

## VERBAL - SENTENCE CORRECTION

Chat summary by GMAT Ninja - May 17 to August 8

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## General Question

[Q] How do you best approach/study verbal part of GMAT ? Do it topic by topic such as modifiers, parallelism etc or category by category like RC,CR,SC ? Reason i am asking is i can speak fluent english but don't remember the actual grammar terms like subject, object, nouns n stuff.

[A]

OK, so here's the thing I liked about this question: how much do you need to worry about grammar jargon?

In my opinion: the grammar jargon really doesn't matter at all. A couple of reasons:

1) the section is called "verbal reasoning", not "grammar and reading" -- the GMAT is trying very hard to test your ability to connect structure to meaning on SC. Sure, there's some grammar involved, but the heart of it is whether you can think strictly and literally about whether a particular sentence adequately and clearly expresses the correct meaning.

2) when you do need to understand grammar, the labels don't matter. Do you know whether a verb matches its subject? If so, I really don't care if you know what the term "verb conjugation" means, as long as you can do it correctly.

Verb tenses are one of my favorite examples: as long as you understand what each tense actually DOES, then I don't care if you know what it's called. "past progressive perfect tense" -- really not important that you know that term. BUT... if it helps you to have labels for the grammatical structures, that's totally cool! For some people, the jargon helps them learn the actual grammar and usage. For others, the jargon is torture.

Americans tend to be AWFUL with grammar jargon. We never really learn it as kids. So I don't use it at all when I teach most Americans, because they'll run screaming in the opposite direction if I do. But it is really helpful for some people.

[Q] GMATNinja, how long it will take me to ace my verbal part if have gone through the basic ones?

[A]

"Ace" the entire verbal section? That's exceedingly rare. And there's no answer to that question -- it just depends on your reading and grammar and reasoning abilities. Here, this one might help, too: <https://gmatclub.com/forum/experts-topi...41004.html>

[Q] Exactly i can tell if a sentence doesn't feel right by just saying it in my mind. But what should the approach be ?

[A]

Exactly! If that's how you feel, don't worry about the labels! But if you're better at understanding "-ing" nouns because you use the term "gerund", that's cool.

[Q] The moment we see a SC question. What should be the approach?

[A]

Two simple steps:

1. Cross out anything that contains a DEFINITE error. If you're certain that, for example, the pronoun has no antecedent, or the subject-verb agreement is wrong, or the parallelism is definitely wrong... then cross it out. But if you're not CERTAIN, don't eliminate it just yet. On average, I think you'll be able to get rid of about half of the answer choices through clear, certain eliminations -- but it obviously varies from question to question.
2. Compare the remaining pairs of answer choices, and see if you can figure out EXACTLY what the differences are. Then think about whether those differences are going to impact the meaning in some way. And that part gets really subtle and tricky.  
Kind of like that prairie dog example from earlier: when you really think strictly and literally about the differences between those sentences, it's reasonably clear that the crappy-sounding option #1 was the best of the bunch. So it's never, ever about "sound." That's the easiest way to walk right into a trap. Even for native speakers.

I think that a huge percentage of correct GMAT sentences sound like hot garbage. I used to manage a team of writers. Using GMAT SC sentences -- correct ones -- would have gotten them fired, because many of the right answers are wordy, messy, and sound like crap. So keep your ear out of it! "Verbal reasoning", not "ooh, this sounds good."

And now that I'm thinking about it: in a weird way, non-native speakers have a subtle advantage in this regard. Native speakers obviously have more experience with English, but some of them really struggle to be strict and literal and analytical when they read SC sentences. It can be harder for them to "turn their ears off" -- and that's generally what needs to happen.

[Q] Can you provide some suggestions on timing?

[A]

On quant, you can sometimes look at a question, and quickly recognize that you have no idea how to solve it.

On verbal? You really don't know whether a question is hard until you invest a ton of time in that question, right? By the time you realize that you're in trouble, you've probably spent something like 80% of the time that you could possibly spend arriving at an answer. Sure, if you're totally stuck between two answer choices, at some point, you'll have to just pick one and move on. But in general, it's hard to save much time by guessing on verbal, unless you're guessing blindly... .. and blind guessing can destroy you on an adaptive test. Again: if you miss stuff that you're capable of handling, you risk wrecking your score in a big hurry. If you really can't get any more efficient at verbal, and you have to guess toward the end, that's OK -- but wait until the end, and accept your beating at that point.

One of my favorite students from about a decade ago (whoa... that sentence made me feel old!) was really good at verbal once we were done with a couple of months of training, but he was slow. Just a naturally slow reader. Not much we could do about it. He was efficient in his approaches to questions, and he knew his stuff, but his visual processing was just slow.

He could do about 36 questions in 75 minutes. He would crush those 36, and then guess on the rest. It worked just fine -- scored above the 90th percentile on verbal, ended up at Wharton. Of course, the key was that he would do incredibly well on the first 36.

[Q] Can you please suggest how to time yourself for Verbal Practice?

[A]

Try starting with this thread: [https://gmatclub.com/forum/strategy-of- ... 38048.html](https://gmatclub.com/forum/strategy-of-...-38048.html) We'll post something more comprehensive about verbal timing at some point, but that one should get you started.

[Q] Can there still be hope if you spend double the time you usually do for the initial 10 verbal questions on test day?

[A]

No. Why would you change what you normally do on test day?!? Practice doing things EXACTLY how you're going to do them in the actual exam. Why would you suddenly slow down like that? it's actually a really important question, and something that gets ignored on quant, too. The key to success on the GMAT is being 100% consistent in your approach to questions, 100% of the time -- EVERY time you practice. Whenever I hear of anybody who walks into the testing room and tries to do something different on test day, that story always ends badly.

That said... well, it's really hard to get faster at verbal. Your reading speed basically is what it is once you reach adulthood. (With an asterisk for non-native speakers who are still fundamentally improving at English.)

So the way I always want everybody to think about verbal is that you're working on maximizing your EFFICIENCY, not your speed. If you try to read faster, that's probably not going to work, because you'll probably read more sloppily. All of those beginner's guides are basically designed to help you think about maximizing accuracy and efficiency -- and sometimes, that requires investing some extra time in the passage itself, so that you waste less time on the answer choices.

[Q] Wouldn't guessing in the end do harm to my score, in case i picked the wrong answer?

[A]

If you can only answer 37 questions well in 75 minutes, then of course you're going to have to guess on some of them. It's either that, or you'll end up rushing through a ton of questions, and then you risk missing FAR more than just those last 4. Guessing on the last 4 won't hurt you that badly on an adaptive test, as long as you've taken care of business on the first 37.

[Q] If we wait towards the end won't it be a disaster? We may end up having a series of incorrect answers

[A]

Yeah, but if you've taken care of business on the first ~36 or whatever, those last five will be HARD. And one or two are likely to be experimental. (41 questions, and I think 11 are experimental -- I can double-check those numbers, but I'm close.) Don't ever try to figure out which ones are experimental. But the thing you NEVER want to do is trade, say, question #15 for question #41. Terrible trade. If you guess on #15 to save time... it's going to affect another 26 questions that follow. That's going to hurt your score MUCH more than guessing at the end. And again, it's not ideal, right? In a perfect world, you'll maximize your efficiency on all three verbal question types, and there won't be a problem.

And again, it's not ideal, right? In a perfect world, you'll maximize your efficiency on all three verbal question types, and there won't be a problem.

[Q] Is it ok to then guess on alternate Qs, is penalty paid a bit less than guessing two in a row

[A]

Again: if you're going to guess, do so at the end of the verbal section. If you answer #11 carefully but then guess on #12, you're still making a terrible trade: you're sacrificing #12 -- which will affect another 29 questions -- for #41, which won't affect anything else. If you take care of business, #41 will be hard, and you can afford to miss it.

Only exception, I guess, is if you're MUCH slower on some question types than others. But if that's the case, something has gone wrong -- the questions are designed to take roughly the same amount of time. Most of us are maybe a little bit faster on SC than RC/CR, but guessing on RC passages is dangerous, since they have 3-4 Qs each. So at the very end, I suppose that you could guess on CRs and focus on SCs... but only at the very end, and I don't think that strategy would make a huge difference, one way or the other.

Here's the thing: you'll always see 4 RC passages, with 3 or 4 questions each. (Usually 3 passages with 3 questions each, one passage with 4 questions.) So keep track of them! That way, you'll know if you still have another RC left toward the end of the test.

Personally, I want nothing to do with RC and CR at the end of the test. I'm tired, and that 4th RC passage is probably not going to be interesting at the end of a 4-hour test. (Selection order changes that, obviously... but for another two weeks, I can whine about verbal fatigue, right?) Psychologically, I feel much better when I'm not blindsided by an RC at question #37. And the order of question types definitely isn't fixed on the GMAT. On one exam, I think I was done with RC by question #30. On others, my last few questions were RC.

And either way: RC annoys me, so I want to know whether I'm done with them.

Generally, you'll see 17 SC, 13 RC (4 RC passages), 11 CR, give or take a couple.

[Q] One quick question could I have solved that last question without knowing the meaning of the word spurious? I'm not a native speaker and words like that really disturb me especially on exam day if I don't know the meaning

[A]

Ooh, that's another good question. What to do about vocabulary? Honestly, the GMAT isn't really trying to test vocabulary. In a whole lot of cases, you can get around the "tough" word that's in a passage or sentence... but not always. And there's no magical vocab list out there that will be a good use of your time. If a shaky vocabulary is causing you HUGE problems, then you probably want to back up and just spend a whole lot more time reading good, hard material in English.

[Q] Any tips to reflect GMAT Prep verbal score in actual GMAT is welcome! After scoring V35-V41 in GMATPrep exam pack 1,2,3, and 4, I scored a terrible V30 on actual GMAT.

[A]

Actually, I'll make this more generic. Reasons why your test scores might not match:

1. You're repeating the exams
2. Non-official tests are unbelievably inaccurate, so those rarely tell us anything
3. You get nervous -- whether you're conscious of it or not -- during your test
4. You get more fatigued during the real exam because you "know that it counts this time" -- and so you're being more intense throughout, and run out of steam on verbal
5. You've done a lot of practice materials that are based on the GMATPrep exams -- especially if you've been doing a lot of the questions here on GMAT Club that come from those tests

6. You're fundamentally inconsistent: if your scores are bouncing around a lot anyway, then a disappointing test result isn't all that shocking -- even if they're lower than your averages
7. You aren't well-rested or you aren't eating right on test day
8. The question banks intermingle a little bit on the GMAC tests: #1 & #2 share questions, #3 & #4 share questions, etc. So that can inflate your GMATPrep average scores a little, even if you aren't explicitly repeating tests.

[Q] The question banks intermingle a little bit on the GMAC tests: #1 & #2 share questions, #3 & #4 share questions, etc. So that can inflate your GMATPrep average scores a little, even if you aren't explicitly repeating tests. what's the approx 'hidden' pool of Qs, that are new when I reset in Gmat prep software.

[A]

I think there's a thread somewhere that discusses the exact number of questions in the "original" GMATPrep tests (#1 & #2) and in the GMATPrep Exam Packs -- I can't remember the exact numbers, but the question banks are MUCH smaller in the exam packs than in the original, free tests.

[Q] How would you go about practising verbal during the last 14 days before taking the actual test? I am trying to strategise a plan that would be both efficient and effective.

[A]

I'm not sure that a lot would need to change in those last two weeks. Usual principles apply: focus on official questions, and spend extra time on anything that's a disproportionate weakness. In theory, I guess I'd argue that CR and RC take longer to improve than SC, so you're more likely to make progress on SC in a short amount of time -- but you obviously can't lose your mojo on CR and RC, either. And start sleeping well now. Sleep deprivation is cumulative -- so this is the week when I start pushing my students to get extra sleep, pay attention to diet, get some exercise. At some stage, your ability to focus and think clearly is going to matter MUCH more on verbal than that last grammar rule you cram into your head the night before the exam.

Honestly, I'm still fine at quant when I'm a little bit tired. But my verbal sharpness fades quickly if I'm not 100%. And I think most people are that way. And you've saved a couple of good, official GMATPrep tests for these last couple of weeks, I hope?

[Q] I see what you mean, definitely makes sense. Yes, I have saved 3 prep tests. I have been taking the Manhattan ones recently but I reckon I should move on to the prep tests now.

[A]

Yes, exactly -- the MGMAT can be good for getting used to the timing and all of that (especially since you can choose your section order on MGMAT!), but you want an official-only diet toward the end. I think we covered this a little bit last week, but if you're worried about stamina on verbal, then you definitely don't want the default order -- it's easy to get fatigued at the very end, and that might affect the precision of your reading. But if you need to "warm up" before doing the sections that matter, then the default order isn't so bad, because you can "settle in" for an hour on stuff that doesn't really matter. If you're looking for absolute perfection on verbal, then sure: you should probably know all of the 25,000 idioms in English. In practice, you can MOSTLY dodge them without having it hurt your score much. And there are too many to memorize.

