratory system
 - B. MSG or Monosodium Glutamate is fairly common in Chinese fast food, they can cause heart palpitations and affect the respiratory system
 - C. MSG or Monosodium Glutamate are fairly common in Chinese fast food; it can cause heart palpitations, affecting the respiratory system
 - D. MSG or Monosodium Glutamate is fairly common in Chinese fast food, it can cause

heart palpitations and affect the respiratory system

E. MSG or Monosodium Glutamate is fairly common in Chinese fast food; they can cause heart palpitations, affecting the respiratory system

4. A survey of private schools shows that there are now one teacher for every eight students, twice as many as many than there were five years ago.

A. there are now one teacher for every eight students, twice as many than there were

B. there is now one teacher for every eight students, twice as many than there were

C. there is now one teacher for every eight students, twice as many as there were

D. every eight students now have one teacher, twice as many than there were

E. every eight students now has one teacher, twice as many as

5. According to the American Census Report of 2011, the number of girls enrolled in government schools has grown every year since 1990.

A. the number of girls enrolled in government schools has grown

B. the number of girls who are in government schools have grown

C. there has been growth in the number of girls in government schools

D. a growing number of girls have been in government schools

E. girls have been growing in number in government schools

To practice hundreds of more sentence correction questions that test subject-verb agreement, download the Prep4GMAT app for free [here](#).

Question 1

A - Incorrect:

The singular subject *a gimmick* does not agree with the plural auxiliary verb *are* and with the plurality of the second subject *waves*.

B - Incorrect:

The relative pronoun *that* relates to the preceding noun *gimmick*, and thus the plural verb *attract* does not agree in number with the singular noun *gimmick*.

C - Correct:

The singular subjects *a gimmick* and *a wave* agree with the singular verb *is*. The relative pronoun *who* relates logically to *jugglers*.

D - Incorrect:

The problem in this option is the phrase *Marketing gimmicky new waves...* would mean the performers are marketing waves of street artists, which makes no sense.

E - Incorrect:

The problem is that the singular *A wave*, which is conceived of as one entity, should not take the plural verb *are*. Also the use of the phrase *at the crossroads* twice, while grammatically OK, is stylistically clunky. Check out chapter 8 for more information on the GMAT's preferred style of writing.

Question 2

A, B, E - Incorrect:

Subject verb agreement error. The plural pronoun *they* cannot refer to the singular subject *committee*.

C - Correct:

The pronoun *it* refers correctly to the singular subject *committee*. The semicolon is properly used - both clauses on either side of the semicolon are independent and related.

D - Incorrect:

The pronoun *that* doesn't have a clear antecedent and can refer to the population, the estimation or the insured population.

Question 3

A, C - Incorrect:

Subject and verb agreement error. The singular noun *hint* does not agree in number with the plural auxiliary verb *are*.

A, B, E - Incorrect:

The plural pronoun *they* doesn't agree with the singular subject *a hint*.

A - Incorrect:

Although, like the word “despite,” always introduces a dependent clause. In this case, a comma needs to follow this clause before the associated main clause.

D - Correct:

This answer choice fixes the pronoun errors and the subject verb agreement error.

Question 4

A, B, D - Incorrect:

The form of comparison *twice as many* is incorrectly used with the conjunction *than* instead of *as*.

A - Incorrect:

The plural auxiliary verb *are* does not agree in number with the singular subject *teacher*.

C - Correct:

This option corrects the subject-verb agreement errors, and the form of comparison is correct: *twice as many as*.

E - Incorrect:

The singular auxiliary verb *has* does not agree with the plural subject *students*.

Question 5

A - Correct:

The use of *the number of* is singular and matches the verb *has grown*. The time indication *since 1990* implies the tense of the sentence, which is present perfect.

B, D - Incorrect:

Subject verb agreement error. The singular subject *the number* does not agree in number with the plural auxiliary verb *have*.

C - Incorrect:

There has been growth is stylistically less preferable.

E - Incorrect:

The use of *in number* is grammatically illogical by implying the growing happened inside a number.

Lesson 2: Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that substitutes for a noun or noun phrase. For example:

Because Allen borrowed HER book, Susan couldn't find IT when SHE looked on HER bookshelf.

Allen accidentally left Susan's book on the subway, but HE didn't want to tell HER until HE could purchase another copy.

In the first sentence, the pronoun *it* replaces *book*, and the pronouns *she* and *her* replace *Susan*. In the second sentence the pronoun *he* stands in for *Allen*, and *her* stands in for *Susan*.

The noun that a pronoun replaces is called the antecedent of the pronoun. *Book*, *Allen* and *Susan* are all antecedents in the examples.

Pronoun Rules

Pronouns must have antecedents

As previously defined, an antecedent is the noun or noun phrase that gets replaced by a pronoun. Antecedents are not optional: You cannot have a pronoun in a sentence that does not refer to an antecedent. This is the fundamental rule of pronouns to remember. All the subsequent rules and concepts follow this rule.

Susan's book was left on the subway, but HE didn't want to tell her until HE could purchase another copy.

In this sentence, the pronoun *he* has no antecedent: There is no appropriate noun within the sentence that *he* could stand in for.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

SC questions will throw in words that look like the antecedent to a pronoun but that are actually imposters. Since a pronoun replaces a noun or noun phrase, the antecedent must actually function as a noun in the sentence. To trick you, the GMAT will use a noun in a non-noun role – for example as an adjective – to pose as the antecedent to a pronoun. Check out the following example:

The New York executive loved to look up at ITS skyscrapers at night.

It is easy to assume that the antecedent of the possessive pronoun *its* is *New York*. However, even though New York is a noun, in this sentence it is being used as an adjective that describes the executive, so it cannot be an antecedent, and therefore this sentence is incorrect.

Pronouns and their antecedents must be logical

Just like subject-verb pairs, pronoun antecedent pairs must make sense. This means that if a pronoun were swapped with its antecedent (the noun or noun phrase it replaced), the sentence would still make sense. Take the following example:

Though the name Denali means “the high one” in the Koyukuk language, IT is only the third highest mountain in the world.

If you replace *it* with its antecedent *the name Denali* you get:

Though the name Denali means “the high one” in the Koyukuk language, the name Denali is only the third highest mountain in the world.

Replacing the pronoun with the antecedent clearly shows the mistake. This sentence could be remedied by foregoing the pronoun and using *Mt. Denali* instead.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

GMAT questions will compose easily understandable sentences like the incorrect example above that seem to make sense but on closer analysis have tangled logic. Make sure you can find the antecedent of a pronoun and that the antecedent makes sense with the pronoun.

Pronouns can only refer to one antecedent

Pronouns must have only one antecedent. When a pronoun has more than one possible antecedent, confusion and ambiguity reign.

*While both the military junta and a dissident citizen group claimed responsibility for the killings, **THEY** did not announce the motive behind the violence.*

Who did not announce the motive? The pronoun *they* could refer to the military junta or the dissident citizen group.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

Constructing sentences with multiple possible antecedents is a popular tactic that the GMAT uses. Always be on the watch for pronouns that conceivably refer to more than one noun or noun phrase.

Pronouns and antecedents must agree in number

Like subjects and verbs, there are plural pronouns and singular pronouns, and pronouns must agree in number with their antecedents.

*Orangutans are known to be dangerous pets as **THEY** can rebel against their owners and even kill.*

The plural pronoun *they* agrees with its plural antecedent *orangutans*.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

Again, like subject-verb agreement, sentence correction questions will pair singular antecedents with plural pronouns and vice versa while trying to hide this error through complex sentence structures.

*With the sudden boom in the housing market, the small island nation of Baltika is easing back restrictions on work visas so that **THEIR** housing demands can continue to be met.*

The antecedent, *small island nation*, is singular, so the corresponding pronoun should be *its* and not the plural *their*. In the sentence, the plural noun *restrictions* acts as a distractor: It makes it sound as if *their* could be correct even though it is illogical that restrictions have housing demands.

Pronoun concepts

Relative pronouns

A relative pronoun is a pronoun that marks a relative clause within a sentence. Relative pronouns have three functions:

1. Connect the relative clause and the main clause
2. Relate to the preceding noun
3. Function as the subject or the object of the relative clause

On the GMAT, the relative pronouns are ***who***, ***whom***, ***whose***, ***whoever***, ***whosoever***, ***which*** and in some cases, ***that***.

The commencement speaker is a famous author WHO was the spiritual leader of his country's revolution.

The relative pronoun *who* links the main clause (*the commencement speaker is a famous author*) to the relative clause of which it serves as the subject of (*who was the spiritual leader of his country's revolution*).

In addition, there are various fused relative pronouns that combine the antecedent with the relative pronoun into one word: ***what***, ***whatever***, ***whatsoever***, ***whoever***, ***whosoever***, ***whomever***, ***whomsoever*** and ***whichever***.

What to look out for:

Nouns dictate which relative pronouns can be used with them. For example, “who” can only be used with people.

Incorrect: *I was hired by a company WHO specialized in bovine bio-tech research.*

In the example above, *that* should have been used instead of *who*.

Correct: *I was hired by a company THAT specialized in bovine bio-tech research.*

Note:

Omitting a relative pronoun is not allowed in formal writing. Clauses must always be connected.

Correct: *Where is the review of the movie THAT we are going to see?*

Incorrect: *Where is the review of the movie we are going to see?*

In rare cases, the relative pronoun may be omitted when it is used with the verb “be.”

Relative pronoun reference

A relative pronoun relates to a preceding noun. Always check whether the relative pronoun logically relates to the preceding noun.

We have thought of numerous ideas for costumes THAT the children will wear for the party.

Here the relative pronoun relates to *costumes*, which makes sense: The costumes are costumes *that* the children will wear.

What to look out for:

Pay attention to the order of words around relative pronouns to make sure that the relative pronoun and the clause it begins relate to the correct noun. In the following example, the relative pronoun modifies the incorrect noun.

We have thought of numerous costume ideas THAT the children will wear for the party.

That and the subordinate clause it begins relate to *ideas* rather than costumes, so the sentence structure illogically states that children will wear ideas for the party.

Relative pronouns *That* and *Which*

Relative pronouns *that* and *which* can refer to any noun, not including human beings. *Which* is used in clauses that express either extra or non-essential information while *that* can only be used in relative clauses that contain essential information. For example, compare the following two sentences.

This is the picture THAT was stolen from the museum.

This picture, WHICH was stolen from the museum, is worth a million dollars.

In the first sentence, *that* introduces information that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Without the relative clause, *that was stolen from the museum*, the sentence would just be *this is the picture*, whose meaning differs significantly from the original.

In the second sentence, the relative clause that starts with *which* introduces extra information into the sentence. The fact that the picture was stolen is not essential to the meaning of the sentence – that the picture is worth a million dollars. When *which* is used to introduce nonessential information, it is preceded by a comma.

What to look out for:

In a sentence correction question, if you see answer choices that feature a change between *that* and *which*, check to see whether the information they introduce is essential or inessential. Remember, *that* should only be used if the clause introduces essential information. Also, *which* should always be preceded by a comma when introducing non-essential information.

Incorrect: *Nikki's favorite movie is the film "Momento" that was directed by Christopher Nolan.*

Correct: *Nikki's favorite movie is the film "Momento," which was directed by Christopher Nolan.*

Using *that* would only be correct if there were multiple movies titled "Momento" as the information in the relative clause would be needed to distinguish which movie named "Momento" was Nikki's favorite.

Relative pronouns *Who* and *Whom*

Unlike *that* and *which*, the relative pronouns *who* and *whom* can only relate to a human noun. The

difference between the two is that *who* is the subject of the relative pronoun and *whom* is the object of the relative pronoun.

If you have difficulty choosing between *who* and *whom*, then read the relative clause separately as if it were an independent sentence, replacing *who* with *he* or *they* and replacing *whom* with *him* or *them*.

The man who is walking along the street is the postman. (He is walking along the street)

The man whom we met in the morning is the postman. (We met him in the morning)

What to look out for:

When you see *who* and *whom* in the answer choices, use the above technique to check whether the relative pronoun is being used as a subject or an object.

