

KHAN ACADEMY'S RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN THE NEW DIGITAL SAT

A FULL GUIDE WITH COMPILED EXPLANATION ARTICLES AND PRACTICE
QUESTIONS



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INTRODUCTION



An Introduction to the digital SAT

- **What is the digital SAT?**

College Board, the maker of the SAT, is introducing changes to both the [content of the test](#) and [how the test is administered](#) in order to better fit the needs of students and educators. Most notably, the test will transition from being taken with paper and pencil to being administered via a [digital assessment platform](#) accessed by computer. While the transition to digital will bring a number of student- and educator-friendly changes, many important features of the SAT Suite will stay the same. The SAT Suite will continue to measure the knowledge and skills that students are learning in school and that matter most for college and career readiness. The digital SAT isn't simply a digital version of the current paper and pencil test—it will be easier to take, more secure, and more relevant.

- **What is on the digital SAT Reading and Writing test?**

The Reading and Writing section of the digital SAT is designed to test students on reading comprehension, rhetoric, and language use by having them engage with academic and literary texts. Skills on the Reading and Writing test can be split into the following four categories:

- **Information and Ideas:** *Use, locate, interpret, and evaluate information from various texts and infographics.*

An Introduction to the digital SAT

- **Craft and Structure**: *Determine the meaning of high-utility academic words and phrases in context, evaluate texts rhetorically, and make supportable connections between multiple related texts.*
- **Expression of Ideas**: *Use revision skills and knowledge to improve the effectiveness of written expression to accomplish specified rhetorical goals.*
- **Standard English Conventions**: *Use editing skills and knowledge to make texts conform to core conventions of Standard English sentence structure, usage, and punctuation.*

• What has changed?

The SAT Reading and Writing test has seen substantial changes in the transition to digital. Changes include:

- **One test for Reading and Writing**: While the pencil-and-paper SAT tested Reading and Writing in separate test sections, the digital SAT combines these topics.
- **Shorter passages (and more of them)**: Instead of reading long passages and answering multiple questions on each passage, students taking the digital SAT will encounter shorter passages, each with just one follow-up question.
- **New question types**: With its greater number and variety of passages, the digital SAT includes new types of questions, with new prompts requiring new strategies.

An Introduction to the digital SAT

• What about the questions' distribution?

Questions on the Reading and Writing section represent one of four content domains, shown in the table below. Questions that test similar skills and knowledge are grouped together and arranged from easiest to hardest.

Content Domain	Skill/Knowledge Testing Points	Operational Question Distribution
Craft and Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Words in Context• Text Structure and Purpose• Cross-Text Connections	13–15 questions ~28%
Information and Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Central Ideas and Details• Command of Evidence (Textual, Quantitative)• Inferences	12–14 questions ~26%
Standard English Conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boundaries• Form, Structure, and Sense	11–15 questions ~26%
Expression of Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rhetorical Synthesis• Transitions	8–12 questions ~20%

An Introduction to the digital SAT

The first two domains—Craft and Structure and Information and Ideas—primarily address reading-related skills and knowledge, while the second two domains—Standard English Conventions and Expression of Ideas—primarily address writing-related skills and knowledge.

- **What is the duration of digital SAT Reading and Writing test?**

The total duration of the Reading & Writing section on the new digital SAT is **64 minutes**, in which you will have to answer **54 questions in both modules**. Each module in this section will be 32 minutes long, consisting of 27 questions.

UNIT 1

INFORMATION AND IDEAS



- LESSON 1: COMMAND OF EVIDENCE-TEXTUAL
- LESSON 2: COMMAND OF EVIDENCE-QUANTITATIVE
- LESSON 3: CENTRAL IDEAS AND DETAILS
- LESSON 4: INFRENCES

UNIT 1

INFORMATION AND IDEAS

LESSON 1: COMMAND OF EVIDENCE-TEXTUAL

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

- **What are "textual evidence" questions?**

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will introduce a claim about an unfamiliar subject. The question will then ask you to identify the piece of evidence that **most strongly supports that claim**.

Textual evidence questions will look like this:

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE: EXAMPLE

Jan Gimsa, Robert Sleigh, and Ulrike Gimsa have hypothesized that the sail-like structure running down the back of the dinosaur *Spinosaurus aegyptiacus* improved the animal's success in underwater pursuits of prey species capable of making quick, evasive movements. To evaluate their hypothesis, a second team of researchers constructed two battery-powered mechanical models of *S. aegyptiacus*, one with a sail and one without, and subjected the models to a series of identical tests in a water-filled tank.

Which finding from the model tests, if true, would most strongly support Gimsa and colleagues' hypothesis?

- A. The model with a sail took significantly longer to travel a specified distance while submerged than the model without a sail did.
- B. The model with a sail displaced significantly more water while submerged than the model without a sail did.
- C. The model with a sail had significantly less battery power remaining after completing the tests than the model without a sail did.
- D. The model with a sail took significantly less time to complete a sharp turn while submerged than the model without a sail did.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

First, we need to **focus in on the hypothesis** our evidence needs to support:

"the sail-like structure running down the back of the dinosaur Spinosaurus aegyptiacus improved the animal's success in underwater pursuits of prey species capable of making quick, evasive movements"

We can simplify this hypothesis to make our lives a bit easier:

Sail on back = quicker movements

Which choice strengthens this idea?

- Choice A does focus on speed of movement, but finds that a sail on the back = *slower movement*. This is the opposite of what we want to support. **We can eliminate this choice.**
- Choice B focuses on water displacement, not the speed of movement. **We can eliminate this choice.**
- Choice C focuses on the "power" needed to move, not the speed of movement. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Choice D focuses on speed of movement, and finds that having a sail made sharp turns take "significantly less time". In other words: **sail on back = quicker movements**. This supports the hypothesis made by the scientists. **Choice D is the answer.**

• How should we think about textual evidence questions?

There are **two** types of textual evidence questions, and we need to think about each type a little differently.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

➤ Scientific evidence

In these textual evidence questions, **a hypothesis** will be presented about a subject in science or social science, usually in the context of new research or experimentation.

We won't need to rely on any previous science knowledge: everything we need will be contained in the short passage. Our task is to **interpret** the researchers' hypothesis, **identify** the research outcome that would support that hypothesis, and then **select** the choice that offers that outcome.

This task should remind you of your science classes, in which you've likely needed to confirm or refute a hypothesis based on the outcomes of an experiment.

➤ Literary evidence

In these textual evidence questions, the passage will make **an argument** concerning a particular literary work, like a poem or novel. The choices will then offer a set of quotations from that literary work.

We don't need any previous knowledge of the literary work under discussion. What we will need is the ability to **evaluate** whether the content of each quotation serves as direct evidence for the argument identified in the question.

This task should remind you of your English classes, in which you've likely needed to pull quotations from a text to support your arguments in an analytical essay.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

While these two types of questions might seem quite different, the skills we need to succeed on them, and our approach to finding the answer, should be quite similar for both.

• How to approach textual evidence questions?

To solve a textual evidence question, consider following these steps:

Step 1: Identify the argument

Every textual evidence question, whether scientific or literary, will introduce a central argument for the question. It might be a research hypothesis, or it might be an interpretation of a literary text, but either way it will be clearly stated. Your first job is to identify that argument and draw it out from the text.

- For instance, in the example question at the start of this article, you can identify the following hypothesis: *"the sail-like structure running down the back of the dinosaur Spinosaurus aegyptiacus improved the animal's success in underwater pursuits of prey species capable of making quick, evasive movements"*.

Step 2: Create a test phrase

Once you've identified the argument you want to support, you should rephrase that argument in the simplest terms possible.

- For example, consider that hypothesis about *Spinosaurus aegyptiacus*. The claim is that a sail would help the dinosaur

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

hunt quick prey while underwater. You could simplify that as follows:

Sail on back = quicker underwater movement

The best choice will make this same argument.

Step 3: Test the choices

Read each choice while keeping your test phrase in mind. Does the choice say something different than the test phrase? **If so, eliminate that choice.**

Once you find a choice that makes the same argument as your test phrase, **you've found the answer.** **You can select that choice with confidence.**

Top tips

1. Stay specific

Don't stray beyond the focus of the passage. Eliminate choices that broaden or blur the argument you're meant to be supporting. And look out for small twists and turns that make a choice *seem* relevant when it actually changes the focus of the argument.

Look at the choices in our example question:

- Choice A introduces a new idea of "power" without connecting it to speed of movement. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

- Choice B introduces the idea of "water displacement", which isn't discussed in the passage. **We can eliminate this choice.**

2. Be strict

Remember, we're looking for the **strongest and most direct evidence**. If a choice "almost" or "kind of" feels like evidence, you can likely eliminate it. If you need to connect too many dots to make the evidence match the argument, then it's probably not strong evidence.

In our example question, **choice A** introduces the idea of "power".

Now, if we made a whole bunch of extra leaps, we might be able to connect the idea of "power" to the main argument about "speed".

You could say:

The sail used up more power, so maybe it's more powerful, and that might mean that the sail makes the dinosaur swim faster"

But this type of extended, indirect reasoning isn't what we want when we're looking for strong support.

See how you had to use the word "might"? "Maybe" isn't strong enough, and it's a good indication that there's not enough evidence in the passage to support this choice. For example, the additional power consumption also might imply that the sail is inefficient.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

MODEL EXAMPLE

“Mr. Cornelius Johnson, Office-Seeker” is a 1900 short story by Paul Laurence Dunbar. In the story, the narrator describes Mr. Cornelius Johnson’s appearance as conveying his exaggerated sense of his importance: _____

Which quotation from “Mr. Cornelius Johnson, Office-Seeker” most effectively illustrates the claim?

- A. “He carried himself always as if he were passing under his own triumphal arch.”
- B. “The grey Prince Albert was scrupulously buttoned about his form, and a shiny top hat replaced the felt of the afternoon.”
- C. “Mr. Cornelius Johnson always spoke in a large and important tone.”
- D. “It was a beautiful day in balmy May and the sun shone pleasantly on Mr. Cornelius Johnson’s very spruce Prince Albert suit of grey as he alighted from the train in Washington.”

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

First we need to focus in on the claim our evidence needs to support:

“the narrator describes Mr. Cornelius Johnson’s appearance as conveying his exaggerated sense of his importance”

We can simplify this claim to make our lives a bit easier:

exaggerated self-importance

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

Let's test this phrase against each of the choices:

- Choice B shows that Cornelius Johnson is tidy and well-dressed, but it doesn't suggest that he is arrogant, or that he exaggerates his self-importance. **We can eliminate this choice.**
- Choice D focuses more on the setting than on Cornelius. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Now choices A and C are a bit trickier. C even includes the word "important". But remember to **be strict**: we don't want a choice that simply says Cornelius acted important, we need evidence of **exaggerated** self-importance.

Choice C is a pretty literal description of Cornelius, telling us what his voice sounds like. Also, the prompt focuses on Cornelius' *appearance*—what he looks like, not what he sounds like. Choice A introduces a comical and hyperbolic description of Cornelius walking around like a big shot.

Choice A is definitely more "exaggerated". **Choice A is the answer.**

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Several studies of sediment (e.g., dirt, pieces of rock, etc.) in streams have shown an inverse correlation between sediment grain size and downstream distance from the primary sediment source, suggesting that stream length has a sorting effect on sediment. In a study of sediment sampled at more than a dozen sites in Alpine streams, however, geologists Camille Litty and Fritz Schlunegger found that cross-site variations in grain size were not associated with differences in downstream distance, though they did not conclude that downstream distance is irrelevant to grain size. Rather, they concluded that sediment influx in these streams may have been sufficiently spatially diffuse to prevent the typical sorting effect from being observed.

Which finding about the streams in the study, if true, would most directly support Litty and Schlunegger's conclusion?

- A. The streams contain several types of sediment that are not typically found in streams where the sorting effect has been demonstrated.
- B. The streams are fed by multiple tributaries that carry significant volumes of sediment and that enter the streams downstream of the sampling sites.
- C. The streams mostly originate from the same source, but their lengths vary considerably due to the different courses they take.
- D. The streams regularly experience portions of their banks collapsing into the water at multiple points upstream of the sampling sites

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

2. In the 1970s, a roughly 60,000-year-old piece of hyena bone marked with nine notches was discovered at a site in western France once inhabited by Neanderthals. Although many believe that only modern humans developed systems for notating numbers, one archaeologist asserts that this artifact may be a sign that Neanderthals also recorded numerical information. The notches on the bone are unevenly spaced but approximately parallel, and microscopic analysis reveals that they were made with a single stone tool; according to the archaeologist, this suggests that the notches were all made at one time by one individual as a means of counting something.

Which finding, if true, would most directly weaken the underlined claim?

- A. Parallel lines are a common feature in modern humans' early systems for recording numerical information.
- B. More than nine approximately parallel notches made with a different stone tool are present on another artifact found at a site in western France.
- C. It would have taken careful effort to make evenly spaced lines on bone with the stone tools typically used by Neanderthals.
- D. Decorative art discovered at another Neanderthal site in western France primarily features patterns of unevenly spaced parallel lines.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

3. A researcher conducted an experiment inspired by studies suggesting that people may benefit from feeling frightened in certain circumstances, such as when watching scary movies or visiting haunted attractions. The researcher recruited several participants and had them walk through a local haunted house attraction. Immediately after exiting the attraction, each participant completed a survey about their experience. Based on the survey responses, the researcher claims that feeling frightened in controlled situations can boost a person's mood and confidence.

Which quotation from a participant would best illustrate the researcher's claim?

- A. "My friends kept laughing as we were walking through the haunted house."
- B. "The haunted house was scary at first, but I knew everyone was just acting, so I felt less scared after a few minutes."
- C. "The sense of relief I felt at the end of the haunted house was similar to the feelings I have when I finish a scary movie."
- D. "After I came out of the haunted house, I felt very accomplished and less stressed."

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

4. In the 1980s, many musicians and journalists in the English-speaking world began to draw attention to music from around the globe—such as mbaqanga from South Africa and quan họ from Vietnam—that can't be easily categorized according to British or North American popular music genres, typically referring to such music as “world music.” While some scholars have welcomed this development for bringing diverse musical forms to prominence in countries where they'd previously been overlooked, musicologist Su Zheng claims that the concept of world music homogenizes highly distinct traditions by reducing them all to a single category.

Which finding about mbaqanga and quan họ, if true, would most directly support Zheng's claim?

- A. Mbaqanga is significantly more popular in the English-speaking world than quan họ is.
- B. Mbaqanga and quan họ developed independently of each other and have little in common musically.
- C. Mbaqanga and quan họ are now performed by a diverse array of musicians with no direct connections to South Africa or Vietnam.
- D. Mbaqanga and quan họ are highly distinct from British and North American popular music genres but similar to each other.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Command of textual evidence questions introduce a claim about an unfamiliar topic and then ask you to identify evidence that directly supports that claim. The claim will always be clearly stated, and it will often be accompanied by useful background information.

The first thing you should do is identify the specific claim you need to support. Let's try that here:

CLAIM: Sediment influx in these streams may have been sufficiently spatially diffuse to prevent the typical sorting effect from being observed.

Lots of big words there. Let's see if we can simplify:

SIMPLIFIED CLAIM: The sources of the sediment were spread out over a large area, which prevented the researchers from seeing the sorting effect on the grains.

Read through the choices. Which finding about the streams in the study would support the claim?

There's a lot of dense background information here. Let's simplify that as well:

- Sediment = dirt and pieces of rocks.
- Studies have shown that grains of sediment get smaller as they get farther away from their source (source = whatever rock or bank they broke off from).
- Theory: stream length has a sorting effect on sediment.
- But a new study of sediment from different sites found that grain size was *not* associated with differences in distance from the source.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

- However, the researchers did *not* conclude that the theory was wrong.

So, the researchers found some evidence that *could* disprove the theory—that streams have a sorting effect on sediment. But they don't actually think the theory is wrong. Instead, they think that the sources of sediment were so spread out that they just couldn't *see* the sorting effect.

What finding about the streams would support the idea that the sediment is entering them from sources that are very spread out?

(D) most directly supports the claim: if stream banks are collapsing into the water at multiple points, then sediment is getting into the water at those various points. This supports the conclusion that the inflow of sediment is very spread out.

QUESTION 2:

Command of textual evidence questions usually introduce a claim about an unfamiliar topic and then ask you to identify evidence that directly supports that claim. But this question has a twist: you're asked to *weaken* the claim instead.

Here the claim is underlined for us:

CLAIM: The notches were made at one time, by one person, as a means of counting something.

Read through the choices. What would weaken this claim?

To weaken the claim, we need to weaken the connection between the claim and the evidence the archaeologist uses to support it.

The text gives us two pieces of evidence:

- The notches on the bone are unevenly spaced but approximately parallel.
- Microscopic analysis reveals that they were made with a single stone tool.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

With that in mind, let's go to the choices and try narrowing them down.

One way to do this is to eliminate choices that aren't relevant. For example, (C) doesn't affect the claim either way. The fact that it took effort to make the lines doesn't tell us anything about what the lines were *for*. It doesn't affect the connection between the evidence and the claim. We can eliminate (C).

Repeat this process for the remaining choices. What's left?

(D) most directly weakens the claim by pointing to a different interpretation of the evidence: if unevenly spaced parallel lines were found on “decorative art” at another Neanderthal site, that would suggest that the hyena bone is probably decorative art as well — *not* a counting tool.

(D) is the answer.

QUESTION 3:

Command of textual evidence questions introduce a claim about an unfamiliar topic and then ask you to identify evidence that directly supports that claim. The claim will always be clearly stated, and it will often be accompanied by useful background information.

The first thing you should do is identify the specific claim you need to support. Let's try that here:

CLAIM: “feeling frightened in controlled situations can boost a person's mood and confidence”

Read through the choices. Which provides evidence for the claim?

Based on the stated claim, we're looking for information that does two things: 1) it should provide evidence of “feeling frightened in controlled situations”, and 2) it should connect that experience with boosted mood and confidence.

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

In (B) the participant says they were frightened at first, but they became less frightened due to the controlled nature of the situation. We don't have evidence of boosted mood or confidence, so we can eliminate this choice.

Which other choices are missing ideas that are central to the claim?

(D) connects the experience of a haunted house (“feeling frightened in controlled situations”) to feeling accomplished and less stressed.

Feeling accomplished is very similar to the idea of confidence. “Less stressed” is definitely an example of boosted mood.

(D) best illustrates the claim and is the answer.

QUESTION 4:

Command of textual evidence questions introduce a claim about an unfamiliar topic and then ask you to identify evidence that directly supports that claim. The claim will always be clearly stated, and it will often be accompanied by useful background information.

The first thing you should do is identify the specific claim you need to support. Let's try that here:

CLAIM: Zheng doesn't welcome the concept of “world music” because it homogenizes distinct musical traditions by reducing them all to a single category.

Or, to simplify further:

SIMPLIFIED CLAIM: The concept of “world music” does the music a disservice because it lumps very different kinds of music into one category.

Read through the choices. Which finding about mbaqanga and quan họ would support the claim?

Unit 1- Lesson 1- Command of Evidence: Textual

Based on the stated claim, we're looking for a finding that would suggest that mbaqanga and quan họ do *not* belong in the same category.

