



How to Solve Any Sentence Correction Problem, Part 1

by Stacey Koprince Sep 23, 2013

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

The 5 Steps for Sentence Correction

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

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

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



1. First Glance

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

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

- the problem type

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

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

- the length of the whole sentence

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

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

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

2. Read the Sentence

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

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

3. Find a Starting Point

4. Eliminate Answers

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

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

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

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

5. Repeat steps 3 and 4

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

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

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

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

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

What do you do when you're stuck?

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

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

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

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

Next Steps

Got all of that? Good!

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

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TAGS Sentence Correction

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tayzul *September 2, 2017 at 11:39 am*

in the world nor on the world

2



duong trong thang *July 29, 2015 at 3:20 am*

thank you Stacey for posting this approach.

for us, non natives, approach to sc is important after we master basic grammar.

the main point here is how to read the original sentence. what do we do when we read the original choice? what do we do to understand the intended meaning of the original or part of the intended meaning. the native can understand the intended meaning easily but non native can not.

what do the non natives do to understand the intended meaning or part of the intended meaning when reading only the original sentence. This is key. if we do not part of the intended meaning when reading the original sentence, we can not find errors and fail. if we do not understand the meaning of the original sentence, we read on , and meet the choice B . and we also do not understand choice B.

so, ability to infer/guess the intended meaning when you read a distorted meaning is key to success on sc. how do we do.

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vishal *July 30, 2014 at 12:18 pm*

thanks Stacey ,
it's effective approach to solve SC ques. This is priceless trick .thanking you once
again.but i am facing problem in long SC questions which has full sentence
UNDERLINED.hoping for quick reply.my email add.-vishal.91boy@gmail.com
thanx

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