Incorrect: *The man whom is walking along the street is the postman.*

(Him is walking along the street)

Concept 3: *The man who we met in the morning is the postman.*

(We met he in the morning)

Practice questions

1. Elliot Carter's String Quartets, the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning composition, consists of atonal, rhythmically complex music, each note a miniature composition inside its own structure.
 - A. each note a miniature composition inside its
 - B. all the notes a miniature composition inside their
 - C. all the notes a miniature composition inside its
 - D. every note a miniature composition inside their
 - E. each note a miniature composition inside their
2. Scientists at the state medical research facility have discovered a dormant virus, one that they believe is a type previously unknown to medical science.
 - A. that they believe is
 - B. that they believe it to be
 - C. they believe that it is of
 - D. they believe that is
 - E. that they believe to be of
3. A letter by John Keats, written in the same year as "Ode on a Grecian Urn" were published, reveals that Keats was often unsettled by his lover Fanny Brawne's behavior towards him.
 - A. A letter by John Keats, written in the same year as "Ode on a Grecian Urn" were published,
 - B. A letter by John Keats, written in the same year of publication as "Ode on a Grecian Urn,"
 - C. A letter by John Keats, written in the same year that "Ode on a Grecian Urn" was published,
 - D. John Keats wrote a letter in the same year as he published "Ode on a Grecian Urn" that
 - E. John Keats wrote a letter in the same year of publication as "Ode on a Grecian Urn" that
4. Driven to desperation by their burgeoning loans, the farmers tried innovative agricultural techniques, planted multiple crops, and even the sale of their poultry for generating additional money.
 - A. the sale of their poultry for generating additional money

- B. sold their poultry to generate additional money
- C. the sale of their poultry in money generation
- D. generating money from the sale of their poultry
- E. their poultry sale to generate additional money

5. Several columnists have harshly criticized a prominent construction company for, first of all, failing to complete projects on time, and secondarily, for their failure to adhere to government guidelines regarding construction of residential buildings.

- A. secondarily, for their failure to
- B. secondly, for their failure to
- C. secondly, that they failed and did not
- D. second, that they failed to
- E. second, for failing to

Answers and explanations

Question 1

A - Correct:

This option correctly uses *each* to modify *note* and the pronoun *its* to replace *note*.

B - Incorrect:

The use of *all* is incorrect as the sentence emphasizes the characteristics of the constituents of the music, i.e., the notes.

C - Incorrect:

The use of *all* is wrong as the sentence emphasizes the characteristics of the constituents of the music, i.e., the notes. Further, the use of the pronoun *its* does not agree with *all* in number.

D - Incorrect:

The use of *every* does not agree with the pronoun *their* in number.

E - Incorrect:

The use of *each* does not agree with the pronoun *their* in number.

Question 2

A, D - Incorrect:

The auxiliary verb *is* creates a comparison between two entities that must be from the same type. In this case, *one (virus) that is a type* implies that the virus is simply a type. Or perhaps *type* may mean *type of virus* where *of virus* is understood.

B, C - Incorrect:

The pronoun *it* does not have a clear antecedent. It can refer to *virus* or *research facility*. While it could be argued that *it* refers to *virus*, *it* is also clearly redundant in these two cases.

E - Correct:

This answer fixes the comparison error by stating that the *virus believed to be of a type* and not *is a type*. The pronoun *it* has been removed. E is a better answer choice than A, among other reasons, because E is a little more precise, and because E doesn't insist that we understand that the word *type* actually means *type of virus*.

Question 3

A - Incorrect:

The auxiliary plural verb *were* is incorrect. *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is a singular noun.

B - Incorrect:

The phrase *written in the same year of publication as* is clunky and uneconomical.

C - Correct:

Correct comparison between *the year* the letter was written and *the year* Ode was published. This answer is the clearest and most economical.

D, E - Incorrect:

The use of the relative pronoun *that* at the end of the underlined sentence opens a relative clause that incorrectly modifies the noun *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, implying that the Ode reveals, rather than a letter by John Keats reveals. The major problem with both D and E is that John Keats is the subject, and his name is awkwardly repeated where the pronoun “he” would be a much better choice.

Question 4

A - Incorrect:

This option is wrong as the use of the noun *sale* is not parallel to the other verbs of the sentence: *tried, planted*.

B - Correct:

This option correctly uses the verb *sold* in parallel form with the other verbs *tried, planted*.

C - Incorrect:

This option is wrong as the word *sale* (noun) is not parallel to the other verbs of the sentence: *tried, planted*.

D - Incorrect:

... *generating* is incorrect as it is not parallel with the past tense of the sentence.

E - Incorrect:

The noun *sale* in this option is not parallel to the use of verbs in the previous phrases.

Question 5

A - Incorrect:

This is a question in which we strive to achieve parallelism. The phrase *secondarily...* is parallel to *first of all*, an adverbial phrase. However, option E, which contains the adverb *second* (an adverb here), is more parallel.

B - Incorrect:

The pronoun *their* is plural, but the noun *company* is singular.

C, D - Incorrect:

The pronoun *they* is plural where the noun *company* is singular. Further, *first of all* and *second* describe a list of items, which must be in a parallel form. However, the second item *that they* that

starts with the relative pronoun *that* is not parallel to *for failing*.

E - Correct:

The adjectives *first* and *second* are parallel, and *for failing to replace* and *for failing to investigate* are parallel as well.

Lesson 3: Modifiers

Modifiers do just what their name implies: They modify a noun or an action in a sentence by giving additional details about it. The simplest modifier is an adjective or adverb, but modifiers can also be whole phrases or clauses.

With sweat falling from her forehead, Anita danced to the Spanish guitar like she had never danced before.

This sentence begins with a modifier in the form of a clause, and it gives additional details about Anita, the subject of the main clause of the sentence.

Plutonium, a transuranic radioactive chemical element, can be found in nature.

A series of words, transuranic radioactive chemical element, all modify the noun plutonium.

Alan leaped deftly over the large puddle.

This sentence features an adverb, deftly, which modifies the verb leaped.

The crux of understanding modifiers – and understanding how the GMAT will try to use them against you – is identifying what the modifier is attempting to describe.

Modifiers Rules

Modifiers must be clearly and logically linked to what they modify

Modifier errors occur when a modifier describes the wrong noun or verb in a sentence. The technical term that GMAC, the makers of the GMAT, use for this is an error in logical predication.

Running down the street, a brick fell on the thief's head.

Who is running down the street? Likely it is the thief who is running down the street, but since *a brick* is the noun that follows the modifying phrase that opens the sentence, this is the noun that receives the information of the modifier.

Whenever a modifier describes a noun, the modifier – no matter if it's a single word or a whole phrase – must be placed next to the noun.

According to the structure of the sentence, it is the brick that is running down the street. This error can be fixed in one of two ways:

1. Moving the modified noun so that it is next to the modifying word or phrase.

Running down the street, the thief was struck by a brick.

2. Switching the order of action.

A brick fell on the thief's head as he was running down the street.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

Sentence correction questions create modifier confusion by separating modifiers from the nouns and verbs they modify. When you come across modifiers, always check what they modify. Make sure that the noun or verb modified matches the author's intention.

The correct use of a modifier is dictated by the author's intention not the structure of the sentence.

For example, the previous example about the brick and the thief is correct if the brick were running (according to the structure of the sentence). However, this meaning does not match the author's intention.

Two of the most common modifier errors are misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers. Misplaced modifiers occur when the modifier is not placed next to the noun it modifies (as in the case of the first example). Dangling modifiers occur when the modifier describes a noun that is absent from the sentence like in the following example.

Overcome with dread, there was silence in the theater.

In the sentence above, the opening modifier has nothing to modify in the sentence: Who was overcome with dread? It doesn't make sense that *silence* or *the theater* was overcome with dread, so the opening modifier is said to "dangle" since it has nothing to modify.

Note that dangling modifiers can occur anywhere in a sentence: at the beginning, in the middle or at the end. The above example can be fixed by providing a noun that the modifier could describe.

Overcome with dread, the audience was silent in the theater.

Modifiers Concepts

Adjectives vs adverbs

Adjectives are words that describe nouns or pronouns. They may come before the word they describe (*that is a cute puppy*), or they may follow the word they describe (*that puppy is cute*).

Adverbs are words that modify adjectives, verbs and other adverbs. They cannot modify nouns or pronouns. A word is an adverb if it answers the question **how**, **when** or **where**.

She is rather daft.

(daft = adjective modifying the pronoun *she*)

She thinks slowly.

(slowly = adverb modifying the verb *thinks*)

You did a good job.

(good = adjective modifying the noun *job*)

We performed badly.

(badly = adverb modifying the verb *performed*)

What to look out for:

Common errors include using an adjective when an adverb is needed.

She thinks slow.

Slow is an adjective, which can only describe nouns or pronouns and not verbs like *thinks*. However, the adverb *slowly* could be used correctly in its place.

Also pay careful attention to what an adverb or adjective is modifying and whether it correctly conveys the intended meaning. In particular, watch when adverbs or adjectives are paired together as subtle but significant changes in meaning can occur. For example, notice how the meaning changes when an adjective is changed to an adverb in the following sentences:

She was the coy Danish librarian he met on the train

She was the coyly Danish librarian he met on the train.

Note,

Contrary to the general rule that only adverbs can modify a verb, use the adjectives *good* or *bad* with sense verbs, such as *look*, *feel*, *smell*, *sounds* or *taste*.

Correct: *The food smells good.*

Incorrect: *The food smells well.*

Participial modifiers

A “participle” is a verb that acts as an adjective, and a participial modifier is a participle or participial phrase that modifies a clause. There are two types of participles: present participles

(*writing, driving*) and past participles (*written, driven*).

The participial modifier appears at either the beginning or the end of a clause and is separated from the rest of the clause by a comma.

Using the results of the previous fiscal year, the managers developed a new business plan.

The managers developed a new business plan, using the results of the previous fiscal year.

What to look out for:

The participial modifier always contains essential information and should not come between the subject and the verb.

Incorrect: The managers, using the results of the previous fiscal year, developed a new business plan.

Illogical participial modifier

A participial modifier must relate logically to the subject of the clause it modifies as in the following sentence.

Scientists warned that rising sea levels were already having a deleterious effect on marine life, REFERENCEING the loss of sea turtle hatching grounds in the South Pacific.

What to look out for:

Participial modifiers are common culprits in dangling modifiers on the GMAT. Check to make sure that it makes sense for the subject of the clause to be modified by the participle or participial phrase.

USING the results of the previous fiscal year, a new business plan was developed by the managers.

This sentence does not make sense because the participial modifier describes the new business plan: The new business plan did not use the results of the previous year, rather the managers did.

Participial modifier time relation

The participial modifier occupies the same period of time as the verb of the clause. In other words, the action contained in the participial modifier and the actions in the clause occur simultaneously.

Celebrating their victory over the Celtic invaders, the monks raided the monastery's ale cellar.

The time period of the action in the participial modifier that begins the sentence is the same time period of the action in the main clause that follows it. The celebrating and raiding are simultaneous events.

What to look out for:

Participial modifier time relation errors occur when a participial modifier is meant to occur in a different time period.

The following sentence is incorrect because the action in the participial modifier happened before the action in the main clause.

Incorrect: Finishing his exam, the boy walked home.

Correct: After finishing his exam, the boy walked home.

Participial modifier at the beginning of a sentence

A participial modifier should modify the subject of the clause that follows the comma.

Floating in the pool, I marveled at the clouds.

Floating in the pool is the participial phrase that modifies the subject, *I*.

Biting his victim, Louis felt a momentary thrill.

Biting his victim is the participial phrase that modifies the subject, *Louis*.

What to look out for:

A participial modifier must make sense describing the subject of the clause that follows. Also, a participial modifier can never describe the impersonal pronoun *it*.

Incorrect: Flying through inclement weather, it took an extra hour to arrive.

Correct: Flying through inclement weather, the plane took an extra hour to arrive.

Participial modifier at the end of a sentence

A participial modifier at the end of a sentence always comes after a comma and modifies the subject of the previous clause.

The colonialists dress in gaudy colors, thinking they are superior to the natives.

What to look out for:

The same errors that can occur with participial modifiers that begin sentences can occur with participial modifiers that end sentences. Make sure that a participial modifier describes the subject of the preceding clause and that this description makes sense.

Incorrect: A large branch struck him, walking down the sidewalk.

Correct: Walking down the sidewalk, he was struck by a large branch.

Practice questions

1. For people living in the small town of Prudhoe Bay in Alaska, mukluk boots with bottom insulation and parka hoods with a ruff are essential items of daily wear, a method to protect against the harsh cold of the approaching Arctic winter.
 - A. a method to protect
 - B. as a method protecting
 - C. protecting
 - D. as a protection of
 - E. to protect
2. An interesting fact about the human ear is that in the cochlea, hair cells are placed close to each other, moving in unison and assuming distinct cell shapes independent of one another.
 - A. moving in unison and assuming
 - B. they move in unison while assuming
 - C. move in unison, and assume
 - D. moving in unison yet assuming
 - E. even though they move in unison and assume
3. A quiet, young boy who was often prone to bouts of sickness, Tutankhamen's rise to power in 1332 B.C. surprised many, though oracles had foreseen King Tut's ascension years ago.
 - A. Tutankhamen's rise to power in 1332 B.C. surprised many
 - B. Tutankhamen's rise in 1332 B.C. to power surprised many
 - C. Tutankhamen's power in 1332 B.C. surprised many
 - D. Tutankhamen surprised many by rising to power in 1332 B.C.
 - E. the power attained by Tutankhamen in 1332 B.C. surprised many
4. Although closed for renovation, architecture students with a college pass can gain entry to the historic monument.
 - A. Although closed for renovation
 - B. Although it is closed for renovation
 - C. Closed for renovation
 - D. Closed on account of renovation
 - E. Having closed for renovation
5. During the early years of the American Civil War, when the Union Army provided one assistant surgeon to every regiment of thousand men, women nurses, familiar with various surgical procedures, were a help in the treating of several injured soldiers.