Knowing this, can you eliminate any choices? For example, (A) compares the popularity of mbaqanga and quan họ within the English-speaking world, but a difference in *popularity* doesn't necessarily mean that they shouldn't be *categorized* together. We can eliminate (A).

Of the remaining choices, which one if true *would* suggest that they don't belong in the same category?

(B) most directly supports the claim and is the answer.

UNIT 1

INFORMATION AND IDEAS

LESSON 2: COMMAND OF EVIDENCE- QUANTITATIVE

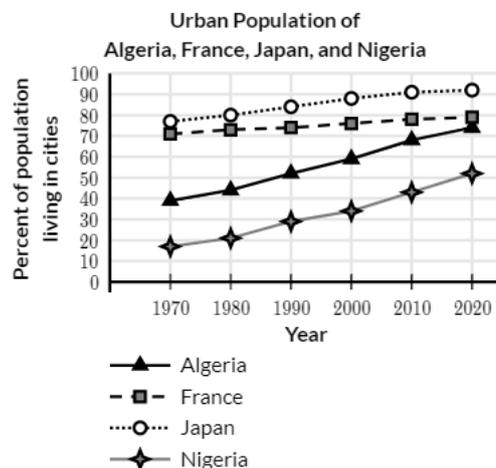
Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

- What are "quantitative evidence" questions?

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will provide you with a graph or table that presents information about an unfamiliar topic. The question will then offer some context for that information and ask you to complete a sentence by **effectively using data from the graph or table**.

Quantitative evidence questions will look like this:

QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE: EXAMPLE



The share of the world's population living in cities has increased dramatically since 1970, but this change has not been uniform. France and Japan, for example, were already heavily urbanized in 1970, with 70% or more of the population living in cities. The main contributors to the world's urbanization since 1970 have been countries like Algeria, whose population went from _____

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

Which choice most effectively uses data from the graph to complete the assertion?

- A. less than 20% urban in 1970 to more than 50% urban in 2020.
- B. less than 40% urban in 1970 to around 90% urban in 2020.
- C. around 40% urban in 1970 to more than 70% urban in 2020.
- D. around 50% urban in 1970 to around 90% urban in 2020.

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

This graph contains a lot of information, as does the paragraph. Let's simplify things by focusing on just the sentence we've been asked to complete:

- The main contributors to the world's urbanization since 1970 have been countries like Algeria, whose population went from _____

So while the graph offers information about several countries, we only need to find data about **Algeria**.

A quick glance at the choices shows that we're looking to compare the data for Algeria in two years: **1970** and **2020**.

The key to the graph shows us that Algeria's data is marked by a triangle and a solid line. According to the graph:

- Algeria's urban population in 1970 looks to be around **40%**

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

- Algeria's urban population in 2020 looks to be around 75%

Only choice C accurately reflects this data. **Choice C is the answer.**

- **How should we think about quantitative evidence questions?**

The challenges of answering quantitative evidence questions can be split into **three parts**. Let's look at each challenge separately.

➤ **Understanding the argument**

Every quantitative evidence question will provide more information than we need. One of the keys to successfully answering these questions is *knowing what data to look for*, so we can avoid being distracted by all the extra details and find the answer more quickly.

The way to do this is by **carefully reading the prompt text**. This paragraph will provide the context we need to understand the data in the graph or table. This paragraph will also **outline the argument that our quantitative evidence must support**.

This argument is the most important part of the question. Whichever data we use to complete the sentence must provide evidence in support of that argument. In other words: it tells us what to look for.

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

➤ Reading the data

The data provided in a quantitative evidence question can be presented in a variety of forms. The question might include a bar graph, a line graph, a table, or any number of other formats that can be used to visually represent data.

Luckily, you've almost certainly encountered all of these types of data visualizations in your math and science courses. You can rely on this experience to help you accurately read graphs and tables on test day.

Remember, though: graphs and tables will include **more data than you need, which will require you to sift through and read around that extra information.** If you're working quickly, or looking back and forth between the question and the graph, your eyes can easily drift. Double check that you're looking in the right place and at the right data.

➤ Evaluating the choices

Quantitative evidence questions will offer **two** different types of incorrect choices alongside the correct answer.

1. False statements

These choices are false according to the information in the graph or table. They misread or misrepresent data.

2. True statements

These choices are true according to the information in the graph or table. They accurately represent data, but they *fail to provide direct evidence for the argument being made.*

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

False statements are easy to eliminate. You can simply compare the claim in the choice to the data in the graph. If those things disagree, **you can eliminate that choice.**

True statements, however, are trickier to handle. Instead of deciding if they're true or false, you'll need to decide if they support the argument made in the paragraph. This is why the first challenge of "understanding the argument" is so important.

**Note: If a question includes false statements among the choices, then all incorrect choices for that question will be false.*

- **How to approach quantitative evidence questions**

To solve a quantitative evidence question, [follow these steps:](#)

Step 1: Skim the graph

You don't need to dig into the graph or table yet, as you don't know what data to look for. However, it can still be useful to familiarize yourself with what the graph or table contains. You can read the title, the labels, the units, and the key. Those should give you a good idea of what the graph contains without taking up too much of your time.

Step 2: Read the paragraph

The text should be your main focus. **It will tell you what data to look for.**

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

Sometimes, like in **our example question**, the text will explicitly direct you to a specific piece of information: a certain time, place, or set of conditions that can be pinpointed within the graph or table. In these cases, you can simply identify the correct information in the graph or table and/or test the choices against the provided data.

Other times, the text will present a general argument, and you'll need to select data that backs up that argument. In these cases, there may be multiple pieces of information that could potentially serve as evidence, so you won't be able to just pull the correct data from the graph. The best thing to do here is to summarize the argument being made in your own words. Then you can test that summary against each of the choices to see which provides effective evidence.

Step 3: *Validate the choices*

As we identified earlier, quantitative evidence choices can contain both **true statements** and **false statements**.

Read the choices and check them against the information in the graph. Are the choices true or false?

- If they're false, **eliminate the false choices**.
- If they're true, **proceed to step 4**.

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

Step 4: Find the best evidence

Once you've validated the choices, you should have eliminated any statements that are false according to the graph or table. This leaves you with choices that are true, but that *may not provide effective evidence for the argument in the text.*

Take your summary of the argument and test it against each remaining choice. Only one choice will provide direct support for that argument. **You can select this choice with confidence.**

Top tips

- Use your finger/cursor

When you're looking at a graph or table that contains multiple data points, your eyes can easily drift. Placing your finger or your cursor directly on the information you're looking for can help you avoid silly mistakes due to looking in the wrong place.

- Check if the choices are true or false

Usually, when one incorrect choice makes a false statement, all the incorrect choices for that question will make false statements. And when one incorrect choice is true, all the incorrect choices will be true.

Determining this early can be helpful, as it changes the nature of your task. If the choices are false, you can easily eliminate your way to the correct answer. If the choices are true, you'll need to think more deeply about the argument being made.

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1.

Distribution of Ecosystem Services Affected by Invasive Species by Service Type

Region (Overall)	Provisioning (75%)	Regulating (21%)	Cultural (4%)
West	73%	27%	0%
North	88%	12%	0%
South	79%	14%	7%
East	83%	6%	11%
Central	33%	67%	0%

To assess the impact of invasive species on ecosystems in Africa, Benis N. Egoh and colleagues reviewed government reports from those nations about how invasive species are undermining ecosystem services (aspects of the ecosystem on which residents depend). The services were sorted into three categories: provisioning (material resources from the ecosystem), regulating (natural processes such as cleaning the air or water), and cultural (nonmaterial benefits of ecosystems). Egoh and her team assert that countries in each region reported effects on provisioning services and that provisioning services represent the majority of the reported services.

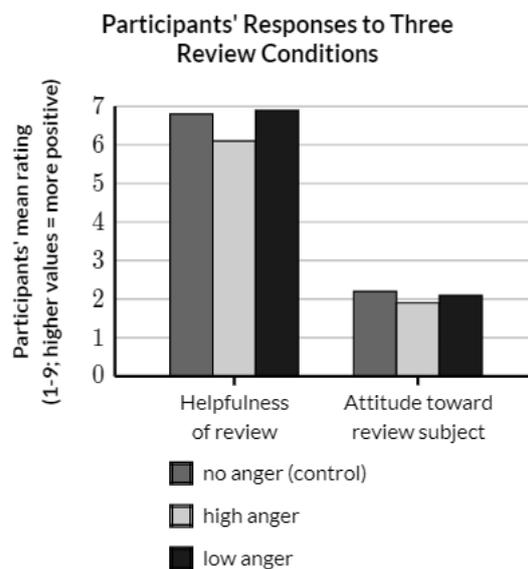
Which choice best describes data from the table that support Egoh and colleagues' assertion?

- A. Provisioning services represent 73% of the services reported for the West region and 33% of those for the Central region, but they represent 75% of the services reported overall.
- B. None of the percentages shown for provisioning services are lower than 33%, and the overall percentage shown for provisioning services is 75%.

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- C. Provisioning services are shown for each region, while no cultural services are shown for some regions.
 - D. The greatest percentage shown for provisioning services is 88% for the North region, and the least shown for provisioning services is 33% for the Central region.
-

2.



To understand how expressions of anger in reviews of products affect readers of those reviews, business scholar Dezhi Yin and colleagues measured study participants' responses to three versions of the same negative review—a control review expressing no anger, a review expressing a high degree of anger, and a review expressing a low degree of anger. Reviewing the data, a student concludes that the mere presence of anger in a review may not negatively affect readers' perceptions of the review, but a high degree of anger in a review does worsen readers' perceptions of the review.

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Which choice best describes data from the graph that support the student's conclusion?

- A. On average, participants' ratings of the helpfulness of the review were substantially higher than were participants' ratings of the reviewed product regardless of which type of review participants had seen.
- B. Compared with participants who saw the control review, participants who saw the low-anger review rated the review as slightly more helpful, whereas participants who saw the high-anger review rated the review as less helpful.
- C. Participants who saw the low-anger review rated the review as slightly more helpful than participants who saw the control review did, but participants' attitude toward the reviewed product was slightly worse when participants saw the low-anger review than when they saw the no-anger review.
- D. Compared with participants who saw the low-anger review, participants who saw the high-anger review rated the review as less helpful and had a less positive attitude toward the reviewed product.

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

3.

Comfort Ratings and Temperature-Adjustment Preferences from One Survey

Participant	Comfort rating	Preferred temperature adjustment
20	-2	Cooler
1	1	Cooler
21	1	Cooler

Nan Gao and her team conducted multiple surveys to determine participants' levels of comfort in a room where the temperature was regulated by a commercial climate control system. Participants filled out surveys several times a day to indicate their level of comfort on a scale from -3 (very cold) to +3 (very hot), with 0 indicating neutral (neither warm nor cool), and to indicate how they would prefer the temperature to be adjusted. The table shows three participants' responses in one of the surveys. According to the table, all three participants wanted the room to be cooler, _____

Which choice most effectively uses data from the table to complete the statement?

- A. and they each reported the same level of comfort.
- B. even though each participant's ratings varied throughout the day.
- C. but participant 20 reported feeling significantly colder than the other two participants did.
- D. but participant 1 reported feeling warmer than the other two participants did.

Unit 1- Lesson 2- Command of Evidence: Quantitative

4. Tadpole Body Mass and Toxin Production after Three Weeks in Ponds

Population density	Average tadpole body mass (milligrams)	Average number of distinct bufadienolide toxins per tadpole	Average amount of bufadienolide per tadpole (nanograms)	Average bufadienolide concentration (nanograms per milligram of tadpole body mass)
High	193.87	22.69	5,815.51	374.22
Medium	254.56	21.65	5,525.72	230.10
Low	258.97	22.08	4,664.99	171.43

Ecologist Veronika Bókony and colleagues investigated within-species competition among common toads (*Bufo bufo*), a species that secretes various unpleasant-tasting toxins called bufadienolides in response to threats. The researchers tested *B. bufo* tadpoles' responses to different levels of competition by creating ponds with different tadpole population densities but a fixed amount of food. Based on analysis of the tadpoles after three weeks, the researchers concluded that increased competition drove bufadienolide production at the expense of growth.

Which choice uses data from the table to most effectively support the researchers' conclusion?

- A. The difference in average tadpole body mass was small between the low and medium population density conditions and substantially larger between the low and high population density conditions.
- B. Tadpoles in the low and medium population density conditions had substantially lower average bufadienolide concentrations but had greater average body masses than those in the high population density condition.
- C. Tadpoles in the high population density condition displayed a relatively modest increase in the average amount of

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bufadienolide but roughly double the average bufadienolide concentration compared to those in the low population density condition.

- D. Tadpoles produced approximately the same number of different bufadienolide toxins per individual across the population density conditions, but average tadpole body mass decreased as population density increased.

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Command of quantitative evidence questions introduce a claim that must be supported with evidence from a graph or table. This claim is usually either the hypothesis or the finding from an experiment or other research. The first thing you should do is identify the claim that you need to support.

In this question, the claim is the researchers' assertion:

CLAIM: Countries in each region reported effects on provisioning services and provisioning services represent the majority of the reported services.

What data from the table supports this claim?

Two support the claim, we need data showing that:

1. Every region reported at least *some* effects on provisioning services—meaning every region reported **more than 0%** for provisioning services.
2. The majority of *all* the reported services are provisioning services—a “majority” being **more than 50%**.

Which choice provides both pieces of information?

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(B) provides this information, and it is the answer.

QUESTION 2:

Command of quantitative evidence questions introduce a claim that must be supported with evidence from a graph or table. This claim is usually either the hypothesis or the finding from an experiment or other research. The first thing you should do is identify the claim that you need to support. Let's do that here:

CLAIM: The mere presence of anger in a review may not negatively affect readers' perceptions of that review, but a high degree of anger in a review does worsen readers' perceptions of that review.

Using the description of the study from the text and graph, we can reword this claim and split it into two parts for more clarity:

REWORDED CLAIM:

1. Low anger *does not* negatively affect readers' perceptions of the review
2. High anger *does* negatively affect readers' perceptions of the review.

What data from the graph supports both parts of this claim?

Note that the claim is not about readers' perception of the reviewed product—it's about how the readers perceive *the review itself*. That means we can ignore the "attitude toward the reviewed product" part of the graph.

Looking at the "helpfulness of review" part of the graph, the data tells us a few things:

- Compared to the no-anger (control) review, low anger reviews were rated as a little bit more helpful. This supports the first part of the claim.

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- Compared to the no-anger (control) review, high anger reviews were rated as less helpful. This supports the second part of the claim.

Which choice best sums up this information?

Only (B) sums up the relevant information from the graph. All the other choices focus on irrelevant data about readers' attitudes toward the reviewed product.

(B) is the answer.

➤ Top Tip: What data is NOT relevant?

The tables and graphs in command of quantitative evidence questions will often contain more data than you actually need.

For example, in this question, the claim is only about readers' perceptions of the review itself —so you don't need any data at all from the "attitude toward the reviewed product" part of the graph. Watch out for wrong choices that accurately express some information from the graph but *don't* actually affect the claim! The correct answer will always be true to the graph *and* support the claim

QUESTION 3:

Command of quantitative evidence questions usually introduce a claim that must be supported with evidence from a graph or table. This claim is often either the hypothesis or the finding from an experiment or other research.

In this case, there is no claim: the text simply describes the setup for some surveys designed to determine participants' comfort levels in a climate-controlled room. Our task is to complete the statement about the survey responses using data from the table.

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So let's head directly to the choices.

Which choice accurately describes the data from the table?

The statement already describes one column from the table: all three participants wanted the room to be cooler. The other column contains their comfort ratings. The text explains the comfort rating scale: it goes from -3 (very cold) to $+3$ (very hot), with 0 being neutral.

So what do these ratings mean? Which choice accurately sums up this information?

(C) accurately sums up the information in the comfort rating column.

(C) is the answer.

QUESTION 4:

Command of quantitative evidence questions introduce a claim that must be supported with evidence from a graph or table. This claim is usually either the hypothesis or the finding from an experiment or other research. The first thing you should do is identify the claim that you need to support.

In this question, the claim is the researchers' conclusion:

CLAIM: Increased competition drove bufadienolide production at the expense of growth.

In other words:

SIMPLIFIED CLAIM: More competition = more bufadienolide and less growth.

What data from the table supports this claim?

The table shows data for three different tadpole densities: low, medium, and high. To support the claim, we need to demonstrate

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that the tadpoles in the high-density pond (meaning the tadpoles with the most competition):

1. made more bufadienolide than the others, and
2. grew less than the others

Which choice provides both pieces of information?

Sure enough, the table shows that:

1. the average body mass of the high-density group is MUCH smaller than the others, and
2. the average concentration of bufadienolide is MUCH higher

Only (B) provides this information. (B) is the answer.

➤ Top Tip: What data is NOT relevant?

The tables and graphs in command of quantitative evidence questions will often contain more data than you actually need.

For example, in this question, the “average number of distinct bufadienolide toxins” column is irrelevant: the conclusion is that the tadpoles in the high-density pond produced *more* bufadienolide overall, not more *kinds* of bufadienolide. Watch out for wrong choices like (D): choices that accurately express some information from the graph but *don't* actually affect the claim! The correct answer will always be true to the graph *and* support the claim.

UNIT 1

INFORMATION AND IDEAS

LESSON 3: CENTRAL IDEAS AND DETAILS

Unit 1- Lesson 3- Central ideas and details

- What are "central ideas and details" questions?

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will present a short passage for you to read. The passage may be excerpted from a work of literature or from a scholarly essay.

Once you read the passage, you'll be asked either to identify **the main idea of the text** or to answer a specific question **based on the text**.

Central ideas and details questions will look like this:

CENTRAL IDEAS AND DETAILS: EXAMPLE

Many intellectual histories of the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s rely heavily on essays and other explicitly ideological works as primary sources, a tendency that can overrepresent the perspectives of a small number of thinkers, most of whom were male. Historian Ashley D. Farmer has shown that expanding the array of primary sources to encompass more types of print material—including political cartoons, advertisements, and artwork—leads to a much better understanding of the movement and the crucial and diverse roles that Black women played in shaping it.

Which choice best describes the main idea of the text?

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- A. Before Farmer's research, historians had largely ignored the intellectual dimensions of the Black Power movement.
- B. Farmer's methods and research have enriched the historical understanding of the Black Power movement and Black women's contributions to it.
- C. Other historians of the Black Power movement have criticized Farmer's use of unconventional primary sources.
- D. The figures in the Black Power movement whom historians tend to cite would have agreed with Farmer's conclusions about women's roles in the movement.

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

We should start by **paraphrasing the passage in our own words**:

- Histories of the Black Power movement tend to focus on men.
- Ashley D. Farmer studies a wider variety of sources.
- Farmer's work increases understanding of Black Power movement, especially women's roles.

In order to **describe "the main idea of the text"**, the best choice will need to accurately capture these ideas. It will also need to avoid introducing information that's *not* covered in the passage.

If we were to **make a prediction**, the main idea might be something like

"Farmer has improved the study of the Black Power movement by exploring the roles of women."

Now let's look at the choices. Do any of them match our prediction?