[Q] Can you share few tips to reduce anxiety and how to be un nerved on D day?

[A]

If we're talking about why real test scores don't match practice test scores, that's probably the biggest issue. Test anxiety might literally be my least favorite thing, period. And I've spoken to tons of psychologists about it, along with some hypnotists, acupuncturists, and meditation experts.

The biggest thing you can do in terms of test-prep: make sure that you have 100% consistent approaches to everything. On RC, for example, some people read more intensely some days, and less intensely other days. Or sometimes, they take tons of notes, and sometimes they don't. That's terrible, because if you get even a little bit nervous on test-day, you'll probably start doing random stuff, and you'll get yourself into all sorts of trouble. Develop consistent approaches and consistent strategies -- that way, the "right approach" is automatic, even if you're a little bit jittery.

And this is totally not interesting, but sleeping and diet and exercise are a really, really big deal, especially as you approach your test date. If you're sleep-deprived, your ability to deal with anxiety plummets. Same thing if your blood sugar is low. So in that last week or two, you really have to take care of your body. Good health won't cure anxiety, but poor health choices will increase your anxiety enormously.

Ego and stubbornness are a really, really big thing, too. I think they play more of a role on quant. It's really easy to get stubborn because you think you "should" get a certain question right. In reality, you're probably going to miss a bunch of quant questions -- and if you get stubborn, you're in trouble. Same is true for verbal, but I generally find that people are less egotistical and stubborn on verbal for some reason. But yes: you're going to miss some questions. So if you get stuck, at some point, you have to shrug, and say "good job, GMAT, you got me!" and move on.

You can't spend 5 minutes on question #10 -- whatever it is, it's not worth it. Pick your battles wisely. Especially since a whole bunch of the questions are experimental and don't count, anyway.

[Q] How to get a question right in the exam given the pressure?

[A]

Yup, you're not alone. Under pressure, instincts take over, and that's when test-takers tend to select the one that "sounds good" or "feels right" -- instead of taking the extra 15 seconds to coldly ANALYZE the difference between those last two answer choices in terms of their literal meaning.

I don't know if this is helpful, but sometimes under time pressure, we all have an instinct to "save time" by rushing through that last little step. But that final, careful comparison of two answer choices might only take 15 seconds. That's nothing. 100% worth the investment if it gets you an extra question right, even if it only happens on one question out of, say, every five or six. Basically, you don't want to "save time" on anything that doesn't really take that much time.

[Q] Can we discuss more on the order selection though - is it a good idea to start with verbal?

I can't imagine that anybody missed the news, but if you have missed refer here: [https://gmatclub.com/forum/big-gmat-cha ... 42718.html](https://gmatclub.com/forum/big-gmat-cha...42718.html)

You can choose the order of your GMAT sections starting July 11. Makes me happy. And I say that as somebody who really struggles to give a crap at the end of a 4-hour exam. Seriously, the hardest thing for me as always been verbal, just because I'm tired and don't care anymore by the time I get to the end.

Here's what I think the selection order choice boils down to: do you need a warmup, or are you more worried about fatigue? IR works as a nice warmup for some people. If that's the case, there's no harm in keeping the conventional order. If you're more worried about fatigue, put the IR and AWA at the end. Personally, I'm more worried about fatigue. Most people who struggle with verbal will probably want to put verbal 1st or 2nd. But I do have students who get a little bit jittery and out of sorts when they walk into the exam room, and the not-very-meaningful AWA and IR sections help them settle in. And if verbal is really easy for you, then the conventional order is probably fine. If quant is a warmup for you, then that's perfect.

GMATPrep will be "fixed" at the end of July if that isn't too late. MGMTAT and Veritas and other companies have incorporated the changes already. You could also do what I call "fake tests" using the GMATPrep Question Pack. Basically, you can put the software in "random" and "exam" mode as you do practice questions, and it'll feel like a real test. (The real thing is obviously adaptive, but it feels really, really random sometimes.) If you're a high scorer, select medium and hard questions only. That way, you can do the sections in whatever order you'd like.

[Q] Do you think practising mocks in AWA-IR-Q-V order and taking real GMAT in any other order will impact our score?

[A]

In general, I'm a believer in the idea that you should try to make everything in your practice tests as similar to the real thing as possible. Including section order. But I'm not sure that it's a big deal, one way or the other. I think that we're all assuming that it's best to stick AWA & IR at the end of our tests, and I'm not sure that it's ideal for everybody to do it that way. If you need to warm up a little bit, then the "normal" order is actually a good thing. Some people really benefit from having an hour to settle into the test environment. If this is true for you, then it might be a problem to do your tests in the old order, and then switch it for the real test. But otherwise, I doubt that it's going to cause much trouble.

[Q] Actually, the GMAT I took was one of the first that you could reorder the sections. However, since I had done 5 practice tests with the AWA IR Quant Verbal order I kept the same order, even though I think many would be tempted to put Quant first.

[A]

Yeah, it's an interesting issue. Personally, I'm starting to see more people for whom the original order (AWA/IR/Q/V) is best, just because it gives you time to settle into the testing room before anything actually matters. But everybody is different. Personally, the hardest thing about the GMAT for me is that I'm out of steam -- and I stop caring as much -- by the end of the test, so I'd prefer to do verbal earlier. But that's just me -- and I also take the exam for different reasons than almost anybody else in here. Not an MBA applicant. For most of our students? If I'm at all worried that they'll get nervous, I think they should use the original order.

[Q] My gut feeling in GMAT scoring shall improve with V at start and competition get even tougher. What does your experience pitch in here?

[A]

I really don't think that the selection order is going to inflate average scores by much. Sure, if you get fatigued on verbal, switching the order will help -- enormously. But again, some people really need that warmup at the beginning, so I think that some people will lose that extra hour to get comfortable, and that could have the opposite effect. But both effects will be really small on average, I think.

[Q] I took mocks a few weeks ago for my first attempt. now I don't have mocks for the second attempt - I mean no official mocks - what do u suggest?

[A]

Ugh, that's a tough spot. A couple of things:

1. It's OK to repeat them if you absolutely have to, it's just that you have to assume that the timing issues will be worse on your actual exam.
2. If you haven't exhausted the GMATPrep Question Pack, there's a way to use those to create what we call "fake tests" -- and we'll post this week's Topic of the Week on that.
3. If you're only running out of time a little bit at the end of the section, that's not necessarily a big deal! Hang onto that question pack! You can use it to create tests that roughly mimic the actual test-day experience. It's not perfect -- and not adaptive -- but it'll give you some practice under time pressure.

[Q] I have gone thru this [Link](#) --> it's 150 hardest and easiest questions, what i have found is that almost all of the difficult questions are from test prep companies and almost all of the easiest ones are from official guide or gmatprep. My question is: if we stay away from testprep questions then from where to get official hard questions for practice?

[A]

So here's the thing: those difficulty levels are determined by the results of those timers, if I'm not mistaken. People struggle on hard questions, but they also struggle on flawed questions. And it's hard to know which is which, to be honest. And it's hard to know which is which, to be honest. I think some people do benefit from doing those non-official questions, since they can give you extra repetition on certain concepts and stretch your supply of official questions. But when I see a discussion that's raging on the forums on a non-official verbal question, it's usually because of a flaw in the question.

The GMAT itself is inconsistent enough with its "rules" (or lack of rules). Non-official questions can make it harder to feel firm in your understanding of how things really work. So use official stuff whenever possible... but yeah, there's not as much official stuff as we'd like, so I acknowledge that particularly hard-working students end up in a tough spot. Do you repeat official questions, or use non-official ones? I don't have a great answer to that.

[Q] How many questions we might get from parallelism and comparisons?

[A]

Not really sure what that means but I'd strongly advice against predicting what the test wants to do. Sure there are certain traps that you should get used to but I honestly think the test is way more straightforward than people make it out to be. Especially the whole concept of 'think like a test taker' - I never understood that. I'd rather say 'think like a well prepared candidate.

Basic SC technique: cross out everything you can based on definite, absolute grammar rules. Things you're sure about. Subject-verb, that kind of thing. Then, compare remaining pairs of answer choices and figure out everything that differs between the two sentences -- and see if you can figure out what's different between them when you look at those differences strictly and literally.

Also 'meaning' is often touted as this really complicated silver bullet for SC. It is really not. More often than not the meaning will boil down to modifier placements.

[Q] How to improve in generally related to the meaning of the sentence? Some times we non-native struggle

[A]

There's nothing horribly complicated or technical there. Just try to figure out how a few words impact the meaning. And yes, it's often things like modifier placements, or changing the form of a word so that it tweaks the meaning a little bit. But there are no formulas for this stuff -- it's just being literal and logical.

[Q] I have a question specific to Sentence Correction Strategy...My Verbal is pretty Weak(26-32) and i have recently started achieving good accuracy in CR and RC (RC was decent always) but my SC is still pretty low (<50%). As suggested by a lot of experts here in GMATCLUB, i studied from MGMAT SC and Aristotle (still learning Idioms List). But kind of a little demotivated..What do u suggest..solving 2000 questions (and analyzing) will help or re-reading the material again. I have only 45 days left.

[A]

The link I just posted probably isn't exactly right for you, but there's some stuff in there that might apply. Basically, I wonder if your brain is getting "logjammed" with all of the rules and idioms, and maybe you're having a hard time separating the important stuff from the less-important stuff. MGMAT covers a TON of rules. It's a great book. It can overstuff your brain, and then make it harder to actually look for the right things in the questions. Not sure if that applies to you, but it might. And I'll have plenty of wisecracks about idioms in this week's topic of the week -- so keep an eye on the SC subforum.

[Q] From where shud we do SC? Is EGMAT enough?

[A]

Many of you have heard me say this dozens of times already, but the GMAT spends between \$1500 and \$3000 developing each test question. E-GMAT would go out of business if they tried to do that. Even the best test-prep companies can't compete -- so for practice, official questions are always the best. You can learn topics from e-GMAT or MGMAT or GMAT Club, but official questions still win when you're practicing.

## **Verb Tense**

[Q] Can you discuss about verb tenses?

[A]

OK, so in a lot of the test-prep books, the verb tense chapters basically list every verb tense that exists in English. As if you have to memorize them all or something. That seems unbelievably painful to me, unless you're just learning English. So I've always believed in a minimalist approach to verb tenses: which ones do you REALLY need to understand? Like, which ones do you need to understand deeply to do well on the GMAT?

Honestly, I think it's only the past perfect tense. ("Had been" or "had studied" or "had + verb".) That one causes all sorts of trouble, partly because it has very specific rules, and partly because we use it incorrectly in everyday speech, at least here in the U.S.

Beyond that, when I look at most verb tense questions, they're basically checking to see if you can match the tenses with the meaning. Seeing if you're paying attention to what, EXACTLY, the sentence

is trying to say. The verb tenses themselves aren't so bad -- again, other than past perfect, which tends to cause trouble for native speakers. My non-native speakers seem to do just fine with it.

The more common mistake I see is this...

People will look at a sentence and decide that there's a problem -- maybe "bad parallelism" or something -- if the verb tenses don't match. And that's not necessarily correct. We mix verb tenses constantly in real life. We're always comparing the past to the future, or the present to the past. That's totally fine, as long as it matches the meaning.

Silly example:

*"Amber studied ballet as a child, studies Pilates now, and will study cooking someday."*

A very common wrong reaction: "that's not parallel!" Sure it is: "Amber (verb), (verb), and (verb)." Structurally, parallelism has nothing to do with verb tense. Mixing verb tenses is fine... as long as it actually makes sense with the meaning! And that's the #1 thing the GMAT is trying to test. Memorizing a crapload of verb tense rules usually isn't useful -- unless, of course, you're still working on your English fundamentals.

So yes, study past perfect tense if you're not 100% comfortable with it. (We'll post a topic of the week on it in the fall.) Otherwise? When you see shifting verb tenses, think about meaning.

Favorite not-super-hard example coming in a moment...

[Q]

*Not trusting themselves to choose wisely among the wide array of investment opportunities on the market, **stockbrokers are helping many people who turn to them to buy stocks that could be easily** bought directly.*

- A. *stockbrokers are helping many people who turn to them to buy stocks that could be easily*
- B. *stockbrokers are helping many people who are turning to them for help in buying stocks that they could easily have*
- C. *many people are turning to stockbrokers for help from them to buy stocks that could be easily*
- D. *many people are turning to stockbrokers for help to buy stocks that easily could have been*
- E. *many people are turning to stockbrokers for help in buying stocks that could easily be*

[A]

OK, so easy elimination on (A) and (B), right? Not trusting themselves to choose wisely among the wide array of investment opportunities on the market, stockbrokers are helping many people who turn to them to buy stocks that could be easily bought directly.