- A. women nurses, familiar with various surgical procedures, were a help in the treating of
- B. women nurses were familiar with various surgical procedures and this enabled them to help in the treatment of
- C. women nurses, familiar with various surgical procedures, helped to treat
- D. having intimate knowledge of various surgical procedures, women nurses helped the treatment of
- E. familiar with various surgical procedures, women nurses helped to treat

Question 1

A - Incorrect:

This option contains a misplaced modifier: the noun after the comma is called an appositive modifier -- it provides extra information about the noun before the comma. In this case it seems that *a method* modifies *daily wear*.

B - Incorrect:

This option incorrectly uses the preposition *as*, which implies that *daily wear* is *a method*.

C - Correct:

The active participle *protecting* correctly modifies *mukluk boots with bottom insulation and parka hoods with a ruff* to imply that these items are protecting people living in the small town of *Prudhoe Bay in Alaska*.

D - Incorrect:

This option seems to imply that *a method* modifies *daily wear* because the noun after the comma is an appositive modifier, which means that it provides extra information about the noun before the comma.

E - Incorrect:

This option contains a misplaced modifier: the implication of the infinitive *to protect* is not clear with respect to the subject.

Question 2

A - Incorrect:

The aggregation word *and* is used illogically to provide contrasting information. While grammatically correct, the use of *and* fails to express the contrasting behavior of hair cells that move together but take on different shapes.

B - Incorrect:

The two independent clauses are connected with a comma, but a semicolon is required.

C - Incorrect:

This answer is not grammatically correct. The use of *move in unison*, *and assume* would need the conjunction *and* to make it part of a verb phrase: *are placed..., and move in unison, and assume*. And, even then, it would be awkward and unidiomatic.

D - Correct:

The aggregation word *yet* is used correctly to show contrast. This answer choice is the one that would best explain why such phenomena are interesting to scientists and to us.

E - Incorrect:

This answer does not make sense. What's surprising is not that the cells are placed close together.

Question 3

A,B,C,E - Incorrect:

The opening modifier illogically modifies the noun phrase *rise to power*. *Rise to power* cannot be a *quiet, young boy*.

D - Correct:

The opening modifier correctly modifies the human *Tutankhamen*.

E - Incorrect:

The opening modifier illogically modifies the noun phrase *the power*.

Question 4

A - Incorrect:

The conjunction *although* requires a clause after it. In this case, no subject and verb follow, and thus no clause follows *although*.

B - Correct:

This answer fixes the structure error by adding the clause with a subject *it* and a verb *is* after the conjunction *although*. Adding the pronoun *it* fixes the meaning of the sentence by having *it* refer to *historic monument*.

C, D, E - Incorrect:

Dangling modifier error. The participle modifier at the beginning of the sentence *closed / having closed* illogically refers to architecture students.

Question 5

A - Incorrect:

The women nurses were a help is informal, conversational phrasing.

B - Incorrect:

This option contains an ambiguous antecedent as *this* refers to *familiar or surgical procedures*.

C - Correct:

The idiom *helped to treat* is in the correct form (*help* + infinitive). The modifiers are in the correct place: *familiar* modifies *women nurses*.

D - Incorrect:

The phrase *having intimate knowledge of various surgical procedures* wrongly modifies “one assistant surgeon” rather than “women nurses” as required.

E - Incorrect:

The phrase *familiar with various surgical procedures* wrongly modifies one assistant surgeon rather than *women nurses* as required.

Lesson 4: Tenses and Moods

There is more to consider than just subject-verb agreement when it comes to verbs in sentence correction questions. Verb tense must also be considered. The tense of a verb indicates when the action occurred.

She RUNS to class.

She RAN to class.

She WILL RUN to class.

In each of the examples, the action *to run* happens at different times. The first example is in the simple present tense, which is used to express “external” states, general rules or facts. The action isn’t currently happening: *She* is not currently running to class. Instead this is simply a general statement.

The second example is in simple past tense: The running already occurred. The third example is in simple future: The action has yet to occur.

In addition to the simple tenses shown above, we will examine progressive and perfect tenses as well as the indicative and subjunctive mood.

Tenses Rules

Verb tense must be consistent

The guiding rule of verb tense is to keep tenses consistent within a sentence. Obviously, if a sentence only has one verb, this task is simple. On the GMAT, however, sentences will often express multiple actions.

Correct: *The diplomat WALKED out of the embassy and SURRENDERED to the angry lemon vendors.*

Incorrect: *The diplomat WALKS out of the embassy and SURRENDERED to the angry lemon vendors.*

Sentences can dictate a switch in verb tense, but only if the switch is in accordance with the meaning of the sentence.

During the first leg of a race I always FEEL fine, but in yesterday's race, I FELT awful from the start.

Since this sentence compares actions (in this case *feeling*) that occurred over two different time periods, a tense switch is needed. The first clause is in the simple present tense because the action is a general statement, but the action in the second clause happened in the past, so the simple past tense is used.

Time indicators such as *today*, *yesterday* or *tomorrow* are the key to figuring out the appropriate tense of a verb.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

Sentence correction questions will often use the wrong tense in a sentence that contains multiple actions. When you see multiple forms of a verb in the answer choices of a question, you need to distinguish whether verb tense, subject-verb agreement or both of these concepts are being tested.

If the number of the verb changes between choices, then subject-verb agreement is being tested. If instead the tense changes, then verb tense is being tested. Finally, if both the tense and the number of the verb change, then subject-verb agreement **and** tense are being tested.

Subject-verb agreement (a change in the number of a verb):

has vs. have

is vs. are

Verb tense

has vs. had been

is vs. was

Both subject-verb agreement and verb tense

has vs. have been

is vs. were

The differences between verbs used in the answer choices will indicate which grammar rule or rules are being tested.

Tenses Concepts

Present simple tense

As pointed out earlier, the present simple tense is used for general information. It is not used to describe actions that occur at specific times.

We WALK to the store.

We ARE WALKING to the store.

Notice the difference in meaning between these two statements. The second statement indicates the time when the action occurred: *walking* is happening now. However, the first statement, written in the simple present tense, does not indicate a specific time. It is simply a general statement.

Besides general statements, the simple present can also be used with repeatedly occurring actions. These actions are often indicated by adverbs of frequency, such as always, never, frequently, every month.

I always FISH with friends.

Alice BUYS chocolate for her mom every Mother's Day.

The simple present can also be used with actions scheduled in the future.

Independence Day FALLS on a Wednesday this year.

The plane ARRIVES at 9 tonight.

What to look out for:

When you see the simple present tense used in an SC question, watch out for time indicators that ascribe a **specific** time to the action. Remember that the simple present is only used for general statements.

Incorrect: Today, improvements in diagnostic testing MAKE it possible to detect early stages of cancer.

The verb make is in the simple present but the time indicator today ascribes a specific time to the action. Therefore, this sentence is incorrect. To correct this mistake, the time indicator today should be taken out to make the sentence a general statement.

***Correct:** Improvements in diagnostic testing MAKE it possible to detect early stages of cancer.*

***Correct:** Today, improvements in diagnostic testing HAVE MADE it possible to detect early stages of cancer.*

Simple past tense

All past tenses describe actions that started and finished in the past. The past simple tense can describe facts or actions that occurred in the past, such as:

The Romans BUILT a system of roads throughout England.

My volume of Persian poetry FELL off the shelf.

The past simple tense can also describe actions that occurred at specific times as indicated by past indicators such as past dates, periods or eras, for example, *yesterday, last week, years ago*.

Jim GRADUATED from university last year.

During WWII, the Germans SHOT Edgar Derby for stealing a teapot.

Future simple

The future simple tense takes the form:

am/is/are + going to

or

will + base verb

Use the simple future tense to express actions that will happen in the future. Look for time indicators such as *next day, week, month, year; tomorrow; in the coming year; etc*.

I AM GOING to watch the game tonight.

The county's water supply WILL PLUMMET in the next five years.

Present progressive

The present progressive tense takes the form *am/is/are + verb + ing*, and it is used to describe actions that are currently happening, such as step-by-step actions and actions occurring at the time of speaking/writing.

The economy IS RECOVERING.

The committee IS now VOTING on the new transportation act.

Present perfect progressive

The present perfect progressive tense takes the form *have been + verb + ing*. Like the present perfect simple tense, the present perfect progressive indicates an action that started in the past and continues in the present. However, the present perfect progressive is used to describe continuous actions.

Elliot HAS BEEN PREPARING dinner since this afternoon.

Ellen HAS BEEN WRITING for two hours.

In both these examples, the action is continuous: Elliot has continuously been preparing dinner since the afternoon, and Ellen has written continuously for two hours.

What to look out for:

The present perfect progressive cannot be used for non-continuous actions or actions of short duration.

Incorrect: Elvis HAS BEEN LEAVING the building.

Correct: *Elvis has LEFT the building.*

Past progressive

The past progressive tense takes the form:

was/were + verb + ing

The past progressive is used to indicate continuous action that occurred and finished in the past. More specifically, the past progressive is used to express the following time conditions.

Past action in progress, such as past actions that occurred gradually or step-by-step.

The economy WAS RECOVERING.

The Beatles WERE quickly BECOMING the world's most famous band by 1963.

1. Past actions that occurred within a limited time frame.

Thoreau WAS WRITING "Walden" during the summer of 1848.

2. Two past actions that occurred simultaneously and connected in the sentence by *while* or *when*.

While I WAS ROWING, Martin was watching for the island.

3. A continuous action in the past that was interrupted by another action. Again *while* or *when* should link the actions.

While he WAS WRITING his first novel, he had an idea for a screen play.

Future progressive

The future progressive tense takes the form:

will + be + verb + ing

or:

is/am/are + going to + be + verb + ing

The future progressive tense indicates continuing action: something that will be happening or going on at some point in the future.

I cannot attend the meeting tomorrow because I AM BE GOING TO BE PLAYING golf all day.

Scientists predict temperatures WILL BE steadily RISING over the next century.

Present perfect tense

The present perfect tense is formed by combining the simple tense of the verb *have* (*has/have*) and a past participle.

I HAVE TAKEN the GMAT twice before.

The present perfect simple tense is used to express the following time conditions:

1. Actions that started in the past and continue in the present. Time indicators include the words *since*, *for*, *lately*, *recently*, *so far*, *never/always* (for duration, not as an adverb of

frequency), *ever, always, before, yet, already, once, twice, three times, four times, five times.*

For six days, we HAVE SAILED the Atlantic.

The present perfect tense have sailed indicates that we've been sailing for four days and are still sailing in the present.

I HAVE always SPOKEN French.

Note here always is used to express a continuous action and not a repetitive action such as in I always speak French to your parents, which requires the simple present.

2. Actions that have ended in the present or close to the present. The time indications are *right now, just, already, recent, recently, lately.*

Elvis HAS just LEFT the building.

3. Actions that have ended, but the present period of time continues. Time indicators include once, twice, three times, this year, this month.

The attaché HAS BEEN to Ukraine twice this year.

What to look out for:

Watch for cases when the simple present tense sneaks into sentences with specific time indications. In these cases, the simple perfect tense is usually required.

Incorrect: This is the first time our family JOINS the annual reunion.

Incorrect: This is the first time our family JOINED the annual reunion.

Correct: *This is the first time our family HAS JOINED the annual reunion.*

The first example is in the simple present tense, but there is the specific time indicator *first time*. The second sentence incorrectly uses the simple past tense *joined*.

Past perfect tense

The past perfect simple tense takes the following form:

had + past participle

The past perfect tense describes an action in the past that occurred before another action in the past. The earlier past action takes the past perfect tense while the more recent past action takes the simple past tense.

The sun HAD GONE down before we WENT to the movies.

The past perfect should only be used when the prior action has some connection to the action that comes after it, such as in a sequence of events.

The train HAD LEFT by the time we ARRIVED at the station.

Jane HAD PLANNED her trip carefully before she BOOKED the flight.

What to look out for:

The past perfect cannot be the only verb tense in a sentence; it is only used with the simple past tense.

Incorrect: We HAD LIVED in San Diego.

Correct: *We LIVED in San Diego.*

Correct: *We HAD LIVED in San Diego before we MOVED to New Mexico.*

Make sure the past perfect action and the simple past action are in the correct order in a sentence. The past perfect action must precede the simple past action.

Incorrect: We VISITED Morocco before we HAD VISITED France.

Correct: *We HAD VISITED Morocco before we VISITED France.*

The first sentence illogically uses the past perfect tense with the action that happened later.

Try not to confuse the past perfect with the present perfect tense. Remember, the past perfect always uses *had*.

Incorrect: We HAVE SIGNED our lease prior to seeing the new apartment.

