

Sentence Correction is one of the key subjects of the GMAT verbal section. It is also a subject most of my non-native students feel uneasy about the first time they hear it is on the GMAT.

Once you've checked some sample questions, the feeling could get worse. After all, you (and back in the day I) thought we left painful grammar classes behind in high school, hoping not to face them again.

But resurrected and revamped, you are facing sentence correction (SC) questions some of which could even trump native speakers. Believe me; I know how you feel, after all English is my second language as well. Back in the day while I was preparing for my first GMAT exam, Inside Verbal part, I had to work by far the most to improve my skills in Sentence Correction.

But fear not, the Veritas Prep team is here to support you. Today, I'll share some of the tips I have developed over many years of test preparation experience with non-native students.

Our basic aim is to follow some kind of Aikido philosophy. We will first check what we are facing, learn the mechanics of our foe's (read: GMAT test from now on) blow, and see how to respond with a stronger counterblow once we understand the weaknesses of the blow we are facing. In other words, we will see how you can transform a section where you have a disadvantage into a section that is one of your solid areas.

Let's start by checking what we face.

First the facts: Sentence Correction makes up roughly 1/3 of the Verbal section. As most of you know, there are sentences with underlined sections and you have to choose whether the underlined portions are correct or could be improved by one of the answer choices.

Finding the correct answer can require knowing the right use of an unknown idiom, knowing more precise grammar than Shakespeare, or remembering the odd preposition which goes with the right verb/noun. Needless to say, also in most of the questions, the answers choices are carefully designed to look very similar to each other in terms of grammar. That means it could take a lot time and concentration to get through a SC question.

Moreover, some questions tend to be less tricky for native speakers, the "natives". Due to years of passive and active English knowledge, natives have grown an "ear", although most of the time they can't articulate what type of a mistake they are seeing, they could instinctively distinguish the "right" answer from the "wrong". This is critical, as you might know; the difficulty of a GMAT question is determined by the number of test takers who get it right. Or on a more macro level, the more often other people answer a test section correctly, the better you have to perform in that section to stay on top.

But, luckily (for non-natives like you and me) having an "ear" for SC is a blessing and a curse. This talent mainly works on easy to medium questions but could be misleading for tougher questions.

Now it is time to train ourselves against the blow, but that is the topic of our second lesson in Aikido. Stay tuned to learn more in Part II next week.