

Section 5: Writing Explanations

Improving Sentences

- 1) B) In order to agree with the third person plural “students,” it is necessary to use the third person plural “themselves.” B is correct over E because E includes unnecessary language. A and D incorrectly use the second person, and C incorrectly uses the third person singular.
- 2) B) Either “when” or “where” is acceptable in this sentence, so this question is an issue of verb tense. B is correct because it uses the past tense “spoke” to describe a single action that occurred in the past. A, C, and D are all present tense constructions (and C does not even express a complete thought). E incorrectly uses the present perfect construction, which is typically used to describe an event that began in the past and continues into the present.
- 3) E) The original underlined portion uses the passive voice, which is undesirable because it is an indirect construction. E fixes the problem by rewriting the underlined portion using the active voice. Although C and D are also written in the active voice, they are far too awkward; the natural subject of the independent clause in the underlined portion should be “cats” (replaced by “they” in the correct answer).
- 4) C) The underlined portion is incorrect because it is awkward. B, D, and E are also awkward. C is correct because it is the most direct, straightforward way of expressing the information.
- 5) E) The original sentence features a verb tense error with the verb “turning,” which results in a sentence that fails to express a complete thought. It is necessary to use the past tense “turned” to fix this problem. E is correct over D because D joins two independent clauses with a comma and no conjunction.
- 6) B) The word “he” is problematic in the original sentence because “he” is a subject pronoun and it is being used as an object. Instead, it is necessary to use the object pronoun “him.” B is correct over C and E because C uses a verb tense (“including”) that results in the sentence failing to express a complete thought and E unnecessarily restates the subject with the word “she.”
- 7) E) Because the portion of the sentence after the comma is in direct contrast with the first part of the sentence, it is necessary to use a contradictory transition word, and E is the only answer choice that does so.
- 8) B) The original sentence contains an error in parallel construction. Parallel construction dictates that items in lists and comparisons must be expressed in as similar a manner as possible. B is the correct answer because it expresses the three items in the list in a similar manner, expressing all three items as nouns. D is tempting, because it expresses the three items in the list in a similar manner as independent clauses, but it is incorrect because a list of independent clauses cannot be preceded by the introduction “such as.”
- 9) E) The original sentence is an awkward construction that does not express a complete thought. Much of the problem is caused by the unnecessary word “by,” so B is incorrect for the same reason. C is incorrect because it is awkward. D is incorrect because it contains a misplaced modifier. The allergies, not the students, are what “[flare] up in the fall and the spring,” so the word “allergies” would need to

come right after this introductory phrase, since phrases must go right next to whatever they are modifying. E is correct because it is the most direct, straightforward way of expressing the idea.

10) A) The original sentence is correct as it is written, since it correctly uses the present perfect construction to describe an ongoing event that began in the past. B is incorrect because the word “who” results in a fragment, which fails to express a complete thought. C is incorrect because “had went” is never an acceptable construction; “went” is the past simple form of the verb “to go,” but “gone” is the past participle and should therefore be used when preceded by an auxiliary verb such as “had.” D and E are use the wrong verb tense, since they use present tense constructions to describe something in the past.

11) D) The original sentence contains a misplaced modifier. All modifying words and phrases must be next to whatever they modify, so the phrase that opens the sentence must be followed by whoever it is describing. In this case, the opening phrase is describing Golda Meir, so “Golda Meir” must come directly after the comma. Therefore, D is the only option that works. E could be tempting, but the phrase is describing “Golda Meir,” not “Golda Meir’s election.”

12) A) The original sentence is correct as it is written; the word “whose” is correctly used to mean “belonging to who/which.” B and C are incorrect because they are awkward. D and E can be eliminated because the word “when” is inaccurate, since a time is not being discussed.

13) A) The original sentence is correct as it is written, featuring correct use of the word “whom” as an object in the sentence. B is incorrect because a comma-conjunction should be used to join two independent clauses, not an independent clause and a phrase. C is incorrect because the word “whereas” implies contradiction where none exists. D and E are incorrect because a semi-colon is used to join two independent clauses, and what comes after the semi-colon in D and E fails to express a complete thought.