Correct: *We HAD SIGNED the lease prior to seeing the new apartment.*

Subjunctive

As discussed in the introduction, verbs have a mood in addition to a number and a tense. The mood of a verb indicates the author or speaker's belief about the action.

Most verbs are written in the indicative mood, which conveys certainty or knowledge. For example:

This bakery makes the best bagels in Boston.

At least 13 different species of finches live on the Galapagos Islands.

These sentences express something that is true or that the author believes to be true.

The subjunctive mood on the other hand expresses a hypothetical situation or the wishes of the author.

If I WERE a rich man, I'd hire a private tutor.

It is critical that he BE involved in this discussion.

These examples represent the two main instances when the subjunctive mood is used:

1. To express hypothetical wishes or unreal conditions:

If I WERE tall, I would play on the Miami Heat.

2. To express demands, requests or proposals:

In light of the recent scandal, we propose that the provost RESIGN.

The GMAT rarely tests the first case, the hypothetical subjunctive. Instead, expect to see questions that test the second type of subjunctive, the command subjunctive.

Certain verbs of command require the command subjunctive. Command verbs include *advice, ask, demand, direct, insist, instruct, order, recommend, request, require, suggest, command*.

The coach insisted that Jim BE on time next practice.

We ask that the board CONSIDER our proposal.

With these verbs, the subjunctive always takes the following construction:

verb of demand + *that* + subject + infinitive (without the *to*)

There are a few important things to remember with command verbs and the subjunctive.

That must be included. If *that* is omitted, the construction is incorrect in formal writing.

Incorrect: *The coach insisted Jim be on time next practice.*

Correct: *The coach insisted THAT Jim be on time next practice.*

The command verb can be in any tense.

Correct: *We ASKED that the board consider our proposal.*

Correct: *We ASK that the board consider our proposal.*

The subjunctive verb cannot change in tense or number. It must remain in the base form (the infinitive form but without the *to*).

Incorrect: *The defense requires that you ARE in court tomorrow.*

Correct: *The defense requires that you BE in court tomorrow.*

Verbs such as *should*, *will* or *would* cannot be added to the subjunctive.

Incorrect: *The mayor ordered that all citizens SHOULD REMAIN inside during the storm.*

Correct: *The mayor ordered that all citizens REMAIN inside during the storm.*

The last and most frustrating key to the subjunctive is that not all demand verbs require a subjunctive verb.

Some command verbs require an infinitive verb.

Correct: *I forbid you TO LEAVE this classroom.*

Incorrect: *I forbid you LEAVE this classroom.*

Forbid is a command verb; however, it requires a verb in the infinitive form.

Some command verbs can take an infinitive or subjunctive verb.

Correct: *The tour group asked that the guide SPEAK louder.*

Correct: *The tour group asked the guide TO SPEAK louder.*

Asked is a command verb that can take either a subjunctive or an infinitive verb.

Unfortunately, there are no rules to determine which verbs require which forms. The best method is to memorize which forms go with which verbs.

Command verbs that require a subjunctive verb:

demand

mandate

request

dictate

propose

stipulate

insist

recommend

suggest

Command verbs that require an infinitive verb:

advise

persuade

allow

want

forbid

Command verbs that can take subjunctive or an infinitive verb:

ask

order

require

beg

prefer

intend

urge

What to look out for:

Though the subjunctive appears complex, sentence correction questions that test the subjunctive are predictable and can be approached methodically.

A command verb is the first clue that a question is testing the subjunctive. Whenever you see a command verb, you know that the following verb in the sentence must either be in the subjunctive form or the infinitive form.

If the following verb is a part of the question's underlined text, you can eliminate any option that does not feature a subjunctive verb or an infinitive verb. Next, eliminate options that feature these common errors:

Eliminate any option that uses the subjunctive without *that*. Remember, *that* cannot be omitted from subjunctive constructions. However, *that* is omitted for verbs that use the infinitive form with the subjunctive.

Eliminate any option that uses the subjunctive with additional verbs such as *should*, *will* or *could*. Subjunctive constructions with these words are always incorrect.

Eliminate any subjunctive construction in which the verb that follows the command verb is in a tense other than the base tense (infinitive without *to*).

Looking for these common errors will simplify subjunctive questions and make the correct answer easy to find.

Practice questions

1. Although temporarily disconnected, Roger was soon able to reconnect to the Internet using the emergency code provided by the telecom operator.
(A) Although temporarily disconnected, Roger was soon able to reconnect
(B) Although having been temporarily disconnected, Roger had connected
(C) Although it had been temporarily disconnected, Roger was probably to be able to connect
(D) Temporarily disconnected though it had been, Roger had been able to connect
(E) Disconnected temporarily, Roger has been able to connect
2. Passions have run high as the meeting between Poland and Russia in Warsaw in the football Euro Cup on Tuesday has been billed by the media as the Battle of the Vistula part two, a reference to a famous Polish victory over a stronger Bolshevik army in 1920.
(A) have run high
(B) ran high
(C) had run highly
(D) run high
(E) were running highly
3. In the 1930s, John W. Campbell wrote short stories about an Antarctic research camp that discovers and thaws the ancient body of a crash-landed alien and eventually combined them in a novella forming the basis of the blockbuster movie “The Thing.”
(A) forming the basis of the blockbuster movie
(B) that were forming the basis of the blockbuster movie
(C) to form the basis of the blockbuster movie
(D) which had formed the basis of the blockbuster movie
(E) that formed the basis of the blockbuster movie
4. India has become the fastest-growing cellular market in the world. According to government surveys, only 10 percent of Indians surveyed in 1996 had access to a telephone connection; of those surveyed in 2012, over 50 percent had access to a mobile phone connection.
(A) only 10 percent of Indians surveyed in 1996 had access to a telephone connection; of those surveyed in 2012, over 50 percent had access to a mobile phone connection
(B) only 10 percent of Indians surveyed in 1996 have access to a telephone connection; if they are surveyed in 2012, over 50 percent have access to a mobile phone connection

- (C) only 10 percent of them had access to a telephone connection; but over 50 percent of them by 2012 had access to a mobile phone connection
- (D) only 10 percent of Indians until 1996, and by over 50 percent by 2012
- (E) Indians in 1996 have telephone connection only 10 percent of the time, but over 50 percent of them had access by 2012

5. Stem cell therapy for diabetes has been garnering a lot of attention as a potential cure based on the assumption that stem cells are able to be programmed to behave like pancreatic cells.

- (A) are able to be programmed to behave like pancreatic cells
- (B) were able to be programmed to behave as pancreatic cells
- (C) can be programmed to behave like pancreatic cells
- (D) could be programmed to behave like pancreatic cells
- (E) are capable of being programmed to behave like pancreatic cells do

Answers and explanations

Question 1

A - Correct:

This is the clearest, most concise answer.

B - Incorrect:

...*having been* is incorrect and confuses the sequence of events.

C - Incorrect:

Usually, when there is a modifying clause before the main clause, the main clause begins with the word being modified. Also, ...*probably to be able to connect*... is unidiomatic.

D - Incorrect:

Temporarily disconnected though it had been is very wordy and awkwardly constructed.

E - Incorrect:

Poor use of the perfect tense. *Disconnected temporarily* signifies one event, while *has been able to connect* suggests a string of disparate events.

Question 2

A - Incorrect:

This option contains the wrong use of the present perfect tense. This sentence is in present tense, so *have run* is wrong.

B - Incorrect:

The first part of the sentence is in active voice and the verb should be in present tense *run* and not *ran*.

C - Incorrect:

The past perfect tense does not align with the tense of the sentence.

D - Correct:

This option contains the correct use of the adverb *high* to modify the verb run, and the present progressive is correct.

E - Incorrect:

The continuous action *were running highly* is illogical, and the tense does not agree with the main verb *billed*. *High* is an adjective with two forms of adverbs: *high* -- same meaning as the adjective; *highly* -- very much.

Question 3

A - Incorrect:

This option contains a misplaced modifier as the participle *forming* illogically modifies *research camps* rather than the events associated with it. It was the events that formed the basis of the novella not the research camp.

B - Incorrect:

This option contains the wrong form of the main verb *forming*, which should be in past tense *form* according to the auxiliary *were*. The use of *that* is allowed in indirect narration only hence the sentence should be in past tense. Further, the use of the participle (verb + *ing*) is valid only when there is only one subject of the sentence.

C - Incorrect:

The use of the first form of the verb *form* is wrong as the sentence is in past tense. The use of the infinitive implies that John Campbell purposely wrote the short stories and it was not a coincidence.

D - Incorrect:

The use of past perfect tense is wrong in this case as the writing of short stories finished earlier, and according to the past perfect rules, the first sentence must be in past perfect.

E - Correct:

This option correctly uses the conjunction *that* and correctly modifies stories. The verb *formed* is in correct tense, past simple.

Question 4

A - Correct:

The use of past simple tense for both uses of the verb *had* in *had access* is clear and concise. This is the best answer choice.

B - Incorrect:

In the first clause, the usage of the present simple tense *have access* is less desirable here because the time context is the past. (It's worth noting, however, that authors may sometimes use the present when talking about things that happened in the past in order to make the story more vivid.) A more serious problem is the second clause that begins, *if they are surveyed in 2012*; this is not the correct meaning, nor is it a correct use of *if*.

C - Incorrect:

The pronoun *them* has no clear antecedent.

D - Incorrect:

Sentence fragment.

E - Incorrect:

This answer changes the meaning of the original sentence. The adverb of degree *only* before *10 percent* changes the meaning of the original sentence.

Question 5

A, E - Incorrect:

Awkward and wordy use of passive voice. This is a simple concept and the prose should reflect that.

B - Incorrect:

Incorrect: The use of the preposition *as* (which means “in the position of”) illogically implies that stem cells behave in the position of pancreatic cells (literally the same entity).

C - Correct:

This simple sentence provides us with all the information we need.

D - Incorrect:

It’s a practical fact here that these stem cells can be programmed to act like pancreatic cells, so *could* is incorrect.

E - Incorrect:

The use of *being* is usually wrong on the GMAT.

Lesson 5: Parallelism

Though parallelism sounds complicated, it is one of the easiest sentence correction skills to master. In essence, it is about keeping terms in a sentence similar (parallel) to one another. Look at the following example.

The new student is smart, thoughtful and has talent.

The sentence describes the new student by listing three of her qualities. However, the terms in the list are not parallel: *smart* and *thoughtful* are adjectives, but *has* is a verb. In order to achieve parallelism, each item in the list needs to be an equivalent part of speech.

In the example above, the verb phrase should be changed to an adjective.

The new student is smart, thoughtful and talented.

Primarily, parallelism deals with lists, such as the list of qualities in the example above. Lists can be composed of words, phrases or clauses, and each list item must be similar to the others.

Rules

List items must be structurally similar and logical

Whenever terms are put into a list or another parallel structure, they must be structurally similar and logical. Lists are the most common type of parallel structures, but there are a number of others that will be looked at more in depth shortly. For now, look again at the example.

The new student is smart, thoughtful AND talented.

There are three list items in the sentence – the attributes that describe the new student. These items are all similar because they are all adjectives. For items to be similar, they must all be the same part of speech, or in some cases, approximations of the same part of speech. Here are some more examples:

Before the race, the crew checked tire pressure, adjusted mirrors AND changed the oil.

The above sentence features a parallel structure of verbs: *checked, adjusted, changed*.

The teacher advised THAT the students begin their final papers two weeks before the due date AND THAT they have their parents review the first draft.

The example contains two parallel clauses linked by *and*.

Susan planned incessantly for her trip, booking excursions in advance, researching attractions to visit AND taking French lessons in her spare time.

The *-ing* participial phrases *booking excursions, researching attractions* and *taking French lessons* are parallel with one another. Do not be fouled by the main verb *planned* as it is not part of the parallel structure. The parallel participial phrases describe how Susan planned, so they must be parallel with each other rather than with *planned*.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

Parallelism is one of the GMAT's favorite concepts to test, and many sentence correction questions will contain lists and other parallel structures. Parallelism errors are created when dissimilar items are put into a parallel structure.

The board of directors believed that the new business plan was neither profitable nor would it increase brand loyalty.

To spot parallelism errors, such as the error in the above example, follow this two-step process:

1. Check the sentence for any lists or other parallel structures.
2. After identifying the parallel structure, check the part of speech of each item in the structure to make sure they are all similar and make sense together.

Neither... nor creates a parallel structure in this sentence. The words that this structure compares are the list items: *profitable*, an adjective, and *would increase*, a verb phrase. To solve this parallelism error, the items need to be made equivalent parts of speech.

The board of directors believed that the new business plan was NEITHER profitable NOR

beneficial for brand loyalty.

Here the parallel structure *neither... nor* compares an adjective with an adjective: *profitable* with *beneficial*.

