

Section 2: Writing and Language

...Basically English Grammar and Style

Provided by Madrona Tutoring

The English section is governed by rules about grammar and style that are over one hundred and fifty years old. Don't be surprised if they seem a little rigid, or simply different from what you have been told in English class. So just imagine that the SAT is really just an old, stodgy, formal neighbor. It's a little out of touch, pretty fussy, and you can't argue with it. If you play nice, then it'll stop bothering you.

The Basics:

In the English section, there are 44 questions in 35 minutes, which is about 48 seconds per question. That might not sound like much, but it is totally manageable. The trick is developing a steady pace. The keys to getting a good scores on the English section are:

1. **Read the passage, and answer the questions as you go.** You'll miss important context clues on a third of the questions if you don't. Don't try skipping from question to question.
2. **Say the sentence in your head.** Chances are you know English pretty well. Use that to your advantage. Say the sentences aloud in your head, and see if anything sounds wrong. Usually you'll be right.
3. **If saying it in your head doesn't help, break the sentence apart into its pieces.** This is called diagramming the sentence. If you break it up into subjects, verbs, and objects, you'll be able to see what's wrong really quickly.
4. **If all the answers seem okay, check for style differences.** The SAT loves stiff, formal, concise language. All things being equal, the answer will always be short, sweet and formal.
5. **If you can't find anything wrong, then pick no change.**

Style Rules

Style problems are easy to spot because there will be more than one grammatically correct answer available. So remember that if more than one choice seems correct to you, you need to pick the answer with the superior style: short, sweet and formal.

Redundancy

Something is redundant if it repeats information. Any redundancy is wrong.

- **Examples:**

1. Jerry took a walk through the thickly wooded, pine tree covered hills.
2. Mary took a sip from her mug of tea, which was filled to the brim with a dark fragrant tea.

- **Practice:** Find and remove redundant phrases.

1. Bobby jo walked slowly down the road with Billy Jean, relishing their slow pace.
2. The annual board meeting occurred once a year.
3. Mr. Vik was a sandwich fiend, eating sandwiches every day.
4. The plane ride was shakey, and riddled with tremors.
5. Repetitious behaviors can be habit forming, reinforced by repeating.

Concise

If it is possible to say something in a shorter way while still getting the same information across, then that is the best answer. Remember, the SAT likes **short and sweet**.

- Examples:

1. Garfunkle was nearly there, almost at the grocery store.
2. Oates could just barely see out of the tiny window.

- Practice:

1. Jack went along with Jill to the hill.
2. The pizza delivery guy was shocked, stunned and flabbergasted that he was paid in bottle caps.
3. The corpulent, overstuffed, and obese aristocrat couldn't be bothered to lift another cookie to his mouth.
4. Jules decided that he would go along with Vern to the movies.
5. It was difficult to see in the smoky, hazy, cigarette choked room.

Formal vs. Informal Language

The SAT likes formal, almost stiff language. Every once in a while it'll throw out a question where everything is grammatically correct, but most of the answers seem kind of relaxed. **The answer is always the formal option.**

- Examples:

1. Listen up ya'll!
2. The pizza parlor was totally full of cringy middle schoolers.

- Practice:

1. I was giving my brother the run around about shelling out the dough I owed him.
2. Even though they're cold, polar regions are pretty good places to live if you like wildlife.
3. Baba Yaga was feeling a little rough, her aches and pains just refused to stop howling at her.
4. Lady Pravda was pretty cool, totally backing up the truth in the face of some really uncool guys.
5. Karen lurched into bed, too tired to give a hoot about a shower.

Grammar Problems

Most of the questions in the English section are straight up grammar problems. The best way to approach them is to **identify the type of error**. Below, we'll go through all the major error types.

Wrong Word

Wrong word problems insert a related but incorrect word into a sentence, just to see if you'll notice. Usually these are pretty easy to notice if you just say them aloud in your head.

- Examples:

1. Since we have to leave in two minutes, would you like to grab your coat **than** get your shoes on?
2. My brother is seven years younger than me, so I have to be careful when we play because he is so much more **immature** than me.

- Practice:

1. As I picked up the two thousand year old pottery, I was struck by how weak it was.
2. The hotel was immaculate, it was obvious that all of the bed linens were scrubbed.
3. Luke told Mrs. Nesbit that he didn't have his essay because his dog had gnashed it.
4. Donald's mom wasn't sure if the soccer team liked surgar cookies more then gingersnaps.
5. Professor Habennicht had declared an essay for next Monday; all his students groaned.