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- Choice A actually says the *opposite* of what we learned in the passage. We're told that there were "*many* intellectual histories" of the Black Power movement before Farmer's. **We can eliminate this choice.**
 - Choice C introduces information not included in the passage. The text doesn't mention what other historians think of Farmer's research. If it's not mentioned, then it can't be a "main idea". **We can eliminate this choice.**
 - Choice D introduces information not included in the passage. We're not told about the beliefs of "figures in the Black Power movement." If the text doesn't mention this information, then it can't be a "main idea". **We can eliminate this choice.**
 - Only choice B accurately captures the central ideas we identified in the text, including a specific mention of "Black women's contributions" to the Black Power movement. Choice B also avoids introducing any ideas that can't be found in the passage. **Choice B is the answer.**
-

• How should we think about central ideas and details questions?

Central ideas and details questions focus on reading comprehension, and they do so in a fairly straightforward way.

We won't need any outside knowledge. We won't need to analyze the text too deeply or do any complex reasoning. We'll simply need to read the passage carefully.

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➤ Central ideas

Central ideas questions ask us to identify "the main idea" of the passage. Since the passages for these questions are fairly short, finding this main idea shouldn't be too tricky.

The main idea **should**

- cover a majority of the details introduced in the text.
- mention any particular points of emphasis from the text.

The main idea **should not**

- focus too intently on just one detail from the text.
- introduce new ideas not addressed within the text.
- contradict information from the text.

➤ Details

Details questions ask us to answer a specific question about an idea contained in the passage. Details questions can usually be answered using information from one particular sentence in the text.

These questions will contain **words, phrases, or ideas** that direct us to the appropriate part of the text. Once there, we simply need to find the correct detail needed to answer the question.

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➤ How to approach central ideas and details questions?

To solve a central ideas and details question, consider following these steps:

Step 1: *Summarize the text in your own words*

Don't just skim the passage. Read it closely, and try to summarize the ideas you encounter in your own words. By the time you finish reading, you should have a strong understanding of the information contained in the passage.

Step 2: *Determine the task*

The question that follows the passage will reveal your task. Does it ask about the "main idea"? Or does it ask about a particular piece of information?

Step 3: *Revisit the text*

If the question is about the main idea, then revisit your summary of the text to find the overarching theme.

If the question asks about something specific, then head to that section of the passage to search out the correct detail.

Step 4: *Predict and eliminate*

Based on your understanding of the passage, you should be able to answer to the question fairly accurately without even looking at the choices. If someone asked you to summarize the text, what would you say?

For instance, in the example question above, we might predict that the main idea is something like

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"Ashley D. Farmer has improved the study of the Black Power movement by exploring the roles of women."

Once you predict the answer in your own words, it should be pretty easy to find a match among the choices. If you're still not sure, you can eliminate your way to the answer by getting rid of choices that contradict the passage or introduce new ideas.

Top tips

1. Stay specific

Don't stray beyond the focus of the passage. Eliminate choices that broaden or blur the ideas in discussed in the text. And look out for small twists and turns that make a choice *seem* relevant when it actually expresses something unsupported by the passage.

➤ Look at the choices **in our example question:**

Choice C introduces information not included in the passage. The text doesn't mention what "other historians" think of Farmer's research.

If it's not mentioned, then it can't be a "main idea". **We can eliminate this choice.**

2. Keep your prediction as short and simple as possible

If your prediction is just as long as the passage itself, it's not simple enough! **Keep simplifying** it until you can sum it up in one brief idea, then use that prediction as a test. The more concise

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your prediction, the quicker and easier it will be to check it against the choices.

3. Use keywords as a map

When a question asks about a detail from the passage, it will often do so by **referencing key words and phrases** from the text. Find those words in the passage: they'll direct you towards the answer you seek!

MODEL EXAMPLE

The following text is adapted from Robert Louis Stevenson's 1883 novel *Treasure Island*. Bill is a sailor staying at the Admiral Benbow, an inn run by the narrator's parents.

Every day when [Bill] came back from his stroll he would ask if any seafaring men had gone by along the road. At first we thought it was the want of company of his own kind that made him ask this question, but at last we began to see he was desirous to avoid them. When a seaman did [stay] at the Admiral Benbow (as now and then some did) he would look in at him through the curtained door before he entered the parlour; and he was always sure to be as silent as a mouse when any such was present.

According to the text, why does Bill regularly ask about "seafaring men"?

- A. He isn't sure that other guests at the inn will be welcoming of sailors.
- B. He's trying to secure a job as part of the crew on a new ship.
- C. He's hoping to find an old friend and fellow sailor.
- D. He doesn't want to encounter any other sailor unexpectedly.

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ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

This question asks about a **detail** from the text.

Specifically, the question references Bill ""asking about seafaring men". **Let's use that phrase as a guide and find it in the passage:**

Every day when [Bill] came back from his stroll he would **ask if any seafaring men** had gone by along the road.

Ok, so this just tells us that Bill *does* ask about "seafaring men", but it doesn't tell us why. **Let's check the next sentence to see if it tells us what we need to know:**

At first we thought it was the want of company of his own kind that made him ask this question, but at last we began to see he was desirous to avoid them.

Here we go. This sentence tells us that Bill "was desirous to avoid [seafaring men]". **In other words, he wanted to stay away from them!**

Let's use that as our prediction:

"Bill wants to stay away from sailors".

Which choice says something similar to our prediction?

Choice D is similar to our prediction. **Choice D is the answer.**

Unit 1- Lesson 3- Central ideas and details

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. To protect themselves when being attacked, hagfish—jawless marine animals that resemble eels—will release large quantities of slimy, mucus-like threads. Because these threads are unusually strong and elastic, scientist Atsuko Negishi and her colleagues have been trying to recreate them in a lab as an eco-friendly alternative to petroleum-based fibers that are often used in fabrics. The researchers want to reproduce the threads in the lab because farming hagfish for their slime would be expensive and potentially harmful to the hagfish.

Which choice best states the text’s main idea?

- A. Hagfish are not well suited to being raised in captivity.
- B. The ability of hagfish to slime their attackers compensates for their being jawless.
- C. Hagfish have inspired researchers to develop a new petroleum-based fabric.
- D. The slimy threads that hagfish release might help researchers create a new kind of fabric.

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2. NASA's *Cassini* probe has detected an unusual wobble in the rotation of Mimas, Saturn's smallest moon. Using a computer model to study Mimas's gravitational interactions with Saturn and tidal forces, geophysicist Alyssa Rhoden and colleagues have proposed that this wobble could be due to a liquid ocean moving beneath the moon's icy surface. The researchers believe other moons should be examined to see if they too might have oceans hidden beneath their surfaces.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

- A. Rhoden and colleagues were the first to confirm that several of Saturn's moons contain hidden oceans.
- B. Research has failed to identify signs that there is an ocean hidden beneath the surface of Mimas.
- C. Rhoden and colleagues created a new computer model that identifies moons with hidden oceans without needing to analyze the moons' rotation.
- D. Research has revealed that an oddity in the rotation of Mimas could be explained by an ocean hidden beneath its surface.

Unit 1- Lesson 3- Central ideas and details

3. In 2022, researchers rediscovered ancient indigenous glyphs, or drawings, on the walls of a cave in Alabama. The cave's ceiling was only a few feet high, affording no position from which the glyphs, being as wide as ten feet, could be viewed or photographed in their entirety. However, the researchers used a technique called photogrammetry to assemble numerous photos of the walls into a 3D model. They then worked with representatives of tribes originally from the region, including the Chickasaw Nation, to understand the significance of the animal and humanoid figures adorning the cave.

According to the text, what challenge did the researchers have to overcome to examine the glyphs?

- A. The cave was so remote that the researchers couldn't easily reach it.
- B. Some of the glyphs were so faint that they couldn't be photographed.
- C. The cave's dimensions prevented the researchers from fully viewing the glyphs.
- D. The researchers were unable to create a 3D model of the cave.

Unit 1- Lesson 3- Central ideas and details

4. Disco remains one of the most ridiculed popular music genres of the late twentieth century. But as scholars have argued, the genre is far less superficial than many people believe. Take the case of disco icon Donna Summer: she may have been associated with popular songs about love and heartbreak (subjects hardly unique to disco, by the way), but like many Black women singers before her, much of her music also reflects concerns about community and identity. These concerns are present in many of the genre's greatest songs, and they generally don't require much digging to reveal.

What does the text most strongly suggest about the disco genre?

- A. It gave rise to a Black women's musical tradition that has endured even though the genre itself faded in the late twentieth century.
- B. It has been unjustly ignored by most scholars despite the importance of the themes addressed by many of the genre's songs.
- C. It has been unfairly dismissed for the inclusion of subject matter that is also found in other musical genres.
- D. It evolved over time from a superficial genre focused on romance to a genre focused on more serious concerns.

Unit 1- Lesson 3- Central ideas and details

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Some central ideas and details questions will ask you about the “main idea” of a text. The main idea will include the central focus of the text and its major details. It won't introduce new information or contradict information from the text.

When looking for a main idea, you should always start by summarizing the text in your own words. How would you summarize the text here?

We might summarize the text like this:

Hagfish release lots of slimy thread, which is unusually strong and elastic. Negishi and company are interested in making lab-created hagfish fibers so we don't have to use petroleum to make fabrics. They want to make it in the lab because it's cost-prohibitive and possibly harmful to the hagfish to farm them.

This summary can serve as a *prediction* for the main idea of the text. Take a look through the choices: do any of them feel similar to our summary?

(D) matches the summary we created. (D) is the answer.

QUESTION 2:

Some central ideas and details questions will ask you about the “main idea” of a text. The main idea will include the central focus of the text and its major details. It won't introduce new information or contradict information from the text.

When looking for a main idea, you should always start by summarizing the text in your own words. How would you

We might summarize the text like this:

Unit 1- Lesson 3- Central ideas and details

Mimas is wobbly. Rhoden and friends modeled its gravitational interactions with Saturn, and their best guess is that the wobble comes from a hidden ocean sloshing around inside of Mimas. Now they want to look at other moons to see if they might also possibly have secret oceans inside of them!

This summary can serve as a *prediction* for the main idea of the text. Take a look through the choices: do any of them feel similar to our summary?

(D) matches the summary we created. (D) is the answer.

QUESTION :3

Some central ideas and details questions will ask you about an idea or detail from the text. These questions can usually be answered using information from one particular sentence in the passage.

Before diving into the particulars, you may find it useful to briefly summarize the passage in your own words. How would you summarize the text here?

We might summarize the text like this:

In 2022, researchers found ancient glyphs on the walls of a cave in Alabama. The glyphs were very wide, but the cave's ceiling was low, so you couldn't see all the glyphs at once. So the researchers used photogrammetry: they took a bunch of different photos of the glyphs and assembled them into one big picture. Then they worked with local tribes to interpret the glyphs.

The question stem wants us to figure out what problem in the cave made the glyphs hard to look at. Of the choices, which one matches information in the summary?

(C) accurately summarizes the challenge researchers had to overcome to get a good look at the glyphs, and so it is our answer.

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QUESTION 4:

Some central ideas and details questions will ask you about an idea or detail from the text. These questions can usually be answered using information from one particular sentence in the passage.

Before diving into the particulars, you may find it useful to briefly summarize the passage in your own words. How would you summarize the text here?

We might summarize the text like this:

People make fun of disco, but it's not as superficial as you might think. Donna Summer's music reflects concerns about community and identity as a Black woman, not just love and heartbreak (which is also represented plenty in less-ridiculed genres of music). Many popular disco songs reflect these themes, and it's not hard to find them.

Of the choices, which one matches information about disco in the summary?

(C) is the only choice that's supported by the text, and so it is our answer!

UNIT 1

INFORMATION AND IDEAS

LESSON 4: INFRENCES

Unit 1- Lesson 4- Inference

- **What are "inference" questions?**

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will provide an unfinished passage that introduces information about an unfamiliar topic. Based on that information, you'll be asked to select the choice that **most logically completes the text**.

Inference questions will look like this:

INFERENCES: EXAMPLE

Adaptations to cold temperatures have high metabolic costs. It is expensive, in terms of energy use, for land plants and animals to withstand very cold temperatures, and it gets more expensive the colder it gets, which means that the lower the air temperature, the fewer species have evolved to survive it. This factor, in conjunction with the decline in air temperature with increasing elevation, explains the distribution of species diversity in mountain ecosystems: you find fewer species high up a mountain than at the mountain's base because _____

Which choice most logically completes the text?

- A. there are relatively few environments hospitable to species that are adapted to live in low air temperatures.
- B. there are relatively few species with the adaptations necessary to tolerate the temperatures at high elevations.

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- C. adaptations that allow plants and animals to survive in rocky environments are metabolically costly.
 - D. some mountain environments are at elevations so high that no plants or animals can survive them.
-

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

We should start by paraphrasing the information provided in the passage:

- Cold temperatures are costly for organisms to survive in.
- Few species have evolved to survive cold weather.
- The temperature is colder at higher elevation.
- Fewer species live at the top of a mountain than at the base of the mountain.

In order to logically complete the text, we need **to connect** the dots between these ideas. Which choice does that?

Choice A has a different focus than the provided information. It focuses on *the number of environments* instead of *the number of species*. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Choice C has a different focus than the provided information. It focuses on *rocky environments* instead of *high elevations* or *cold temperatures*. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Choice D doesn't explain the claim we want to focus on. Instead, it makes a *new claim* about elevation and species diversity. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Only choice B connects all the ideas provided in the passage. It uses the first few bullets we identified to explain the final bullet:

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- Few species can survive cold weather.
- Weather is cold at high elevation.

So...

- Few species can survive at high elevation.

Choice **B** is the answer.

• How should we think about inference questions?

Inference questions are all about how we connect information and ideas to create arguments.

We can break arguments into **two** basic parts: **premises** and **conclusions**.

- **Premises** are the facts on which an argument is based. When premises are connected, they should provide strong evidence for the argument's conclusion.
- The **conclusion** is the heart of the argument. It's the overall claim that the argument's author is trying to support.

Our example question above presents the following pieces of information:

1. Cold temperatures are costly for organisms to survive in.
2. Few species have evolved to survive cold weather.
3. The temperature is colder at higher elevation.
4. Fewer species live at the top of a mountain than at the base of the mountain.

In this case, we've been provided three premises (statements 1, 2, and 3) and the argument's conclusion (statement 4). Notice how

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the blank is preceded by the transition word "because". This means we're looking for **further support, not a further conclusion**. Our job for this question is to find the choice that completes the premises, tying them together in a way that supports the conclusion already identified.

Sometimes, an inference passage will present a set of premises, and your task will be to determine the appropriate conclusion. Other times, an inference passage will include the conclusion, and your task will be to identify a gap in the premises that must be filled.

Either way, the basic task is the same: **you need to identify what is missing from the argument, and fill that gap with one of the choices**.

• How to approach inference questions

To solve an inference question, consider following these steps:

➤ **Step 1:** **Separate the text into bullet points**

Everything you need to successfully answer an inference question is contained within the provided passage. Therefore, to find the answer, you'll need to read closely and carefully consider the information contained in the text.

A great way to do this is to take each idea in the passage and turn it into its own bullet point. This will create a step-by-step progression for the argument being made and allow you to see where any gaps might exist.

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➤ Step 2: *Examine the argument*

Consider each piece of information offered in the passage. Then consider how those pieces fit together. Do they add up to something? What's the connection between them?

Each inference question is like a mystery. Everything you need to solve that mystery is provided for you. You just need to be a detective and piece the clues together!

By the end of this step, you should have a solid understanding of the argument being made. This should give you some idea of what might fit in the blank. At the very least, you'll be better prepared to recognize what *doesn't* fit in the blank.

➤ Step 3: *Explore the choices*

Look at the choices one by one. Ask yourself if the information contained in the choice completes the argument in the passage.

Be wary of choices that broaden the discussion or introduce ideas not explicitly mentioned in the rest of the passage. The arguments made in inference passages are often highly specific. **Eliminate any choices that stray from or disagree with the points made in the passage.**

➤ Step 4: *Select the choice that strengthens the argument*

The choice you select should fit in fairly obviously with the information provided in the passage. But even further, the choice you select, when combined with the rest of the passage, should make the argument both clearer and stronger. Once you find such a choice, you can select it with confidence!

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Top tips

➤ Stay specific

Don't stray beyond what can be inferred. Be cautious with words like "most" or "many" when a passage only discusses one thing in particular. And look out for small twists and turns that make a choice *seem* relevant when it actually changes the focus of the argument.

- Look at the choices in **our example** question:
 - Choice C changes the focus of the argument. Instead of discussing *cold environments*, choice C introduces the idea of "rocky environments". **We can eliminate this choice.**

➤ Lean on transitions

Pay close attention to the transition words used throughout an inference passage. These transitions will show you how the ideas in the passage are related. In particular, the transition words used before the blank at the end of the passage will provide a useful clue to what information you're looking for.

- In our example question, the blank is introduced by the transition word "because".

This tells us that we're looking for further **support** for a conclusion that's already introduced in the passage.

- Transitions like "therefore", "thus", and "this suggests/implies" will introduce **conclusions**.
- Transitions like "because", "due to", and "since" will introduce **further support**.

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➤ Let the punctuation help

Similar to transitions, punctuation marks give shape to the ideas in the passage and show how those details are connected. Colons, semicolons, and dashes can all be used to inject conclusions, examples, and exceptions. Take a closer look at these punctuation marks to see what type of information they signal within the text.

MODEL EXAMPLE

Many animals, including humans, must sleep, and sleep is known to have a role in everything from healing injuries to encoding information in long-term memory. But some scientists claim that, from an evolutionary standpoint, deep sleep for hours at a time leaves an animal so vulnerable that the known benefits of sleeping seem insufficient to explain why it became so widespread in the animal kingdom. These scientists therefore imply that _____

Which choice most logically completes the text?

- A. it is more important to understand how widespread prolonged deep sleep is than to understand its function.
- B. prolonged deep sleep is likely advantageous in ways that have yet to be discovered.

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- C. many traits that provide significant benefits for an animal also likely pose risks to that animal.
- D. most traits perform functions that are hard to understand from an evolutionary standpoint.

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

We should start by paraphrasing the information provided in the passage:

- **All animals sleep, and sleep has known benefits**
- **However, deep sleep for hours at a time leaves animals vulnerable**
- **Some scientists think the danger of this vulnerability outweighs the known benefits of sleep**

In order to logically complete the text, we need to connect the dots between these ideas. Let's think through the argument that's being made:

- **All animals sleep, so sleep *must* be beneficial, or animals wouldn't have evolved that way.**
- **The known dangers of prolonged sleep outweigh the known benefits.**

This argument is presenting a discrepancy. From what we know, animals shouldn't have evolved to sleep for hours at a time, but they *did* evolve that way.

The conclusion of this argument is becoming clear: **there must be something good about deep sleep that we don't know.**

Do any of the choices match that conclusion?

Choice **(B)** matches our prediction and is the answer.