Concepts

Parallel structures

Certain idioms have a built-in parallel structure. Some typical examples are illustrated below.

and	<i>Kangaroos and alligators</i>
, , and	<i>Mice, ducks and penguins</i>
Both and	Both <i>puppies</i> and <i>kittens</i>
or	<i>T-rex</i> or <i>Stegosaurus</i>
, , or	<i>T-rex, Stegosaurus, or Triceratops</i>
Either or	Either <i>a meteor</i> or <i>a volcano</i>
Neither nor	Neither <i>floods</i> nor <i>hurricanes</i>
as well as	<i>A meteor</i> as well as <i>a volcano</i>
Not only (,) but also	Not only <i>dinosaurs</i> but also <i>mammals</i>
rather than	<i>Swallow their prey</i> rather than <i>chew it</i>
Not but	Not <i>rodents</i> but <i>marsupials</i>
Not but rather	Not <i>rodents</i> but rather <i>marsupials</i>
yet	<i>Carefully</i> yet <i>quickly</i>
but	<i>Running fast</i> but <i>breathing easy</i>
One , another	One <i>runs</i> , another <i>flies</i>
The one , the other	The one <i>runs</i> , the other <i>flies</i>
Some , others	Some <i>run</i> , others <i>fly</i>
From to	From <i>dinosaurs</i> to <i>mammals</i>

Become familiar with these structures. Whenever you see one in a sentence correction question, automatically check the items to make sure they are logically comparable and similar.

Parallel items

A parallel structure can contain almost any part of speech as well as phrases or clauses.

Nouns *I have blueberries, strawberries and raspberries in my bag.*

Verbs *The student studied all morning, slept all night and went to work the day after.*

Adjectives The employee was smart, friendly and professional.

Adverbs My teacher taught the material quickly yet thoroughly for the upcoming exam.

Participles The mechanization of farming has doubled the yield and cut the costs in half.

Infinitives Mary likes to hike, to swim and to ride bulls.

Clauses We agreed that the film was mawkish and that it wasn't worth our money.

What to look out for:

Even if the comparable items in a list are parallel, make sure that the items are logically related.

Incorrect: She likes singing and dances.

Singing is a gerund, which is the -ing form of a verb that functions like a noun. Dances could be a noun, as in many schools hold dances for the students, or it could be a verb, as in she dances around her room. While gerunds and nouns can be parallel, in the example it does not make sense to pair these two items together.

Correct: She likes singing and dancing.

Parallelism of nouns and noun phrases

Nouns can be used in lists together with other nouns, noun phrases or pronouns.

Noun and noun

Grace and Susan

Noun and noun phrase

Grace and her little sister

Noun phrase and pronoun

My little sister and I

Noun phrase and noun phrase

My older brother and my younger sister

What to look out for:

Nouns can also be used in a parallel structure with gerunds. However, a gerund can only be used with a noun if there is no noun suitable to replace the gerund. If a noun exists that has an equivalent meaning to the gerund, then that noun must be used.

Both yoga and spinning are offered at the new gym.

There is no noun equivalent to spinning, so the noun-gerund pair is parallel. Compare this to the following.

Incorrect: Most professionals struggle to maintain a balance between working and play.

The gerund working could be replaced by the noun work.

Correct: *Most professionals struggle to maintain a balance between work and play.*

Parallelism of adjectives

Unlike nouns, which can be parallel to more than just other nouns, an adjective can only be parallel to other adjectives.

Incorrect: The author is humorous, creative and a celebrity.

Correct: The author is humorous, creative and famous.

Adjectives in a list can be modified using adverbs but only as long as the adverbs logically agree and maintain the parallelism.

Though she had been plagued with disease all her life, she was tall and very beautiful.

The adverb very modifies the adjective beautiful, and even though the other adjectives in the list do not have adverbs, the list is still parallel.

Parallelism of verbs

Verbs are only parallel to other verbs. In parallel structures, verbs can be used in different tenses and voices as long as the variation is logical.

The book was WRITTEN in the 18th century and PREDATES what was previously thought to be the original.

Written is in the past tense because the action occurred in the 18th century, but predates is in the present tense because it is a general fact that this book is older than another copy that was believed to be the original.

What to look out for:

Though a parallel structure can be composed of verbs in different tenses, the tenses must be logical together given the context of the sentence.

Incorrect: The book was WRITTEN in the 18th century, PREDATING what was previously thought to be the original.

The present progressive tense of the second verb *predating* is illogical in this sentence.

Parallelism of infinitives

Infinitives are only parallel to other infinitives. If there are more than two infinitives in a list, the *to* can be dropped. If the second infinitive in the list omits the *to*, then the following list items must also omit it. If the second does not omit the *to*, all other items must have the *to*.

Correct examples:

During the tour, tourists will be able TO VISIT picturesque bays and lagoons, TO EXPLORE stunning landscapes, and TO TAKE a trip on a Dghajsa boat.

During the tour, tourists will be able TO VISIT picturesque bays and lagoons, EXPLORE stunning landscapes, and TAKE a trip on a Dghajsa boat.

What to look out for:

Whenever you see a parallel structure that contains infinitives, check the proper inclusion or omission of *to*.

Incorrect examples:

During the tour, the tourists will be able TO VISIT picturesque bays and lagoons, TO EXPLORE stunning landscapes, and TAKE a trip on a Dghajsa boat.

During the tour, the tourists will be able TO VISIT picturesque bays and lagoons, EXPLORE stunning landscapes, and TO TAKE a trip on a Dghajsa boat.

Parallelism of participles

Certain phrases may contain multiple participles that modify the subject. In such cases, all participles that modify the subject should be parallel. In rare instances, past participles and present participles may be used together.

Correct: *Archeologists have recently discovered a temple with massive foundations CARVED from a single rock some 1000 years ago and EXTENDING for more than 100 feet in all directions.*

In the example above, *carved* and *extending* begin two participle phrases that both describe the temple's foundations. *Carved* is a past participle while *extending* is a present participle.

What to look out for:

Remember, participles can only be parallel to other participles. Watch for parallel structures that pair participles with verbs.

Incorrect: *Archeologists have recently discovered a temple with massive foundations CARVED from a single rock some 1000 years ago and IS EXTENDING for more than 100 feet in all directions.*

The above sentence incorrectly pairs *carved*, a past participle, and *is extending*, a verb, in a parallel structure.

Practice questions

1. Nerve cells are often enclosed in a sheath of myelin, making nerve conduction faster and electric signals traveling more quickly.
 - (A) electric signals traveling
 - (B) electrical signal travels
 - (C) electrical signals are caused to travel
 - (D) causing electric signals to travel
 - (E) causing travelling of electric signals
2. Smartphones have not only allowed users to remain continuously connected to the Internet, but they have also been blamed for distracting drivers, causing hundreds of accidents, and damaging the country's road safety records.
 - (A) causing hundreds of accidents, and damaging the country's road safety records
 - (B) which caused hundreds of accidents and damaged
 - (C) In effect having caused hundreds of accident, which will damage the country's roads safety records
 - (D) which in turns causes the hundreds of accidents that led to the country's road safety records being damaged
 - (E) to cause hundreds of accidents, damaging the country's road safety records.
3. Although it was anticipated that the urban electorate would shun the present rural centered government in the upcoming elections, pre-election polls predict that both urban and the rural voters approve of government actions.
 - (A) urban and the rural voters
 - (B) urban voters and the rural
 - (C) the urban and also the rural voters
 - (D) urban and rural voters will
 - (E) voters who are urban and those who are rural
4. A journal has reported that within the last decade, over a hundred dancers and models had opted for early retirement rather than deal with the physical restraints brought on by age.
 - (A) had opted for early retirement rather than deal with
 - (B) had opted for early retirement instead of dealing with

- (C) have opted for retiring early instead of dealing with
- (D) have opted to retire early rather than dealing with
- (E) have opted to retire early rather than deal with

5. North America's carbon footprint is growing larger in relation to Europe's; the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per capita in the United States is up to three times of Britain's emission.

- (A) up to three times of Britain's emission
- (B) as much as thrice that of Britain's emission
- (C) as much as three times that emitted in Britain
- (D) up to three times what Britons emit
- (E) up to thrice the British emission

Answers and explanations

Question 1

A, B, C - Incorrect:

The participle *making* must be parallel to another participle. Since there is no comma before the connecting conjunction *and*, a new clause cannot start unless both clauses are very short.

D - Correct:

The adverb *quickly* can relate to the infinitive *to travel*.

E - Incorrect:

This answer is incorrect because of awkward and unidiomatic uses of the gerund *traveling* and attendant adverbs.

Question 2

A - Correct:

This is the only answer choice that has parallel verbs.

B, C, D, E - Incorrect:

All of these answer choices violate parallelism. All of the elements in the list must be in the *-ing* form.

Question 3

A, B - Incorrect:

Parallelism error. The construction *both X and Y* requires X and Y to be from the same part of speech and parallel in structure, but *urban* (noun) is not parallel to *the rural* (article + noun). Plus, *predict* takes a future tense.

C - Incorrect:

Wordy and clumsy.

D - Correct:

This case puts the two items in the list in parallel: urban and rural voters.

E - Incorrect:

Also wordy and clumsy.

Question 4

A, B - Incorrect:

The past perfect simple tense *had opted* is used incorrectly since there is not another verb in a

past tense in the sentence that it could precede.

A - Incorrect:

The noun *retirement* is not parallel to the verb *deal*, so this does not appear to be the best choice.

C - Incorrect:

The simple past tense *opted* is more commonly associated with an event that ended at a specific time. Here the implication is that dancers began opting to retire years ago and have continued that trend up until now. So, the past perfect *have opted* is more correct. Also, *for retiring* is awkward and unidiomatic.

D - Incorrect:

The infinitive *to retire* is not parallel to the gerund *dealing*, causing this answer to be awkward.

E - Correct:

The infinitive *to retire* is parallel to the infinitive *deal*. The particle *to* before *deal*, in the second infinitive, can be omitted. This is the best, most idiomatic answer.

Question 5

A, B, E - Incorrect:

Comparison error. The sentence compares *amount of carbon dioxide* to *emission*. The choices also contain frightfully unidiomatic expressions.

B - Incorrect:

Parallelism error. The prepositional phrase *in the United States* should be parallel to the other entity being compared, but in this case, the use of the relative pronoun and the object phrase of *that of* is not parallel in structure to the first part of the comparison.

C - Correct:

The use of the relative pronoun *that* correctly replaces the *the amount of carbon dioxide* in the comparison *as much as*. The phrase *three times* correctly modifies *the amount*. The parallel structure is kept – *in the United States and in Britain*.

D - Incorrect:

Comparison and parallelism errors. The sentence compares *carbon dioxide* to *what Britons emit*.

Lesson 6: Comparisons

Comparisons are a form of parallelism that compare two or more parts of a sentence. Words and phrases such as *like*, *as*, *unlike*, *more than*, *less than*, *in contrast to* and *different from* establish comparisons in sentences. As another type of parallel structure, comparisons must contain words, phrases or clauses that are similar and make sense together.

Comparisons can be divided into three different forms: the comparative, superlative and the equality form. It is not critical that you learn each type in detail, but remembering these types can help you recognize their use in sentences.

Rules

Comparisons must be parallel and logical

Comparisons must be logical, and the items compared must be similar to one another.

Alex's wit, like his grandmother, is as sharp as a tack.

When you see comparison words such as *like*, you first need to ask what items are being compared in the sentence. In the example above, *like* compares Alex's wit with his grandmother, which is illogical. It doesn't make sense to compare *wit*, a personal quality, to *grandmother*, a person. Instead, the sentence should compare Alex's wit to his grandmother's wit.

Alex's wit, like his grandmother's, is as sharp as a tack.

Parallelism in comparisons also dictates that the structure of items must be similar. Take the following example.

Janice likes to watch TV more than attending class.

More than sets up a comparison between Janice's enjoyment of watching TV and going to class. Though the comparison makes sense, it is not parallel because the compared items do not share a similar structure. *To watch TV* begins with an infinitive verb and the item it is compared to begins with a gerund, *attending*.

To be parallel, the structure of each item should be similar. In this case, each verb could be used in the ing form for increased parallelism.

Janice likes watching TV more than attending class.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

Sentence correction questions frequently compare un-parallel items – either the items or their structures are not similar – or compare items that are not logically comparable. To spot these errors, follow these steps:

Familiarize yourself with the comparison words this chapter discusses so that you can recognize them in sentences.

Whenever you come across a comparison word in a sentence, extract which items are being compared.

Check whether the items can logically be compared, whether they're similar and finally whether their structures are similar.

Concepts

Logic in comparisons

For a comparison to be logical, the entities must be comparable. For example, a thing cannot be compared to an action, and a quantity cannot be compared to person.

Incorrect: *A car is less tiring than walking.*

Incorrect: *The rate of unemployment among women is as high as men.*

Each of the examples makes an illogical comparison. In the first, a physical thing, *a car*, is compared to an action, *walking*. In the second, a quantity, *the rate of unemployment*, is compared to humans, *men*.

To correct each comparison, make sure the compared terms are comparable entities.

