

Grammar Tips

Grammar:

Simple Semicolons: The semicolon is grammatically the same as a period. Only choose a semicolon as the answer if it separates two complete sentences.

Who vs. Which “Who” is used for people, and “which” is used for things.

Indiscriminate mingling is a No-No: A pronoun must take the place of ONE, and only one, specific noun! If a pronoun is going with all sorts of nouns, this is a very bad thing. If you can’t tell what the pronoun is taking the place of – another bad thing. And, finally, if the pronoun does not agree with the noun – yet another bad thing.

Odd One Out: If three answer choices contain a pronoun, and the fourth contains a specific noun, pick the noun.

Colons: Colons are used to indicate that a definition, explanation, or list is to follow. Colons may or may not separate two complete sentences.

Colon Trick: If a colon indicates an EXPLANATION follows, think “why, because.” If this phrase fits with the info that comes after the colon then the colon is being used correctly.

Clauses: Clauses that can stand alone are separated with a semicolon, comma with a conjunction, or a period. These clauses are called INDEPENDENT clauses and represent sentences – have a subject and verb.

Who?: Remember “whose” shows ownership and “who's” is who is.

Conjunction Rule: If you have a conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) separating two complete sentences, then you need a comma before the conjunction. If you don’t have a complete sentence on both sides of the conjunction, NO comma is required.

Beginnings: Use a comma after a prepositional phrase that comes at the beginning of a sentence. Also, use a comma after an introductory adverbial clause – clauses that begin with such words as when, after, while, because, since, etc.

Semi-colons and Periods are the Same: If two answer choices are identical except that one contains a period and the other contains a semi-colon, cross them both out. Since they are grammatically identical, neither one can be correct.

“Should Of” = No/No: Should of, could of, would of, are all incorrect. Replace “of” with “have” = should have.

Then vs Than: Than is used to compare two or more people, places, things, or ideas. Then indicates time or a sequence of events.

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Duo of Dashes: Often a dash is correct if and only if there is a second dash immediately before or after it.

Dash = Comma: Technically, a dash is a STRONG comma. You can't have a complete sentence after a dash. Also, can't sandwich a phrase between a comma and a dash. Dashes go with dashes and commas go with commas.

Helping Verbs: Is, are, was, were, have, has...are helping VERBS. If these verbs are underlined then the question is either a subject/verb or tense question.

Periods/Semi-colons and Commas are Opposites: Periods and semi-colons MUST separate two complete sentences and commas can NEVER separate two complete sentences.

Look around for Tense: Look at the lines above and below the verb in question in order to determine the tense.

Shortest is Sweetest: Redundancy is a major problem in writing. Eliminate repetitive wording by choosing the shortest answer.

Consistency: Keep verb tenses consistent! Look around the sentence for other verbs and choose the verb that is in the same form as the rest of the verbs in the sentence.

Blanket Rule: Two commas are used to surround, or "blanket," clauses, phrases, or words that are not essential to the sentence's meaning.

Zero or Two: Many times the answer to a comma question contains zero or two commas. Not one! One comma will be the answer if the question is asking about an introductory or concluding phrase, or a list.

They Belong Together: Do not put a comma between an adjective and a noun that form a pair: *disc jockey, pop star, cookie jar, cell phone.*

Subject/Verb = Tricky Preposition: If the question is a subject/verb question, often there will be a tricky prepositional phrase before the verb that needs to be stripped.

"Of" is KEY Preposition: "Of" is the number one preposition and is often found before the verb in a subject/verb question. Students forget that "of" is a preposition!

Think of a Box: Most prepositions relate to a box = **in** a box, **around** a box, **before** a box, **with** a box....

Keep ITS Straight: Don't mix up it's (it is) with its (possessive pronoun – its) on the exams. You may also see Its' – don't be fooled! Its' does not exist!

Pair the Words: Watch for pairs of words (hand-holders) such as "not only... but also," "either...or," "neither..nor," "to..from," "both...and."

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Either, Neither, Each: These are some tricky little pronouns. They ALWAYS take the singular verb. This is a nit-picky grammar rule that sounds wrong, so you can't use your ear. Memorize that "either," "neither" and "each" are singular.

Which/That: Use "which" if the information can be eliminated from the sentence. Use "that" if the information can't be eliminated from the sentence because the sentence will no longer make sense.

Who and Whom: If you can't decide between the two, replace "who" with "he" and "whom" with "him". See what sounds the best and this will be the answer. Another trick = whom is often NOT the answer!

Comma Confusion: Two sentences can never be separated by a single comma. This is called a comma splice.

Collective Nouns: These are nouns that are singular, but collectively include multiple items.

Watch out for words like "team, New York, family"! You'll want to refer to these nouns as "they," but **collective nouns are singular** and take the pronoun "it."

That vs. Those: "That" is singular and "Those" is plural.

Apostrophe Trick: Ask yourself if the second word belongs to the first word. If not, then no apostrophe is needed.

"LY" = ADVERB: Adverbs are married to verbs

Married: Last Adjective is married to the noun and should not have a comma between the two words:
Adjective, Adjective Noun

Divorced: If two adjectives, must have comma between

Married to a UNIT: Cumulative Adjectives are DIFFERENT. These adjectives are married to a noun unit = NO commas (colors are usually cumulative: *Adjective COLOR Noun* or *COLOR adjective noun*)

Lov... "ING": ING after a comma or at the beginning of a sentence = PHRASE (Usually)

Numbers are Important: Always circle numbers to find agreement (singular/plural)

Hate BEING: Don't choose or use in your writing. Being indicates passive voice and we like to be active!

Use your Ear: Who = HE Whom = Him

Confused: Can't decide if verb is plural? Put "He" or "They" before the verb (*He walks, they walk*)

Be in Control: Do NOT look at answer choices in order