Noun/Verb Agreement

Usually this is taught in foreign language classes more than in English class. With this type of problem, you need to be able to identify the subject and the main verb in a sentence and make sure that they are in agreement. That means both are singular or both are plural.

If you're having trouble with that, check out the grammar review section. Just remember, the subject is the noun that is acting.

- Examples:

1. I **are** going to the store later today.
2. My friends still **looks** under their beds for monsters.

- Practice:

1. Watching the soccer game, my brother, only eleven, run along the sidelines.
2. The quarterback of the opposing team throw a mean spiral.
3. One of the debaters cheat, always "accidentally" keeping the files of the other team.
4. Everyone on the chess team always play very well after they've consumed two or three energy drinks.
5. Traveling through Spain, Eustace's group, consisting mostly of non-native speakers, have a difficult time getting dance parters at the disco.

Pronoun/Noun Agreement

Remember what pronouns are? He/She/it/one? Pronouns are the words used to avoid saying things like "John went to the store to get John's breakfast, and then John took out John's garbage." We use "he" instead. The SAT will try to switch up the pronouns on you sometimes, flipping singular to plural or gendered (he/she) to neuter (one).

- Examples:

1. My dad and I are headed out to the Olympic Peninsula, where no one will bother **we**.
2. At the annual vampire convention, the Sparklepires found **themselves** the target of many subtle jokes.

- Practice:

1. After all of the graduate students get their PhD's, he or she will still have to accrue teaching experience in order to get a job.
2. Even though Angelica was the top scholar in the prestigious Roosevelt Clown Academy, one still had to try very hard to maintain her status of 3.9 Red Noses.
3. The class all went a wassailing, and we loved every minute of it.
4. Frederick wanted to go to the Halloween party dressed up as Jack Smellington, but ultimately one decided against it.
5. Susie Q and Georgy Porgy tag teamed the Jeopardy game in fifth period Spanish class. She and he left only the subjunctive questions for the others.

Pronoun/Pronoun Agreement

Just like nouns and pronouns have to agree, two pronouns which refer to the same things have to agree. These problems usually have to do with switches between 2nd and 3rd person singular pronouns (you vs he/she/one).

- Examples:

1. **She** went down to the butcher to get a few steaks for dinner, but **one** didn't like the prices.
2. Even when **you** are sure that your room is clean, **I** have to be sure that your little brother isn't in there, messing it up.

- Practice:

1. No matter what you think about the Large Hadron Collider, one must admit that particle acceleration is pretty cool.
2. When they all went to the May Day celebration, he had a grand time dancing.
3. After I visited New York, we realized that the subways were horrible.

Pronouns: Subjects vs Objects

More pronouns?! Last one I promise. Okay, you know how you can't say "Take I to the store with you" or "Them can't come with us to the movies tonight"? Pronouns can be **subject** pronouns (I/You/We/He/She/It/They) and they can be **object** pronouns (Me/You/Us/Him/Her/Them).

Basically, some of the pronoun questions will test whether or now you can tell the difference between object and subject pronouns.

Pro Tip: any pronoun following a preposition (across/from/of/to/between) should be an object.

- Examples:

1. Geraldine was a little premature, practicing her valedictorian speech before **she** final grades had been submitted.
2. Brock Slamfist stormed down the hall, absolutely furious that **him** had forgotten to pack the tray of rice crispy treats for lunch today.

- Practice:

1. Josephat promised to give a secret recipe for a jalapeno smoothie to my grandmother and I.
2. Stephanie balked when told that her and Jonesy would have to apologize for covering Mr. Slivovitz's chair with chewing gum and thumb tacks.
3. When the aliens told we that it was necessary to beam up, we knew it was a practical joke.
4. Sherlock and Dr. Watson knew that them had to continue to follow the clues, otherwise the case would never be solved.
5. My parents live on an island, and when me come home for Christmas, I have to take a boat to her house.

Complete Sentences

How do you know when a sentence is complete? Well, the easiest rule is to read the sentence and ask if it feels like a complete thought. If it feels like there's something missing, there probably is.

To actually check the sentence, look for a subject, a verb and an object. A complete thought usually has all of those (although some sentences only need a subject and a verb: "I am." or "Billy sat."). Fragments might be missing a verb or a subject, and run-ons generally consist of multiple complete thoughts that aren't separated by correction punctuation or conjunctions.