(A) stockbrokers are helping many people who turn to them to buy stocks that could be easily

(B) stockbrokers are helping many people who are turning to them for help in buying stocks that they could easily have

*"Not trusting themselves... stockbrokers..." --> nope, the stockbrokers trust themselves just fine.*

So... in (C) and (E), "could be easily" or "could easily be" are present tense. (Conditional, but still present tense.) In (D), "could have been" is in the present perfect conditional (ugh, what a terrible term)

-- basically, we're referring to stocks in the past, not just the present. And that doesn't really make sense. Why is it that many people "are turning to stockbrokers" for help purchasing stocks... in the past? That's the problem with (D). Subtle! All about meaning.

[Q]

*The company announced that its profits declined much less in the second quarter than analysts **had expected it to and its business will improve** in the second half of the year.*

- A. *had expected it to and its business will improve*
- B. *had expected and that its business would improve*
- C. *expected it would and that it will improve its business*
- D. *expected them to and its business would improve*
- E. *expected and that it will have improved its business*

[A]

"we need perfect past tense right? because analysts expected before announcement. Also D doent have "that" and E has "will"" --> yup, that's spot-on. The announcement is in simple past, the expectations must have happened before that -- so we need past perfect in this case. For whatever it's worth, the pronoun "it" in (E) could just refer to "company." That seems fine. In (D), "them" could refer to profits -- that seems fine, too. I think the parallelism is clearer in (B) than in (D) -- "that its business would improve" is more clearly parallel to "that its profits declined." But I'm not 100% sure that the parallelism in (D) is wrong -- just really, really suspect. The verb tenses seem like the bigger issue.

[Q] When can we use simple present in reported speech?

[A]

Simple present just indicates a general characteristic.

*"Hurricanes destroy millions of homes."* --> This doesn't exactly mean that it's happening right now; it's just a general characteristic of what hurricanes do.

[Q] I am facing a difficulty with verb tense sequencing. How to know whether two actions are related or they are independent?

[A]

For most people, the only verb tense that is worth special attention is past perfect tense: "had been", "had done", "had studied," etc.

And I suspect that most of you know how that one works: it has to describe an action in the past that happened BEFORE some other "marker" that happened later in the past. Usually, that "marker" is another past tense action in simple past. And from there, it's just a question of making sure that the logic of the sentence is sound.

*"I had been a real jerk until I ate my second breakfast."* --> "had been" happened first, "ate breakfast" happened later. No problem -- that makes sense.

Not as good: *"I had been a real jerk but now I am a nice guy."* --> nope, because the only other action is in the present. There's no need for past perfect.

And past perfect is the relatively easy case. From there, I don't think that there's a lot of "technical" or "grammatical" stuff that will help much with verb tenses (unless, of course, you just aren't familiar with English verb tenses in general). It's just a question of following the logic of what the sentence is trying to say, and figuring out whether the mix of verb tenses actually makes sense.

*"I have eaten 14 burritos since sunrise."* -- "have eaten" suggests an action that starts in the past and continues into the present. In other words, it spans both the past and the present.

**GMAT example:**

*"The fossil has been dated at 35 million years old."* vs.

*"The fossil was dated at 35 million years old."*

I don't know -- I feel like it should be the latter. Isn't "dating" (i.e., carbon dating) a process that scientists perform once in a lab, and then it's over? But the GMAT uses "has dated." That's fine, I guess -- it's just that there's some grey area between present perfect and past tense, and it's a stylistic choice by the author or speaker.

**[Q] So later event in sequence is always past tense and earlier in past perfect**

[A] That's correct. Though there are rare cases where there could be some other "marker" besides a simple past action.

For example,

*"By noon yesterday, Charles had already eaten 14 burritos."* Fine -- "by noon" gives us some other marker in the past, and the past perfect "had eaten" just indicates that the eating happened before that other "marker" in the past. But that usage is pretty rare on the GMAT.

[Q]

*Construction of the Roman Colosseum, **which was officially known as the Flavian Amphitheater, began in A.D. 69, during the reign of Vespasian.** was completed a decade later, during the reign of Titus, who opened the Colosseum with a one hundred-day cycle of religious pageants, gladiatorial games, and spectacles.*

(A) *which was officially known as the Flavian Amphitheater, began in A.D. 69, during the reign of Vespasian,*

(B) *officially known as the Flavian Amphitheater, begun in A.D. 69, during the reign of Vespasian, and*

(C) *which was officially known as the Flavian Amphitheater, began in A.D. 69, during the reign of Vespasian, and*

(D) *officially known as the Flavian Amphitheater and begun in A.D. 69, during the reign of Vespasian it*

(E) *officially known as the Flavian Amphitheater, which was begun in A.D. 69, during the reign of Vespasian, and*

My query is regarding usage of correct past participle with helping verb (ie. had begun) since the subject- Construction of the Roman Colosseum- has verbs - began and completed - out of which ideally began happened first and then construction was completed. Do you agree that sequencing of events (begin of construction and completion of construction) makes logical sense here?

[A]

It's interesting: construction began before it was completed, right? But "had begun" isn't even an option. I guess it's because both actions are so far in the past that we don't really care about the sequence --

or at least, the sequencing isn't something that needs to be emphasized in order to make sense of the sentence?

What I usually tell my students is that they want the past perfect to jump out at them, since it has such a straightforward rule attached. In this case, it's not an option -- and the verb tenses aren't really much of an issue the way the question is written, since they don't give us the option of past perfect.

[Q] So how do we know whether two actions can be sequenced when a complex SC is given?

[A]

Here's my thinking: if you see past perfect tense, great -- start there. It has very specific rules. Same with "having + verb." From there, don't worry too much about the verb tenses unless you see some sort of split. Two answer choices say "began" and three say "have begun"? Great: there's a chance that the split is irrelevant (and yes, that happens on the GMAT!), but it's more likely that there's a clue somewhere.

For example, "since 1996" would tell you that you need "have begun"; "in 1996" would indicate simple past. That sort of thing. And if THAT doesn't do the trick, then it's just a question of trying to figure out if the actions in the sentence need to happen in some sort of sequence. In general, if two actions are in the same verb tense, then they're more or less simultaneous; if they're in different tenses, then they aren't. And sometimes that's just a question of being really clear about what the sentence is trying to say.

**[Q] If we are using begun, does it need a helping verb?**

[A] Yeah, "begun" is the past participle form, so you'll need a helping verb if you're using "begun" as a verb.

[Q] Can you provide an explanation on the usage of 'having + verb'?

[A]

The quick version is that "'having + verb" ("having been", "having studied," "having eaten," etc.) is sort-of just another "-ing" modifier, but the timeline has to be correct.

Just like any other "-ing" modifier, it has to make sense with the noun it modifies. But the added twist is that the timeline has to make sense, too. The "having + -ing" has to occur before some other action. Sort of like past perfect tense.

Ex:

1. *Having been sick all day today, Amber called in sick to work this morning.*  
Here's the problem: the timeline is wrong in #1. The "having + verb" needs to be the first action, followed by another action. That's not happening here. Logically, she wasn't sick "all day today" before she called in sick this morning.
2. *Having eaten dinner already, Amber immediately began drinking heavily at the dinner party.*  
This one actually gets the timeline right. She ate dinner first, and then started drinking at the dinner party. That's perfectly fine logically.

To be honest, I can't think of any official questions that use this "having + verb" construction in a correct answer. It's not inherently wrong, but GMAT doesn't seem to use it much.

In that sense, it's sort of like "being" -- mostly used in wrong sentences, but there's no reason why it couldn't be used correctly.

**[Q] But is 2 not redundant?**

[A] Yes, in some sense the verb tenses already clarifies the timeline, so "already" is arguably redundant. But for a teaching example, I'm trying to be super-clear about the logical timeline, so that's why I put it in there.

[Q]

**With an emphasis on color and form at the expense of exact duplication of detail, art historians have suggested that Impressionism had evolved** in response to the advent of black-and-white photography, which allowed precise, albeit monochromatic, pictorial reproduction of a landscape.

- A. *With an emphasis on color and form at the expense of exact duplication of detail, art historians have suggested that Impressionism had evolved*
- B. *Emphasizing color and form at the expense of exact duplication of detail, it has been suggested by art historians that Impressionism evolved*
- C. *Art historians have suggested that Impressionism, with its emphasis on color and form at the expense of exact duplication of detail, had evolved*
- D. *Art historians have suggested that Impressionism, with its emphasis on color and form at the expense of exact duplication of detail, evolved*
- E. *Impressionism, with its emphasis on color and form at the expense of exact duplication of detail, was suggested by art historians to have evolved*

Why is 'had evolved' wrong in the above question?

[A]

The biggest thing is that the historians "have suggested" -- and that's not past tense, it's present perfect. And it wouldn't make sense to use "had evolved" before an action in present perfect, since "have suggested" is an action that continues into the present...

[Q]

**Galileo did not invent the telescope, but on hearing, in 1609, that such an optical instrument had been made, he** quickly built his own device from an organ pipe and spectacle lenses.

- A. *Galileo did not invent the telescope, but on hearing, in 1609, that such an optical instrument had been made, he*
- B. *Galileo had not invented the telescope, but when he heard, in 1609, of such an optical instrument having been made,*
- C. *Galileo, even though he had not invented the telescope, on hearing, in 1609, that such an optical instrument had been made, he*
- D. *Even though Galileo did not invent the telescope, on hearing, in 1609, that such an optical instrument had been made,*
- E. *Even though Galileo did not invent the telescope, but when he heard, in 1609, of such an optical instrument being made, he*

[A]

(A) looks OK to me

(B) is missing "he"! Also, the past perfect tense doesn't work very well here -- there's no good reason to use it. And the "having been" is unnecessary, too.

(C) is still a full sentence, not a fragment. That last part beginning with "he" is an independent clause. Bigger problem here is the use of past perfect tense. The sentence has three actions: "had not invented the telescope", "instrument had been made", "he quickly built." That implies that Galileo first did not invent the telescope, and then he built one. That doesn't really make sense -- he NEVER invented the telescope, so why would we use past perfect tense, which suggests an action that ended before some other action?

(D) Repeats the error in B (missing 'he')

I think there's a point about redundancy in (E), but there are plenty of other problems there, too. Absolutely no good reason to use "being" in (E).

Verb tenses also make more sense in (A): heard that the instrument HAD BEEN MADE... and then he BUILT his own. Textbook use of past perfect tense with simple past tense.

[Q]

*The three women, liberal activists who strongly support legislation in favor of civil rights and environmental protection, **have consistently received labor's unqualifying support.***

- A. *have consistently received labor's unqualifying support*
- B. *are consistently receiving the unqualifying support of labor*
- C. *have consistently received the unqualified support of labor*
- D. *receive consistent and unqualified support by labor*
- E. *are receiving consistent and unqualified support by labor*

[A]

I think of SC as having two "halves": there's grammar/usage "rules", and then there's "meaning." The two are inseparable, if we're being honest about it. But most of us spend our SC study time thinking about grammar and rules. So how do you even begin to "study" meaning on the GMAT? And this question is a nice, classic example of some meaning issues. I don't think that any of the answer choices are grammatically WRONG, exactly. These are 100% about meaning.

unqualifying = not meeting standard, while unqualified = not limited

Only "unqualified" makes sense here. But it's pretty subtle, and there's no master list of stuff like this. "Economic" vs. "economical" is a similar issue that comes up occasionally. But the GMAT could come up with limitless supplies of these sorts of little distinctions.

OK, so we're left with C, D, and E.

- C. *have consistently received the unqualified support of labor*
- D. *receive consistent and unqualified support by labor*
- E. *are receiving consistent and unqualified support by labor*

(C) *have consistently received the unqualified support of labor* --> "have received" is present perfect tense, so the action starts in the past, and continues into the present. Makes sense: the women must have received that support in the past, right? And also the present.

(D) *receive consistent and unqualified support by labor* --> present only. Plus, I'm not sure why we're saying that the support is consistent. In (C), they receive the support consistently -- it makes a little bit more sense that way. (And yes, "support of labor" is better than "support by labor", too.)

(E) *are receiving consistent and unqualified support by labor* --> "are receiving" is present progressive tense, emphasizing that the action is going on right now. But why would we emphasize that? It makes a whole lot more sense to use present perfect, as in (C). Also, issues with "consistent" and "by labor" are the same as in (D).

I think we might have discussed verb tenses very briefly last week, but the bottom line is that it's all about matching the meaning to the tenses. Three different tenses in this particular question. And none of them are grammatically WRONG, exactly -- but each of them tweaks the meaning just a little bit. And it's a question of figuring out which meaning is the most reasonable. That's classic GMAT.