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PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. The Hubble Space Telescope (HST) is projected to maintain operation until at least 2030, but it has already revolutionized high-resolution imaging of solar-system bodies in visible and ultraviolet (UV) light wavelengths, notwithstanding that only about 6% of the bodies imaged by the HST are within the solar system. NASA researcher Cindy L. Young and colleagues assert that a new space telescope dedicated exclusively to solar-system observations would permit an extensive survey of minor solar-system bodies and long-term UV observation to discern how solar-system bodies change over time. Young and colleagues' recommendation therefore implies that the HST

Which choice most logically completes the text?

- A. will likely continue to be used primarily to observe objects outside the solar system.
- B. will no longer be used to observe solar system objects if the telescope recommended by Young and colleagues is deployed.
- C. can be modified to observe the features of solar system objects that are of interest to Young and colleagues.
- D. lacks the sensors to observe the wavelengths of light needed to discern how solar system bodies change over time.

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2. As the name suggests, dramaturges originated in theater, where they continue to serve a variety of functions: conducting historical research for directors, compiling character biographies for actors, and perhaps most importantly, helping writers of plays and musicals to hone the works' stories and characters. Performance scholar Susan Manning observes that many choreographers, like playwrights and musical theater writers, are concerned with storytelling and characterization. In fact, some choreographers describe the dances they create as expressions of narrative through movement; it is therefore unsurprising that _____

Which choice most logically completes the text?

- A. some directors and actors rely too heavily on dramaturges to complete certain research tasks.
- B. choreographers developing dances with narrative elements frequently engage dramaturges to assist in refining those elements.
- C. dramaturges can have a profound impact on the artistic direction of plays and musicals.
- D. dances by choreographers who incorporate narrative elements are more accessible to audiences than dances by choreographers who do not.

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3. Martin Dančák, Wewin Tjiasmanto, and colleagues have identified a new carnivorous plant species (*Nepenthes pudica*) in Indonesia. Like other carnivorous plants, *N. pudica* has pitfall traps, or pitchers, that capture prey, but unlike others, the pitchers of *N. pudica* are located underground. The researchers unearthed the new species on fairly dry ridges with surfaces that host few other plants and animals. Therefore, the researchers hypothesize that the *N. pudica* species likely _____

Which choice most logically completes the text?

- A. is buried by nearby animals as they forage along the ridges for food.
- B. evolved to have underground traps to access more prey than would surface traps.
- C. formed pitchers early in development to absorb more moisture.
- D. represents one of many undiscovered carnivorous plant species in the region.

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4. “Gestures” in painting are typically thought of as bold, expressive brushstrokes. In the 1970s, American painter Jack Whitten built a 12-foot (3.7-meter) tool he named the “developer” to apply paint to an entire canvas in one motion, resulting in his series of “slab” paintings from that decade. Whitten described this process as making an entire painting in “one gesture,” signaling a clear departure from the prevalence of gestures in his work from the 1960s. Some art historians claim this shift represents “removing gesture” from the process. Therefore, regardless of whether using the developer constitutes a gesture, both Whitten and these art historians likely agree that _____

Which choice most logically completes the text?

- A. any tool that a painter uses to create an artwork is capable of creating gestures.
- B. Whitten’s work from the 1960s exhibits many more gestures than his work from the 1970s does.
- C. Whitten became less interested in exploring the role of gesture in his work as his career progressed.
- D. Whitten’s work from the 1960s is much more realistic than his work from the 1970s is.

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ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Inference questions present us with an argument that needs to be completed. In these arguments, a series of facts will build upon one another to reach a logical conclusion. Since inference passages can often be dense with facts, it can often be helpful to break them down into pieces, summarizing each fact into a simple bullet point.

How would you summarize the argument here?

We might break down the argument like this:

- The HST will operate until at least 2030.
- It's already gotten some great images of stuff in our solar system, but that's only 6% of what it observes.
- Researchers claim that a new telescope used *only* for solar-system observations would allow us to get a better look at stuff in our solar system—both the small stuff and how stuff changes over time.
- The researchers recommendation implies that the HST _____

With this in mind, read through the choices. What does the researcher's recommendation imply about the HST?

The HST will operate until at least 2030, but it's only observing stuff inside our solar system 6% of the time. If we could get a different telescope to observe stuff inside our solar system 100% of the time and take more extensive images of certain things, then the HST could continue to be used *mainly* for observing stuff *outside* the solar system.

(A) completes the argument and is the answer.

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QUESTION 2:

Inference questions present us with an argument that needs to be completed. In these arguments, a series of facts will build upon one another to reach a logical conclusion. Since inference passages can often be dense with facts, it can often be helpful to break them down into pieces, summarizing each fact into a simple bullet point.

How would you summarize the argument here?

We might break down the argument like this:

- Dramaturges serve a variety of functions in theater.
- Most importantly, dramaturges help writers hone stories and characters.
- Many choreographers are also concerned with storytelling and characterization, as they often use their dances to tell stories.
- It is therefore unsurprising that _____

Which of the choices is something that would be "unsurprising" given the provided facts?

Dramaturges help playwrights with storytelling and characterization. Choreographers often tell stories through dance, so they are also concerned with storytelling and characterization. This suggests that choreographers seek the help of dramaturges with the storytelling aspects of their dances.

(B) completes the argument and is the answer.

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QUESTION 3:

Inference questions present us with an argument that needs to be completed. In these arguments, a series of facts will build upon one another to reach a logical conclusion. Since inference passages can often be dense with facts, it can often be helpful to break them down into pieces, summarizing each fact into a simple bullet point.

How would you summarize the argument here?

We might break down the argument like this:

- Like other carnivorous plants, *N. pudica* has pitchers that capture prey.
- Unlike others, *N. pudica*'s pitchers are underground.
- They found *N. pudica* in dry ridges with surfaces that host few other plants and animals.
- Therefore, the researchers hypothesize that *N. pudica* probably _____

What conclusion is implied by the facts as they're laid out?

Read through the choices. Which completes and strengthens the argument in the text?

The text says that *N. pudica*'s prey-catching pitchers are underground. It also says that the ridges where *N. pudica* lives don't have many plants and animals *on the surface*. This suggests that *N. pudica* evolved underground pitchers in order to catch more prey.

(B) completes the argument and is the answer.

Unit 1- Lesson 4- Inference

QUESTION 4:

Inference questions present us with an argument that needs to be completed. In these arguments, a series of facts will build upon one another to reach a logical conclusion. Since inference passages can often be dense with facts, it can often be helpful to break them down into pieces, summarizing each fact into a simple bullet point.

How would you summarize the argument here?

We might break down the argument like this:

- “Gestures” in painting = expressive brushstrokes.
- In the ‘70s, Whitten used a tool that applied paint to an entire canvas in one stroke to make what he called “one gesture” paintings.
- This was a departure from his ‘60s paintings, which were made of many gestures.
- Some historians claim that using the tool “removed gesture” completely.
- Regardless of whether the tool constitutes one gesture or no gesture, Whitten and historians probably agree that _____

With this in mind, read through the choices. Which one offers some point that Whitten and historians would probably agree on?

Whitten thinks the tool made “one gesture” paintings, while historians think the tool “removed gesture” from the process completely. But putting that debate aside, both Whitten and the historians would agree that the paintings he made with the tool in the ‘70s have way *fewer* gestures than his paintings from the 60s, in which gestures are “prevalent”, meaning widely and extensively present.

(B) completes the argument and is the answer.

UNIT 2

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE



- LESSON 1: WORDS IN CONTEXT
- LESSON 2: TEXT STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE
- LESSON 3: CROSS-TEXT CONNECTIONS

UNIT 2

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

LESSON 1: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

- **What are "words in context" questions?**

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will ask you to select the **most logical and precise word or phrase** in a given context.

Words in context questions will look like this:

WORDS IN CONTEXT: EXAMPLE

In recommending Bao Phi's collection *Sông I Sing*, a librarian noted that pieces by the spoken-word poet don't lose their _____ nature when printed: the language has the same pleasant musical quality on the page as it does when performed by Phi.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

- A. Jarring
- B. Scholarly
- C. melodic
- D. personal

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

We've never read Bao Phi's poetry, so how are we supposed to know what the poems are like? Well, luckily we don't have to.

If we look at **the second part** of the prompt text (the part after the colon), it *tells* us what Bao Phi's poems are like: they have a "*pleasant musical quality*". The most precise word in this context will emphasize the same positive association with music.

"**Melodic**" also means pleasant and musical, so it best emphasizes the point being made in context. The answer is **(C)**.

- **How should we determine the most "precise" word?**

A "**precise**" word is one that means exactly what it should in a given situation: it will fit its sentence perfectly and **reinforce the text's meaning**.

This last bit is important. We're not just looking for a word that sounds right or looks good. Instead, we need to understand the text and select the word with a meaning that **best matches** the point the text is making. This means that, when attempting words in context questions, reading comprehension is just as important as our knowledge of vocabulary.

To help us identify the best word in context, we should focus on **two things: context and connotation**.

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

➤ Context

Context refers to the specific scenario we're attempting to match a word or phrase to. To understand the context, we must **read the provided text carefully**.

Because we need to know the *meaning* of the word we're looking for, that meaning will be provided a second time within the text. This results in many prompts for words in context questions following a similar pattern of

Statement. Restatement.

The trick then is to match the word we're looking for with the equivalent idea in the other statement.

For example, let's look back at our example item prompt:

In recommending Bao Phi's collection *Sông I Sing*, a librarian noted that pieces by the spoken-word poet don't lose their _____ nature when printed: the language has the same pleasant musical quality on the page as it does when performed by Phi.

We have two matching statements here:

- The poems keep their _____ nature when printed.
- The poems have the same pleasant musical quality when "on the page".

Notice how the blank in the first statement lines up with the phrase *pleasant musical quality* in the second statement. This is the context that tells us what word that we should choose: the word that most closely means "pleasant" and "musical".

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

➤ Connotation

"Connotations" are the associations that we have with different words. One common example of connotation is whether a word feels *positive* or *negative*. Words can have similar meanings but vastly different connotations.

For example, the words "promising" and "ominous" both mean that something is predictive of the future. However, while "promising" has a strongly positive connotation, "ominous" has a strongly negative connotation. Therefore, these words can't logically applied to the same context.

If you're stuck on a words in context question, try focusing on these connotations. Is the sentence positive? Then the word we choose should be positive too!

For example:

- The basketball star's **promising** play this season suggests a bright future.
- The dark, **ominous** clouds on the horizon suggest a storm is coming.

Based on context clues like "bright" and "storm", it's clear where the positive and negative words are most appropriate.

• **How to approach words in context questions**

To solve a words in context question, follow these three steps:

Step 1: *Summarize the text in your own words*

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

Don't just skim the text. Read it closely, and try to summarize the main idea in your own words. This can be tricky, since an important word is likely missing. If you're struggling to understand the text, try and translate each idea into a simple bullet point.

Remember, words in context prompts tend to follow a similar pattern. They will make a claim, and then they will expand upon or restate that claim in different words.

Step 2: *Identify the key word, phrase, or idea*

The text provides all the information you need to know. Whatever point the text is making, the correct answer will reinforce that idea. Often, there will be one word or phrase in the text that has nearly the same meaning as the correct answer. Find the right context clues, and the next part should be easy.

Step 3: *Select the word that matches*

If a choice changes the meaning of the text, or introduces a new idea or perspective, then it's not the most precise word in context. Only one of the choices will match and emphasize the idea being expressed in the text. You can select that choice with confidence!

Top tips

➤ Charge it (+/-)

Sometimes connotation alone is enough to answer a words in context question. Is the text expressing something **positive**? If so, we can eliminate any choices that are too **negative** or **neutral**.

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

- Let's look back at our example question:

We can tell the text is trying to say something **positive (+)** about Bao Phi's poetry: it has a "pleasant musical quality".

Which of the choices is a **positive** word?

"Jarring" is a negative word. "Scholarly" and "personal" aren't negative, but they're not exactly positive either...

That leaves us with "melodic", which *is* positive and is the answer.

➤ Avoid unknowns

On test day, you may encounter some words that you don't know. Many test-takers make the mistake of selecting words that they don't know in the choices instead of ones they know better and "feel right". These students think the words they know better must be "traps", because they might "seem too easy". This strategy can often backfire.

To raise your chances of getting words in context questions correct, try this instead:

- Eliminate what you can from the words you *do* know
- Select an option from what remains.

Note: The only time you should select a word you don't know is if you can confidently eliminate *all* of the other choices.

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

MODEL EXAMPLE

The following text is from F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby*.

[Jay Gatsby] was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness.

As used in the text, what does the word “quality” most nearly mean?

- A. Characteristic
- B. Standard
- C. Prestige
- D. Accomplishment

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Like many words, "quality" can mean different things in different contexts. It can be a noun that means something like "attribute", but it can also describe how good something is (e.g, "high quality" vs "low quality"). **How is it being used here?**

"This quality" is phrased in a way that refers back to something in the previous sentence. In particular, it seems to link to "that resourcefulness of movement...), which the previous sentence works hard to describe. That whole phrase, in turn, is being use to characterize the way is behaving.

So, "quality" is being used to describe an "attribute" of how Gatsby is behaving. **(A)**, "characteristic", matches this use.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Some foraging models predict that the distance bees travel when foraging will decline as floral density increases, but biologists Shalene Jha and Claire Kremen showed that bees' behavior is inconsistent with this prediction if flowers in dense patches are ____: bees will forage beyond patches of low species richness to acquire multiple resource types.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

- A. Depleted
- B. Homogenous
- C. Immature
- D. Dispersed

Unit 2-lesson 1: Words in Context

2. Business researcher Melanie Brucks and colleagues found that remote video conference meetings may be less conducive to brainstorming than in-person meetings are. The researchers suspect that video meeting participants are focused on staring at the speaker on the screen and don't allow their eyes or mind to wander as much, which may ultimately _____ creativity.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

- A. Recommend
- B. Criticize
- C. Construct
- D. Impede

3. US traffic signals didn't always contain the familiar three lights (red, yellow, and green). Traffic lights only _____ red and green lights until the three-light traffic signal was developed in 1923.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

- A. Avoided
- B. Featured
- C. Appreciated
- D. Disregarded

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4. Stephen Hannock's luminous landscape paintings are appealing to viewers but have elicited little commentary from contemporary critics, a phenomenon that may be due to the very fact that the paintings seem so _____. Many critics focus their attention on art that is cryptic or overtly challenging.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

- A. Innovative
- B. Accessible
- C. Profound
- D. Subversive

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Words in context questions always offer clues to the blank. They usually do so by reinforcing the meaning of the missing word elsewhere in the passage. Let's try to simplify this passage by removing some of the details before and after the blank.

Some predict that the distance bees forage will go down as flower density goes up. But we know this isn't true if flowers in dense patches are ____: bees will forage beyond patches of low species richness to find more diversity.

It can be helpful to make a prediction. What word might work here?

Since we can assume that what comes after the colon directly reinforces the blank, we can predict that we're looking for a word

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that has the same meaning as “low species richness”, like “alike” or “not diverse”.

Which choice matches this prediction?

(B) matches our prediction and is the answer.

QUESTION 2:

Words in context questions always offer clues to the blank. They usually do so by reinforcing the meaning of the missing word elsewhere in the passage. Let’s try to simplify this passage by removing some of the details before and after the blank.

Researchers found that video meetings are not as good for brainstorming as in-person meetings. They suspect that video meeting participants focus on staring at the screen and don’t let their eyes or mind wander, which might _____ creativity.

It can be helpful to make a prediction. What word might work here?

We’re looking for a verb that captures what video meeting participants’ over-focus on the screen does to their creativity. The first sentence tells us that video meetings may be “less conducive to” brainstorming (“less conducive to” meaning “less good for” or “less encouraging of”). So we can predict that the video meeting participants’ over-focus *is bad for* creativity.

In other words, we’re looking for a verb that conveys the same general idea as “may be less conducive to”. Something like “limit” or “prevent” would work.

Which choice matches this prediction?

(D) matches our prediction and is the answer.

- **Top tip: Identify the tone!** On words in context questions, identifying the tone of the text can be helpful for eliminating

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choices. For example, the first sentence of this text describes video meetings' effect on brainstorming in *negative* terms: they may be "less conducive to" brainstorming. So we can predict that the video meeting participants' over-focus *is bad for* creativity. With this in mind, we can eliminate (A) and (C) right away: they're both too positive to reflect this tone!

- **Top tip: Reduce, reuse, recycle!** Note that in this problem we were able to "recycle" another phrase from the passage ("may be less conducive to") and plug it into the blank. It's a good idea to look for similar opportunities in other questions.

QUESTION 3:

Words in context questions always offer clues to the blank. They usually do so by reinforcing the meaning of the missing word elsewhere in the passage. Let's try to simplify this passage by removing some of the details before and after the blank.

Traffic signals only ____ red and green lights until the three-light traffic signal was developed in 1923.

It can be helpful to make a prediction. What word might work here?

We're looking for a verb that goes with traffic signals as its subject and "red and green lights" as its object. We know that traffic signals *had* only red and green lights (and now they have yellow too), so we might look for a word like "had".

Do any of the choices match that prediction?

(B) is the closest match for our prediction. (B) is the answer.

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QUESTION 4:

Words in context questions always offer clues to the blank. They usually do so by reinforcing the meaning of the missing word elsewhere in the passage. Let's try to simplify this passage by removing some of the details before and after the blank.

Viewers like Hannock's paintings, but modern critics haven't commented on them. This might be because the paintings seem so _____, and critics usually focus on art that is mysterious or challenging.

It can be helpful to make a prediction. What word might work here?

The text tells us that most critics focus on art that is mysterious and challenging, which is why they've ignored Hannock's paintings. This suggests that Hannock's paintings are *the opposite of mysterious* or *the opposite of challenging*.

Which choice matches this prediction?

(B) matches our prediction and is the answer.

UNIT 2

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

LESSON 2: TEXT STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE

Unit 2- lesson 2- Text structure and purpose

- **What are "text structure and purpose" questions?**

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will present a short text for you to read. The question will then ask you to identify the **main purpose** or **overall structure** of the text.

Text structure and purpose questions will look like this:

TEXT STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE: EXAMPLE

The following text is from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1910 poem "The Earth's Entail".

No matter how we cultivate the land,
Taming the forest and the prairie free;
No matter how we irrigate the sand,
Making the desert blossom at command,
We must always leave the borders of the sea;
The immeasurable reaches
Of the windy wave-wet beaches,
The million-mile-long margin of the sea.

Which choice best describes the overall structure of the text?

Unit 2- lesson 2- Text structure and purpose

- A. The speaker provides examples of an admirable way of approaching nature and then challenges that approach.
- B. The speaker describes attempts to control nature and then offers a reminder that not all nature is controllable.
- C. The speaker argues against interfering with nature and then gives evidence supporting this interference.
- D. The speaker presents an account of efforts to dominate nature and then cautions that such efforts are only temporary.

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Let's start **by paraphrasing the poem**. By putting the text into our own words, we should start to see the shape and structure behind it.

- The first four lines follow a consistent pattern, which shows us that they're linked. However, those lines don't really form a complete thought. Instead, they use the transition phrase "no matter" to introduce some sort of contrast with whatever idea will follow in the next part of the poem.

Together the first four lines say something like

Despite the fact that we can control and shape the land...

