

# 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