- Examples: Sentences, Run-ons and Fragments, oh my!
 1. Not without my walking stick. **Fragment.**
 2. Max didn't even know whether he could get as far as. **Fragment.**
 3. Emily wondered out loud whether Trudy would be able to make it to tea time with her little doggie. **Complete.**
 4. Harry was a spectacular private detective he told himself this frequently at night even though he'd ever only solved half a case. **Run-on.**
- Practice: Determine whether sentences are complete, fragments or run-ons.
 1. Bobby-Joe-Jim stood outside.
 2. Billy-Jim-Bob stood.
 3. Stewart McNorthlands stared at his well structured Tudor mansion and quietly.
 4. Goergey Porgey, his pudding and his pie in hand.
 5. Although not as popular as vampires, sparkly werewolves were making a comeback in the mianstream the attraction was all due to the glitter fur.

Prepositional Idioms

The word "Idiom" sounds a lot like the word "idiot". And they both mean "something that no one understands". Just like an idiot is a person that doesn't make much sense, an idiom doesn't make much sense if you look at it too closely. **Most idioms are centered on a preposition.** So this is another reason to keep an eye out for prepositions: if a preposition sounds almost right, then maybe there's a better option.

Have you ever thought about why we fall **in** love? Why not **into** love, or **with** love, or **toward** love? There's not really a good reason. We just have to know that in English, we fall **in** love.

- Examples:

1. Today, I slipped and fell **into** love. The girl who helped me up became my wife.
2. The puppies were all putting **up** their best collars **with** a hurry; mom was going to take them **toward** the movies any minute!

- Practice:

1. Tina was worried for her driving exam.
2. Gerald was thrown back, and sank on the mud puddle in the middle of the playing field.
3. Screaming of pain, Linda regretted hitting her thumb by the hammer.
4. Jack had to finish his Spanish homework, but he wasn't able to get onto writing a story in Spanish.
5. Nicole of the other hand couldn't write in Spanish at all, being enrolled into Chinese class.

Parallel Structure

Parallel structure is a fancy way of saying that when an sentence has a list of verbs in it, they need be the same kind of verbs. Generally these problems have three verbs in a row, and one them won't be like the others. Look for one that isn't in the same tense, and change it to match the others.

- Examples:

1. El padre took one look at the bartender, blinked twice, and **ordering** a tall glass of ice water.
2. All the while, the bartender was watching el padre, moving slowly to avoid startling him, and **prepared** for anything.

- Practice:

1. My debate coach told me to go to bed, get some rest, and be waking by six in the morning.
2. My stomach, however, told me that I should be opening the fridge, take out the leftovers, and eat my fill before bed.
3. When the rangers go out looking for the dire wolves, they use their snowmobiles, look for any paw prints in the snow, and are listening for sounds of wolf pups and howling.
4. Jerry likes to sit on the couch, playing video games, and avoid work.

Commas:

The first (and really only real) rule of commas is that **commas are used to separate dependent clauses from complete sentences**. That might sound kind of complicated, but it's not really that bad. A dependent clause is just a phrase, or series of words which aren't a complete sentence by themselves. **So, a comma separates a complete sentence from an incomplete sentence**. The simple version looks like this:

Although hungry, John didn't eat.

Now "although hungry" is our dependent clause. It sounds funny if you say it out loud by itself. It doesn't tell us who is hungry, or anything else. It is dependent on the rest of the sentence to support it. "John didn't eat" is a complete sentence by itself. It doesn't need "although hungry" but it can support "although hungry".

So the comma is necessary because we need something to separate the dependent clause from the complete sentence. Make sense?

Now, more complicated sentences can make this seem trickier by adding dependent clauses or phrases in the middle of a complete sentence, or at the end of a complete sentence.

Although hungry, John, the clown, didn't eat the banana cream pie.

We see here that the aside ",the clown," is set off by commas on both sides. That's because it is a dependent phrase only used to clarify who John is. This is called a comma hug. You should be able to take anything in a comma hug completely out of the sentence, and the sentence should still make sense.(but we'll deal with comma hugs more explicitly in a little bit). Try this next example:

Although hungry, John, the clown, didn't eat the banana cream pie, since there was no room in the doghouse.

Okay, so this is close to the most complicated version of a comma sentence we'll see. There is a comma hug in the middle, and a dependent clause on either end of the real sentence.

We can see that the real sentence is still just "John didn't eat the banana cream pie." The other parts are all dependent. They can't be said by themselves or be used together to form a complete thought: "Although hungry the clown since there was no room in the doghouse" makes no sense.)