So what's the follow up? Let's look at the next four lines. They work to emphasize the size and power of the ocean. Taken together, they last four lines say something like

We can't control the sea.

Put these parts together, and we have the following summary:

Unit 2- lesson 2- Text structure and purpose

Despite the fact that we can control and shape the land, we can't control the sea.

This is the story the poem is trying to tell. It's the shape and structure of the text behind the flowery language.

Let's look at the choices and see which one matches the structure we've identified:

- Choice A says the speaker is focused on whether an approach to nature is "admirable", but the poem doesn't focus on good or bad. Instead, it focuses on possible or impossible. **We can eliminate this choice.**
- Choice C says the speaker argues against interfering with nature, but the poem doesn't say that it's bad to interfere with nature. Also, notice that the second half of the poem doesn't "[give] evidence supporting" interference with nature; the second half of the poem argues that interfering with the sea is impossible. **We can eliminate this choice.**
- Choice D is tempting. The first half of the poem does indeed "[present] an account of efforts to dominate nature". However, the second half of the poem doesn't say those efforts are "temporary". Instead, it argues that in some cases it's simply impossible to dominate nature. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Only choice B accurately reflects both parts of the poem:

While some nature can be controlled, some nature can't.

Notice how this choice very closely resembles the summary we created. **Choice B is the answer.**

Unit 2- lesson 2- Text structure and purpose

• How should we think about text structure and purpose questions?

Text structure and purpose questions are all about seeing past the surface of a passage. Instead of just *what* a text says, these questions dig into *why* and *how* the text says it.

Since these questions might ask about purpose *or* structure, let's look at each in turn.

➤ **Purpose**

Purpose is the ***why*** behind the passage. Why did the author write it? What did they want to accomplish? What's the point?

A text's purpose can often be framed using active verbs that demonstrate the goals of the author. Some examples include

- to explain _____
- to illustrate _____
- to criticize _____
- to argue _____
- to introduce _____

The author wants you to have a particular experience when you read their writing. Maybe they want to help you understand a new concept, or maybe they want to convince you of something. What were *your* takeaways from reading the text? Chances are, those takeaways are closely related to the text's purpose.

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➤ Structure

Structure is *how* a passage works to achieve its purpose. How does the text flow from one idea to the next? Where does the author place particular emphasis?

A text's structure can often be described as a sort of motion, following the focus as it shifts from one place to another.

Separating a text's structure from its content can be difficult, but it often helps to consider how the ideas within the text relate to one another. Do they disagree? Does one idea cause or build upon another? These relationships create a shape for the text which serves to support the goals of the author.

• **How to approach text structure and purpose questions**

To solve a text structure and purpose question, consider following these steps:

➤ ***Step 1: Identify the task***

The first thing you should do is glance at the question to see if it asks about "overall structure" or "main purpose". While structure and purpose are closely linked, you may find it helpful to read the passage while focusing on just the one the question asks about.

➤ ***Step 2: Summarize the text***

Read the passage closely and summarize the ideas you encounter. Try to boil the whole text down to one or two simple points. You

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already know whether the question asks about structure or purpose, so keep that in focus as you form your summary.

Rephrasing things in your own words will give you a strong understanding of *what* the passage is about, and this is the first step to understanding the *why* and *how* of the text.

➤ **Step 3:** *Test the choices*

Compare your summary to each of the choices. While a summary isn't exactly the same as a structure or purpose, you should find a significant resemblance.

A text's purpose will include reference to the main ideas in the passage. A text's structure will often be made obvious by a straightforward summary.

One of the choices should jump out as the most clearly linked to your summary. You can select this choice with confidence!

Top tips

1. Stay specific

Don't stray beyond the focus of the text. Eliminate choices that describe a purpose or structure that introduces information not directly addressed in the passage. Likewise, avoid choices that shift or blur the purpose of a text by emphasizing details that aren't a central focus.

Let's look at the choices in our example question:

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- Choice A introduces the word "admirable", which makes a judgment about whether these attempts to control nature are good or bad. But the poem doesn't discuss whether things are good or bad. **We can eliminate this choice.**

2. Be strict

Choices in structure questions often break the text into two parts. *Make sure the description of both parts of the text is accurate.* If a choice correctly describes the first part of the text, but doesn't feel quite as accurate for the second part, eliminate that choice. Every part of the answer needs to accurately describe the text.

Let's look at the choices in our example question:

- Choice D describes the first part of the text pretty well. The first four lines of the poem do discuss "efforts to dominate nature". However, the second half of choice D disqualifies the whole choice; the poem never claims that anything is "temporary". **We can eliminate this choice.**

3. Lean on transitions

Transitions like "however" and "therefore" contribute significantly to the structure of a text by showing how one idea flows into the next. Take note of any transition words you encounter while reading; these can be very helpful when trying to map out the structure of the text.

Let's look at the text in our example question:

The text uses the subordinating conjunction "no matter" to link the first half of the poem to the second half. "No matter" is very

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similar to "despite" or "regardless", and it very clearly signals that there will be a contrast between the first half of the poem and the second half. This contrast is reflected in the correct answer.

- **What are "part-to-whole relationships" questions?**

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will require you to read a short text with one underlined sentence. The question will then ask you to identify the **function of the underlined sentence** within the text as a whole.

Part-to-whole relationships questions will look like this:

PART-TO-WHOLE RELATIONSHIPS: EXAMPLE

The following text is from Herman Melville's 1854 novel *The Lightning-rod Man*.

The stranger still stood in the exact middle of the cottage, where he had first planted himself. His singularity impelled a closer scrutiny. A lean, gloomy figure. Hair dark and lank, mattedly streaked over his brow. His sunken pitfalls of eyes were ringed by indigo halos, and played with an innocuous sort of lightning: the gleam without the bolt. The whole man was dripping. He stood in a puddle on the bare oak floor: his strange walking-stick vertically resting at his side.

Which choice best states the function of the underlined sentence in the overall structure of the text?

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- A. It sets up the character description presented in the sentences that follow.
 - B. It establishes a contrast with the description in the previous sentence.
 - C. It elaborates on the previous sentence's description of the character.
 - D. It introduces the setting that is described in the sentences that follow.
-

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Let's start by summarizing the passage. Rephrasing things in our own words should help us determine how the underlined sentence contributes to the text.

- The first sentence introduces a mysterious "stranger". Then we get our underlined sentence:

"His singularity impelled a closer scrutiny."

The rest of the passage then describes the physical appearance of the stranger. We could summarize the passage in the following way:

- There's a mysterious stranger.
- He's "gloomy" and dirty, and maybe a little scary.
- He looks tired, and he is soaked with water. Maybe he just came in from the rain?

Essentially, this passage is just describing an unknown character: the mysterious "stranger". If the text is working to describe the stranger, what purpose does the underlined sentence serve?

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The sentence uses some fancy words that might be hard to decipher. Let's break those down:

- "singularity" suggests the stranger's appearance is unusual
- "impelled" means that something is *urging* you to do something
- "scrutiny" refers to close and careful observation

Taken together, the underlined sentence basically says

You've got to take a closer look at this guy!

So in this case, the underlined sentence seems pretty literal. If we were to predict its function, we might say that **it draws attention to the stranger's appearance, which is the subject of the rest of the passage.**

Let's look at the answer choices and see if any match the function we identified above:

Choice B claims a contrast that isn't there. The previous sentence just says the stranger is standing in a room. The underlined sentence doesn't contradict that.

Choice C doesn't really pertain to the underlined sentence. The elaborate descriptions of the stranger come in the *following* sentences. The underlined sentence itself doesn't actually provide any literal description.

Choice D focuses on "setting". But the passage doesn't describe the setting besides briefly mentioning that we're in a cottage. Instead, the text is focused on describing the stranger.

Only choice A matches the function we identified. The underlined sentence draws attention to the stranger's appearance, which is

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then described in detail in the following sentences. Choice **A** is the answer.

- **How should we think about part-to-whole relationships questions?**

Part-to-whole relationships questions are a type of text structure and purpose questions. To succeed on these questions, we need to understand **what** the author is trying to achieve in the text, as well as **how** the text works to achieve that purpose.

But while other text structure and purpose questions focus on the entire passage, part-to-whole relationships questions require us to focus on one specific part of the text: the underlined portion.

- What information does the underlined portion contain?
- How does that information relate to the rest of the text?
What is its function? In other words, what does it *do*?

Answering these questions will allow us to determine what role the underlined portion plays in the flow of the text.

- **How to approach part-to-whole relationships questions**

To solve part-to-whole relationships questions, consider following these steps:

Step 1: *Summarize the text*

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Read the passage closely and summarize the ideas you encounter. Try to boil the whole text down to one or two simple points. Give some extra attention to the underlined portion: you know the question will focus on it!

Rephrasing things in your own words will give you a strong understanding of the "whole" of the passage. This will make it much easier to identify how the "part" functions within that whole.

Step 2: *Make a prediction*

Once you have a firm understanding of the entire passage, you should try to state the function of the underlined portion in your own words.

- How does the underlined portion fit into the text?
- Does it introduce what comes next?
- Does it contradict what came before?

Comparing the information in the underlined portion with what comes immediately before and immediately after will often reveal how that information contributes to the flow of the text.

Step 3: *Test the choices*

Compare your prediction to each of the choices. Which choice most closely matches your prediction? You can select that choice with confidence!

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Top tips

1. Stay within the underline!

Make sure the choice you select applies directly and specifically to the underlined portion. Other choices may correctly identify the function of *other* sentences within the text, so make sure you're looking in the right place!

Let's look at the choices from our example question:

- Choice B is interesting. It accurately describes the function of a number of sentences in the text (pretty much every sentence *after* the underlined one). However, the underlined portion doesn't "elaborate" on the description of the stranger: it *initiates* the description of the stranger. The sentences that follow do all the elaboration. **We can eliminate this choice.**

2. Be strict

Choices on part-to-whole relationships may often seem *partly* correct. Maybe they describe the "part" accurately, but not the "whole".

Eliminate any choices that feel *kind of* correct, but that contain a detail or two that doesn't match the text. A choice must be entirely accurate to be the answer.

Let's look at the choices from our example question:

- Choice C is very nearly accurate. The underlined portion does indeed introduce the description that comes in the following sentences. However, choice C says that description is focused on "setting". But the text describes the appearance of the stranger, not the setting of the story. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Unit 2- lesson 2- Text structure and purpose

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Mathematician Claude Shannon is widely regarded as a foundational figure in information theory. His most important paper, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” published in 1948 when he was employed at Bell Labs, utilized a concept called a “binary digit” (shortened to “bit”) to measure the amount of information in any signal and determine the fastest rate at which information could be transmitted while still being reliably decipherable. Robert Gallager, one of Shannon’s colleagues, said that the bit was “[Shannon’s] discovery, and from it the whole communications revolution has sprung.”

Which choice best describes the overall structure of the text?

- A. It introduces a respected researcher, describes an aspect of his work, and suggests why the work is historically significant.
- B. It names the company where an important mathematician worked, details the mathematician’s career at the company, and provides an example of the recognition he received there.
- C. It mentions a paper, offers a summary of the paper’s findings, and presents a researcher’s commentary on the paper.
- D. It presents a theoretical concept, illustrates how the name of the concept has changed, and shows how the name has entered common usage.

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2. Michelene Pesantubbee, a historian and citizen of the Choctaw Nation, has identified a dilemma inherent to research on the status of women in her tribe during the 1600s and 1700s: the primary sources from that era, travel narratives and other accounts by male European colonizers, underestimate the degree of power conferred on Choctaw women by their traditional roles in political, civic, and ceremonial life. Pesantubbee argues that the Choctaw oral tradition and findings from archaeological sites in the tribe's homeland supplement the written record by providing crucial insights into those roles.

Which choice best describes the overall structure of the text?

- A. It details the shortcomings of certain historical sources, then argues that research should avoid those sources altogether.
- B. It describes a problem that arises in research on a particular topic, then sketches a historian's approach to addressing that problem.
- C. It lists the advantages of a particular research method, then acknowledges a historian's criticism of that method.
- D. It characterizes a particular topic as especially challenging to research, then suggests a related topic for historians to pursue instead.

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3. Researchers have found a nearly 164,000-year-old molar from a member of the archaic human species known as Denisovans in a cave in Laos, suggesting that Denisovans lived in a wider range of environments than indicated by earlier evidence. Before the discovery, Denisovans were thought to have lived only at high altitudes in relatively cold climates in what are now Russia and China, but the discovery of the tooth in Laos suggests that they may have lived at low altitudes in relatively warm climates in Southeast Asia as well.

Which choice best states the function of the underlined portion in the text as a whole?

- A. It defines a term used in the description that follows in the rest of the sentence.
- B. It emphasizes the main goal of the research introduced in the previous sentence.
- C. It provides context that clarifies the significance of the information that follows in the rest of the sentence.
- D. It dismisses as untrue the research presented in the previous sentence.

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4. Works of moral philosophy, such as Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, are partly concerned with how to live a morally good life. But philosopher Jonathan Barnes argues that works that present a method of living such a life without also supplying a motive are inherently useful only to those already wishing to be morally good—those with no desire for moral goodness will not choose to follow their rules. However, some works of moral philosophy attempt to describe what constitutes a morally good life while also proposing reasons for living one.

Which choice best describes the overall structure of the text?

- A.** It mentions two renowned works and then claims that despite their popularity it is impossible for these works to serve the purpose their authors intended.
- B.** It summarizes the history of a field of thought by discussing two works and then proposes a topic of further research for specialists in that field.
- C.** It describes two influential works and then explains why one is more widely read than the other.
- D.** It provides a characterization about a field of thought by noting two works in it and then details a way in which some works in that field are more comprehensive than others.

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ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Some text structure and purpose questions will ask about the “overall structure” of the passage, which refers to how the focus and tone of the text shift throughout the passage. For these questions, it can often be helpful to simplify and summarize the text in your own words.

How might you summarize this text?

We might summarize the text as follows:

Shannon is a foundational figure in information theory. In his most important paper, he invented the concept of the “bit” to measure information. One of Shannon’s colleagues said that the “bit” was the basis of the entire communications revolution.

So the text starts with a general statement about Shannon, then describes a specific contribution of his, then provides a quote that illustrates just how important this contribution was.

Do any of the choices describe that structure?

(A) describes the overall structure that we identified. (A) is the answer.

QUESTION 2:

Some text structure and purpose questions will ask about the “overall structure” of the passage, which refers to how the focus and tone of the text shift throughout the passage. For these questions, it can often be helpful to simplify and summarize the text in your own words.

How might you summarize this text?

We might summarize the text like this:

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A historian has identified an issue with research on the status of Choctaw women during the 1600s and 1700s: the written sources from that time underestimate the power these women had in their traditional roles. The historian argues that the Choctaw oral tradition and archaeological findings add to the written record by providing important insights into those roles.

So the text begins by stating a problem: written sources underestimate the power that Choctaw women had in their traditional roles. Then it presents one historian's solution: looking to oral tradition and archeological findings for more insight into these roles.

Do any of the choices match that structure?

(B) matches the overall structure that we identified. **(B)** is the answer.

QUESTION 3:

Some text structure and purpose questions will ask you about the function of a particular portion of the text. To better understand how that portion fits into the larger passage, it can often be helpful to simplify and summarize the whole thing in your own words.

How might you summarize this text?

We might summarize the text like this:

Researchers found a molar from an ancient Denisovan in a cave in Laos, indicating that Denisovans lived in a wider range of environments than we thought. Before the discovery, Denisovans were thought to have lived only at high altitudes in cold climates, but the discovery suggests that they also lived at low altitudes in warm climates.

So the text overall describes how a new discovery expands our knowledge of Denisovans. The underlined portion recounts what

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we used to think about Denisovans, which helps the reader understand the meaning of the discovery.

Does that function match any of the choices?

(C) describes a function that matches the emphasis we identified. **(C)** is the answer.

QUESTION 4:

Some text structure and purpose questions will ask about the “overall structure” of the passage, which refers to how the focus and tone of the text shift throughout the passage. For these questions, it can often be helpful to simplify and summarize the text in your own words.

How might you summarize this text?

We might summarize the text like this:

Works of moral philosophy, such as X and Y, describe how to live a morally good life. But works that say *how* without saying *why* are only useful to people who already want to be morally good—people with no desire to be morally good won't follow their rules. However, some works try to include both the 'how' and the 'why'.

So the text starts by stating what moral philosophy is concerned with and naming two examples of works in the field. Then it describes a shortcoming of some works in that field, but then it states that other works try to avoid that shortcoming.

Do any of the choices describe that structure?

(D) describes the overall structure that we identified. **(D)** is the answer.

UNIT 2

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

LESSON 3: CROSS-TEXT CONNECTIONS

Unit 2-lesson 3- Cross-text connections

- What are "cross-text connections" questions?

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will present two short texts for you to read. The question will then ask you to **compare the points of view** of the authors of the two texts.

Cross-text connections questions will look like this:

CROSS-TEXT CONNECTIONS: EXAMPLE

Text 1

What factors influence the abundance of species in a given ecological community? Some theorists have argued that historical diversity is a major driver of how diverse an ecological community eventually becomes: differences in community diversity across otherwise similar habitats, in this view, are strongly affected by the number of species living in those habitats at earlier times.

Text 2

In 2010, a group of researchers including biologist Carla Cáceres created artificial pools in a New York forest. They stocked some pools with a diverse mix of zooplankton species and others with a single zooplankton species and allowed the pool communities to develop naturally thereafter. Over the course of four years, Cáceres and colleagues periodically measured the species

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diversity of the pools, finding—contrary to their expectations—that by the end of the study there was little to no difference in the pools' species diversity.

Based on the texts, how would Cáceres and colleagues (Text 2) most likely describe the view of the theorists presented in Text 1?

- A. It is largely correct, but it requires a minor refinement in light of the research team's results.
- B. It is not compelling as a theory regardless of any experimental data collected by the research team.
- C. It may seem plausible, but it is not supported by the research team's findings.
- D. It probably holds true only in conditions like those in the research team's study.

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Let's start by summarizing each text in our own words.

Text 1: This passage presents the view of a group of "theorists" about ecological diversity. Specifically, the theorists claim that "historical diversity is a major driver of how diverse an ecological community eventually becomes." If we were to simplify and rephrase this claim, we might say that

More diversity early on means more diversity later.

Text 2: This passage presents the findings from a particular experiment. Scientists stocked a number of pools, giving some high species diversity and others low species diversity. After four

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years, they found ("contrary to their expectations") that the species diversity in all the pools to be the same. If we were to simplify and rephrase this finding, we might say that

Surprisingly, more diversity early on doesn't make a difference.

Now that we have brief summaries of each passage, we can see how those summaries relate to one another. Do they agree? Disagree?

In this case, our two texts are in disagreement. The claims of the theorists in Text 1 are *not* supported by the findings of the researchers in Text 2.