14) D) The original sentence is incorrect because the pronoun “they” is used vaguely and because it contains a misplaced modifier. All modifying words and phrases must be next to whatever they modify. Because the phrase at the beginning of the sentence is intended to modify “tomato” or “tomatoes,” “tomato” or “tomatoes” must come directly after this phrase. D is correct over E because E incorrectly uses the present perfect verb tense, implying an ongoing action that began in the past, which makes little sense in this context.

15) C) The original sentence incorrectly uses the singular verb “has” with the plural subject “changes.” Instead, it is necessary to use the plural verb “have.” It would be easy to mistake the singular “policy” for the subject of the sentence. However, “policy” is the object of the prepositional phrase that begins with the word “in,” and the simple subject of a sentence can never be found within a phrase. It is often difficult to recognize verb agreement errors just by using your ear, so whenever a verb is underlined, it is wise to match it with its simple subject to check for agreement. C is the correct answer because it correctly uses the plural verb “have.” Although B also uses the verb “have,” it unnecessarily restates the subject with the pronoun “they.” D and E are incorrect because they are awkward, specifically in light of the word “who” that comes right after the underlined portion.

16) E) The expression is “more... than,” not “more... at,” so A and B can both be eliminated due to incorrect use of idiomatic language. E is correct over C and D because it exhibits correct parallel construction. Parallel construction dictates that items in lists and comparisons must be expressed in as similar a manner as possible. In this case, the first part of the comparison is how many books “her firm sold” in the beginning of one year, so the second part of the comparison should involve how many “it did” (sold) in another.

17) D) The original sentence incorrectly joins two independent clauses with a comma and no conjunction. Although E adds a conjunction, it is still incorrect because it results in an awkward sentence, since it implies that the “physical feats” she performed were something she did in addition to being a stuntwoman. B, C, and D all turn the second part of the sentence into a phrase, which can then be correctly linked with a comma to the preceding independent clause. B is incorrect because the singular verb “is” does not agree with the plural subject “feats.” C is incorrect because the pronoun “they” is used vaguely, since it does not have an antecedent. Therefore, D is the correct answer.

18) C) In the original sentence, the verb “surpassing” is written in an incorrect verb tense that that results in the sentence failing to express a complete thought; instead of the present participle, the past tense “surpassed” should be used. C is correct over D because D incorrectly compares “the success of Dracula” to “other novels.” Because it is necessary to compare like to like, the sentence must instead compare “the success of Dracula” to the success of “other novels,” or “that of... other novels” (“that” renames “success.”)

19) C) The original sentence is awkward because the underlined portion is an independent clause, which is out of place in the context of the sentence as a whole. Furthermore, the pronoun “they” is used vaguely in the original sentence, since it lacks an antecedent. B is incorrect because it exhibits similar awkwardness to the original sentence. C is correct over D and E because D and E are unnecessarily wordy and awkward.

20) B) The original sentence is incorrect because the word “where” incorrectly implies that a place or location is being discussed. C is incorrect because it results in a run-on. D incorrectly implies that Dale intentionally captivated the readers in order to cause them to send the author letters, which makes no sense. E is incorrect because it unnecessarily restates the subject with the pronoun “she.” Although B might appear to be an unusual construction, it is grammatically correct, and this type of construction appears somewhat frequently on the PSAT and SAT.

Identifying Sentence Errors

21) A) The singular verb “was” does not agree with the plural subject “office buildings.” Instead, it is necessary to use the plural verb “were.” Although a subject usually comes before its verb, this type of construction is not uncommon on the PSAT and SAT. It is often difficult to recognize verb agreement errors just by using your ear, so whenever a verb is underlined, it is wise to match it with its simple subject to check for agreement.

22) D) The sentence should read “had grown,” rather than “had grew.” “Grew” is the past simple form of the verb “to grow,” while “grown” is the past participle, and the past participle should always be used following an auxiliary verb such as “had.”

23) B) The underlined portion labeled B creates an error in parallel construction. Parallel construction dictates that items in lists and comparisons must be expressed in as similar a manner as possible. In this case, the first two items in the lists are nouns, so the third item in the list should also be a noun. The sentence could be fixed by deleting the word "have."