Just remember: commas are necessary only when a real sentence needs to be separated from a dependent clause.

- Practice: place/remove commas for a correct sentence!
 1. Jerry on his way back from breakfast spotted a vicious looking bluejay.
 2. On a hike up mount Si only the American Pika was seen by the

hikers.

3. Because it may rain Thomas refuses to leave without his walking stick.
4. On the contrary, Lars, the breakfast, was absolutely, delicious.
5. Just because you're smaller than me, doesn't mean I have to be nice to you.

Comma Hugs

Just like we noticed in the section above, when you have a phrase or addition in the middle of a sentence that needs to be separated from the normal sentence you must have commas on both sides.

Pretty Pink Ponies, an amazing one man show, sold out in minutes.

You need to have two commas to make it clear what is okay to take out of the sentence.

Pretty Pink Ponies ... sold out in minutes.

So whenever you see a comma in a sentence ask yourself should there be another comma to make a hug? Where should it be?

The test will frequently give you sentences with only one comma underlined, and you'll need to figure out whether you should add a comma or take one out. Make sure to read the whole sentence carefully! There might be other commas you haven't noticed yet which will affect the answer!

- Practice: make the comma hugs make sense.
 1. Caesar, the general of the Roman army ate his breakfast alone.
 2. Lancelot on the other hand ate breakfast with Geinevere King Arthur's wife.
 3. Gawain who stood up to the green knight, eats breakfast alone in his tower.
 4. Even though it seemed difficult, Gregory, who was known for making amazing lemonade transitioned to prune smoothies instead.
 5. The fiber in the smoothies, or so his doctor's told him would make his life much more predictable.

Comma Splices

Last comma rule. I swear.

Remember how commas are only supposed to separate incomplete sentence pieces from complete sentences? **Well, when you have two complete sentences separated only by a comma, that's called a comma splice. Commas splices are always wrong.** And knowing how to recognize a splice is super handy, because you'll see comma splices in the questions but also in the answers.

Henry and Petey love to eat bacon, they are real breakfast fiends.

See how there are two complete sentences here? We have to get rid of the comma. When you fix a comma splice you have three options:

- Possible Solutions:
 1. A period. *Henry and Petey love to eat bacon. They are real breakfast fiends.*
 2. A semi Colon. *Henry and Petey love to eat bacon; they are real breakfast fiends.*
 3. Make one half of the sentence incomplete (dependent/subordinate).
Since Henry and Petey love to eat bacon, they are real breakfast fiends.

On the harder comma splice problems, you'll have to remember that you can change not just the punctuation but the sentences themselves. A handy list to remember is your FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) which are all coordinating conjunctions. If you add any of the FANBOYS to the sentence, then a comma is okay!

- Practice: correct the comma splices.
 1. Slam Fridgechest loves steak, he loves it so much sometimes he cries.
 2. Huge McBiglarge avoids long empty corridors, inevitably that's where the aliens pop out at you.
 3. Crush Beefcake wasted no time getting in the lunch line, it was mac and cheese day.
 4. Smack Pudgewiggle embarked upon his epic voyage, he ran out of beef jerky on the second day.
 5. Sometimes you can't make it to the zoo to watch animals, you can always go to the coffee shop and watch people.

Semi Colons:

Remember how you could solve a comma splice with semi colons? That's because semi colons are the opposite of commas. **Semi colons can only be used between two full sentences.** It's actually kind of nice and tidy: you have to use commas to separate incomplete sentences from complete sentences, and semi colons to separate two complete sentences.

Because they are so closely related, most of the problems that you see involving semi colons will also be commas splice problems.

- Examples: Correctly used semi-colons.
 1. Jonesy woke up and headed out towards the breakfast tent; Slap-happy Sam had already finished cooking the eggs.
 2. Always thirsty, Jonesy poured himself three mugs of coffee at once.
- Practice:
 1. Lady Janice walked slowly down the aisle; for she understood the importance of gravitas.
 2. The banana cream pie was cold, it tasted delicious.
 3. Although freezing; Sheri took another spoonful out of the double fudge ripple ice cream.
 4. Because there was no other option, they went all the way to Poughkeepsie for Thanksgiving.
 5. Sherline; the singing queen; welcomed them all as they arrived.

Colons:

Colons are actually pretty simple. **You use colons for introducing lists and explanations.** That's it. A colon can only occur at the end of a complete thought (sentence). And the explanation or list can begin with a capital letter, but doesn't need to. So check to see if the sentence is a complete thought, and if there is a list or an explanation following the colon.