Let's take a look at the choices, and see which one matches the relationship we just described:

- Choice D suggests that the theorists claim "holds true" in the researchers study. We found the exact opposite. **We can eliminate this choice.**
- Choice B goes beyond what we learn about the researchers in Text 2. It suggests that they didn't like the theory in Text 1 even *before* they did their research. However, the text never tells us this; it simply reports on their experiment. **We can eliminate this choice.**
- Choice A suggests that, despite their research findings, the scientists in Text 2 think that the theory in Text 1 is "largely correct". But the research findings directly oppose the theory, and it's never suggested in Text 2 that the researchers support the theory from Text 1. **We can eliminate this choice.**

Only choice C identifies the same disagreement that we identified in our summaries. While the theory from Text 1 sounds like it

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makes sense, the experiment in Text 2 showed a different result. **Choice C** is the answer.

- **How should we think about cross-text connections questions?**

Cross-text connections questions give us twice as much text to consider, but both texts will cover the same subject, and this close interrelation means that each text will build your understanding of the other.

Additionally, cross-text connections questions will always focus on **point of view**, which allows us to read the passages with this particular aspect in mind.

➤ Point of view

Point of view refers to the opinions and perspectives of a given person. In the context of the SAT, the point of view we'll tend to focus on is that of the *author of the passage* or that of *specific individuals named in the passage*. For instance, in our example question, we're asked to consider the views of the "theorists" from Text 1 and "Cáceres and colleagues" from Text 2.

Once we've identified the individuals whose points of view the question asks about, we'll usually need to consider **whether those points of view agree or disagree**.

Remember, the points of view we identify **must be directly supported by the text**. Avoid choices that express opinions that

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are too extreme, that swap the points of view of different people, or that make claims that go beyond the specific focus of the text.

• How to approach cross-text connections questions

To solve cross-text connections questions, consider following these steps:

Step 1: *Summarize the texts*

Read each passage closely and summarize the ideas you encounter. Try to boil each text down to one or two simple points. Give some extra attention to the point of view expressed in each text: you know the question will focus on it!

If a passage introduces a particular person, it's a good idea to focus on the opinions of that person.

By the end of this step, you should have a short summary in mind for each of the two texts.

Step 2: *Determine the relationship*

Now that you have summarized the points of view that the question focuses on, you must determine how those summaries relate to one another.

- Do the points of view agree?
- Do they disagree?
- Does one point of view elaborate on or modify the other?

Answering these questions should allow you to determine how the two texts are connected to each other, and how the ideas they

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contain interact. Once we can state this relationship in our own words, we can move on to the next step.

Step 3: *Test the choices*

Compare your results to each of the choices. Which choice most closely matches the relationship between points of view that you identified? You can select this choice with confidence!

If you're still struggling to decide between the choices, try eliminating choices that go beyond what is expressed by the text or that exaggerate how extreme different points of view might be. Remember, the correct answer will be **directly supported**.

Top tips

1. Look for positives (+) and negatives (-)

Pay attention to the specific words used in a text. Are the words positive, negative, or neutral? Word choice that reveals a particular tone or attitude is highly useful for identifying point of view because it can tell us *how the author (or whoever else we're focused on) feels* about the subject being discussed. Positive and negative words can be particularly useful when looking for agreement or disagreement.

- Let's look back at Text 2 in the example question. There's one interesting piece of Text 2 that gives us some really useful information:

"contrary to their expectations"

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This interjection tells us specifically about what "Cáceres and colleagues" thought about their experiment results. And the negative word "contrary" should jump out at us.

This excerpt reveals that the results **were not** what the researchers expected, and the results **do not** conform to the theory in Text 1. This gives us a huge clue to the answer!

2. Stick to the text

Avoid choices that go beyond what's directly stated in the text. While it might be tempting to infer what an author's opinion *might* be, incorrect choices will frequently make claims that are too extreme or that cover cases not explicitly covered in the text. Don't fall into these traps!

- Let's look back at the choices in our example question:
 - Choice C might be tempting. It does manage to reflect the disagreement between the claim of the theorists in Text 1 and the findings of the researchers in Text 2. However, it takes that position too far, making it *more extreme* than the text suggests. There's no proof in the passages that Cáceres and colleagues think the theory is so bad that it's "not compelling". All we know is that their findings (which they found surprising) don't match the theory. **We can eliminate this choice.**

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PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Text 1

Soy sauce, made from fermented soybeans, is noted for its umami flavor. Umami—one of the five basic tastes along with sweet, bitter, salty, and sour—was formally classified when its taste receptors were discovered in the 2000s. In 2007, to define the pure umami flavor scientists Rie Ishii and Michael O’Mahony used broths made from shiitake mushrooms and kombu seaweed, and two panels of Japanese and US judges closely agreed on a description of the taste.

Text 2

A 2022 experiment by Manon Jünger et al. led to a greater understanding of soy sauce’s flavor profile. The team initially presented a mixture of compounds with low molecular weights to taste testers who found it was not as salty or bitter as real soy sauce. Further analysis of soy sauce identified proteins, including dipeptides, that enhanced umami flavor and also contributed to saltiness. The team then made a mix of 50 chemical compounds that re-created soy sauce’s flavor.

Based on the texts, if Ishii and O’Mahony (Text 1) and Jünger et al. (Text 2) were aware of the findings of both experiments, they would most likely agree with which statement?

- A. The broths in the 2007 experiment most likely did not have a substantial amount of the dipeptides that played a key part in the 2022 experiment.
- B. On average, the diets of people in the United States tend to have fewer foods that contain certain dipeptides than the diets of people in Japan have.
- C. Chemical compounds that activate both the umami and salty taste receptors tend to have a higher molecular weight than those that only activate umami taste receptors.
- D. Fermentation introduces proteins responsible for the increase of umami flavor in soy sauce, and those proteins also increase the perception of saltiness.

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2. Text 1

Because literacy in Nahuatl script, the writing system of the Aztec Empire, was lost after Spain invaded central Mexico in the 1500s, it is unclear exactly how meaning was encoded in the script's symbols. Although many scholars had assumed that the symbols signified entire words, linguist Alfonso Lacadena theorized in 2008 that they signified units of language smaller than words: individual syllables.

Text 2

The growing consensus among scholars of Nahuatl script is that many of its symbols could signify either words or syllables, depending on syntax and content at any given site within a text. For example, the symbol signifying the word *huipil* (blouse) in some contexts could signify the syllable "pil" in others, as in the place name "Chipiltepec." Thus, for the Aztecs, reading required a determination of how such symbols functioned each time they appeared in a text.

Based on the texts, how would the author of Text 2 most likely characterize Lacadena's theory, as described in Text 1?

- A. By praising the theory for recognizing that the script's symbols could represent entire words
- B. By arguing that the theory is overly influenced by the work of earlier scholars
- C. By approving of the theory's emphasis on how the script changed over time
- D. By cautioning that the theory overlooks certain important aspects of how the script functioned

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3. Text 1

Historians studying pre-Inca Peru have looked to ceramic vessels to understand daily life among the Moche people. These mold-made sculptures present plants, animals, and human faces in precise ways—vessels representing human faces are so detailed that scholars have interpreted facial markings to represent scars and other skin irregularities. Some historians have even used these objects to identify potential skin diseases that may have afflicted people at the time.

Text 2

Art historian and archaeologist Lisa Trever has argued that the interpretation of Moche “portrait” vessels as hyper-realistic portrayals of identifiable people may inadvertently disregard the creativity of the objects’ creators. Moche ceramic vessels, Trever argues, are artworks in which sculptors could free their imagination, using realistic objects and people around them as inspiration to explore more abstract concepts.

Based on the texts, what would Lisa Trever (Text 2) most likely say about the interpretation presented in the underlined portion of Text 1?

- A. Markings on depictions of human faces are not necessarily intended to portray particular details about the physical appearance of individuals.
- B. Some vessels may have been damaged during their excavation and thus provide little insight into Moche culture.
- C. Depictions of human faces are significantly more realistic than depictions of plants and other animals are.
- D. It is likely that some depictions of human faces with extensive markings are intended to portray the same historical individual

Unit 2-lesson 3- Cross-text connections

4 Text 1

Philosopher G.E. Moore's most influential work entails the concept of common sense. He asserts that there are certain beliefs that all people, including philosophers, know instinctively to be true, whether or not they profess otherwise: among them, that they have bodies, or that they exist in a world with other objects that have three dimensions. Moore's careful work on common sense may seem obvious but was in fact groundbreaking.

Text 2

External world skepticism is a philosophical stance supposing that we cannot be sure of the existence of anything outside our own minds. During a lecture, G.E. Moore once offered a proof refuting this stance by holding out his hands and saying, "Here is one hand, and here is another." Many philosophers reflexively reject this proof (Annalisa Coliva called it "an obviously annoying failure") but have found it a challenge to articulate exactly why the proof fails.

Based on the texts, how would the author of Text 1 most likely respond to proponents of the philosophical stance outlined in Text 2?

- A. By pointing out that Moore would assert that external world skepticism is at odds with other beliefs those proponents must unavoidably hold
- B. By arguing that if it is valid to assert that some facts are true based on instinct, it is also valid to assert that some proofs are inadequate based on instinct
- C. By agreeing with those proponents that Moore's treatment of positions that contradict his own is fundamentally unserious
- D. By suggesting that an instinctive distaste for Moore's position is preventing external world skeptics from constructing a sufficiently rigorous refutation of Moore

Unit 2-lesson 3- Cross-text connections

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Cross-text connections questions require you to compare the views expressed in two separate passages. Before digging into the specifics of the question, it's worth spending some time simplifying and summarizing the ideas contained in each passage.

How would you summarize each text here?

We might summarize the two texts as follows:

- **Text 1:** Soy sauce, which is made from fermented soybeans, is noted for its “umami” flavor. In 2007, to define the pure umami flavor, Ishii and O’Mahony used broths made from shiitake mushrooms and kombu seaweed, and some Japanese and US judges agreed on a description of the taste.
- **Text 2:** A 2022 experiment by Jünger led to a greater understanding of soy sauce’s flavor profile. They analyzed soy sauce and found that certain dipeptides enhanced its umami flavor and saltiness. They then made a mix of 50 chemical compounds that re-created soy sauce’s flavor.

The question asks us to identify what Ishii and O’Mahony (Text 1) and Jünger (Text 2) would agree on *IF* they were aware of the findings of both experiments.

Since this is a complex hypothetical question, let’s skip making a prediction and instead go straight to the choices. Which choice makes the most sense?

Let’s go through the choices:

- **The broths in the 2007 experiment most likely did not have a substantial amount of the dipeptides that played a key part in the 2022 experiment.**

This makes sense. Ishii and O’Mahony were trying to isolate the *pure* umami flavor, while Jünger was trying to recreate

Unit 2-lesson 3- Cross-text connections

soy sauce, which has a mix of flavors that includes umami. Accordingly, the broths from Text 1 are not described as having any soy sauce in them—just “shiitake mushrooms and kombu seaweed”. So they probably don’t have as much of the dipeptides described in Text 2, which were found to be a key part of soy sauce’s umami-ness *and* its saltiness.

- (B) On average, the diets of people in the United States tend to have fewer foods that contain certain dipeptides than the diets of people in Japan have. This strays too far from both texts. Neither text gets into the diets of people in the United States, nor the diets of people in Japan, so there’s no basis for this comparison.
- (C) Chemical compounds that activate both the umami and salty taste receptors tend to have a higher molecular weight than those that only activate umami taste receptors. This is more on-topic than (B), as Text 2 does talk about the molecular weights of chemical compounds. But chemical compounds and molecular weights aren’t discussed at all in Text 1, so we don’t know if Ishii and O’Mahony would have an opinion on these things.
- (D) Fermentation introduces proteins responsible for the increase of umami flavor in soy sauce, and those proteins also increase the perception of saltiness.

Neither text supports this. Text 1 mentions that soy sauce is “made from fermented soybeans”, but it never suggests that the fermentation is responsible for its flavor in any way. And we don’t have enough information in Text 2 to infer any position about fermentation.

(A) is the only choice supported by the texts. (A) is the answer.

Unit 2-lesson 3- Cross-text connections

QUESTION 2:

Cross-text connections questions require you to compare the views expressed in two separate passages. Before digging into the specifics of the question, it's worth spending some time simplifying and summarizing the ideas contained in each passage.

How would you summarize each text here?

We might summarize the two texts as follows:

- **Text 1:** We don't know exactly how Nahuatl script worked. Many scholars assumed that the symbols signified entire words, but Lacadena theorized that they signified syllables.
- **Text 2:** The growing consensus is that Nahuatl script symbols could signify either words or syllables, depending on the context. For example, the symbol signifying the word *huipil* (blouse) in some contexts could signify the syllable "pil" in others.

The question asks us how Author 2 would characterize Lacadena's theory. Can you infer what Author 2 would think about this theory?

Lacadena's theory is that Nahuatl script symbols signified syllables, but the consensus described in Text 2 is that they can signify *either* symbols *or* full words, depending on the context. So we might logically infer that Author 2 would think that Lacadena's theory is too simplistic: it's missing the importance of the context in determining the meaning of a symbol.

(D) captures this view and is the answer.

QUESTION 3:

Cross-text connections questions require you to compare the views expressed in two separate passages. Before digging into the

Unit 2-lesson 3- Cross-text connections

specifics of the question, it's worth spending some time simplifying and summarizing the ideas contained in each passage.

How would you summarize each text here?

We might summarize the two texts like this:

- **Text 1:** Moche sculptures of human faces are so detailed that some historians have interpreted facial markings to represent real blemishes. Some historians have even used these sculptures to identify skin diseases that some Moche people might have had.
- **Text 2:** Historian Lisa Trever argues that the interpretation of Moche face sculptures as hyper-realistic may ignore the creativity of the sculptors. Trevor thinks Moche sculptors used their imagination, using real people as inspiration to explore more abstract concepts.

The question asks us to identify how Trever would respond to the interpretation underlined in Text 1. What might Trever think about this interpretation?

We can infer that Trever thinks the facial markings on the sculptures may not have represented real skin blemishes on real people: in her view, they could be products of the sculptors' imagination and creativity.

(A) captures this view and is the answer.

QUESTION 4:

Cross-text connections questions require you to compare the views expressed in two separate passages. Before digging into the specifics of the question, it's worth spending some time **simplifying and summarizing the ideas contained in each passage.**

How would you summarize each text here?

We might summarize the two texts as follows:

Unit 2-lesson 3- Cross-text connections

- **Text 1:** Philosopher G.E. Moore defines the concept of common sense as certain beliefs that everyone, including philosophers, knows instinctively to be true, even if they say otherwise (like the fact that we have bodies or that other things exist). Moore’s work on common sense may seem obvious, but it was actually groundbreaking.
- **Text 2:** External world skepticism is the philosophical stance that we can’t be sure that anything exists outside of our own minds. G.E. Moore rebutted this stance by holding out his hands and saying, “Here is one hand, and here is another.” Many philosophers reject Moore’s rebuttal but have a hard time articulating why.

The question asks us how the author of Text 1 would respond to supporters of the philosophical stance in Text 2, the stance being “external world skepticism”. How do you think this author would respond to external world skeptics?

According to Author 1, Moore’s definition of common sense—things we *instinctively know* are true—includes the belief that we all “exist in a world with other objects.” Author 1 describes this notion as both “obvious” and “groundbreaking.” So it’s safe to infer that Author 1 would observe that Moore would respond to external world skeptics by arguing that since everyone instinctively knows that things exist outside of their own minds, then external world skepticism must be wrong.

(A) captures this view and is the answer.

UNIT 3

EXPRESSION OF IDEAS



- LESSON 1: TRANSITIONS
- LESSON 2: RHETORICAL SYNTHESIS

UNIT 3

EXPRESSION OF IDEAS

LESSON 1: TRANSITIONS

Unit 3- Lesson 1 - Transitions

- **What are "transitions" questions?**

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will ask you to select the **most logical transition word or phrase** to connect information and ideas within a brief passage .

Transitions questions will look like this:

TRANSITIONS: EXAMPLE

Iraqi artist Nazik Al-Malaika, celebrated as the first Arabic poet to write in free verse, didn't reject traditional forms entirely; her poem "Elegy for a Woman of No Importance" consists of two ten-line stanzas and a standard number of syllables. Even in this superficially traditional work, _____ Al-Malaika was breaking new ground by memorializing an anonymous woman rather than a famous man.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

- A. in fact,
- B. though,
- C. therefore,
- D. moreover,

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ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

The first sentence tells us that *Al-Malaika sometimes used "traditional forms"*. The second tells us that *even when she used traditional forms, Al-Malaika was "breaking new ground"*.

These two ideas disagree with one another: they say nearly opposite things ("traditional" vs. "new"). We'll want to use a transition like "however" to reflect this contrast.

"**Though**" is a transition that reflects a contrast between two ideas, so choice **B** is the answer.

• How should we think about transitions?

Transitions are the glue that holds ideas together. They connect sentences in ways that tell the reader *how* those sentences are related. Is there an argument being made? A story being told? The transitions used in the text should reflect that relationship.

The relationships between ideas usually fall into the following categories:

➤ Agreement or disagreement

Do the sentences express the same underlying idea? If so, we may want to use an *agreement* transition like "**similarly**".

- Lentils are an excellent way to add plant-based protein to one's diet. **Similarly**, other legumes, like beans and

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chickpeas, can serve as integral protein sources for vegans and vegetarians.

- Other common *agreement* transitions include **again, also, correspondingly, equally,** and **likewise**.

Do the sentences identify a disagreement or contrast? If so, we may want to use a *disagreement* transition like "**however**".

- The rock star Prince was a multi-instrumentalist, having played 27 instruments on his debut album. **However**, he is primarily remembered as a guitarist and vocalist.
- Other common *disagreement* transitions include **but, yet, conversely, though, still, in contrast, although, nevertheless,** and **on the other hand**.

➤ Sequence and order

Are the events in the sentences being organized by time or by position? If so, we may want to use a *sequence* transition like "**previously**".

- The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* was published in 1980, seventeen years after it was written. **Previously**, the novel had been rejected by many different publishers.
- Other common *sequence* transitions include **then, later, before, first, finally,** and **subsequently**.

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➤ Addition and exemplification

Does the second sentence elaborate on the first? If so, we may want to use an *addition* transition like "**furthermore**".

- Moles are highly suited to their lifestyle, with short, powerful forelimbs adapted for digging. **Furthermore**, moles have evolved to require less oxygen, allowing them to avoid suffocation while underground.
- Other common *addition* transitions include **additionally**, **also**, **too**, **moreover**, and **in fact**.

Does the second sentence provide an example? If so, we may want to use an *exemplification* transition like "**for instance**".

- Throughout history, painters were endangered by poisonous ingredients in their paints. The use of lead in white paint, **for instance**, caused lead poisoning in many famous artists, including Vincent Van Gogh.
- Other common *exemplification* transitions include **for example**, **for one thing**, and **to demonstrate**.

➤ Cause and effect

Is the second sentence caused by or a consequence of the idea in the first sentence? If so, we may want to use a *cause and effect* transition like "**therefore**".

- The Hubble Space Telescope has provided astronomical insights for over 30 years, but its eventual breakdown is

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inevitable. **Therefore**, its successor, the James Webb Space Telescope, was launched in late 2021.