Correct: *Driving is less tiring than walking.*

(An action compared with an action)

Correct: *The rate of unemployment among women is as high as the rate among men.*

or

Correct: *The rate of unemployment among women is as high as that among men.*

(A concept compared with a concept)

Comparative form

The comparative form uses words such as *more*, *better*, *older*, *younger* and *more difficult* to compare two entities that are logically comparable.

She is older than her sister.

He is younger than his cousin.

The cafe offers better quality coffee than the restaurant around the corner.

Everyone thought that the intro class was more difficult than the seminar.

When you see comparative words such as the ones above, check which items are being compared. Ask what is better, older, younger, greater, higher, bigger, etc. than what?

Adjectives and adverbs in comparative form are only followed by *than*.

Jerry works harder than Peter.

Superlative form

The superlative form is a form of comparison that expresses the greatest degree of an adverb or adjective.

Superlatives are formed in one of the following ways:

Most /best + adjective

or

adding *-est* at the end of an adjective.

Of all the dogs in the world, English Mastiffs are the most gentle.

This dating profile is the saddest story I have ever read.

Superlatives cannot compare two items; there must be at least three items. In the above examples, *English Mastiffs* are compared to *all the dogs in the world* – a number definitely greater than two – and *this dating profile* is compared to all the stories *I have read*, which can be assumed to be greater than two.

Incorrect: *Between English Mastiffs and Irish Wolf Hounds, Mastiffs are the tallest.*

Correct: *Between English Mastiffs and Irish Wolf Hounds, Mastiffs are taller.*

Correct: *English Mastiffs are the tallest of all.*

Equality form

The equality form of comparison is used to show that one entity is equal to another. Usually it takes the form:

as + adjective/adverb + as

Some actors say that doing a voice-over is as difficult as acting.

For negative equalities, it is also possible to use the form:

so + adjective/adverb + as

Some actors say that doing a voice-over is not so difficult as acting.

Another common equality form is the phrase *the same as*.

Being outgoing is not the same as being a good orator.

Comparing an entity with a group

When a single entity is compared with a group, you must decide whether to use one of these forms:

than any

or

than any other.

If the entity is part of the group you are comparing it to, use *than any other*. For example:

In the early 2000s, Kobe Bryant shot the ball better than any other player in the NBA.

Kobe Bryant is a single entity being compared with a group – all the other players in the NBA during the early 2000s. Since Kobe is a part of the group, NBA basketball players, *than any other* is used.

If the entity being compared is not part of the group, *than any* should be used.

Kobe Bryant shoots the ball better than any European basketball player.

Kobe Bryant is not a part of the group he is being compared to here (he is not a European basketball player), so *than any* is used.

Like, As

Frequently, *like* and *as* are used to compare items in a sentence. While *as* can function either as a preposition or as a conjunction (with completely different purposes), *like* can only function as a preposition.

The preposition *as* means “in the position of” or “in the same manner.”

Before becoming rich off her first novel, Beth worked AS a waitress in a late-night diner in Hoboken.

As in this sentence conveys that Beth *was* a waitress. Compare this meaning with the use of *like* in the following sentence.

Beth drove LIKE her mother, obeying all traffic laws and never going over the speed limit.

Like means “similar to,” and in this sentence, *like* conveys that *Beth* drove the same way her mother did. A comparison that uses *like* states that one entity is similar to another but the entities are not the same thing. A comparison that uses *as* states that one entity is the same as another. Here are some more examples:

Jennifer talks LIKE her sister.

Jennifer works AS a flight attendant.

AS a child, Mozart traveled all over Europe to give musical performances.

LIKE a child, Mozart would become grumpy if he went without a nap.

Note:

The combination *just like* is illogical. *Just* means “exactly” while *like* means “similar.” The phrase “exactly similar” does not make sense either.

What to look out for:

Since *like* can only function as a preposition, it can never be followed by a subject and a verb. In other words, *like* can never be used as a conjunction to link two clauses.

Incorrect: *Jennifer talks LIKE her sister does.*

The addition of the verb *does* forms a clause (*her sister does*), and it makes *like* act as a conjunction linking two clauses. However, *like* can only function as a preposition, so this sentence is incorrect.

In general, whenever you see a verb after *like* in a comparison, *like* is being used as a conjunction and the sentence is incorrect.

When *as* serves as a conjunction, it must be followed by a subject and a verb. The conjunction *as* means “the same way” or “in the same manner.”

Incorrect: *Jeffery acts AS many teenagers, irreverent and feckless*

Correct: *Jeffery acts AS many teenagers do, irreverent and feckless.*

Also, *like* can never be used to introduce examples. Instead, use *such as*.

Incorrect: *Adele enjoys playing sports LIKE soccer, baseball and badminton.*

Correct: *Adele enjoys playing sports SUCH AS soccer, baseball and badminton.*

Since *like* means “similar to,” the incorrect example means that Adele likes sports similar to soccer, baseball and badminton, but not necessarily those specific sports. What’s important is that this usage is considered ungrammatical on the GMAT and in formal writing.

Twice vs. Double

Twice is used in comparisons rather than *double*. Usually, *twice* compares quantities or amounts. *Double* is used as an adjective, noun, verb or participle.

Tyler has TWICE as much money as Morgan has.

The above is a comparison between the amount of money Tyler has and the amount Morgan has.

The number of commercial flights rose sharply in the 1970s, DOUBLING the total of the previous decade.

In this example, *double* is used as a participle, *doubling*, that begins a participial phrase, which modifies the subject of the previous clause, *number*. It is not comparing the number of flights in the 1970s to the number in the previous decade. Such a sentence would look like this:

There was twice the total number of commercial flights in the 1970s as in the previous decade.

What to look out for:

Whenever *double* is used in a sentence, make sure it is not being used in a comparison.

Incorrect: *He has DOUBLE the amount of money as she has.*

Similarly, make sure that *twice* is only used to compare entities.

Incorrect: *The number of commercial flights rose sharply in the 1970s, TWICE the total amount of the previous decade.*

One or other vs. One or another

Use *one or other* to choose between **two** entities. Use *one or another* to choose between **many** entities, i.e., more than two.

The president was confident that ONE OR ANOTHER of the foreign delegates would accept his offer.

They have only durian or mackerel flavored ice cream, so pick ONE OR THE OTHER.

Among vs. Between

For comparisons, the rule of thumb is to use *among* if you are comparing three or more people, places or things and to use *between* if there you are comparing only two people, places or things.

Correct: *We divided the chores AMONG the six of us.*

Correct: *We divided the chores BETWEEN Jack and James.*

Between follows an idiomatic structure. In order words, it can only be used in the form: *between X and Y.*

Correct: *The coach had to choose BETWEEN John AND Jack for the team captain role.*

Incorrect: *The coach had to choose BETWEEN John OR Jack for the team's captain role.*

Practice questions

1. Although online travel sites have made the local travel agent obsolete, the digitization of the ticketing process in the commercial bus industry reduced the average occupancy while the previous year's costs were increased to double.
 - (A) digitization of ticketing in the commercial bus industry reduced the average occupancy while the previous year's costs were increased to double.
 - (B) digitization of ticketing in the commercial bus industry reduced the average occupancy while increasing costs to double those of the previous year
 - (C) digitization of ticketing in the commercial bus industry reduced the average occupancy as cost were increased to twice of the previous year's
 - (D) ticketing digitization in the commercial bus industry reduced the average occupancy as it doubled the previous year's costs
 - (E) ticketing digitization in the commercial bus industry reduced the average occupancy while costs were increased to twice that of the previous year
2. As literally all the popular classics are, Robinson Crusoe was written for an age of eloquent prose and poetic narration.
 - (A) As literally all the popular classics are
 - (B) As with literally all of the popular classics
 - (C) Like literally all of the popular classics
 - (D) Like the cities where literally all the popular classics are
 - (E) Like other cities where literally all the popular classics are
3. Differences among married couples do not always arise from spite for people, like corporations, can find themselves locked into difficult situations unable to form compromises.
 - (A) do not always result from spite for people, like corporations, can find
 - (B) do not always results from spite; people, just as corporations, finding
 - (C) do not always results from spite; people, such as corporations, can find
 - (D) are not always the results of spite; people in the same way that corporations can find
 - (E) are not resulting always from spite; just like corporations who can find
4. Mumbai has a greater number of residences per square kilometer than any other Indian city.
 - (A) a greater number of residences per square kilometer than any other Indian city
 - (B) greater numbers of residences per square kilometer than any other Indian city

- (C) a greater number of residences per square kilometer than does any other Indian city
- (D) greater numbers of residences per square kilometer than do other Indian cities
- (E) a great per square kilometer number of residences, more than does any other Indian city

5. Modern filmmakers are often annoyed by film critics' labeling of Pernin's Diaspora as an inaccurate documentary.

- (A) critics' labeling of Pernin's Diaspora as
- (B) critics' labeling of Pernin's Diaspora like
- (C) critics, labeling of Pernin's Diaspora as
- (D) critics who categorize Pernin's Diaspora as
- (E) critics who categorize Pernin's Diaspora like

Question 1

A - Incorrect:

Parallelism error. *While* is a word that in this context signals a comparison, thus the two items compared should ideally be the same part of speech and parallel in structure. In this case, the verb *reduced the average occupancy* is not parallel to *the previous year's costs* (noun). Also, one should avoid the passive voice wherever possible. Here, it is reasonably clear that the “digitalization” of the ticketing both reduced the occupancy and increased the costs. There is thus no need to say the ...*costs were increased*..., when the active voice would serve much better.

B - Correct:

The perfect verb has *reduced* is parallel to the perfect participle having *increased*. This is the appropriate use of the perfect tenses. The plural noun *costs* is replaced correctly by the plural pronoun *those*.

C - Incorrect:

Meaning error. The singular noun *cost* does not agree with the plural verb *were increased*. The infinitive *to double* creates an illogical meaning that the cost increased intentionally to double the cost of previous year. Also, ...*double of the previous year's*... is unidiomatic.

D - Incorrect:

...*ticketing digitalization*... is an awkward expression; it is unidiomatic.

E - Incorrect:

Parallelism error. The word *double* is used in comparisons and requires that the two items ideally be from the same part of speech and parallel in structure. In this case, the plural noun *costs* is not parallel to the singular pronoun *that*. *That* should be changed to *those*.

Question 2

A - Incorrect:

The main reason this choice is wrong is because the present simple verb tense *are* does not match the past tense of the non-underlined part. Choice C is also more concise and more aesthetically appealing.

B - Incorrect:

As with is awkward phrasing. Compare with *like* in C.

C - Correct:

The use of the preposition *like* is correct and creates a comparison between *popular classics* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Also, the rule of thumb is that when *as* and *like* are used in comparisons, *as* is

used before a subject and a verb and *like* is used before a smaller or less weighty group of words, such as a phrase, a noun, a pronoun, an adjective, etc.

D, E - Incorrect:

Comparison error between *cities* and *Robinson Crusoe*.

Question 3

A - Correct:

This option correctly uses the preposition *like* to draw similarities with a different entity, *corporation*. The idiom *result from* is correct.

B - Incorrect:

The idiom *just as* is wrong, and the gerund *finding* implies continued action, which is wrong in this case.

C - Incorrect:

The use of *such as* is wrong as it is used to introduce examples not comparisons.

D - Incorrect:

This option does not convey the intended meaning of similarity between people and corporations.

E - Incorrect:

The active participle *resulting* implies continued action, which is not intended in this sentence.

Question 4

A - Incorrect:

This option contains the wrong comparative structure as it lacks an auxiliary verb for parallel comparison: *Mumbai has... other Indian city*.

B - Incorrect:

This option contains the wrong comparative structure as it lacks an auxiliary verb for parallel comparison: *Mumbai has... other Indian city*.

C - Correct:

This option contains the correct comparative structure by including the auxiliary *does*.

D - Incorrect:

The use of the singular auxiliary *has* does not agree with the plural numbers.

E - Incorrect:

The use of *more* is redundant, and the comparative form of the adjective high, higher, is needed.

Question 5

A - Correct:

This option correctly uses the possessive case to imply the view of critics regarding Pernin's Diaspora, and *as* is used to logically convey this view.

B - Incorrect:

This option incorrectly uses the preposition *like*, which illogically conveys that the critics thought the film was similar to an inaccurate documentary.

C - Incorrect:

This option lacks a connection between *labeling* and *critics*.

D - Incorrect:

The relative pronoun *who* changes the meaning of the sentence as it suggests a personal annoyance with critics, rather than their labeling of the movie.

E - Incorrect:

This option incorrectly uses the preposition *like*, which does not definitively convey that the critics thought the film was an inaccurate documentary.

Lesson 7: Idioms

Idioms are particular expressions that are formed according to accepted conventions rather than grammatical rules. For example, it's correct to say "the dispute *over* your rights" but incorrect to say, "the dispute *about* your rights." Based on the rules of grammar, either phrasing should be correct, but English has particular conventions that dictate which words can be used in certain expressions.

Unlike the other chapters, there are no general rules you can use to spot idiom errors in sentence correction questions. The best way to study idioms is to simply memorize the common idioms found in GMAT questions.