I've been saying this a lot lately, but the section is called "verbal reasoning" and not "reading and grammar." It's a silly distinction, in some ways, but it does tell you something about what the test-makers are asking you to do. If you try to memorize your way to an awesome score, that probably won't work -- even on SC, which is the most "mechanical" or "formulaic" part of the verbal section.

## Parallelism

[Q]

**Based on records from ancient Athens, each year young Athenian women collaborated to weave a new woolen robe that they used to dress** a statue of the goddess Athena and that this robe depicted scenes of a battle between Zeus, Athena's father, and giants.

- C. *According to records from ancient Athens, each year young Athenian women collaborated to weave a new woolen robe that they used to dress*
- D. *Records from ancient Athens indicate that each year young Athenian women collaborated to weave a new woolen robe with which they dressed*
- E. *Records from ancient Athens indicate each year young Athenian women had collaborated to weave a new woolen robe for dressing*

[A]

First thing you always want to do when you're dealing with parallelism: find the trigger. That's usually "and" or "or", though there are obviously others.

And then you'll always want to ask yourself: what follows the parallelism trigger?

Notice that "and" in the second line of the question.

What follows the "and"? "that", so something else needs to be parallel to the "that" clause.

(E) doesn't have anything that could possibly be parallel to the "that" clause -- so (E) is out.

In C: *"each year young Athenian women collaborated to weave a new woolen robe that... this robe depicted scenes of a battle between Zeus, Athena's father, and giants."* Huh? That doesn't make sense.

In (D): *"Records from ancient Athens indicate that... this robe depicted scenes of a battle between Zeus, Athena's father, and giants."*

Think of it this way: the thing that follows the "and" is the end of a list -- in this case, a list of two phrases.

So think of parallelism as a list of some sort -- two or more things that have to be in the same grammatical structure.

**[Q] That is followed by dependent clause or phrases?**

[A] In **D**, here are your two phrases:

1. *that each year young Athenian women collaborated to weave a new woolen robe,*
2. *(follows AND) that this robe depicted scenes of a battle between Zeus, Athena's father, and giants.*

And there's some "stem" that comes before all of that stuff, and the stem has to make sense with EVERY item in the list. In this case, the "stem" that precedes the parallelism is "*Records from ancient Athens indicate...*"

So here's your ideal steps for parallelism:

1. find the trigger ("and" and "or" are the most common)
2. figure out what comes immediately after the trigger  
^^ that would be the LAST item in the "list"
3. find something that's parallel to that last item
4. make sure that EVERY item in the list makes sense with the "stem"

**[Q] C doesn't make sense. Not parallel?**

[A] The funny thing is that (**C**) is sort-of parallel, grammatically. It's just that it doesn't make logical sense the way it's constructed.

**[Q] is verb-ing correct in C?**

[A] Yeah, I'm OK with the "*according to records...*" thing. That seems fine.

**Modifier : General**

[Q] Any posts on modifiers that you think is very useful?

[A]

[This](#) and [this](#).

[Q] Can we say that -ing can act as a noun/adj/verb but -ed can act only as verb/adj?

[A]

Yes, I think that's correct. If there's an exotic way that an "-ed" can be a noun, I can't think of what that would be -- and it's not going to cause trouble on the GMAT, anyway.

[Q] Can you give an example about the -ing and -ed and can you make the point you made up there more clear with the help of an example

[A]

*"The politician who lost Tuesday's election, which was the most expensive and closely-watched US House race in history, decided to hide from the public all night, crying silently in his bedroom."*

Who is it that's crying silently in his bedroom? The politician -- waaaaay at the beginning of the sentence. But that's fine -- we could argue that "crying silently in his bedroom" modifies that entire clause "the politician decided to hide from the public all night." After all, "crying silently in his bedroom" is giving us extra information about what he was doing when he was hiding from the public. But the "-ing" isn't terribly close to "the politician." And that really isn't a big deal, as long as the sentence still makes sense logically. And I think it does here.

[Q] Can you please advise us on the **modifier touch rule**, especially when **which/that** is used?

[A]

**Warning: The abusive language that is used is solely for demonstrating the modifier touch rule and is not intended to offend any person or sentiments :-)**

*The son of a bitch that spilled my beer deserves to die.*

So I would look at that sentence and think, "*the bitch that spilled my beer*" -- that's wrong, because it wasn't the bitch that spilled my beer. It was the son. So what's the issue here? We have two modifiers in a row: "of a bitch" modifies "son" -- and logically, so does "that spilled my beer". The intended meaning is that the "son of a bitch" spilled my beer and deserves to die. So it LOOKS like "that" is misplaced. But there really isn't a better way to say it because there are two consecutive modifiers.

You wouldn't want to say "*the son that spilled my beer of the bitch...*"

We don't really have a choice here, so this sentence is actually fine. I think some people call it a "mission critical modifier" -- not sure who popularized that term, but a few have asked about it here. "of a bitch" can't be separated from "son" -- so there's really no way for "that" to touch the thing it modifies.

**[Q] Also, we can not use which here, is it compulsory for which to always touch the subject/object it is modifying?**

[A] "That" and "which" basically work the same way on the GMAT: yeah, they generally have to be as close to the noun as possible. Most of the time, they'll "touch" the noun being modified. But there are exceptions for both. Search for "Emily Dickinson" on GMAT Club, and you'll find a notorious example that uses "which."

Here's the thing, though: we're talking about an exception here, and it's really hard to know when it's OK to have the exception. As far as I know, the "exception to the touch rule" generally applies only when there are prepositional phrases in the way.

And in general, the GMAT is mostly concerned with this: which of these sentences most clearly expresses the intended meaning of the sentence? So if the modifier placement seems unclear, there's a good chance that it's wrong. If there's an exception to the "touch rule", there has to be a really good reason for it.

[Q] Can you throw some light on the usage of **'that'** and **'which'** modifying a distant noun

[A]

The traditional rule: when used as noun modifiers, "that" and "which" must modify the immediately preceding noun. And that's correct most of the time.

Silly example:

"My favorite restaurant is in Brooklyn, which serves delicious bhindi masala." - **Wrong**, because Brooklyn doesn't serve bhindi masala.

Traditional rule about "that" and "which", part 2: "that" isn't preceded by a comma, "which" always is. "That" is an essential modifier, "which" is non-essential.

The GMAT really doesn't spend a lot of time testing the distinction between essential and non-essential modifiers, and it definitely doesn't spend any time testing you on comma rules. It's actually really hard to test whether it's better to use "that" or "which"...

1. *The GMAT book, which is on the table, is useless.*
2. *The GMAT book that is on the table is useless.*

Both are fine. Which one is better? It just depends on whether you think that "on the table" is extra information, or if I'd have a hard time identifying the book if you didn't point out that it was on the table. So the vast majority of the time, the GMAT is interested in whether you can figure out if the modifier makes logical sense -- the difference between "that" and "which" doesn't matter much

And I can't find any official GMAT questions that are concerned with comma rules, either. So yes: "which" is generally preceded with a comma, like any other non-essential modifier. "That" generally isn't preceded with a comma when it's used as a noun modifier. But there are exceptions, and you shouldn't worry too much about the comma. That's rarely, if ever, the thing you should be focused on.

Same with dashes, by the way -- they really don't matter much. Experts disagree about the correct way to use dashes. When you see them on the GMAT, look for other issues. The dash isn't the determining factor.

One last thought (for now!) on "that" and "which": both of them can occasionally reach back a little bit further. 95% of the time, they have to "touch" the noun being modified -- but there are exceptions. They're rare, but they exist. There has to be a really, really good reason for "that" or "which" to "reach further back" into the sentence. Usually a prepositional phrase of some sort. Again, here's one of the best examples: [https://gmatclub.com/forum/for-many-rev ... -5903.html](https://gmatclub.com/forum/for-many-rev-...-5903.html)

[Q] But 'that' can also be preceded by a comma right - in case of a non-essential modifier coming in between

[A]

Absolutely. Or if you have a list of modifiers beginning with "that", it's possible to have commas between them. You definitely don't want to get too mechanical with commas on the GMAT. It just isn't a priority on the exam. And again, experts often disagree about comma placement rules, anyway. If the commas somehow impact meaning, great. But other than that, they're generally a non-issue.

And you've all heard me say this before, but you're never looking for a right answer. You're looking for four wrong answers. The least-worst is the correct answer. Correct GMAT sentences are rarely "good." They're wordy and awkward, in my opinion. But that doesn't matter -- the GMAT makes the rules here. Least-worst is your winner.

While we're on the topic of modifiers and "touch rules": if anything, the placement rules are even LESS strict for modifiers other than "that" and "which." For example, "-ing" and "-ed" modifiers need to be as close as possible -- and they need to make sense! -- but they don't necessarily have to "touch" anything.

Friendly reminder: it's "verbal reasoning", not "reading and grammar." So they're testing you on your ability to connect meaning and structure. I wish that there were more absolute rules that applied to SC, but modifier placement is much more about logic and being LITERAL with your interpretation of the sentence than it is about absolute rules.

[Q]

*The use of lie detectors is based on the assumption that lying produces emotional reactions in an individual **that, in turn, create unconscious physiological responses.***

- A. *that, in turn, create unconscious physiological responses*
- B. *that creates unconscious physiological responses in turn*
- C. *creating, in turn, unconscious physiological responses*
- D. *to create, in turn, physiological responses that are unconscious*
- E. *who creates unconscious physiological responses in turn*

here that does make a jump over prep phases.

[A]

yeah, this is a classic case, unless I'm remembering the question incorrectly. No problem to have "*that create unconscious psychological responses*" modify "*emotional reactions in an individual*", rather than just modifying the individual alone. And just be careful not to "hallucinate" exceptions to the "touch rule" for these modifiers. The exceptions exist, but you need to have a pretty darned good reason for them.

I think of the exceptions to the "touch rule" as an "advanced" topic. If my students are botching basic examples, I'll keep them away from the exceptions until they really get good at the basic "touch rule." And Americans sometimes really struggle with the basic rule, believe it or not -- we break the rule constantly in normal speech.

[Q]

*Gusty westerly winds will continue **to usher in a seasonably cool air mass into the region, as a broad area of high pressure will build and** bring fair and dry weather for several days.*

- A. *to usher in a seasonably cool air mass into the region, as a broad area of high pressure will build and*
- B. *ushering in a seasonably cool air mass into the region and a broad area of high pressure will build that*
- C. *to usher in a seasonably cool air mass to the region, a broad area of high pressure building, and*
- D. *ushering a seasonably cool air mass in the region, with a broad area of high pressure building and*
- E. *to usher a seasonably cool air mass into the region while a broad area of high pressure builds, which will*

[A]

I'm going to spoil the surprise and tell you that the answer isn't what you want it to be here. And it isn't what I want it to be, either.

*Gusty westerly winds will continue to usher in a seasonably cool air mass into the region, as a broad area of high pressure will build and bring fair and dry weather for several days.*

(E) is CLEARLY wrong, yes? There are no other correct answers anywhere with "which" modifying a verb or a verb phrase.

And the exceptions that we've discussed to the "touch rule"? The only exceptions I've ever seen on the GMAT will allow "that" or "which" to "jump over" a prepositional phrase -- but not a verb.

But (E) is correct -- despite the fact that the "which" phrase is modifying a verb phrase.

"Builds" is definitely a verb, unfortunately.

The goofy thing is that this is how we speak in real life -- all the time. "I ate four burritos while I was waiting for the train, which made me feel fat and happy." Totally normal -- "which" doesn't modify "trains", it modifies the entire clause. Very few professional editors would object to this sentence -- but it's always been wrong on the GMAT.

**[Q] Can you also please go into why A is wrong?**

[A] Two issues here. "*To user in (something) into the region...*" Really redundant. Plus, I don't think the parallelism makes a whole lot of sense in (A).

[Q] But strangely in the below OG2018 SC question 'which' jumps over the verb 'builds' in the correct answer choice?

[A]

Yeah. The problem is that we've never seen anything quite like this on the GMAT. Again: I'd argue that it's fine in real life. Just like I'd argue that my train example is fine in real life. But the GMAT has been consistent about this... until now.

Here's the dirty little secret of GMAT preparation that nobody likes to admit: the entire industry is trying to make up rules based on what we see in official GMAT questions. These "rules" don't necessarily match those of standard English -- most great editors would disagree with a TON of GMAT SC questions. And the worst part? Those "rules" may or may not exist, and they may or may not be fluid. We're guessing based on the official materials.

You'll only buy our books and courses if we SOUND certain about "the rules." But very few "GMAT SC rules" are 100% absolute rules that never break. Subject-verb agreement might be one of the very few. And that's part of why I emphasize the "verbal reasoning" aspect of the test far more than the grammar. Every time they release a new OG edition, one of our "rules" starts to get shaky, or it gets broken entirely. Consider this the funeral for "which" as an ABSOLUTE RULE.