- Other common *cause and effect* transitions include **since**, **because**, **subsequently**, **thus**, **as a result**, and **consequently**.
-

• How to approach transitions questions

Transitions questions ask you to select the "most logical transition". However, these questions are actually as much about how well you understand the text as they are about the transitions themselves. So be sure to **read carefully!**

To answer a transitions question, follow these three steps:

- **Step 1:** *Summarize the text in your own words*

Don't just skim the passage . Read it closely, and try to summarize the main idea in your own words. This can be tricky since an important transition word is missing. If you're struggling to understand the text, try to translate each sentence into a simple bullet point.

- **Step 2:** *Identify the relationship between the passage's ideas*

The transition we're asked to select will connect two ideas from the passage. How are those ideas related? Do they disagree? Does one cause the other? We should be able to place the relationship into one of the four categories discussed above.

- **Step 3:** *Select the transition that matches the relationship*

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Only one of the choices will offer a transition that matches the relationship we identified. We can select it with confidence!

If you find yourself stuck between two choices, try plugging them each into the blank. Which transition creates the clearest meaning when placed in context?

Top tips

➤ *Be flexible*

There is an enormous variety of transition words and phrases, and the exact transition you expect to see might not be offered in the choices. If you think the sentence needs a disagreement word, but "however" isn't an option, look for a transition with a similar function (like "on the other hand").

➤ *Eliminate copycats*

If two choices seem to function in a similar or interchangeable way (like "also" and "in addition"), you can safely *eliminate them both*. They can't both be right, so they must both be wrong!

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MODEL EXAMPLE

1. Reforestation efforts, while undeniably valuable, often result in forests with limited biodiversity. _____ care should be taken to plant a wide variety of native flora in depleted woodlands.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

- A. However,
- B. Accordingly,
- C. Nevertheless,
- D. Furthermore,

2. The "Gordie Howe hat trick", an unofficial statistic in which a hockey player scores a goal, records an assist, and gets in a fight all in the same game, is named after hockey great Gordie Howe. _____ Howe only achieved this feat twice in his professional career, far fewer times than many other players.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

- A. However,
- B. Therefore,
- C. Afterwards,
- D. As a result,

Unit 3- Lesson 1 - Transitions

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Let's apply one of our tips: **Be flexible**

It seems like we have a clear cause-effect relationship here. "Reforestation can harm biodiversity, **so** care should be taken". We might expect to use a transition like "**therefore**". But "therefore" isn't among the choices...

Is there a different choice that serves a similar purpose?

B is the best choice. "Accordingly" is used to indicate a *cause-effect* relationship, which applies to this context. *Because* reforestation can lead to a lack of biodiversity, a variety of plants should be planted.

QUESTION 2:

Let's apply one of our tips: **Eliminate copycats**

Do any of our choices have similar meanings? How about "Therefore" and "As a result"?

Since those two transitions have very similar meanings, we can eliminate both choices and select from our remaining options.

A is the best choice. "However" appropriately reflects the fact that the feat is named after Howe *even though* he only accomplished it twice in his career (and fewer times than others).

Unit 3- Lesson 1 - Transitions

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Seismologists Kaiqing Yuan and Barbara Romanowicz have proposed that the magma fueling Iceland's more than 30 active volcano systems emerges from deep within Earth. The great depths involved—nearly 3,000 km—mark Iceland's volcanoes as extreme outliers; _____ many of Earth's volcanoes are fed by shallow pockets of magma found less than 15 km below the surface.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

- A. consequently,
- B. In addition,
- C. Indeed,
- D. Nevertheless,

2. Alexander Lawrence Posey (1873–1908) varied his focus and tone depending on the genre in which he was writing. In his poetry, he used heartfelt language to evoke the beauty and peacefulness of his natural surroundings; in his journalism, _____ he employed humor and satire to comment on political issues affecting his Muskogee Creek community.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

- A. by contrast,
- B. granted,
- C. that is,
- D. similarly,

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3. The number of dark spots that appear on the Sun, known as sunspots, can vary greatly. For example, there were about 180 sunspots in November 2001. _____ there were only about 2 sunspots in December 2008.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

- A. In other words,
- B. Similarly,
- C. Therefore,
- D. By comparison,

4. When one looks at the dark craggy vistas in Hitoshi Fugo's evocative photo series, one's mind might wander off to the cratered surfaces of faraway planets. _____ it's the series' title, *Flying Frying Pan*, that brings one back to Earth, reminding the viewer that each photo is actually a close-up view of a familiar household object: a frying pan.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

- A. Alternatively,
- B. Consequently,
- C. Ultimately,
- D. Additionally,

Unit 3- Lesson 1 - Transitions

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Transitions questions ask you to select the most logical transition in the context of a passage. Selecting the best transition depends on your understanding of the text. In particular, it requires you to understand how the idea before the transition is related to the idea after the transition.

Try summarizing the text in your own words, both before and after the blank. What is the relationship between these parts of the text?

➤ **We might summarize the text like this:**

- Iceland's volcanoes are outliers because their magma comes from deep within the Earth.
- Many of Earth's volcanoes are fed by shallow pockets of magma located just beneath the surface.

So there is a relationship of *agreement* between the two parts of the last sentence, with the second part supporting the same underlying idea: the first part tells us that Icelandic volcanoes' super deep magma is unusual, and the second part tells us that most volcano magma is much more shallow.

Which transition among the choices could reflect that relationship?

"Indeed" appropriately indicates an elaboration on the same underlying idea. **(C)** is the answer.

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QUESTION 2:

Transitions questions ask you to select the most logical transition in the context of a passage. Selecting the best transition depends on your understanding of the text. In particular, it requires you to understand how the idea before the transition is related to the idea after the transition.

Try summarizing the text in your own words, both before and after the blank. What is the relationship between these parts of the text?

➤ **We might summarize the text like this:**

- Posey wrote in different tones for different genres. For poetry, he used heartfelt language to describe the beauty of nature;
- for journalism, he used humor to comment on political issues.

So the last sentence compares the tone Posey used in his poetry to the tone he used in his journalism. We know from the descriptions in this sentence (“heartfelt” versus “humor and satire”) *and* from the claim in the first sentence that these tones are different from each other.

Which transition among the choices could reflect a relationship of difference or distinction?

“By contrast” appropriately indicates that the second tone is very different from the first tone. (A) is the answer.

QUESTION 3:

Transitions questions ask you to select the most logical transition in the context of a passage. Selecting the best transition depends on your understanding of the text. In particular, it requires you to understand how the idea before the transition is related to the idea after the transition.

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Try summarizing the text in your own words, both before and after the blank. What is the relationship between these parts of the text?

➤ **We might summarize the text like this:**

- The number of sunspots varies greatly. For example, there were 180 sunspots in November 2001.
- There were only 2 sunspots in December 2008.

The second sentence gives an example of a time when there were a lot of sunspots, and this sentence gives an example of a time when there were very few sunspots. At first glance, we might think that this is a relationship of disagreement—but these two sentences *together* support the claim in the first sentence, that the number of sunspots can vary greatly.

So we actually have a relationship of comparing / contrasting: the text compares two examples to illustrate how great the variance can be.

Which transition among the choices could reflect that relationship?

“By comparison” appropriately indicates that the text is comparing one example to another example. (D) is the answer.

QUESTION 4:

Transitions questions ask you to select the most logical transition in the context of a passage. Selecting the best transition depends on your understanding of the text. In particular, it requires you to understand how the idea before the transition is related to the idea after the transition.

Try summarizing the text in your own words, both before and after the blank. What is the relationship between these parts of the text?

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➤ **We might summarize the text like this:**

- When you look at the photos in Fugo's series, you imagine faraway planets.
- The series' title, *Flying Frying Pan*, brings you back to Earth, as it reminds you that each photo is actually a close-up of a frying pan.

There seems to be a relationship of sequence / order between these two sentences: the viewer imagines that they're looking at landscapes from another planet, *but then* the series' title reminds them that they're looking at a frying pan. Which transition among the choices could reflect that relationship?

“Ultimately” appropriately indicates that the experience described in the second sentence happens at the end, *after* the viewer has had the experience described in the first sentence. (C) is the answer.

UNIT 3

EXPRESSION OF IDEAS

LESSON 2: RHETORICAL SYNTHESIS

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

• What are "rhetorical synthesis" questions?

On the Reading and Writing section of your SAT, some questions will provide you with a series of bulleted notes that contain related information about an unfamiliar topic. The question will then ask you to **effectively use relevant information from the notes** to accomplish a particular goal.

Rhetorical synthesis questions will look like this:

RHETORICAL SYNTHESIS: EXAMPLE

While researching a topic, a student has taken the following notes:

- Maika'i Tubbs is a Native Hawaiian sculptor and installation artist.
- His work has been shown in the United States, Canada, Japan, and Germany, among other places.
- Many of his sculptures feature discarded objects.
- His work *Erasure* (2008) includes discarded audiocassette tapes and magnets.
- His work *Home Grown* (2009) includes discarded pushpins, plastic plates and forks, and wood.

The student wants to emphasize a similarity between the two works. Which choice most effectively uses relevant information from the notes to accomplish this goal?

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

- A. *Erasure* (2008) uses discarded objects such as audiocassette tapes and magnets; *Home Grown* (2009), however, includes pushpins, plastic plates and forks, and wood.
- B. Like many of Tubbs's sculptures, both *Erasure* and *Home Grown* include discarded objects: *Erasure* uses audiocassette tapes, and *Home Grown* uses plastic forks.
- C. Tubbs's work, which often features discarded objects, has been shown both within the United States and abroad.
- D. Tubbs completed *Erasure* in 2008 and *Home Grown* in 2009.

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

For rhetorical synthesis questions, we really want to focus on the **goal identified in the question stem**. In this case, that goal is to "**emphasize a similarity between the two works**".

Let's look through the choices to find a sentence that **emphasizes a similarity**:

- *Choice A*: This choice tells us about both works of art, but frames this information by focusing on how the artworks use different types of objects. This emphasizes a difference.
- *Choice B*: This choice tells us something that's true about both works of art. They both "include discarded objects". **This emphasizes a similarity.**
- *Choice C*: This choice doesn't mention either of the works of art we're supposed to be comparing. It doesn't emphasize any similarities or differences between those specific works.

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- *Choice D*: This choice doesn't directly compare the two artworks, but the information it does provide identifies how the works were completed at different times. This presents a difference (but doesn't really *emphasize* it).

Only choice B emphasizes a similarity between the two works of art, so only choice B accomplishes the goal identified in the question. **Choice B is the answer.**

- **How should we think about rhetorical synthesis questions?**

Rhetorical synthesis questions throw a lot of information at us. If we focus too much on that information, we can easily lose track of what the question is actually asking us to do.

The key to success on these questions is to **ignore** all the details at first and to focus in on the **goal** identified in the question prompt.

If we understand how rhetorical synthesis questions are structured, finding this goal should be easy.

- **Question structure**

Every rhetorical synthesis question has the same parts:

- an introduction
- a series of bulleted facts
- a question prompt
- the choices

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Many test-takers will instinctively be drawn to the bulleted information first. However, we should instead focus on the question prompt.

The question prompt will identify a goal for our solution sentence. For example, we might be asked to **emphasize a similarity or difference**, or to **introduce a study and its findings**, or to **provide an explanation and example** of some particular idea.

Only one of the choices will accomplish this goal. In fact, if we're short on time but are focused on the identified goal and explore the choices, we can often answer rhetorical synthesis questions *without ever reading the bulleted information*.

• How to approach rhetorical synthesis questions

If we actually had to compose the answer to a rhetorical synthesis question, our job would be much harder and more open-ended. We'd need to examine the presented information closely, decide which information is most relevant, and write a clear and concise sentence of our own making.

But since rhetorical synthesis questions are multiple choice, we can avoid all that complexity and be much more systematic.

To solve a rhetorical synthesis question, follow these three steps:

➤ **Step 1:** *Identify the goal*

Start by reading the question prompt. What does the correct choice need to accomplish?

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This goal will be plainly stated. For instance, in the example item at the start of this lesson, the goal is "**to emphasize a similarity between the two works**".

If you find yourself confused by the stated goal, you can get some more context by reading the bulleted information. But you won't need to understand all those details to be able to complete the next step.

➤ **Step 2:** *Test the choices*

All of the choices will present a grammatical sentence that accurately represents information from the bullets. This means we don't need to determine whether or not the sentences contain errors. We only need to focus on the goal.

Read through each choice. As you do, ask yourself, "does this sentence accomplish the identified goal?"

If the answer is no, eliminate that option.

➤ **Step 3:** *Select the choice that matches*

Once you've tested each answer choice, you should find that only one choice successfully accomplishes the goal defined in the question. You can select that choice with confidence!

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

Top tips

1. Simplify the goal

The simpler you can make the goal, the easier it will be to test the choices. **For example**, if the question wants to "emphasize a difference between *thing X* and *thing Y*", we can simplify our test to just "difference".

Does each choice describe "difference"? If not, we can eliminate it.

Simplifying the goal can help us eliminate a few choices very quickly. But we may have to reexamine the complete goal to distinguish between the remaining choices.

- Let's look back at our example question:

The goal is "to emphasize a similarity between the two works". Let's simplify that goal to just "similarity" and see what we can eliminate.

- Choice A doesn't emphasize "similarity". Notice how it uses the word "however" to introduce a *difference* instead. **We can eliminate choice A.**
- Choice C doesn't emphasize "similarity". It only tells us the years that the artworks were created, and those years are *different*. **We can eliminate choice C.**

2 Be strict!

Don't be generous with choices that "kind of" or "almost" accomplish the goal. If a choice doesn't completely address all parts of the goal, we can eliminate it. Details matter!

- Let's look back at our example question:

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Choices A and C both describe "similarity" in Tubbs's artwork. However, remember the entirety of the stated goal: "to emphasize a similarity *between the two works*".

This means we're not looking for similarity in Tubbs's artwork in general. We're looking specifically for similarities between two artworks: *Erasure* and *Home Grown*.

- Choice B doesn't focus on these two specific artworks; it only talks about Tubbs's artwork in general. **We can eliminate choice B.**
- Choice D describes similarities specific to *Erasure* and *Home Grown*. **Choice D is the answer.**

3 Ignore the grammar

All of the choices will be well-written and grammatically correct. Make your choice based on the information the choices contain, not how good they sound in the sentence.

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

MODEL EXAMPLE

While researching a topic, a student has taken the following notes:

- Marine biologist Camille Jazmin Gaynus studies coral reefs.
- Coral reefs are vital underwater ecosystems that provide habitats to 25% of all marine species.
- Reefs can include up to 8,000 species of fish, such as toadfish, seahorses, and clown triggerfish.
- The Amazon Reef is a coral reef in Brazil.
- It is one of the largest known reefs in the world.

The student wants to introduce the scientist and her field of study to a new audience. Which choice most effectively uses relevant information from the notes to accomplish this goal?

- A.** Located in Brazil, the Amazon Reef is one of the largest known coral reefs in the world.
- B.** Marine biologist Camille Jazmin Gaynus studies coral reefs, vital underwater ecosystems that provide homes to 25% of all marine species.
- C.** Providing homes to 25% of all marine species, including up to 8,000 species of fish, coral reefs are vital underwater ecosystems and thus of great interest to marine biologists.
- D.** As Camille Jazmin Gaynus knows well, coral reefs are vital underwater ecosystems, providing homes to thousands of species of fish.

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Let's apply one of our tips: **Simplify the goal**

The goal here is "to introduce the scientist and her field of study to a new audience". But we can simplify this goal a bit before testing the choices.

Let's just focus on the first part: "introduce the scientist".

Take a look through the choices. Which ones fail to introduce the scientist?

- Choice A doesn't mention the scientist at all. **We can eliminate choice A.**
- Choice C doesn't mention the scientist at all. **We can eliminate choice C.**

Now that we've eliminated a few choices, let's try applying our second tip: **Be strict!**

The goal here is "to introduce the scientist and her field of study to a new audience". To do this effectively, a sentence will need to name the scientist, name her field of study, and explain what that field of study includes.

Does either of the remaining choices fail to do all these things?

- Choice D names the scientist and alludes to the fact that she "knows [coral reefs] well", but it doesn't specifically identify the field of marine biology, the way choice B does. Nor does choice D explicitly state that Gaynus is a scientist engaged in formal research. **We can eliminate choice D.**

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

1. While researching a topic, a student has taken the following notes:
 - A thermal inversion is a phenomenon where a layer of atmosphere is warmer than the layer beneath it.
 - In 2022, a team of researchers studied the presence of thermal inversions in twenty-five gas giants.
 - Gas giants are planets largely composed of helium and hydrogen.
 - The team found that gas giants featuring a thermal inversion were also likely to contain heat-absorbing metals.
 - One explanation for this relationship is that these metals may reside in a planet's upper atmosphere, where their absorbed heat causes an increase in temperature.

The student wants to present the study's findings to an audience already familiar with thermal inversions. Which choice most effectively uses relevant information from the notes to accomplish this goal?

- A.** Gas giants were likely to contain heat-absorbing metals when they featured a layer of atmosphere warmer than the layer beneath it, researchers found; this phenomenon is known as a thermal inversion.
- B.** The team studied thermal inversions in twenty-five gas giants, which are largely composed of helium and hydrogen.
- C.** Researchers found that gas giants featuring a thermal inversion were likely to contain heat-absorbing metals, which may reside in the planets' upper atmospheres.
- D.** Heat-absorbing metals may reside in a planet's upper atmosphere.

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

2. While researching a topic, a student has taken the following notes:

- Platinum is a rare and expensive metal.
- It is used as a catalyst for chemical reactions.
- Platinum catalysts typically require a large amount of platinum to be effective.
- Researcher Jianbo Tang and his colleagues created a platinum catalyst that combines platinum with liquid gallium.
- Their catalyst was highly effective and required only trace amounts of platinum (0.0001% of the atoms in the mixture).

The student wants to explain an advantage of the new platinum catalyst developed by Jianbo Tang and his colleagues. Which choice most effectively uses relevant information from the notes to accomplish this goal?

- A.** Like other platinum catalysts, the new platinum catalyst requires a particular amount of the metal to be effective.
- B.** Platinum is a rare and expensive metal that is used as a catalyst for chemical reactions; however, platinum catalysts typically require a large amount of platinum to be effective.
- C.** While still highly effective, the new platinum catalyst requires far less of the rare and expensive metal than do other platinum catalysts.
- D.** Researcher Jianbo Tang and his colleagues created a platinum catalyst that combines platinum, a rare and expensive metal, with liquid gallium.

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

3. While researching a topic, a student has taken the following notes:

- In 2013, paleontology professor Hesham Sallam and his students from Mansoura University in Egypt made a discovery.
- The team found a partial dinosaur skeleton at a site in Egypt's Dakhla Oasis.
- The skeleton belonged to a dinosaur species that lived approximately 80 million years ago.
- The new species was named Mansourasaurus to recognize the team that discovered it.

The student wants to explain the origin of the species' name. Which choice most effectively uses relevant information from the notes to accomplish this goal?

- A.** The new species was named Mansourasaurus to recognize the team that discovered it, a professor and students from Mansoura University.
- B.** Mansourasaurus, a species that lived approximately 80 million years ago, was discovered in 2013 by Egyptian paleontologist Hesham Sallam and a team of university students.
- C.** Mansourasaurus, a new species discovered in Egypt in 2013, lived approximately 80 million years ago.
- D.** A partial dinosaur skeleton found in Egypt's Dakhla Oasis belonged to a species named Mansourasaurus.