- Examples: Correctly used colons.
 1. Phylis only needed a few more things: Eye of newt, salamander's tongue, a cup of sugar and one tablespoon of baking powder.
 2. I could see that the toddler didn't understand: without the requisite years of experience and mental development Aristotle was simply beyond him.
- Practice: Change the sentence or punctuation.
 1. Hey: how are you doing today?
 2. Jim Bobby Jr. was an immense child capable: of unspeakable acts.
 3. Bela Lugosi: the iconic actor: was one of the first to play Dracula on film.
 4. Everyday, give yourself: a present.
 5. Jinny let out a thunderous cry: her arms flapping as she ran towards the terrified neighbor.

Dashes:

Dashes are horrible. Seriously, don't use dashes when you write. Dashes can do the job of colons by introducing an explanation or list, and can be used as a comma substitute when using a comma hug (but not a single comma).

- Examples: Correctly used dashes
 1. Lindsey stood up and took a deep breath before facing his grisly fate - the parent/teacher conference.
 2. Ricki - who prided himself on a strong stomach - didn't know if he could stand both the smacking mouthbreather sitting next to him and the smell of the tuna casserole that had been served for lunch.
- Practice: Correct the dash placement
 1. The freshly roasted coffee beans were a problem, they proved he had indeed been to the coffee house and not to the cobblers.
 2. The laundry gnomes, responsible for all the lost socks - took stock of their winter haul.
 3. The deer - alone in the middle of the path, took two tentative steps towards the pond.
 4. Allow me to introduce the most celebrated bear stand up comedian of all time, Fozzy the bear!
 5. Hey Jimmy John - would you pass me the ammonium chloride?

Who/Whom/whose/who's

These are the relative pronouns. That means that they are used during times when it is not clear to what person we are referring to in a sentence. (Who was that?) For those of you who have taken a cased language (Russian/German/Latin/Greek, etc), this will be a little easy. For everyone else, this requires a little memorization. Here's the way it breaks down:

- **Who:** is always the subject. Always. No Exceptions. Any time you can use "He" you can use "Who".
- **Whom:** Is always the object. Any time you can use "Him" you can use "Whom". It will usually follow a preposition. (of, after, under, etc.)
- **Whose:** Is the possessive form of the relative pronoun. It basically means (of *Steve*, or of whomever) "Whose dog is this?"
- **Who's:** This one is a trick! It is actually the contraction Who + is. Just remember that the apostrophe means it's a contraction!
- Examples: corrected with bolded words.
 1. Fee Fi Fo Fum! Whose **who's** been eating my cinnamon buns!
 2. When I lived in Spain, I met a number of people whom **who** absolutely hated eating sandwiches.
- Practice: Write in the correct relative pronoun.
 1. Whom is coming down the stairs?
 2. Who did you see the other day?
 3. Who's dog is chasing that cat?
 4. Why did he give the grocery money to the chimpanzee? Who was he supposed to give it to?
 5. Gertrude was having none of it, and she didn't care whom thought otherwise.

Its it's:

Similar to who vs. who's, with its vs it's the apostrophe always marks the contraction. It's = it is. So then, its must be the possessive form of it. Just remember that if there is an apostrophe it must be a contraction; therefore the option without the contraction is possessive.

- **Its:** possessive form. Literally "of it"
- **It's:** contraction of It + is. = It is.
- **Its':** doesn't exist. This would be the plural possessive, but it is always singular, so it is always wrong.
- Examples:
 1. I'm sorry, Justine. Its' **It's** not working out. Its **It's** not me, its' *it's* you.
 2. Why did she feel the need to go there? Its' It's supposed to be a simple toast, not a sermon.
 3. I love the new hand mixer! It's **Its** color matches all the towels I keep in the kitchen.
- Practice:
 1. Ignoring his father's advice, he lifted the full frying pan by it's handle, spilling almost all of the sauce.
 2. Only that cat knew the truth. The dog just spun in circles, chasing its' tail.
 3. I'd love to know who designed this obstacle course. Its clearly impossible to escape from the Tiger.
 4. Krampus looked down at the house from his vantage point on the mountain. He could barely make out the smoke coming from its' chimney.
 5. Who knows what the new year will bring? Its' probably going to be clowns. I hope its clowns.

There/they're/their:

This is a set of words that is impossible to differentiate based on the sound alone. For that reason, it's important to be able to tell them apart based on their spelling.