But don't get me wrong: everything we've said about "which" and "that" is still mostly true. It's just that you have to be careful with it -- if there are worse crimes in other answer choices, apparently it's OK for "which" to refer to a verb phrase. Not THAT big of a deal, I guess. We only have one exception so far -- and the other four answer choices have really, really severe problems. Fair enough, I guess.

[Q]

*My favorite restaurant is in Brooklyn that serves delicious food.*

Here "in Brooklyn" is a prepositional phrase and since that can not modify Brooklyn it make perfect sense to jump over prepositional phrase and eventually modify restaurant which is logically and grammatically sound.

Why did it make sense to jump over prepositions in the OG example whereas in Brooklyn example it did not

[A]

There was a verb 'is' - It cant jump over verbs. "that" and "which" modifiers can "jump" prepositional phrases if it's absolutely necessary for the meaning of the sentence, but they can't jump verbs... ever.

### Modifier : V-ed

[Q] Does verb-ed modifier always appear at the beginning or after the comma?

[A]

Verb-ed modifiers **can appear anywhere**. I think they cause the most trouble when they appear at the beginning of the sentence for some reason.

- *"**Frustrated** by his nation's increasingly racist politics, the American hatched a plan to emigrate to Canada."*
- *"The American, **frustrated** by his nation's increasingly racist politics, hatched a plan to emigrate to Canada."*
- *"The tech company **founded** in 1996 became one of the world's five largest companies by 2017."*

### Modifier : V-ing

[Q] Do you feel verb-ing are far more versatile in terms of placement? I have observed more proximity between noun and verb-ed than noun and verb-ing

[A]

I'm not sure that the difference in proximity between "-ing" and "-ed" modifiers is anything that you need to worry about too much. If you have specific examples in mind, send 'em over, and I'll take a look. But I think you're OK with the general rule for "-ing" and "-ed" modifiers: the modifier has to be close enough to make sense. That's a crappy rule, but it's OK for there to be a little bit of distance between these types of modifiers and the things being modified

[Q] Can we consider that, in GMAT the "-ing" form is used as a verb ONLY to insist on the ongoing nature of the action ?

[A]

Basically, yes. To be fair, you can get into some weird, exotic versions of "ing" verb forms.

*"Mike **had been surfing** in Hawaii when he realized that he deeply loved the GMAT."*

We're emphasizing that there was an active, ongoing action when Mike made his realization, but that action ("had been surfing") is still in the past. Past perfect progressive tense, if we're being technical. And that's not something you'll see very often. But yeah, any "-ing" used as a verb will always be a progressive tense of some sort. They're fairly rare on the GMAT, though. They exist, but it's hard to do anything terribly devious with them.

### Comparison

[Q] Can we please start with comparisons first?

[A]

OK, let's start with comparisons... and meaning. All at once, because I'd argue that it's sort-of all the same topic. Sort of.

You'll see roughly 17 SC questions. And if you're always using process of elimination, you'll cross out 68 wrong sentences over the course of your test. (And you should always use process of elimination. Don't ever fall in love with a verbal answer choice! Find four wrong choices.) I like to say that of those 68 wrong answer choices, roughly half are "mechanical" and half are "non-mechanical." By "mechanical", I mean things that are governed by a clear grammar rule -- cases when you can see a clear, unambiguous error.

Examples of clear, mechanical errors: countable vs. non-countable modifiers, pronouns with no antecedent, subject-verb errors, etc.

Think of that stuff as roughly half of the test. The other half is a whole lot trickier -- "non-mechanical" errors that generally have something to do with subtleties of meaning. Those are much, much harder. But to be fair, I think the line between "mechanical" and "non-mechanical" is blurry sometimes.

And comparisons tend to occupy that really blurry space between "mechanical" and "non-mechanical" errors.

This is straightforward, right:

*"Like LeBron James, Kevin Durant is pretty good at basketball."*

Or

*"Unlike LeBron James, the quality of basketball play by Kevin Durant isn't quite as good."* -- clearly **wrong**, since you can't compare LeBron to basketball

So there's a family of comparisons that, IMO, end up being straightforward, and they "feel mechanical" as a result. "Like" and "unlike" are giving you very, very clear clues. "In contrast to" would be another obvious one, that basically works the same way as "like" or "unlike"

But here's the thing: the people who write the GMAT don't really claim to be testing grammar. It's a "verbal reasoning" section, not a "grammar and reading" section, right? So they're more concerned about connecting structure and meaning than anything else -- and comparisons can be a nasty way to see if you're really dialed into the literal meaning of sentences.

**Another example:**

1. *The debt-GDP ratio of Greece is lower than Japan.*
2. *The debt-GDP ratio of Greece is lower than that of Japan.*
3. *The debt-GDP ratio of Greece is lower than that of Japan's.*

#1 is comparing Greece's debt-GDP ratio to Japan itself, and that makes no sense.

#2 correctly compares "the debt-GDP ratio of Greece to the debt-GDP ratio of Japan"

#3 gets a little bit more subtly crappy: "the debt-GDP ratio of Greece to the debt-GDP ratio of Japan's" -- and yeah, you could think of it as "Japan's... what, exactly?", you could think of it as a bizarre double-possessive or something ("that of" and "Japan's" both indicate possessiveness)

I'd love to say that there are some magical formulas we can give you for comparisons, but even in the debt-GDP ratio example -- which is actually relatively straightforward -- it's mostly about thinking strictly and literally about the precise comparison in each sentence, and asking yourself if the comparison actually makes sense

**Another example:**

***Plants are more efficient at acquiring carbon than are fungi, in the form of carbon dioxide, and converting it to energy-rich sugars.***

- A. Plants are more efficient at acquiring carbon than are fungi*
- B. Plants are more efficient at acquiring carbon than fungi*
- C. Plants are more efficient than fungi at acquiring carbon*
- D. Plants, more efficient than fungi at acquiring carbon*
- E. Plants acquire carbon more efficiently than fungi*

Is anybody driving themselves nuts trying to figure out whether "are" is necessary in (A) vs. (B)?

This is interesting and cool -- a lot of my students find this plant/fungi question confusing, because they get stuck on whether you need the "are" or not. and this sentence is not GMAT-correct: "whether... or not" is redundant! But nobody cares in real life.

This is typical GMAT: they're distracting you with some funny stuff in that "comparison" at the beginning. But guess what? They're also telling you that it doesn't matter, because there's a very clear meaning error in A, B, and E.

A, B, E seem to be saying "fungi, in the form of carbon dioxide..." -- and that doesn't work  
Classic GMAT. If you get too hung up on one thing, you'll miss the meaning issue that is probably WAY more important, especially in a case like this and I'd make a similar argument about idioms: if you're not sure about an idiom, see if you can find other errors, and don't worry about it.

So bottom line for comparisons: there really aren't a whole lot of magic structural/grammatical rules that will save you, but if you're being really strict and literal with the meaning, that's going to get you a long way.

**[Q] I understand the meaning issue. Is "more efficiently" grammatically correct?**

[A] Sure, "more efficiently" would just be an adverb that modifies "acquire" -- so I don't see anything wrong with that.

[Q]

*Many airline carriers are attempting to increase profitability while keeping overhead low by offering, in terms of flights, **an equal amount as last year, doing so by** using larger planes that fly more efficiently.*

- A. an equal amount as last year, doing so by*
- B. the same number offered last year*
- C. an equal amount offered last year and*
- D. the same number as last year but*
- E. an equal number as were offered last year,*

I have read in the forum that we can ignore words when the tense is not changing. But here are we allowed to do that? Isn't there a tense change from offering to offered? Please correct me if I am wrong

[A]

I get really nervous whenever I hear the phrase "ignore words." I agree that there are moments when you have to TEMPORARILY block out a chunk of the sentence in order to understand what's going on ("A bag of peaches cost more in Georgia than in Colorado." -- you need to ignore "of peaches" momentarily to see that this is wrong), but I see a lot of overzealous word-skipping. Not sure if you're doing that here, but the phrase in general makes me nervous. The thing you're ignoring is likely to affect SOMETHING in the sentence, somewhere.

But yes -- I think it's clear enough without repeating "as was offered last year"

And that's the heart of GMAT SC when you're wondering if something can safely be omitted: is the meaning still clear? Or at least clearer than in the other answer choices?

One last example:

1. Prairie dogs live in colonies of several dozen that often have many puppies as well as a large number of adults.
2. Prairie dogs live in colonies of several dozen prairie dogs that often have many puppies as well as a large number of adults.
3. Prairie dogs live in colonies of several dozen of them that often have many puppies as well as a large number of adults.

In real life: I really don't like #1. It feels a little bit unclear to me. But it's correct. In #2, "them" is just ambiguous enough to give us trouble. (Another future topic of the week: pronoun ambiguity isn't always wrong... but it's not ideal if you have a better alternative!)

And the difference between #1 and #3 is just the repetition of "prairie dogs". I'd argue that it's unnecessary, and so would the GMAT. You know in #1 that we're talking about several dozen prairie dogs -- so there's no need to repeat.

Again, I don't love the "sound" of #1, but nobody cares what I think. If we're analyzing the sentence based on logic and meaning, there's no need for the repetition in #3.

[Q] Can you explain the basic rules to follow in a comparison based question?

[A]

OK, some generic thoughts on comparisons.

They should be really straightforward, and there should be really good rules for them. But there sometimes aren't.

Some things have super straightforward rules: "like" or "unlike," for example:

*"Like the poetry of Bruce Willis, Chuck Norris is flowery and pretty."*

Easy to see the problem there... I hope.

**[Q] Aren't we comparing poetry to Chuck Norris?**

[A] Exactly. And it really doesn't make a whole lot of sense to compare poetry to Chuck Norris.

That's sort of the basic level of GMAT comparisons: "like" or "unlike" or "-ings" or "-eds" -- the two things being compared need to make logical sense.

[Q] The main problem (*-with comparison*) comes when we have ellipsis. Can you explain?

[A]

*"Like the poetry of The Rock, an intelligent, charismatic, muscle-bound mutant who is toying with a bid for the United States presidency in 2020, that of Chuck Norris is flowery and pretty."*

You can compare The Rock to Chuck Norris, or you can compare the poetry to the poetry -- but you can't really compare a man to poetry.

So they can be devious about sticking a bunch of garbage in the middle of the comparison to make it hard to see what's up -- but the fundamental principle is no different, even with that rant in the middle. It's about being strict and literal about what's being compared. It's fairly easy to spot when there are obvious "key words" such as "like" or "unlike" or an "-ing" modifier. Trickier when they get more subtle.

[Q]

Currently 26 billion barrels a year, **world consumption of oil is rising at a rate of 2 percent annually.**

- A. world consumption of oil is rising at a rate of
- B. the world is consuming oil at an increasing rate of
- C. the world's oil is being consumed at the increasing rate of
- D. the rise in the rate of the world's oil consumption is
- E. oil is consumed by the world at an increasing rate of

[A]

OK, so I'm getting a bunch of different answers -- but let's focus on the comparison

Currently 26 billion barrels a year, \_\_\_\_\_

What sort of thing would actually make sense in the blank? "the rise"?, "oil", in general?

It wouldn't make sense to say that "oil" is currently 26 billion barrels a year.

So here's the key concept on comparisons of all sorts: you have to be strict and literal. You can't compare poetry to Chuck Norris, and you couldn't say that "oil... is 26 billion barrels a year."

In that sense, modifiers and comparisons are awfully similar on the GMAT -- it's really the same logic that you're employing in both cases, whether you're dealing with "like" and "unlike" or "in contrast to" (comparisons) or "-ing" or "-ed" modifiers... or something like "currently 26 billion barrels..."

[Q] In comparisons, with ellipsis, how do you determine whether you have to repeat the verb, or the clause ?

[A]

*According to public health officials, in 1998 Massachusetts became the first state in which more babies were born to women over the age of thirty than under it.*

1. than
2. than born
3. that they were
4. than there had been
5. than had been born

You're in some tricky territory here! The hard part is that there really aren't a whole lot of super-clear, bulletproof rules you can apply to these situations. They're all just a little bit different. In a lot of cases, it's just a question of being really literal about connecting meaning to structure.

Comparing A & B in the example:

(B): *"more babies were born to women over the age of thirty than under it."* The "it" refers to "age of thirty", presumably. So now this is saying *"more babies were born to women over the age of thirty than under the age of thirty."* That doesn't make a lot of sense -- the babies aren't born to women under the age of thirty. That's why (A) is better in this particular case.

Now that I'm thinking about it, there are a few little traps the GMAT tends to recycle in these types of questions...

*"Yesterday, I ate four times as many burritos as I did the day before."* -- no problem, right?

*"Yesterday, I ate four times as many burritos than I did the day before."* -- **wrong**... and pretty easy to spot the error

*"four times as many than"* -- **nope**.