24) C) The subject of the verb "were" is "Leaving his beloved science fiction books at home," which is one singular thing, despite the fact that it involves more than one book. Therefore, it is necessary to use the singular verb "was" rather than the plural verb "were." It is often difficult to recognize verb agreement errors just by using your ear, so whenever a verb is underlined, it is wise to match it with its simple subject to check for agreement.

25) B) Two candidates could not have been one teacher. Because the sentence uses the plural pronoun "both," it is necessary to use the plural "teachers" rather than the singular "a teacher."

26) D) To create the comparative form of an adjective, you should either add an "er" to the end of the word or place the word "more" in front of the word, but it is never correct to do both of these things at the same time. The correct comparative form of "lively" is "livelier."

27) B) In order to agree with the singular antecedent "history," it is necessary to use the singular pronoun "its" rather than the plural pronoun "their."

28) D) Because this sentence is discussing what people thought to be possible in the past, it is necessary to use the past conditional construction "would have seemed" rather than the present conditional "would seem."

29) D) Words are "derived from," not "derived by," other words. As is often the case when a preposition is underlined, this is an issue of idiomatic language, meaning that there is no reason why one preposition is used over another in the expression. You simply have to know the expression or be able to use your ear to figure it out.

30) E) The sentence is correct as it is written. Remember that E, "No error," is correct about its fair share of the time, so you should not be afraid to choose it. However, if you do not notice an error when you first read a sentence, you should examine each underlined portion more carefully, looking for common errors involving each underlined part of speech, before deciding that there is in fact no error.

31) A) The original sentence contains a misplaced modifier. All modifying words and phrases must be next to whatever they modify, and because "Viewing it from mars" is technically describing whoever is doing the viewing, it would need to be followed by a subject such as "people," "viewers," or "astronomers." Because the opening phrase is instead followed by "the planet Mars," it is necessary to reconstruct the opening phrase in a way that it describes Mars itself rather than those who view it. This change can be accomplished by replacing "Viewing it" with "Viewed."

32) D) When making a comparison, you must compare like to like. Therefore, it is incorrect to compare "the tone of a viola" to "a violin." Instead, "the tone of a viola" should be compared to "the tone of a violin" or "that of a violin."

33) E) The sentence is correct as it is written. Remember that E, “No error,” is correct about its fair share of the time, so you should not be afraid to choose it. However, if you do not notice an error when you first read a sentence, you should examine each underlined portion more carefully, looking for common errors involving each underlined part of speech, before deciding that there is in fact no error.

34) B) The appropriate word would be “respectfully,” which means “with respect,” rather than “respectively,” which means “in the previously stated order.”

Improving Paragraphs

35) C) This sentence primarily serves to explain the term “Action Units” by providing specific examples. Therefore, this sentence should follow Sentence 6, since Sentence 6 introduces the term “Action Units.”

36) D) Because Elkman’s research is first mentioned in the first paragraph, D creates the best transition by connecting the second paragraph to the first paragraph.

37) B) The transition word “therefore” is inappropriate in the original version of Sentence 9 because it implies a causal relationship between Sentence 8 and Sentence 9. Answer choice B fixes this problem by creating a more appropriate transition, since the complexity of a smile is being compared to the simplicity of a wink.

38) E) Answer choice E creates the smoothest and most logical transition between the two actions by relating them in terms of the order in which they occurred. Answer choice A is tempting, but the previous paragraph already established that “Elkman catalogued the various facial expressions,” so it is somewhat repetitive. B and D are incorrect because the words “instead” and “although” indicate contradiction where none exists. C is incorrect because the word “because” indicates a causal relationship where none exists.

39) A) This sentence provides an example that is very much the opposite of the example provided in Sentence 14, so the contradictory transition “in contrast” makes sense. B is incorrect because it indicates that Sentence 15 restates what is said in Sentence 14, which it does not. C is incorrect because it indicates that Sentences 14 and 15 describe two things that are occurring at the same time, which is not the case. D is incorrect because there is nothing “unfortunate” about the phenomenon described in Sentence 15. E is incorrect because it indicates that Sentence 15 is the most important thing discussed, which it is not.