- Practice:
 1. **There:** is a place. Like here.
 2. **They're:** Again, check out the apostrophe. It's a contraction of They + are = They are.
 3. **Their:** This is the possessive, 3rd person, plural pronoun. Whose is it? It's theirs.

Would have/could have/should have:

Anything + "of" is **always** wrong.

This one is kind of fun. Say "would have" out loud. Did it sound like "would of"? That's because when there are soft consonants like 'h' after hard consonants like t, d, or b, the soft ones get eaten up. So "would have" begins to sound like "would ave" after a while, and then we get sloppy and it starts to slip into something like "would of". Now just because it sounds like that does not mean "would of" is correct. In fact, it's never correct. **Would of, could of, and should of are all wrong. Always.** The answer is always would HAVE, could HAVE, should HAVE.

Being: Always wrong.

Being is always wrong. That simple. If an answer contains "being" it is wrong. The SAT hates "being". Nothing else to see here. If you see being, cross it off.

English Long (content) Questions

The second type of questions that you will see in the English section are the long content questions. You'll know when these pop up because there will be a sentence asking a question, as opposed to just a list of possible answers. Let's check out the five different types of long question.

Transition questions

So what are transitions? Transitions are words like *however*, *although*, *on the contrary*, *ergo*, and *thus* which make movement from one thought to another easier. These look just like normal grammar questions. **However**, they are content questions which require you to understand the context the sentence is in to get the correct answer, which is why they are in this section.

Most transitions you'll see can be categories as either continuous or discontinuous. A continuous transition is used to describe a continuing relationship between two sentences.

Johnny Appleseed loved apples, thus he planted apple trees accross the country.

Discontinuous transitions mark a reversal of logic or meaning.

Johnny Appleseed loved apples, however, he absolutely detested pears.

Discontinuous	Continuous
However	Thus
On the contrary	Ergo
On the other hand	Similarly
Alternatively	likewise
nonetheless	further

This isn't an exhaustive list, but it gives you an idea of the differences between the two types.

There are two ways to solve a transition problem:

1. Read for context (above and below the underlined word), and understand what kind of transition should be used.
2. Look at the possible answers. Three will agree with each other (all discontinuous or continuous). The answer that does not agree is the correct answer. We call this the odd man out.

Given that all of the following are true...

Many of the long form questions begin with the words "Given that all the following are true...". These questions always give you a **clue**

as to what they want. Pay really close attention to that clue, and pick the answer that matches it the closest.

Given that all the following are true, which answer best provides sensory evidence to support the claim of the paragraph?

Sensory evidence is actually pretty specific. Whichever answer has to do with one of the five senses is the correct answer.

Given that all the following are true, which answer provides a sense of deliberate pace and anticipation?

Deliberate pace and anticipation sounds like slowly enjoying something. Which answer has the chef slowly enjoying something?

Always pick the answer that is closest to the clue provided. Don't over think it, and try to justify a decision. It should be really apparent that there is a single correct answer. If it is not, reread the question to see if you understand the clue completely.

Should a sentence be added, subtracted or placed differently?

Sometimes, the SAT will ask whether a sentence should be added, removed, or placed in a different location. These take a little time to solve because you need to reread the paragraphs in question. But the trick to getting these questions right is muffins. Imagine you're reading a muffin recipe:

First you mix the flour and the baking powder. Then you add the eggs and the the milk. *Katanas are swords that ninjas use.* Then scoop the dough into the muffin tins and place them in the oven at 350 degrees.

If we know what the paragraph is about, then anything that isn't important to the main point of the paragraph can be taken out. So, we don't need to know about ninjas or their swords if we're in the middle of a paragraph about muffins. Make sense? So **figure out what the paragraph is about, and check that the sentence is about the same thing.**

Sometimes all the sentences in the paragraph are about the same thing, but they aren't necessarily in the proper order. **Use logic to determine the proper order of events.**

Fist you mix the flour and the baking powder. Then scoop the dough into the muffin tins. Then add the eggs and the milk. Then place them into the oven.

It doesn't make any sense to add the eggs and milk if I've already scooped the batter into the tins, so we need to rearrange the order of the sentences.

Summary

Basically you need to keep a close eye on the problems which begin with a sentence. The sentence will either give you a very specific clue, or ask you if something needs to be cut, added or rearranged. You need to reread the paragraph to be clear on what the subject of the paragraph is, and then use logic to determine if anything can be cut added or placed.