But if I stick enough garbage in the middle, it's hard to see the mistake:

*"Yesterday, I ate four times as many burritos, which are delicious tortilla-wrapped bundles of joy, stuffed with a glorious combination of meat, salsa, cheese, avocado, and vegetables, than I did the day before."*

Wordy. But that's not unusual for correct GMAT sentences, unfortunately.

## Pronouns

[Q] Few points on pronoun ambiguity

[A]

A good way to understand pronoun ambiguity is that it is only ambiguous if you could replace both the nouns in question and still make sense.

The best way to understand those nuances is to just solve official questions and understand them. A lot of officially correct answers have 'ambiguous' pronouns.

[Q] As per your experience, pronoun and idioms are not usually deterministic errors.

[A]

I wouldn't go that far! Pronouns can definitely be definite errors, and so can idioms. It's just that pronoun ambiguity isn't always wrong. If a pronoun has NO reasonable antecedent, it's definitely wrong...

*"Whenever I go to the post office, they overcharge me for stamps."*

We know what "they" refers to: post office workers. But it's still wrong.

[Q] More about Pronoun...

[A]

Pronoun ambiguity is NOT an absolute rule. Ron is right about that. But it's still important. And to be honest, most things on GMAT SC aren't absolute rules, anyway. For example, the "touch rule" for noun modifiers ("which", "that", etc.) -- that's not an absolute rule, either. Same is true for pronoun ambiguity.

Basic advice for pronouns: as soon as you see "them", for example, look for a plural noun that "they" could refer back to. One of four things could happen:

1. there are no plural nouns --> then it's just wrong
2. there are one or more plural nouns, but none of them make logical sense --> wrong
3. there's only one plural noun, and it makes perfect sense --> right
4. there are multiple plural nouns, and one of them makes logical sense --> potentially ambiguous

You don't want to AUTOMATICALLY eliminate an answer choice because of pronoun ambiguity. Make sure that one of the other answer choices "fixes" the ambiguity somehow -- as long as the other answer choice doesn't contain a more severe error.

You're always looking for the "least awful" of the five answer choices. Find the four that are the "most wrong." The fifth might still have some flaws -- and pronoun ambiguity isn't usually one of them, but it definitely does happen.

you just don't want to get TOO mechanical with the pronoun ambiguity. It's often a major issue. It's just that it's not an absolute rule that applies 100% of the time.

1) Amber's husband eats so much that she calls him a pig. --> wrong, because non-possessive pronoun "she" can't refer back to possessive noun "Amber's"

[Q]

***Although jogging is known to cause knee injury, it can be avoided if the right pair of jogging shoes is worn.***

- A) *Although jogging is known to cause knee injury, it*
- B) *The fact that jogging is known to cause knee injury*
- C) *Injury to the knee caused by jogging*
- D) *Jogging is known to cause knee injury, although it*
- E) *Jogging is known to injure the knee, which*

'it' is ambiguous in option A because 'it' can refer to 'jogging', which is the subject. Although its meaningless to say that jogging can be avoided if the right pair of jogging shoes is worn.

[A]

Actually, the "it" unambiguously refers back to "jogging", since the second clause starts with a pronoun -- that pronoun refers back to the subject of the first sentence. But yeah, the meaning makes no sense. Whenever a sentence has two full clauses -- generally, one independent and one dependent clause, or two independent clauses separated by a semicolon -- then if the second clause starts with a pronoun, that pronoun unambiguously refers back to the subject of the first clause.

[Q]

*Books in European libraries last longer than books in libraries in the United States **because, although the climate in Europe is fairly humid, libraries there are not subjected to the extremes of temperature and humidity that** damage collections in the United States.*

- A. *because, although the climate in Europe is fairly humid, libraries there are not subjected to the extremes of temperature and humidity that*
- B. *because, although the climate in Europe is fairly humid, libraries there are not subject of the extremes of temperature and humidity as those that*
- C. *because, although the climate in Europe is fairly humid, libraries there are not subjected to the extremities of temperature and humidity as*
- D. *because the climate in Europe is fairly humid, but still libraries there are not subject of the extremes of temperature and humidity as*
- E. *because the climate in Europe is fairly humid, but libraries there are not subjected to the extremities of temperature and humidity such as those that*

[A]

So here's one thing I'd ideally want you to notice here: the pronoun "those."

Actually, let me give you two of the answer choices:

- A. *Books in European libraries last longer than books in libraries in the United States because, although the climate in Europe is fairly humid, libraries there are not subjected to the extremes of temperature and humidity that damage collections in the United States.*
- B. *Books in European libraries last longer than books in libraries in the United States although the climate in Europe is fairly humid, libraries there are not subject of the extremes of temperature and humidity as those that damage collections in the United States.*

My eyes immediately go to "that" and "those." In B), I guess those refers to "extremes"? It's the nearest plural. So B) gives us "libraries there are not subject of the extremes of temperature and humidity as the extremes that damage collections in the U.S."

I have no idea why we would need the pronoun "those", to be honest -- A) is much cleaner. And the comparison in B) doesn't make much sense, either: I can't really make sense of why we're using an "as" comparison there. European collections are not subject to the extremes of temperature and humidity that damage US collections -- that makes sense. But there's no good reason to use "as" there.

If you're hesitant about (A), this is a classic "son of a bitch" or "son of a gun" exception. (Or mission critical modifier, as some call it.) "Extremes of temperature and humidity that damage collections in the U.S." -- "that damage collections" is, in some sense, "reaching behind" the prepositional phrases here. It's not just the humidity that damages collections. It's the entire phrase: "extremes of temperature and humidity."

Everybody comfortable with that example? And I'll leave C, D, and E for your enjoyment on the [forum thread](#)

Feel free to tag me in the forum thread if you have any lingering questions -- there are already some good responses on the thread.

[Q] In the question above I have a small query about those, i think it makes sense to replace it with extremes.

[A]

Yeah, "those" refers back to "extremes", and that's not completely horrible. We know what the referent is. The trouble is, it's completely unnecessary. We're fine with just "that", as in (A).

[Q] I was wondering why do we have a preference for "to determine" when "for determining" also works just fine.

[A]

Yeah, I would wonder the same thing. Full disclosure: sometimes I'm honestly not sure about idioms, either. Often, there are several different ways to say the same thing, and native speakers might use them interchangeably, other than some regional variations (London English vs. New York English vs. Southern U.S. English, for example). There might be some subtle cases when I'd prefer one of those idioms over the other, but both seem perfectly OK to me.

[Q]

*Bluegrass musician Bill Monroe, whose repertory, views on musical collaboration, and vocal style **were influential on generations of bluegrass artists, was also an inspiration to many musicians, that included Elvis Presley and Jerry Garcia, whose music differed significantly from** his own.*

- A. *were influential on generations of bluegrass artists, was also an inspiration to many musicians, that included Elvis Presley and Jerry Garcia, whose music differed significantly from*
- B. *influenced generations of bluegrass artists, also inspired many musicians, including Elvis Presley and Jerry Garcia, whose music differed significantly from*
- C. *was influential to generations of bluegrass artists, was also inspirational to many musicians, that included Elvis Presley and Jerry Garcia, whose music was different significantly in comparison to*
- D. *was influential to generations of bluegrass artists, also inspired many musicians, who included Elvis Presley and Jerry Garcia, the music of whom differed significantly when compared to*
- E. *were an influence on generations of bluegrass artists, was also an inspiration to many musicians, including Elvis Presley and Jerry Garcia, whose music was significantly different from that of*

I don't get why A is wrong. And how could we correct it? will removing "was" from "was also" make this sentence correct?

[A]

Subject-verb eliminates (C) and (D) quickly.

(E): check out the pronoun "that" at the end of the underlined portion. If you're not sure what to do with the pronoun "that", read this article: [https://gmatclub.com/forum/experts-topi ... 43686.html](https://gmatclub.com/forum/experts-topi...43686.html)

In (A), "that included" -- especially after a comma -- is much clunkier than "including. Plus, "influenced... artists" is MUCH more clear and direct than "were influential on... artists." And: Monroe "inspired" in B, vs. "was an inspiration to" in A. That last one isn't a DEFINITE error or anything, but everything points in the same direction: B is clearer

[Q] Is "that" never preceded by comma GMATNinja ?

[A]

I see that question fairly often. Sure, when "that" is used as a modifier, it's usually not preceded by a

comma, but there are other uses of "that." Even as a modifier, there's no reason why you couldn't have "that" as part of a list of some sort -- and then it might be preceded with a comma...

"I believe that Santa Claus is real, that the Knicks will win the 2018 NBA title, and that aliens control the White House." --> no problem, we have three parallel subordinate clauses

[Q]

*In some species of cricket, the number of chirps per minute used by the male **for attracting females rise and fall in accordance with the surrounding temperature, and they can in fact serve** as an approximate thermometer.*

- A. *for attracting females rise and fall in accordance with the surrounding temperature, and they can in fact serve.*
- B. *for attracting females rises and falls in accordance with the surrounding temperature, which can in fact serve*
- C. *in attracting females rise and fall in accordance with the surrounding temperature, in fact possibly serving.*
- D. *to attract females rises and falls in accordance with the surrounding temperature, and it can in fact serve.*
- E. *to attract females rises and falls in accordance with the surrounding temperature, in fact possibly serving.*

Here 'it' refers to 'number' right? How can a number serve as a thermometer?

[A]

Think of it as "number of chirps per minute". "number of chirps per minute... can in fact serve as an approximate thermometer". For anybody who missed Monday's session, we talked about the fact that in a sentence with two clauses -- either one dependent and one independent, or two independent clauses -- if the subject of the second sentence is a pronoun, it can unambiguously refer back to the subject of the first clause.

So in (D), that "it" looks ambiguous (does it refer to temperature? cricket? number?) -- but it unambiguously refers back to "number of chirps per minute" in (D).

**[Q] But E seems to convey the meaning better by providing the result of the action - 'rise and fall'**

[A] I'm not so sure about that. It's the number of chirps that could be mapped onto temperature -- not just the rising and falling of the chirps. And the last little bit "in fact possibly serving" isn't ideal, either -- seems to say that it actually may serve as a thermometer in practice, instead of saying that it CAN in fact serve as a thermometer if you wanted it to.

**Idioms**

[Q] What's your strategy for idioms ?

[A]

In theory, you'll get better at idioms if you just get tons of exposure to high-quality written English. But that's a very long-term strategy. Depending on the person, I'll advise a couple of different strategies on idioms.

**For native speakers**, memorizing more idioms is rarely productive. Sure, if you miss one on an OG or

GMATPrep question, then you might as well learn it, but sitting there with a huge list is a waste of time for native speakers.

**For non-native speakers...** well, most of my students do just fine without explicitly studying idioms. I'll tell everybody to avoid the idiom if they're not sure about it, and look for other errors. That can be enough sometimes. For somebody who misses a TON of idioms, it's not terrible to memorize the lists from MGMAT or other sources, but that takes a lot of work, and I'm not 100% sure that it pays off. So if you're good at memorizing -- and/or you enjoy memorizing stuff -- go for it. But I'm not sure that it pays off. You'll pick up some idioms just by practicing in the OG and GMATPrep.

[Q] Do you mean to say pronouns and idioms will be backed by more deterministic error say modifier or parallelism?

[A]

Well... yes, sort of. The GMAT will often give you multiple errors in the same SC answer choice. So you can "get around" quite a few things, but only some of the time. Whenever you're not sure if, say, an idiom is completely wrong, see if you can find some other error. The last thing you want to do is "invent" a rule if you're not sure about it

[Q] What reading source do you recommend ?

[A]

Something you actually enjoy that employs fairly sophisticated language. I'm a fan of the Economist and New York Times, personally. Scientific American isn't bad, either. If you have a particular academic interest, go read academic journals -- the language in those can be brutal, and that's great for your reading skills in the long run.

[Q] Can you point out the difference between 'due to' and 'because of' ?

[A]

Here, I have two examples:

1. *The picnic was canceled due to rain.*
2. *Souvik's incredible GMAT score was due to his hard work.*

Basically, you'll want to ask yourself: **what does the "due to \_\_\_\_" phrase modify?**

1) *The picnic was canceled due to rain.* --> what does "due to rain" modify?

"due to rain" doesn't modify "rain", yes -- it modifies the cancelation.

Trouble is, the word "cancelation" doesn't appear -- it just says "was canceled". That's a verb.

And "due to" can't modify a verb or verb phrase -- just nouns.

**[Q] So 'Souvik's success on the GMAT was because of his hard work' is not correct?**

[A] Souvik's incredible GMAT score was due to his hard work. --> what does "due to his hard work" modify?

**[Q] Does it modify Souvik's action or work?**

[A] No, "*due to his hard work*" does not modify "work." The "due to \_\_\_\_" phrase indicates some sort of causality. You want to ask yourself what is affected by the "due to \_\_\_\_" phrase. In this case, it's the GMAT score that's "caused" or "affected by" or "due to" Souvik's hard work.

