

So how can we train ourselves to master the Sentence Correction section of the GMAT? Lesson materials are not enough to make up for the natural speed disadvantage non-natives have against native English speakers. Here is a relatively understated fact: In order to create homogenous sentence correction questions in their data bank, GMAC is in general putting similar incorrect sentence structures into all SC questions. Therefore, if you practice solving many questions it could give you the edge you are missing. I will be bold here and suggest tackling 350 to 500 SC practice questions before exam day if you think you really need to improve your SC. The more the better, but don't overkill yourself, after 300+ questions you should check your performance and decide at some point that you improved enough. You could start with questions inside official GMAT study books (all are old official test questions). Then, continue with a few good test prep books. Each book should have 100-150 sentence correction questions. Go through the questions like a dedicated Padawan. You will learn very valuable techniques for solving SC when you study the SC study material, but in order to succeed in the test, you should try the techniques on many questions. Most probably, during your first tries, you will have mistakes and you will be extra slow as most of the concepts are new or long forgotten. Therefore, be patient in the beginning with your pace. More importantly, make sure you carefully read and digest the answers. The goal is to get a solid understanding about how you picked the wrong choice and also to understand the correct approach. Don't get unmotivated thinking you need hours of studying. In the beginning it might take you 60 to 100 seconds to solve a SC question, but after 100 or so questions, you will realize it is taking you generally less than a minute to go through a question.

After 100 questions, you will start to see the similarities between most of the mistakes that you are supposed to find in the question stem. You will grow the instinct/ear in addition to the speed that you are missing.

After 200-250 questions, you will improve beyond that, you will start seeing the right answers, and probably even more often than most of the native test takers. The critical detail is, most sentence constructs we think and "feel" are correct in daily life, are not so in GMAT's world. In fact, they are mostly the wrong answer. While the natives are making choices they "feel" are right, you will pick the choices that you "know" are right. After all, you have seen GMAC trying the same sentence construct tricks over many questions, plus you have read explanations to tons of them. By now you are thinking exactly like a test-maker when it comes to SC.

Now that we know how to defend ourselves, where is our strong counterblow? In other words, how could SC become our advantage? Here it comes, after lots of practice; you will eventually become a SC machine. Most of my students following these techniques go through a SC question in around 45 seconds on average and also they spend little mental energy during the process. It is almost automatic for them except a few very original or tough questions out there.

This is a great asset in cracking the GMAT verbal section altogether. As you know, on average you have 2 minutes for each verbal question. Solving SC questions in less than half the time, you will stack up solid extra time you can use in paragraph and critical reasoning questions. After all, as a non-native you truly need more than 2 minutes for a question in those sections.

How about tips for solving Paragraph and Critical Reasoning parts as a non-native quickly and correctly? Well, that will be some Aikido practice for another day.