Dispute/Debate

Both *dispute* and *debate* should be followed by *over*.

dispute + over

debate + over

Correct: *The DISPUTE OVER the amount of sugar kids should consume has engulfed the nation.*

Incorrect: *The DISPUTE ABOUT the amount of sugar kids should consume has engulfed the nation.*

Aim/Target

Aim and *target* should be followed by either *at* or an infinitive (*to* + base verb).

aim + at

aim + infinitive

target/targeted + at

Correct: *Jack AIMS TO SCORE 700 on his GMAT.*

Correct: *Jack AIMS his bow AT a bale of hay.*

Correct: *The new sitcom is TARGETED AT adolescents.*

Incorrect: *Jack studies WITH AN AIM TO SCORE 700 on his GMAT.*

Incorrect: *Jack AIMS his bow FOR a bale of hay.*

Incorrect: *The new sitcom is TARGETED TO adolescents.*

Able/Ability, Capable/Capability, In order to/to

Able or *ability* must be followed by an infinitive:

able/ability + infinitive

Correct: *Humans are not ABLE TO HEAR infrasound signals.*

Incorrect: *Humans are not ABLE OF HEARING infrasound signals.*

Capable or *capability* should be followed by *of* and then a gerund:

capable/capability + of + gerund

Correct: *The fastest runners are CAPABLE OF RUNNING a mile in under four minutes.*

Incorrect: *The fastest runners are CAPABLE TO RUN a mile in under four minutes.*

In questions that feature *capability of + gerund* and *ability + infinitive*, both phrases have a similar meaning, but *ability + infinitive* is usually preferred because it is more concise.

The phrase *in order to* or *just to* means “with the purpose of.” A phrase that begins with *in order to* or *to* must logically relate to the first subject or the object of the clause.

Correct: *IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE SCORE, one has to practice a few hours a day.*

Correct: *TO IMPROVE THE SCORE, one has to practice a few hours a day.*

Incorrect: *IN ORDER THAT THE SCORE IS IMPROVED, practice a few hours a day.*

Incorrect: *SO AS TO IMPROVE THE SCORE, practice a few hours a day.*

Incorrect: *FOR SCORE IMPROVEMENT, practice a few hours a day.*

Try/Attempt

Both the words *try* and *attempt* need to be followed by an infinitive:

try/attempt + infinitive

Correct: *The senator voted for the environmental laws as an ATTEMPT TO MINIMIZE air pollution caused by the motor industry.*

Incorrect: *The senator voted for the environmental laws as an ATTEMPT AT minimizing air pollution caused by the motor industry.*

Damage

Damage, when used as a noun, takes the form:

damage (noun) + to + object

Damage, when used as a verb, takes the form:

damage (verb) + object

Correct: *The sun can cause DAMAGE TO our car.*

Correct: *Driving in the sand will DAMAGE our CAR.*

Incorrect: *The sun can cause DAMAGE FOR our car.*

Contend

The verb *contend* requires the conjunction *that* followed by a clause:

contend + that + clause

Correct: *Some historians CONTEND THAT “Beware the Cat” was the first novel.*

Incorrect: *Some historians CONTEND “Beware the Cat” was the first novel.*

Known

There are two uses of the word *known* with which you should familiarize yourself:

1. *known as* signifies “famous” or “recognition” and
2. *known as* signifies “there is a knowledge of.”

This second meaning of “known” must be followed by an infinitive.

known + infinitive

Correct: *Carlos, the talented snowboarder, was KNOWN AS the “flying jalapeno” in the boarding community.*

Correct: *A few snakes are KNOWN TO HAVE enough venom to kill an adult human.*

Incorrect: *Carlos, the talented snowboarder, was KNOWN TO BE the “flying jalapeno” in the boarding community.*

Incorrect: *Some snakes are KNOWN AS having enough venom to kill a fox.*

Consists/Dispose/Approve

Consists, dispose, confess and *approve* must be followed by the preposition of:

consists + of, dispose + of, approve + of

Correct: *He was worried that both Anne and Joshua would not APPROVE OF his new relationship, given Bertha’s criminal record.*

Correct: *My fossil collection CONSISTS OF multiple Mastodon tusks fragments and the needle-like beak of an Ichthyosaur.*

Correct: *Can you help Bertha DISPOSE OF this body?*

Incorrect: *He was worried that both Anne and Joshua would not APPROVE his new relationship, given Bertha’s criminal record.*

Incorrect: *My fossil collection CONSISTS multiple Mastodon tusks fragments and the needle-like beak of an Ichthyosaur.*

Incorrect: *Can you help Bertha DISPOSE this body?*

Compare to vs. Compare with

Compare to is used to stress the similarities between two entities similar to the use of *like*.

Compare with is used to show the differences between two entities similar to the use of *unlike*.

compare + to (like)

compare + with (unlike)

Correct: *Danny COMPARED his desktop TO a laptop, noting its fast processing speed.*

Correct: *Anne COMPARED her profligate brother WITH their father, an unabashed miser, in order to illustrate the family's conflicted attitudes towards money.*

Incorrect: *The author COMPARED Trenton WITH Newark, noting the cities' similar industrial histories.*

Incorrect: *The scientist COMPARED the Mojave desert TO California's redwood forests to demonstrate the variety of climates found in the state.*

Words paired with *as*

The following words must be paired with *as*.

regarded + as

seen + as

used + as

shown + as

function + as

described + as

defined + as

recognized + as

depicted + as

perceived + as

identified + as

thought of + as

viewed + as

Correct: *She is generally REGARDED AS the authority on penguin art.*

Correct: *He is widely RECOGNIZED AS the best runner in the state.*

Correct: *Western movies often DEPICT Indians AS primitive tribal people.*

Incorrect: *She is generally REGARDED TO BE the authority on penguin art.*

Incorrect: *He is widely RECOGNIZED TO BE the best runner in the state.*

Incorrect: *Western movies often DEPICT Indians TO BE primitive tribal people.*

Led to

Led to should be used before a specific event or result:

led to + noun (event or result)

Correct: *Wide voter turnout LED TO record poll numbers this year..*

Correct: *Historians debate whether popular irrigation techniques of the 1920s LED TO the Dust Bowl.*

Incorrect: *Historians debate whether popular irrigation techniques of the 1920s LED the Dust Bowl.*

From X to Y

With *from*, the correct expression is *from X to Y*.

Correct: *He is an expert on topics ranging FROM mathematics TO geology.*

Correct: *The price of gasoline fell FROM \$4 TO \$3.50.*

Incorrect: *He is an expert on topics ranging FROM mathematics AND geology.*

Incorrect: *The price of gasoline fell FROM \$4 DOWN TO \$3.50.*

The reason is + because

The reason is and *because* together are redundant and unidiomatic. Any sentence that contains both is incorrect.

Correct: *The REASON we were late IS that there was an accident.*

Incorrect: *The REASON we were late IS BECAUSE there was an accident.*

Superior/Inferior, Similar/Equal

The assorted forms *superior*, *inferior*, *similar*, *equal* and *equivalent* must be followed by *to*.

superior + to

inferior + to

similar + to

equal + to

equivalent + to

Correct: *Many students argue that computers are SUPERIOR TO notebooks and pens in composing notes.*

Correct: *With its inventive use of material, the artist's latest painting is SIMILAR TO a collage.*

Incorrect: *Many students argue that computers are SUPERIOR THAN notebooks and pens in composing notes.*

Incorrect: *With its inventive use of material, the artist's latest painting is SIMILAR WITH a collage.*

The same as

The same as is the correct form of the phrase. *The same + that* is ALWAYS incorrect.

Correct: *Mike was exactly the SAME height AS his twin sister was.*

Incorrect: *Mike was exactly the SAME height THAT his sister was.*

Responsible + for

Responsible must be used with *for*.

Responsible + for

Correct: *We are not RESPONSIBLE FOR the quality of the cheese with which we stuff our burritos.*

Incorrect: *We are not RESPONSIBLE THAT the quality of cheese meet a certain standard.*

Practice questions

- Several marine biologists contend that all of the millions of species housed in the planet's oceans can be traced back to a single unicellular ancestor
 - that all of the millions of species housed in the planet's oceans can be traced back
 - that the planet's oceans house millions of species of which all can be traced
 - the planet's oceans house millions of species which are all traceable
 - all of the millions of species housed in the planet's oceans to be traceable
 - the ability to trace all of the millions of species that are housed in the planet's oceans
- In order to prevent further spread of the deadly plague, the health officials have ordered the bodies of the deceased to be incinerated and that the remains be buried.
 - the bodies of the deceased to be incinerated and that the remains be
 - that bodies of the deceased should be incinerated, with the remains being
 - the incineration of bodies of the deceased and the remains to be
 - incineration of bodies of the deceased, with their remains
 - that the bodies of the deceased be incinerated and the remains
- The new model of dark matter reactivity hopefully can provide sufficient evidence, this will put to rest the age-old debate on the existence of antimatter.
 - hopefully can provide sufficient evidence, this will put
 - it is hoped, can provide sufficient evidence that will put
 - can, it is hoped, provide sufficient evidence to put
 - is hopeful to put
 - hopes putting
- Terry McIver had a falling out with Leo Bishinky in a bitter dispute over the nature of feminist literature.
 - in a bitter dispute over
 - over bitterly disputing
 - after there was a bitter dispute over
 - after having bitterly disputed about
 - after having bitterly disputed about

5. Among the various figurines found in the Egyptian pyramids were bronze idols of ancient gods left by priests who were either asking the god Ra's aid in freeing the souls of the dead or thanking him for such help.

- (A) in freeing the souls of the dead or thanking him for such help
- (B) in freeing the souls of the dead and to thank him for helping
- (C) in freeing the souls of the dead, and thanking him for such help
- (D) to free the souls of the dead or to thank him for such help
- (E) to free the souls of the dead or thanking him for such help

Answers and explanations

Question 1

A - Correct:

Uses the correct idiom *contend that*. This answer is stated as simply as possible, without changing the meaning of the original sentence or violating conventions.

B - Incorrect:

This answer changes the meaning of the original sentence, stating that biologists asserted that the planet's oceans house millions of species and not that all of the million species can be traced back to a single unicellular ancestor, as the original sentence and the answer choice answer (A) suggests.

C, D, E - Incorrect:

The problem with these answers, in addition to changing the meaning of the sentence (C), is that they are all also uneconomical, unidiomatic, or awkward.

Question 2

A - Incorrect:

This structure and the lack of a relative pronoun (*that*) implies that the health officials issued the orders to the *bodies*.

B - Incorrect:

The subjunctive mood of verb requires the use of the base form of the verb, not *should be*.

C - Incorrect:

Without a relative pronoun to introduce a separate clause, this option states that the health officials have ordered the incineration of the bodies ...*with the remains buried*, which lacks a verb to complete the clause. This does not convey the command as intended.

D - Incorrect:

Like C, this option does not clearly convey the order to incinerate and to bury.

E - Correct:

This option correctly uses the conjunction *that* to join two clauses and the verb base form *be* in accordance with the subjunctive mood of the sentence. The orders are correctly and concisely conveyed.

Question 3

A - Incorrect:

Hopefully (adverb) is incorrectly used to modify the model; *hopefully* is generally wrong on the

GMAT. Also, the meaning has changed from a prediction with uncertainty (*can*) to a certain thing in the future (*will put*). Further, this is a run-on sentence: the two independent clauses are connected only by a comma without a connecting conjunction or semicolon.

B - Incorrect:

The clause *it is hoped* should be either separated with commas (as in answer C) or connected with an appropriate conjunction.

C - Correct:

The clause *it is hoped* is separated correctly with commas. The use of the infinitive *to put* shows an intention and fixes the prediction error.

D, E - Incorrect:

This option removes important information (*sufficient evidence*) that appears in the original sentence. Also, neither of these two phrases is idiomatic.

Question 4

A - Correct:

The phrase *dispute over* is the correct idiom.

B, D, E - Incorrect:

The correct idiom is *dispute over*. In these cases, the constructions *dispute about/dispute + noun* are incorrect.

B - Incorrect:

This answer changes the meaning, suggesting that the *bitter dispute*, rather than *the nature of... literature*, was the cause of the falling out.

C - Incorrect:

The use of *there was* doesn't convey the intended meaning that the falling out happened as part of a dispute.

Question 5

A - Correct:

The phrase *aid in* is the right idiom. The construction *either... or* is the right idiom.

B, C - Incorrect:

The phrase *aid in* is the right idiom. The construction *either... and* is the wrong idiom. The construction *either... or* is the right idiom.

D, E - Incorrect:

The phrase *aid to* is the wrong idiom. The phrase *aid in* is the right idiom.

Lesson 8: Redundancy and Voice

Sentence correction questions test more than just grammar. For efficient and lucid communication, business writing prefers a concise style in which the meaning is conveyed without any unnecessary or irrelevant wording.