Bottom line on "due to": the phrase "due to \_\_\_\_\_" must logically modify a noun, not a verb phrase.

**[Q] One confusion. If we state a reason for something, we use because of. So, in this question can't we say the reason for his score is his hard work. I agree that His score is caused by his hard work but reasoning concept has confused me now.**

[A] The weird thing about "due to" and "because of" (and "caused by", I suppose) is that they all mean basically the same thing. But the distinction is grammatical. The only thing that the GMAT really seems to test is the fact that "due to" can NEVER modify a verb or a verb phrase -- just a noun. This sentence "makes sense", but it's wrong: "The game was postponed due to rain."

**[Q]: I am still not clear. How to identify due to is modifying noun or verb phrase?**

[A] "due to rain" -- what happens "due to rain"? What is being modified by "due to rain"? You wouldn't say that "*the game is due to rain.*" The thing that "due to rain" modifies is "was postponed" -- it's the postponing that happens "due to rain." And that can't work: "was postponed" is a verb phrase. That's really all. You'll never see anything other than a noun after "due to" anyway, so that's a non-issue. And I wouldn't overthink "because of" -- I've never seen an official GMAT question that requires you to think too deeply about "because of", at least not that I can think of.

[Q] I read on egmat that always replace due to by 'caused by'. If it sounds right then fine. Is this approach wrong?

[A]

Yeah, but I've found that a lot of people tell me that "*The picnic was canceled caused by rain*" sounds OK, and "*Souvik's success on the GMAT was caused by his hard work*" sound bad. So it doesn't work for everybody.

[Q] Can you expand on "To be" idiom, when is it used correctly? I often see **To be** in incorrect choices but sometimes in correct choices as well. Its not clear whats the appropriate use for **To be**. Seems to be, perceived to be vs Perceived As. Appears to be vs Appears As.

Also can you explain a bit more about **-been** - earlier i used to assume that **been** tends to be associated with passive tense than active tense, but i got OG qs incorrect on those basics

[A]

The verb "to be" is just a verb. Sure, it's not an action verb -- it's a verb that describes a state of being. But it's still just a verb, and can be used in active voice.

**Silly examples:**

"*Wariorguy is truly a warrior.*" "*Hawaii is beautiful.*" "*I am hungry.*" Not passive voice.

**Active voice:**

"*The pigs ate the entire buffet.*" -- pigs are performing the action, this is active voice.

**Passive voice:**

"*The entire buffet was eaten by the pigs.*" -- the pigs are performing the action, but the sentence has been "flipped" so that the object ("the entire buffet") is acting as the subject of the sentence. And sure, there's a form of "to be" here -- you'll always need some form of "to be" for passive voice, but you can have a form of "to be" in active voice.

Regarding the earlier question: "Can you expand on "To be" idiom, when is it used correctly? I often see To be in incorrect choices but sometimes in correct choices as well. Its not clear whats the appropriate use for To be. Seems to be, perceived to be vs Perceived As. Appears to be vs Appears As."

I'll be honest: I hate that the GMAT tests idioms. There are something like 40,000 of them in the English language, depending on whose estimates you're looking at. You can't write all that many sentences without idioms, but I don't like the gimmicky questions that test you on whether to say "considered" or "considered as" or "considered to be". It's not fair to non-native speakers, in my opinion. But the GMAT doesn't care what I think, of course. There is no set rule for idioms with "to be." Some are OK, others aren't.

*"Souvik was considered to be the wisest of all GMAT Club moderators."* -- wrong

*"Souvik was considered the wisest of all GMAT Club moderators."* -- right

*"Souvik was thought to be the wisest of all GMAT Club moderators."* -- right

"considered to be" is wrong, but "estimated to be" or "thought to be" are OK

[Q] Can we also talk bit more about **being**?

[A]

I can't remember if we talked about being in last week's chat, or just in the forums. But the quick version is that "being" really isn't too different from any other "-ing" word.

"Being" can be a verb ("*I am being cruel to Mike today.*") or a noun ("*Being a GMAT Club member is good for your mental health.*"). It's just that it can't act as a modifier, at least not that I've ever seen on a correct GMAT sentence:

*"Being a GMAT Club member, ziyuen improved his GMAT score."* That last one doesn't work.

[Q] Isn't being acting as modifier here --->>> *Being heavily committed to a course of action, especially one that has worked well in the past, is likely to make an executive miss signs of incipient trouble or misinterpret them when they do appear.*

[A]

Nope! *"Being heavily committed... is likely to make an executive miss signs..."*

*"Being heavily committed"* is the subject of the sentence, and therefore a noun. (Gerund, if you like jargon.)

[Q] Please explain use of **As**. Is it used before noun?

Long thread on like and as, if that's what you're asking about, SVSI. But "as" can be used in hundreds of different idioms, so there's no single rule on "as". [GMATClub Link](#)

[Q]

*Many airline carriers are attempting to increase profitability while keeping overhead low by offering, in terms of flights, **an equal amount as last year, doing so by** using larger planes that fly more efficiently.*

- A. an equal amount as last year, doing so by
- B. the same number offered last year
- C. an equal amount offered last year and
- D. the same number as last year but
- E. an equal number as were offered last year,

[A]

The key is figuring out -- for each answer choice -- the exact, literal comparison that the sentence is making. (and there's more to this one than just the comparison, btw -- parallelism, countable vs. non-countable)

Based on just countable vs. non-countable, A and C are gone. "Amount of flights" doesn't work.

I think the difference between (B) and (D) is pretty subtle, but there's a really good reason to eliminate it.

So when you're down to two on SC, you can always do this: find EVERYTHING that differs between the two answer choices. And then ask yourself what EACH difference does to the meaning of the sentence.

"offered" vs. "as" -- any thoughts?

(B) ends up being redundant. Is (B) totally horrible because of the redundancy? I guess that's debatable, but it's definitely not as good as (D) in that sense.

Let's talk about the "but". Why do we need it?

Without but, the sentence really isn't clear:

Many airline carriers are attempting to increase profitability while keeping overhead low by offering, in terms of flights, an equal amount as last year, doing so by using larger planes that fly more efficiently.

So we're increasing profitability by offering the same number of flights, using larger planes that fly more efficiently? There's a contrast there -- and the "but using larger planes..." makes that contrast clearer. Hard question, but (B) is a little bit redundant, and it doesn't present the meaning as clearly as (D) does, because (B) doesn't show the contrast using "but" in this case. Really subtle. Hard.

[Q]

*Especially in the early years, new entrepreneurs may need to find resourceful ways, like renting temporary office space or using answering services, **that make their company seem large** and more firmly established than they may actually be.*

- A. that make their company seem large
- B. to make their companies seem larger
- C. thus making their companies seem larger
- D. so that the companies seem larger
- E. of making their company seem large

Has GMAC started using "like" to depict examples?

[A]

not that I know of, but notice that "like" isn't underlined, so you can't do anything about it. It's a funny thing -- the GMAT violates its own "rules" constantly in quant, CR, and RC questions. And sometimes in underlined sections of SC questions.

[Q] So we should not blindly eliminate options wherein like is used to depict examples or was this example an error?

[A]

At the risk of getting philosophical: there really aren't all that many ABSOLUTE rules on the GMAT. I've been saying this a lot lately, but the section is called "verbal reasoning", not "reading and grammar." That distinction seems silly, but it does tell you something about what the test-makers are thinking. You're always trying to match structure and meaning in the best way possible -- and that means that there aren't tons of absolute rules... I'm pretty sure that "like" is still inferior to "such as" when introducing examples. I'm OK eliminating "like" -- there's a pretty solid history on that issue... .. but a lot of what we've been discussing lately is that a lot of GMAT "rules" -- pronoun ambiguity, the noun modifier "touch rule" -- aren't absolute, 100% rules.

[Q] Another query for idioms - we had a discussion yesterday regarding a particular idiom - **In comparison with** v/s **in comparison to** --> I feel GMAT considers both correct. Is there any difference between both?

[A]

Hm... I think "compared with" and "in comparison to" both seem OK. I'm not sure about "in comparison with", though. I'd be shocked if you'll ever be forced to choose among these three, though... but maybe there's an example out there that I can't remember. When I see "in comparison..." or "in contrast..." my first thought is that they're testing the logic of the comparison -- and probably not the choice of preposition. But again, maybe there's another example out there that proves me wrong.

[Q] I want to know when can we use **but also** without **not only**

***Not only did the systematic clearing of forests in the United States create farmland (especially in the Northeast) and gave consumers relatively inexpensive houses and furniture, but it also caused erosion and very quickly deforested whole regions.***

- A. *Not only did the systematic clearing of forests in the United States create farmland (especially in the Northeast) and gave consumers relatively inexpensive houses and furniture, but it also*
- B. *Not only did the systematic clearing of forests in the United States create farmland (especially in the Northeast), which gave consumers relatively inexpensive houses and furniture, but also*
- C. *The systematic clearing of forests in the United States, creating farmland (especially in the Northeast) and giving consumers relatively inexpensive houses and furniture, but also*
- D. *The systematic clearing of forests in the United States created farmland (especially in the Northeast) and gave consumers relatively inexpensive houses and furniture, but it also*
- E. *The systematic clearing of forests in the United States not only created farmland (especially in the Northeast), giving consumers relatively inexpensive houses and furniture, but it*

[A]

Here's the way I would think of it: if you see a "not/but" construction, you should be worried about parallelism, right? So in any answer choices in that particular question that have the not/but going on, check to see if it's parallel. But there's no reason why you couldn't use "but also" without a "not only" -- and you obviously could use "but" by itself without any trouble at all. In other words: if you see a "but"

or a "but also", don't assume that you need a "not only."

In **(A)**, there's a subtle parallelism problem: "Not only did the clearing create farmland... and GAVE..." It should be "give" in this case. **(A)** is out.

The modifier "which" doesn't make sense in **(B)**.

**(C)** isn't a sentence at all, since the subject "systematic clearing" has no verb.

No problems at all with **(D)** -- the subject "it" refers back to the subject of the first clause, "clearing." And again: just because there's a "but" doesn't mean that you need a "not only"

**(E)** botches the parallelism: not only created (verb), but it (noun)

So not a lot of reason to doubt **(D)**, since the others have reasonably clear errors. They don't all SOUND wrong... but sound really doesn't have much to do with anything on this silly test.

**[Q] But you told in last chat here the stem is - not only did - in option A and parallel elements are create and gave both in past tense.**

**[A]** it's a funny structure with a helping verb. Think of it this way: "Souvik did create a great MBA essay." "Souvik did gave a great admissions interview." Does that help?

**[Q]** It is expected that you be here or it is expected that you should be here? Which is correct?

**[A]**

Definitely not the latter. "Should" is a value judgment of sorts, so it doesn't work with "expected." The former is OK, I guess, but "you are expected to be here" is better.

**Others Practice Question Explanations**

**[Q]**

*For the farmer who takes care to keep them cool, **providing them with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing** an average of 2,275 gallons of milk each per year.*

- A. providing them with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing*
- B. providing them with high-energy feed, and milked regularly, the Holstein cow produces*
- C. provided with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing*
- D. provided with high-energy feed, and milked regularly, the Holstein cow produces*
- E. provided with high-energy feed, and milked regularly, Holstein cows will produce*

**[A]**

**How many of you are looking at the non-underlined portion of the sentence?**

So here's what I'm seeing pretty often, both from my students and on the forum: a little bit of tunnel-vision. If you focus ONLY on the underlined part, you'll miss the pronoun. And that's probably the easiest part of the sentence to deal with, in this case.

So now, you're hopefully noticing that **B & D** are all out. Because of the "them", "cow" is wrong.

So friendly reminder: don't get TOO obsessed with the underlined portion. It's really easy to make that mistake.

(I'm mean like that. If you're awesome and volunteer an answer, I'll ask you to explain. Did I mention that I used to be a high school teacher?)

Any thoughts on the parallelism?

Because "*providing them with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly*" this is wrongly made parallel with producing...

Cool, what should "providing/provided" and "milking/milked" be parallel to?

If you're going off of "sound", you'll get yourself into all sorts of trouble. That's never a good strategy. Keep an eye on the SC forum in the next couple of days -- I'll post a topic of the week that discusses why your ear is not your friend.

Let's break this down a little bit.

I'm going to start with **(C)**, for no particular reason:

*For the farmer who takes care to keep them cool, providing them with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing an average of 2,275 gallons of milk each per year.*

**(C)** *provided with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing*

So whenever you're looking at parallelism, start with the trigger that indicates that something is parallel. In this case, the trigger is "and". What follows "and" in **C**? "milking."

OK, so what's that parallel to: provided? That doesn't really work: "*For the farmer who takes care to keep them cool, provided with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing....*"

So **(C)** is out. Down to **(A)** and **(E)**.

