



How To Solve Any Sentence Correction Problem, Part 2

by Stacey Koprince Sep 30, 2013

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

1. Take a *First Glance*
2. *Read* the Sentence
3. Find a *Starting Point*
4. *Eliminate* Answers
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4

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

Drills to Build Skills

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

Drill Number 1: First Glance

Open up your Official Guide and find some lower-numbered SC questions that you've already tried in the past. Give yourself a few seconds (no more than 5!) to glance at a problem, then look away and say out loud what you noticed in those few seconds.



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

Xxx xxxxxx xxxx xx and she xxx xxxxx xxxx xxxx xxx xxx xxxxx.

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

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

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

Drill Number 2: Read the Sentence

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

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

If you're struggling or unsure, then one of two things is happening. Either you just don't understand, or the sentence actually doesn't have a clear meaning and that's why it's wrong! Decide which you think it is and then look at the explanation. Does the explanation's description of the sentence match what you thought—the sentence actually does have a

meaning problem? If not, then how does the explanation explain the sentence? That will help you learn how to “read it right” the next time. (If you don’t like the OG explanation, try looking in our GMAT Navigator program.)

Drill Number 3: Find a Starting Point

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

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

Drill Number 4: Eliminate Answers

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

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

- (1) Why is the right answer right? Why are each of the four wrong answers wrong?
- (2) How would you justify *eliminating* the right answer? What is the trap that would lead someone to cross this one off?
- (3) How would you justify *picking* any of the wrong answers? What is the trap that would lead someone to pick a wrong answer?

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

Next Steps

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

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

Published in Sentence Correction, Verbal

TAGS

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Joseph Alexander *December 17, 2014 at 12:14 pm*

Hi Stacey,

This 2 part write up is awesome. Wish I read it earlier! Keep writing! 😊

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