Common style errors include redundancy and voice. Redundancy occurs when words or phrases unnecessarily repeat information, and voice concerns whether the subject does or receives the action of the verb in a sentence. Passive voice, in which the subject is acted upon by the verb, often leads to wordy or confusing sentences while the active voice helps create clear, concise sentences. However, there are instances when the passive voice is preferred over the active voice.

Style errors are not as important as grammatical errors in sentence correction questions. The correct answer to a sentence correction question will be grammatically correct, preserve the original meaning of the sentence, and among choices that fulfill the first two requirements, have the better style.

On the GMAT, the stylistically better option is usually the more concise or economical one.

Rules

The GMAT prefers active voice

In the active voice, the subject of a sentence does the action of the verb. For example:

John ATE pancakes and blueberry muffins.

The subject of the sentence, *John*, does the action. He is the one who eats. Compare this sentence with the following sentence written in the passive voice.

The pancakes and blueberry muffins WERE eaten by John.

Here the subject, *pancakes and blueberry muffins*, receives the action of the verb. In other words, the subject does not do anything, but rather something is done to it.

Generally, the passive voice is considered stylistically inferior to the active voice, and often, it creates wordy or confusing sentences.

Passive: *It has been decreed by experts that tonsils facilitate bacteria growth.*

Active: *Experts decree that tonsils facilitate bacteria growth.*

The active construction above conveys the same meaning that the passive sentence conveys, but it does so more directly and with fewer words.

While the passive voice is grammatically correct, the GMAT prefers the active voice given that the active voice sentence is error free and conveys the correct meaning. Should you be faced with two grammatically correct answer choices, check the voice of each choice. The correct choice will likely feature active voice rather than passive voice.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

There are some instances when the passive voice should be used instead of the active voice. Common instances include when the writer wishes to de-emphasize the doer of the action. For example,

Before hurricane season, a new canal was constructed to prevent the lake from flooding the city.

The emphasis in this sentence is placed on the new canal and why it was constructed. Who did the action – *who constructed the canal* – is not important.

Also, whenever the non-underlined part of a sentence correction question contains the doer of the action preceded by the preposition “by,” the passive voice is required.

The governor’s landslide victory was viewed with suspicion by supporters of her opponent.

Since the doers of the action (the supporters who view with suspicion) fall outside of the underlined text, it is impossible for any answer choice to create the active voice in this sentence.

Eliminate unneeded words

Redundancy occurs when words that mean the same thing are unnecessarily used in a sentence. Take the following example:

Once a new innovation, cell phones are now taken for granted in our increasingly technologized world.

Innovation by definition means new, so the phrase *new innovations* is redundant. The sentence should read:

Once an innovation, cell phones are now taken for granted in our increasingly technologized world.

How the GMAT will try to trick you:

Redundancy is often subtle like the example above. To check if a word or phrase is redundant, try subtracting it from the sentence, and if the sentence still has the same meaning without the word or phrase, then the word or phrase is redundant. The following sections will address common redundancies found in sentence correction questions.

Common redundancies

Annual and Year

Annual means “yearly,” such as in:

Correct: *John’s annual salary is 30,000 dollars.*

Watch out for the use of *annual* and *year* or *yearly* in the same sentence. This almost always results in redundancy.

Incorrect: *John’s ANNUAL salary is 30,000 dollars A YEAR.*

Incorrect: *EACH YEAR, John receives 30,000 dollars for his ANNUAL salary.*

After + when

Combining *after* with *when* in a phrase is always wrong as it creates an illogical meaning.

After means “at some point after a specified time,” and in certain contexts *when* means “at the same time.”

Correct: Believe it or not, but I was standing on my feet immediately AFTER I got out of the operation room.

Incorrect: Believe it or not, but I was standing on my feet immediately AFTER WHEN I got out from the operation room.

A reason conjunction and a conclusion conjunction

Using both a reason conjunction and a conclusion conjunction that refer to the same relation is redundant.

Keep on the lookout for the following redundant structures:

because/since/due to/as...

followed by

...so/therefore/thus/consequently

Incorrect: *SINCE Jane cannot fly, SO she takes the train.*

Incorrect: *DUE TO increased demand, THEREFORE the price has risen consequently.*

Correct: *SINCE Jane cannot fly, she takes the train.*

Correct: *DUE TO increased demand, the price has risen.*

Because of + the fact that

Though common in everyday speech, the phrase *because of the fact* is redundant.

Incorrect: *BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT the rain didn't fall, the crops didn't grow this year.*

Incorrect: *Birds have been dying BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT their feathers have become more valuable on the black market.*

Correct: *BECAUSE the rain didn't fall, the crops didn't grow this year.*

Correct: *Birds have been dying BECAUSE their feathers have become more valuable on the black market.*

Decreased + down, Declined + down

Both the forms *decreased + down* and *declined + down* are redundant.

Incorrect: *The temperature DECREASED DOWN to 15°.*

Incorrect: *Over the past months, the company's profits have DECLINED DOWN.*

Correct: *The temperature DECREASED to 15°.*

Correct: *Over the past months, the company's profits have DECLINED.*

Return + back

The form *return + back* is always redundant. Only *return* is needed.

Incorrect: *He RETURNED BACK from his trip.*

Incorrect: *In the evening, the tour will RETURN BACK to the ship.*

Correct: *He RETURNED from his trip.*

Correct: *In the evening, the tour will RETURN to the ship.*

Sufficient + enough

***Sufficient + enough* is always redundant.**

Incorrect: *Is boiling water SUFFICIENT ENOUGH to kill harmful bacteria?*

Correct: *Is boiling water SUFFICIENT to kill harmful bacteria?*

Amount + to a sum

The form amount + to a sum is redundant along with sum + total.

Incorrect: *The annual fees AMOUNT TO A SUM of \$100.*

Incorrect: *The price of the ingredients SUM TO A TOTAL of \$12.75.*

Correct: *The annual fees AMOUNT TO \$100.*

Correct: *The price of the ingredients SUM TO \$12.75.*

Correct: *The price of the ingredients TOTAL \$12.75.*

Rise + up, Increase + up, Ascending + up

Rise + up, increase + up and ascending + up are redundant. To fix this redundancy, omit up.

Incorrect: *RISE UP to the occasion.*

Incorrect: *The fee was INCREASED UP to \$10,000.*

Incorrect: *The alpinists are ASCENDING UP the southern face of Kailash.*

Correct: *RISE to the occasion.*

Correct: *The fee was INCREASED to \$10,000.*

Correct: *The alpinists are ASCENDING the southern face of Kailash.*

Join + together

To join entities is to bring them together, so the form *join + together* is redundant.

Incorrect: *The author JOINS depravity TOGETHER with black humor in his new novel.*

Incorrect: *The sundry rebel groups JOINED TOGETHER in an assault against their reptilian overlords.*

Correct: *The author JOINS depravity with black humor in his new novel.*

Correct: *The sundry rebel groups JOINED in an assault against their reptilian overlords.*

Whether + or not

The phrase *whether or not* is considered redundant and is an incorrect use of the idiom.

When you encounter *whether* in a question, the question is likely testing the use of *if* versus *whether* or the redundancy of using *or not*. Note that in most cases, *whether* is preferred over *if*.

Correct: *Regardless of WHETHER literature is available on digital devices, readers will continue to cherish books.*

Correct: *WHETHER citizens agree or they don't, tax revenues must increase.*

Incorrect: *WHETHER OR NOT literature is available on digital devices, readers will continue to cherish books.*

Incorrect: *WHETHER OR NOT citizens agree, tax revenues must increase.*

Practice questions

1. A common problem reported by violinists is unilateral hearing loss, a consequence of holding the violin too close to one ear for a prolonged period of time.
 - (A) a consequence of holding the violin too close to one ear for a prolonged period of time
 - (B) a consequence from holding the violin for a prolonged period of time too close to one particular ear
 - (C) a consequence which resulted from holding the violin too close to one particular ear for a prolonged period of time
 - (D) damaged from holding the violin too near to one particular ear for a prolonged period of time
 - (E) damaged because they held the violin too close to one particular ear for a prolonged period of time
2. Although temporarily disconnected, Roger was soon able to reconnect to the Internet using the emergency code provided by the telecom operator.
 - (A) Although temporarily disconnected, Roger was soon able to reconnect
 - (B) Although having been temporarily disconnected, Roger had connected
 - (C) Although it had been temporarily disconnected, Roger was probably to be able to connect
 - (D) Temporarily disconnected though it had been, Roger had been able to connect
 - (E) Disconnected temporarily, Roger has been able to connect
3. Although the United Nations petitioned member states as long ago as 2010 to legalize abortion, more than a year of active campaigning was required to begin to develop and enforce the ideology that all women must be given the right to choose between abortion and unwanted pregnancy.
 - (A) was required to begin to develop and enforce the ideology that all women must be
 - (B) was required for developing and enforcing the ideology of all women being
 - (C) was to be required in developing and enforcing the ideology of all women to be
 - (D) is required to begin to develop and enforce the ideology that all women must be
 - (E) will be required for developing and enforcing the ideology of all women being
4. After gradual ascension up to 30 hours in 2000, the average television viewing time in China has steadily decreased to the point that the average person now watches an estimated 10 less hours of television every year.
 - (A) After gradual ascension up
 - (B) Following a gradual ascension up

- (C) After gradual ascending up
- (D) After gradually ascending
- (E) Following gradual ascending

5. Even though the implementation of a credit rating system can help monitor home loan defaults, it is unlikely that its effect on their frequency is significant in the absence of an appropriate legal sanction.

- (A) it is unlikely that its effect on their frequency is significant
- (B) it is unlikely that the frequency of their effect would be significant
- (C) affecting their frequencies are not likely to be significant
- (D) the significance of their effect on its frequency is unlikely
- (E) its effect on their frequency is not likely to be significant

Answers and explanations

Question 1

A - Correct:

...*consequence of* is the correct idiom.

B - Incorrect:

...*consequence from* is the incorrect form of the idiom. The correct form is *consequence of*.

C - Incorrect:

The phrase *a consequence which resulted* is redundant.

D, E - Incorrect:

The participial modifier starting with the participle *damaged* relates illogically to the subject of the clause beginning *A common problem....* There are two things that the adjectival participle *damaged* might modify grammatically: *problem* and *hearing loss*. *Damaged* does a poor job of modifying either.

Question 2

A - Correct:

This is the clearest, most concise answer.

B - Incorrect:

...*having been* is incorrect and confuses the sequence of events.

C - Incorrect:

Usually, when there is a modifying clause before the main clause, the main clause begins with the word being modified. Also, ...*probably to be able to connect...* is unidiomatic.

D - Incorrect:

Temporarily disconnected though it had been is very wordy and awkwardly constructed.

E - Incorrect:

Poor use of the perfect tense. *Disconnected temporarily* signifies one event, while *has been able to connect* suggests a string of disparate events.

Question 3

A - Correct:

The construction *required + infinitive* is the right idiom. The two infinitives *to develop and (to) enforce* are from the same part of speech and thus are parallel. The relative pronoun *that* starts a modifier that correctly modifies *ideology*.

B, E - Incorrect:

The use of *being* at the end of the underlined sentence create a redundancy error. Being is usually not preferable on the GMAT. The phrase *required for developing* is unidiomatic.

B, C, E - Incorrect:

The object phrase *ideology of all women* potentially changes the meaning of the original sentence by turning a relative pronoun modifier to an object of *ideology* (*ideology of all women*). This is potentially ambiguous in that it could be interpreted to mean that all women possessed this ideology. More importantly, it is extremely unidiomatic.

C - Incorrect:

The construction *was to be required* is wordy.

D - Incorrect:

The use of present tense in *is required* is incorrect. The tense used in the sentence is simple past; thus unless an explicit time indication is added, the original tense must be kept.

E - Incorrect:

The use of future simple tense in the verb in *will be required* changes the meaning of the sentence. Also, this is a redundant statement of the obvious, because the campaign has proceed for a few years and has not borne the expected fruit. Obviously, more than a year will be required.

Question 4

A, B, C - Incorrect:

Redundancy error. *Ascending/ ascension + up* is redundant.

D - Correct:

This sentence fixes the adverbial errors and redundancy in the other answer choices.

E - Incorrect:

The adjective *gradual* cannot describe the verb *ascending*. Adverbs must modify verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.

Question 5

A, B, D - Incorrect:

The phrase *can help monitor* in the *Even though* clause signifies that the scenario is hypothetical, but the main clause employs the realistic phrase *is significant*, as if the ground rules were suddenly changed. This falls far short of the ideal. None of these is as clear or idiomatic as the correct answer.

C - Incorrect:

The noun phrase *affecting their frequencies* is singular and requires a singular verb.

D - Incorrect:

This answer choice changes the subject to *the significance*, which changes the meaning of the original sentence.

E - Correct:

This option presents the right use of the different pronouns in the sentence. The singular pronoun *its* refers correctly to the singular subject *the implementation*, and the plural pronoun *their* refers correctly to the plural object *home loan defaults*.

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