And what's happening in **(E)**? Pop quiz: what part of speech is "milked"? A noun? A verb? A modifier?

"milked" and "provided" are actually parallel to another adjective: "cool."

So **(E)** might not SOUND parallel, but it's perfect, once you recognize that this is just a bunch of parallel adjectives:

*"For the farmer who takes care to keep them cool, provided with feed..., and milked regularly, the Holstein cows..."*

Great case of two things:

1. If you ignore the non-underlined portion ("them!"), you can get into trouble,
2. Parallelism isn't about sound. It's about matching structure to meaning.

**[Q] What if we had no comma before "and milking them" in Option A?**

**[A]** AkshayKS21 asked a hypothetical earlier, and I'm going to address it with a different example:

1. *Amber traveled the world, ate dodgy street food, and contracted gastrointestinal diseases.*

2. *Amber traveled the world, eating dodgy street food and contracting gastrointestinal diseases.*

What do you think? Both right? Both wrong? One right and one wrong? Same meaning? Different meaning?

In example #1, we're basically saying that these are three "equal" actions that Amber performed. They don't necessarily depend on each other in any way.

In #2, "eating" and "contracting" are giving us more information about what Amber did while traveling -- which I think makes a little bit more sense. But #1 isn't necessarily wrong.

So again: parallelism isn't really about "sound". We could argue that #1 SOUNDS more parallel than #2. But #2 is totally fine -- and maybe a little bit better.

There's no magic formula for getting good at breaking down tough passages, unfortunately, but the article has some advice on how to get started at getting better.

some of you have seen me make some embarrassing errors in here. "Perfect" is impossible on this, and there's always more room to learn and get better.

[Q]

*According to findings derived from functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), the area of the brain in which a second or third language is stored depends on the age of the language learner; **whereas each language occupies a distinct area of the brain in an adult learner**, language areas overlap in a young child.*

- A. *whereas each language occupies a distinct area of the brain in an adult learner,*
- B. *whereas for adults each language occupies a distinct area of the brain and*
- C. *each language occupies a distinct area of the brain when they are learned by an adult, while*
- D. *each language in adults occupied a distinct area of the brain, while*
- E. *each language occupying a distinct area of the brain for an adult learner, and*

[A]

I immediately notice the semicolon, but I don't think it's doing anything terribly consequential. The "each" jumps out at me, because it makes me think that we'll have a plural vs. singular thing, maybe. And I see some parallelism ("and") and another "they" lurking in **(C)**. So plenty of nice, mechanical stuff to work with, at least in the beginning.

**(A)** *whereas each language occupies a distinct area of the brain in an adult learner, -->* looks OK to me, at least at a glance

**(B)** *whereas for adults each language occupies a distinct area of the brain and -->* the parallelism doesn't feel quite right to me. "...and language areas overlap in a young child" is a clause, and I guess it's parallel to "for adults each language occupies a distinct area of the brain," but it doesn't seem quite right to me. If I'm being honest: I would keep this at first, to be safe. Why not be conservative on that first pass? I don't see any DEFINITE errors, just stuff that doesn't seem quite right. Keep **(B)**, too.

**(C)** has an easy pronoun error

The verb tenses make no sense in **(D)**. Why is "occupied" in past tense for adults, but "overlap" is present for the kids?

(E) is a clear mess.

[Q]

Researchers hypothesize that granitic soil is the ideal construction material for the desert tortoise because it is not **so hard that it makes burrowing difficult or so soft that it could cause** tunnels to collapse.

- A. so hard that it makes burrowing difficult or so soft that it could cause
- B. hard enough to make burrowing difficult or soft enough as to cause
- C. so hard as to make burrowing difficult or soft enough so it causes
- D. as hard as to make burrowing difficult or as soft as to cause
- E. too hard, making burrowing difficult, nor too soft, so as to cause

[A]

Always start by looking for a trigger. "And" in many cases, "or" in this sentence. Then ask yourself: what follows the trigger? Here, it's "so soft that it could cause" (in A). That's nicely parallel to "so hard that it makes burrowing difficult." Same exact structure.

[Q]

**That educators have not anticipated the impact of microcomputer technology can hardly be said that it is their fault:** Alvin Toffler, one of the most prominent students of the future, did not even mention microcomputers in *Future Shock*, published in 1970.

- A. That educators have not anticipated the impact of microcomputer technology can hardly be said that it is their fault
- B. That educators have not anticipated the impact of microcomputer technology can hardly be said to be at fault
- C. It can hardly be said that it is the fault of educators who have not anticipated the impact of microcomputer technology
- D. It can hardly be said that educators are at fault for not anticipating the impact of microcomputer technology
- E. The fact that educators are at fault for not anticipating the impact of microcomputer technology can hardly be said

[A]

The issue with (E) is meaning: it sounds like it's a FACT that educators are at fault.

(E) doesn't sound too bad... but the meaning is very slightly messed up.

(A) is a mess for other reasons, but "that" is basically a type of pronoun. Almost like saying "the fact that", but without the overwhelming implication that something is true.

[Q]

**On Earth, among the surest indications of sunspot cycles are believed to be the rate that trees grow,** as seen in the rings visible in the cross sections of their trunks.

- A. On Earth, among the surest indications of sunspot cycles are believed to be the rate that trees grow

- B. *On Earth, among the surest indications of sunspot cycles are, it is believed, the rate of tree growth*
- C. *On Earth, the rate at which trees grow is believed to be among the surest indications of sunspot cycles*
- D. *Among the surest indications on Earth of sunspot cycles, believed to be the tree growth rate*
- E. *Among the surest indications on Earth of sunspot cycles is believed to be the rate at which trees grow*

[A]

Among other things, this one is flipping the subject and the verb around in a way that isn't completely intuitive.

I think (C) is defensible, but it's not correct, sadly. But I guess this is a good "inside the mind of the GMAT" sort of moment.

**[Q] What's the difference between the usage of on earth in options C and E?**

[A] It's really, really subtle, but the placement of "on Earth" tweaks the meaning a little bit. The sentence is concerned with "*the surest indications on Earth*" of sunspot cycles. In (C), "on Earth" seems to be describing the whole sentence, and that's less clear.

Also, I think the heart of the sentence is hidden a little bit in C. What do we really care about? "*the surest indications of sunspot cycles*", right? That's the phenomenon we're trying to explain. (C) takes forever to mention the sunspot cycles at all. (E) cuts right to the heart of the issue.

Plus, that non-underlined portion at the end of the sentence is modifying the "rate at which trees grow" -- and it's placed correctly in (E), but not in (C). Not a huge issue necessarily, but definitely clearer in (E).

I don't think (C) is terrible, and it's not WRONG. It's just not as good as E in the GMAT's eyes. I can see their point, I guess -- three small issues that all point toward (E), mostly in terms of clarity and meaning.

The annoying thing is that it's hard to extract much from this question that will help on others. I guess the question is telling us to pay really, really close attention to modifier placements. (Both the "on earth" and the non-underlined portion.)

[Q]

*For the farmer who takes care to keep them cool, **providing them with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing** an average of 2,275 gallons of milk each per year.*

- A. *providing them with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing*
- B. *providing them with high-energy feed, and milked regularly, the Holstein cow produces*
- C. *provided with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly, Holstein cows are producing*
- D. *provided with high-energy feed, and milked regularly, the Holstein cow produces*
- E. *provided with high-energy feed, and milked regularly, Holstein cows will produce*

[A]

The parallelism isn't quite right in A. Hang on, let me repost a couple of these answer choices side-by-side...

*For the farmer who takes care to keep them cool, providing them with high-energy feed, and milking*

them regularly, Holstein cows are producing an average of 2,275 gallons of milk each per year.

OK. So in **(E)**, we have "cool (adjective), provided with high-energy feed (adjective), and milked regularly (adjective)..." And that makes sense.

*The farmer is keeping the cows "cool, provided..., and milked..."*

In **(A)**, "*providing them with high-energy feed, and milking them regularly*" are also modifiers, but now they're not parallel to "cool." I suppose "providing... and milking..." could modify the entire phrase "for the farmer that takes care to keep them cool", but that wouldn't make any sense meaning-wise.

in this case, yes -- "*For the farmer who takes care to keep them... provided with high-energy feed.*" Sounds weird in isolation, but it's fine. The farmer "keeps the cow provided with high-energy feed."

For more details refer: <https://gmatclub.com/forum/verbal-chat-...!#p1886827>

[Q]

*Responding to the public's fascination with - and sometimes undue alarm over-possible threats from asteroids, **a scale developed by astronomers rates the likelihood that a particular asteroid or comet may collide with Earth.***

- A. *a scale developed by astronomers rates the likelihood that a particular asteroid or comet may*
- B. *a scale that astronomers have developed rates how likely it is for a particular asteroid or comet to*
- C. *astronomers have developed a scale to rate how likely a particular asteroid or comet will be to*
- D. *astronomers have developed a scale for rating the likelihood that a particular asteroid or comet will*
- E. *astronomers have developed a scale that rates the likelihood of a particular asteroid or comet that may*

[A]

**(A)** and **(B)** are out quickly. "**Responding to the public's fascination...**" Has to be the astronomers, not the scale. <https://gmatclub.com/forum/experts-topi...39780.html>

**(C)** vs. **(D)** is tough.

So in these situations, you want to be super-precise about finding EVERY difference between the two answer choices, and then figuring out how, exactly, those little changes might affect the meaning in particular.

- C. *astronomers have developed a scale to rate how likely a particular asteroid or comet will be to*
- D. *astronomers have developed a scale for rating the likelihood that a particular asteroid or comet will*

Really just one change here.

In **(C)**: "*...scale to rate how likely (an asteroid) will be to collide with Earth.*"

In **(D)**: "*...scale to rate the likelihood that (an asteroid) will collide with Earth.*"

It makes sense to say that we'd "rate the likelihood" that something will occur. Doesn't seem quite right to say that the scale rates "how likely an asteroid WILL BE to collide with Earth." It's subtle, but that doesn't seem right.

[Q]

Faced with an estimated \$2 billion budget gap, the city's mayor **proposed a nearly 17 percent reduction in the amount allocated the previous year to maintain the city's major cultural institutions and to subsidize** hundreds of local arts groups.

- A. *proposed a nearly 17 percent reduction in the amount allocated the previous year to maintain the city's major cultural institutions and to subsidize*
- C. *proposed to reduce, by nearly 17 percent, the amount from the previous year that was allocated for the maintenance of the city's major cultural institutions and to subsidize*
- D. *has proposed a reduction from the previous year of nearly 17 percent of the amount it was allocating for maintaining the city's major cultural institutions, and to subsidize*
- E. *was proposing that the amount they were allocating be reduced by nearly 17 percent from the previous year for maintaining the city's major cultural institutions and for the subsidization*

[A]

I'm not sure that the parallelism is awful in **(E)**, to be honest. "for maintaining" and "for the subsidization" -- both are prepositional phrases, and I think they're parallel enough. But whoever mentioned the issue with "was proposing" is correct -- and "for subsidizing" or "to subsidize" make way more sense than "for the subsidization." So **(E)** is out.

I think the parallelism in **(C)** SOUNDS lovely

**(C)** *proposed to reduce, by nearly 17 percent, the amount from the previous year that was allocated for the maintenance of the city's major cultural institutions and to subsidize* --> parallel, no?

"and" is your trigger. "to subsidize" is at the end of the list. "to reduce" is parallel with "to subsidize".

But it's wrong! Why?

So this is GMAT-style parallelism at its nastiest.

Again, I'd argue that **(C)** is grammatically parallel -- "to subsidize" and "to reduce" are absolutely parallel. No problem there... structurally. But if you think about it in the way that we discussed earlier -- where you really focus on the stem, and on making sure that the stem makes sense with EVERY item in the list -- then **(C)** falls apart:

Stem: *Faced with an estimated \$2 billion budget gap, the city's mayor proposed...*

List item #1: *to reduce, by nearly 17 percent, the amount...*

List item #2: (after the AND trigger) *to subsidize hundreds of local arts groups*

So putting the stem together with list item #2: *"Faced with an estimated \$2 billion budget gap, the city's mayor proposed...to subsidize hundreds of local arts groups."* That doesn't make any sense!

Takeaways from this:

- A. parallelism can be a pain in the ass
- B. parallelism is never about "sound" -- it's about linking meaning to structure
- C. just because something "sounds parallel" or is grammatically parallel doesn't necessarily mean that it's correct -- the meaning has to make sense, too

And as always: the really frustrating thing is that SC isn't really about grammar. Sure, you need to know

some grammar to do well. But you're probably tired of hearing me say this: the section is called "verbal reasoning", not "reading and grammar," and these guys will mess you up if you get TOO mechanical.

Again: I thought **(C)** sounded great on that last example. But my ear is not my friend on this test.