

10.13. “Instead of” Vs “Rather than”

In English, *rather than* is considered more formal usage than *instead of*. Since GMAT Sentence Correction is a test of formal written English, GMAT in general seems to prefer *rather than* over *instead of*.

Having said that, both *rather than* and *instead of* have distinct usages and test-takers should be comfortable with these distinctions.

Rather than

Rather than shows *comparative preference* for the first item over the second one. Grammatically, *rather than* is more *flexible* than *instead of* and can be followed by *verbs*, *adjectives*, *prepositional phrase*, *infinitive phrase* and even *nouns/gerunds*.

James rested rather than worked.

- *rather than* comparing two *verbs* (*rested* and *worked*)

Peter wanted to work less rather than more.

- *rather than* comparing two *adjectives* (*less* and *more*)

Henry preferred to go to the pool rather than to the gym.

- *rather than* comparing two *prepositional phrases* (*to the pool* and *to the gym*)

Michael opted to study rather than to play.

- *rather than* comparing two *infinitives* (*to study* and *to play*)

Over the weekends, Jemina enjoys swimming rather than shopping.

- *rather than* comparing two *gerunds* (*swimming* and *shopping*)

It's important to note that *rather than* compares two *grammatically alike* items (a *verb* with another *verb*, an *adjective* with another *adjective* and so on). Hence, one needs to look out for *faulty parallelism*, when assessing the usage of *rather than*.

Instead of

Instead of means *in place of someone or something*. Grammatically, *instead of* acts as a *preposition* (refer to section 2.1.6 for *Prepositions*). This is easy to appreciate, since *instead of* ends in a preposition *of*. Hence, as is the characteristic of prepositions, *instead of* is always followed by a *Noun/Gerund* (Gerunds are *Noun forms* of the verb; refer to section 6.4.1 for *Gerunds*).

Samuel bought a laptop instead of a desktop.

- *instead of* followed by *Noun* (*desktop*)

Henry spends more time at home instead of playing outside.

- *instead of* followed by *Gerund* (*playing*)

Note:

Instead of and *Instead* are different words, both from *grammatical* and from *meaning* perspective. Let's take an example, to first understand the *meaning* difference:

Samuel bought a laptop instead of a desktop.

- This means that Samuel bought a laptop; he did *not* buy a desktop.

Samuel did not buy a laptop; instead he bought a desktop.

- This means that Samuel bought a desktop; he did *not* buy a laptop.

This underlines the typical difference between *instead* and *instead of*:

a) X instead of Y: X was done, Y was *not*

b) X instead Y: X was *not* done, Y was done

The *grammatical* difference between *instead* and *instead of* is that:

a) *instead* should be followed by a *clause*; (since *instead* is an *adverb* and so, must be followed by a *verb*)

b) *instead of* should be followed by a *noun* (since *instead of* is a *preposition*)