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

4. While researching a topic, a student has taken the following notes:

- In 1978, Sámi activists staged protests to block the construction of a dam on the Alta River in Norway.
- The dam would disrupt Sámi fishing and reindeer herding.
- The dam was ultimately built, but the Alta conflict had a lasting impact.
- It brought international attention to the issue of Sámi rights.
- It led to a set of 2005 legal protections establishing Sámi rights to lands, waters, and resources.

The student wants to make and support a generalization about the Alta conflict. Which choice most effectively uses relevant information from the notes to accomplish this goal?

- A. Sámi rights to lands, waters, and resources received international attention and legal protections as a result of the Alta conflict.
- B. During the Alta conflict, Sámi activists staged protests to block the construction of a dam on the Alta River in Norway that would disrupt local fishing and reindeer herding.
- C. Although the dam that the Sámi activists had protested was ultimately built, the Alta conflict had a lasting impact.
- D. The Alta conflict had a lasting impact, resulting in international attention and legal protections for Sámi rights to lands, waters, and resources.

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Rhetorical synthesis questions present a series of bullet points that offer information about an unfamiliar topic. They then identify a rhetorical goal for how that information is used. For instance, here's this question's rhetorical goal:

The student wants to present the study's findings to an audience already familiar with thermal inversions.

Can you find a choice that accomplishes this goal?

If our goal is to present the findings to a familiar audience, what type of information should and *shouldn't* we include?

We can safely avoid any choice that defines what a thermal inversion is, but we also need to find the choice that talks explicitly about what the study found.

Do any of the choices include that type of information?

Only (C) provides information that both avoids introductory-level information about thermal inversions and *includes* information about the study. (C) is the answer.

Top Tip: What information should NOT be included? Some rhetorical synthesis questions will ask you to assume that the audience is already familiar with a term or concept. This is a hint that there will be some background information in the notes that the answer should *not* include. This information is often located within the first few bullet points. For instance, in this question, the audience is "already familiar with thermal inversions". So we can ignore the entire first bullet point, because all it does is define thermal inversions. And we can eliminate (A) for including this definition.

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

QUESTION 2:

Rhetorical synthesis questions present a series of bullet points that offer information about an unfamiliar topic. They then identify a rhetorical goal for how that information is used. For instance, here's the rhetorical goal in this question:

The student wants to explain an advantage of the new platinum catalyst identified by Jianbo Tang and his colleagues.

Can you find a choice that accomplishes this goal?

If our goal is to explain an advantage of the catalyst, what type of information should we include?

How do standard platinum catalysts work? What's the deal with the new one, and in what ways is it better than the original flavor?

Do any of the choices include that type of information?

Only (C) describes a concrete advantage that the new platinum catalyst has over other platinum catalysts. (C) is the answer.

QUESTION 3:

Rhetorical synthesis questions present a series of bullet points that offer information about an unfamiliar topic. They then identify a rhetorical goal for how that information is used. For instance, here's this question's rhetorical goal:

The student wants to explain the origin of the species' name.

Can you find a choice that accomplishes this goal?

If our goal is to explain the name's origin, what information should we include?

Do any of the choices include information about the name of the dinosaur?

Unit 3- Lesson 2- Rhetorical synthesis

Only (A) provides information that connects the dinosaur to its name origin. (A) is the answer.

QUESTION 4:

Rhetorical synthesis questions present a series of bullet points that offer information about an unfamiliar topic. They then identify a rhetorical goal for how that information is used. For instance, here's this question's rhetorical goal:

The student wants to make and support a generalization about the Alta conflict.

Can you find a choice that accomplishes this goal?

If our goal is to make and support a generalization about the conflict, what type of information should we include?

This goal has two components: we need to find a choice that makes a generalization about the conflict *and* supports it with evidence.

Do any of the choices include that type of information?

Only (D) provides information that both makes a generalization about the conflict *and* provides support for that generalization. (D) is the answer.

UNIT 4

STANDARD ENGLISH CONVENTIONS



- LESSON 1: FORM, STRUCTURE AND SENSE
- LESSON 2: BOUNDARIES

UNIT 4

STANDARD ENGLISH CONVENTIONS

LESSON 1: FORM, STRUCTURE AND SENSE

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

OVERVIEW

- **What are "form, structure, and sense" questions?**

On the SAT Reading and Writing Test, some questions will present you with a short passage that contains a blank. The question will then ask you to complete the text in a way that **conforms to the conventions of Standard English**.

On the SAT, these Standard English conventions are broken down into two categories:

- **Form, structure, and sense**
- **Boundaries** (next lesson)

Form, structure, and sense questions focus on the rules surrounding various parts of speech (nouns, verbs, etc.) and their usage.

-
- **Which Standard English conventions will be tested in form, structure, and sense questions?**

Form, structure, and sense questions focus on these Standard English conventions:

- [Subject-verb agreement](#)
- [Pronoun-antecedent agreement](#)
- [Verb forms](#)
- [Subject-modifier placement](#)

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

- [Plural and possessive nouns](#)

To learn more about these conventions, check out their corresponding grammar guides and lesson videos!

- **How to approach form, structure, and sense questions**

Because each question will focus on a specific convention of Standard English, it's a great first step to **identify which grammar rule is being tested**.

Here's one way to do that:

Step 1: *Investigate the blank*

Read the text closely. What's missing that the blank needs to provide? A noun phrase? A verb phrase? Something else?

Compare the choices. What changes from choice to choice? Are verbs conjugated differently? Are different pronouns used?

Any patterns we can identify will be useful in the next step.

Step 2: *Find the focus*

Based on our observations in the previous step, we should be able to identify which Standard English convention(s) is being tested.

For example, if the main difference between the choices is verb conjugation, we should be focused on avoid errors in *verb forms* and in *subject-verb agreement*.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

If we can narrow our focus to just the convention(s) being tested, we'll have less to think about. This can save us both time and brainpower.

Step 3: *Eliminate the obvious errors*

Now it's time to take a closer look at the choices!

Plug each choice into the blank, and read the passage through. Keeping in mind the focus grammar rules, eliminate any choice that creates an obvious error.

Once we eliminate choices that create errors, we'll be left with only one remaining choice. We can select it with confidence!

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Plurals and Possessives

- **What are plurals and possessives?**

- **Plurals** are nouns and pronouns that refer to more than one thing.
- **Possessives** are nouns and pronouns that show possession.

There are similarities and differences in how plurals and possessives are formed that can cause confusion. In particular, confusion can arise over when to use or not use *apostrophes*.

Incorrect:

- One cannot overstate the importance of **bee's** to the pollination of **Michigans** blueberry crop.
- "bee's"

This noun should be plural, not possessive, so we shouldn't use an apostrophe.

- "Michigans"

This noun should be possessive, not plural, so we should place an apostrophe before the "s".

Correct:

- One cannot overstate the importance of **bees** to the pollination of **Michigan's** blueberry crop.

This version of the sentence correctly forms the plural noun "bees" and the possessive noun "Michigan's".

The formation of plurals and possessives may be tested in one of the [Form, structure, and sense](#) questions that you encounter on test day.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Plurals and Possessives

- **How to form plurals and possessives**

To succeed on questions about plural and possessive nouns, you'll need to know the rules for using apostrophes in the following cases:

- **Plural nouns**

Plural nouns do not require an apostrophe.

Example: The **plants** in the greenhouse are thriving.

- **Singular possessive nouns**

Singular possessive nouns require an apostrophe *followed* by an "s".

Example: The **company's** most popular products include shampoo and moisturizer.

Note: This rule applies even if the singular noun already ends in "s" (e.g., the **rhinoceros's** horn).

- **Plural possessive nouns**

Plural possessive nouns that end in "s" require an apostrophe *after* the "s".

Example: On many superhero teams, the **heroes'** costumes are each a different color.

Note: If a plural noun *doesn't* end in "s", then an "s" should be added after the apostrophe (e.g., the **men's** swim team).

- **Pronouns**

never use apostrophes. His and hers don't use apostrophes. Yours, ours, and theirs are in the same category.

Example: **His** favorite food is the same as **hers**.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Plurals and Possessives

- **How to identify questions about plurals and possessives**

When we approach form, structure, and sense questions, it's important to identify which Standard English conventions are being tested.

Make sure to look for errors with genitives and plurals if

1. the choices add or remove apostrophes
2. the choices change the placement of apostrophes

If you don't see one or both of these features, then the question likely doesn't deal with plurals and possessives.

Let's look at a plurals and possessives question now:

PLURALS AND POSSESSIVES EXAMPLE

Slam poet Elizabeth Acevedo's debut novel *The Poet X*, winner of the 2018 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, is composed of ____ protagonist, fifteen-year-old Xiomara Batista.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. poem's putatively written by the novel's
- B. poem's putatively written by the novels'
- C. poems putatively written by the novels'
- D. poems putatively written by the novel's

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Plurals and Possessives

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

We should quickly notice that the choices are quite similar: the only difference is the placement of apostrophes. This is a strong indication that the question will require us to avoid an error in **plurals and possessives**.

There are two words up for debate in the choices:

- **"poems"**
- **"novels"**

Let's take them on one at a time.

➤ **"Poems":**

- Based on the sentence, we're discussing more than one poem, **so "poems" must be plural.**
- What comes after "poems" doesn't *belong* to the poems, **so "poems" should *not* be possessive.**

Since plural, non-possessive nouns don't require an apostrophe, the noun used should be **"poems"**.

➤ **"Novels":**

- Based on the sentence, we're discussing only one novel, **so "novels" should *not* be plural.**
- What comes after "novels" (the protagonist) *does* belong to the novel, **so "novels" must be possessive.**

Since singular possessive nouns require an apostrophe before the "s", the noun used should be **"novel's"**.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Plurals and Possessives

Only choice D uses both the nouns "poems" and "novel's". **Choice D is the answer.**

Top tips

1. Check all the nouns

SAT questions that ask us about plural and possessive nouns may include *two* nouns in the underline. The choices will include variations where one, both, or neither of the two are made plural or possessive.

Be sure that the answer you choose uses (or doesn't use) apostrophes correctly in *both* nouns.

Look at the choices in our example question:

- Choices A and C both use the correct form of "novel's"
 - Choices C and D both use the correct form of "poems"
- However, only choice C uses the correct form of both nouns.

2. Beware "its" and "their"

"Its" and "their" follow the same rule as other possessive pronouns: **they don't require an apostrophe.** However, these pronouns are frequently confused with the contractions "it's" and "they're".

Any time you see a form of "it's/its" or "there/their/they're" appear in the choices, double check that you're using the appropriate form.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Plurals and Possessives

Use the following tables to keep things straight!

- **its:**

its belongs to it

it's "it is"

- **their:**

their belongs to them

they're "they are"

there that place

Note: You may be offered variations of both "they" and "it" in the same question, so you'll also need to pay attention to *pronoun agreement*.

- Is the noun being referred to singular? **Use a version of "it"**.
- Is the noun being referred to plural? **Use a version of "they"**.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Plurals and Possessives

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Labor unions are formed in order to protect _____ through collective bargaining, which gives employees greater leverage while ensuring they are treated equally by management.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. workers' rights
- B. worker's rights
- C. workers rights'
- D. workers' rights'

2. The striated _____ walls are the result of erosion and frost weathering having exposed layers of multicolored sedimentary rock.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. patterns' of a canyons
- B. patterns of a canyons'
- C. pattern's of a canyon's
- D. patterns of a canyon's

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Plurals and Possessives

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Choice **(A)** is the best choice. The plural possessive noun “workers’” is used correctly to indicate that the plural “rights” belong to the workers.

QUESTION 2:

Choice **(D)** is the best choice. “Patterns” must be plural to match the plural verb “are”, but nothing *belongs* to the patterns, so no apostrophe is needed. “Canyon” must be singular because of the singular article “a”, and is appropriately made possessive to indicate that the “walls” belong to the canyon.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

- **What is pronoun-antecedent agreement?**

Pronoun-antecedent agreement is a convention of Standard English that requires a **pronoun** and **antecedent** to *agree in person and number*.

Incorrect:

- Cranberries are both sour and bitter, so people rarely eat **it** unsweetened.

Correct:

- Cranberries are both sour and bitter, so people rarely eat **them** unsweetened.

In both of these sentences, the bolded pronouns stand in for the noun "cranberries".

Since "cranberries" is a **plural** noun, it needs to be paired with the **plural** pronoun "they".

This same logic must be applied to all pronouns and their antecedents.

Pronoun-antecedent agreement may be tested in one of the [Form, structure, and sense](#) questions that you encounter on test day.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

- **How to identify pronoun-antecedent agreement questions**

When approaching form, structure, and sense questions, it's important to identify which Standard English conventions are being tested.

You'll know to look for pronoun-antecedent agreement errors if

- one choice uses a singular pronoun (like "it") while another choice uses a plural pronoun (like "they")
- a pronoun outside the blank refers to a noun contained within the choices

If you don't notice either of these features, then the question doesn't deal with pronoun-antecedent agreement.

Let's look at a pronoun-antecedent agreement question now:

PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT EXAMPLE

It is hard to live in Antarctica. The cold, dry environment provides the continent's soil-dwelling microbes few nutrients, little water, and almost no sunlight. In a 2017 study of these organisms, microbiologist Belinda Ferrari reported that _____ able to survive on a diet of atmospheric gases found in the soil.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

A. It is

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

- B. This is
- C. Either is
- D. They are

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Notice that each of the choices includes a different pronoun. One of the pronouns is plural ("they"), while the rest are singular. The verbs in the choices simply match the pronoun they're paired with. All of this indicates that this question focuses **on pronoun-antecedent agreement.**

Since we only have control of the pronoun, we need to make sure it matches the correct antecedent. **But what is the antecedent?**

Well, what is the sentence saying is "able to survive"? Is it sunlight? Is it Belinda Ferrari? Neither of those makes sense.

It's "these organisms" that we're saying are able to survive on gases found in the soil. "These organisms" is plural, so we need to use a plural pronoun to match.

Only choice D uses a plural pronoun ("they"). **Choice D is the answer.**

-
- **What can make pronoun-antecedent agreement errors difficult to spot?**

In simple sentences, the connection between a pronoun and its antecedent is often very clear. However, as sentences become more

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

complex, errors in pronoun-antecedent agreement can be much more difficult to identify.

Be extra cautious when you notice any of the following:

➤ Distance between pronoun and antecedent

The further apart a pronoun and its antecedent are in a sentence, the harder agreement errors are to spot. Extra phrases and clauses interfere with our ability to work off instinct.

Errors in these cases are less likely to just "sound wrong". So, if you notice a pronoun way out on its own, track down its antecedent and check for agreement.

Incorrect:

- The record player largely fell out of style in the 1980s and 90s, but there has since been a revival in **their** popularity.

Correct:

- The record player largely fell out of style in the 1980s and 90s, but there has since been a revival in **its** popularity.

In this compound sentence, the pronoun and its antecedent are in different independent clauses, which makes the error harder to see.

But once we identify the antecedent as the **singular** noun phrase "the record player", we know to use the **singular** pronoun "it".

➤ Multiple nouns before the pronoun

When multiple nouns appear before a pronoun in a sentence, identifying the correct antecedent can be tricky. Errors in pronoun-

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

antecedent agreement will be difficult to identify in these cases, especially if some of the nouns are plural and others are singular.

When you notice multiple nouns before the pronoun, take the time to identify the most logical antecedent.

Incorrect:

- The cougar, the largest of all North American cats, has lost most of **their** range in the eastern United States.

Correct:

- The cougar, the largest of all North American cats, has lost most of **its** range in the eastern United States.

Explanation: Even though “cats” is a plural noun close to the pronoun, it isn’t the logical antecedent of the pronoun. The actual antecedent, “cougar”, is a **singular** noun and requires the **singular** “it”.

➤ Pronoun before the antecedent

"Antecedent" literally means *what comes before*, but sometimes this relationship gets flipped. And when a pronoun becomes before its antecedent, we're less likely to notice an agreement error.

If you see a pronoun towards the beginning of the text, track down the noun it refers to and double check for agreement.

Incorrect:

- While **it** may not be widely associated with long life, ocean clams have been known to live for over 500 years.

Correct:

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

- While **they** may not be widely associated with long life, ocean clams have been known to live for over 500 years.

Since we read the pronoun before we know whether its antecedent is plural or singular, this error can be hard to identify. But once we notice that our antecedent is the **plural** noun "clams", we know to use the **plural** pronoun "they".

Top tips

1. Find the antecedent

To recognize pronoun agreement errors, we must be able to identify the antecedent of the pronoun in question—*the noun that the pronoun logically refers to*.

Read carefully! Antecedents can be hard to find when multiple singular and plural nouns are present.

2. Plug in the antecedent

If you're not sure you've identified the correct noun as the antecedent, try plugging it in where the pronoun goes. If the sentence still makes sense, you've found the antecedent!

For example:

The survival of the orangutan is threatened by the destruction of **its** habitat.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

The only noun that can logically replace "it" in this sentence is "orangutan", so that's the antecedent:

The survival of the orangutan is threatened by the destruction of **the orangutan's** habitat.

3.A note about gendered pronouns

The SAT won't ask you to choose between a gendered pronoun ("he" or "she") and the non-gendered singular pronoun "they" when referring to a single person.

When checking for pronoun-antecedent agreement, you'll only need to determine **A)** if the noun is singular or plural, and **B)** if the noun is a person or a thing.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Before a jury trial begins, lawyers for each side interview potential jurors closely, _____ questions intended to reveal any biases.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. asking him or her
- B. asking them
- C. asking it
- D. to ask him or her

2. Thanks to _____ long legs, giraffes are very fast, running as quickly as 35 miles per hour in short bursts.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. its
- B. one's
- C. their
- D. his or her

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: pronoun-antecedent agreement

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Choice **(B)** is the best choice. The plural pronoun "them" appropriately agrees with its plural antecedent "jurors".

QUESTION 2:

Choice **(C)** is the best choice. The plural pronoun "their" appropriately agrees with the plural noun it refers to, "giraffes".

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

• What is subject-verb agreement?

Subject-verb agreement is a convention of Standard English that requires a **subject** and **verb** to *agree in number*.

Incorrect:

- Apples **is** different from oranges.

Correct:

- Apples **are** different from oranges.

-

"Is" is the **singular** present tense of the verb "to be". "Are" is the **plural** present tense of the verb "to be".

Since "Apples " is a **plural** subject, it needs to be paired with the **plural** form of the verb.

This same logic must be applied to all subject-verb pairings.

Subject-verb agreement may be tested in one of the [Form, structure, and sense](#) questions that you encounter on test day.

• How to identify subject-verb agreement questions

When approaching form, structure, and sense questions, it's important to identify which Standard English conventions are being tested.

You'll know to look for **subject-verb agreement errors** if different choices contain singular and plural forms of the same verb.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

If you don't see this difference among the choices, then the question doesn't deal with subject-verb agreement.

Let's look at a subject-verb agreement question now:

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT EXAMPLE

When a fire burns red or green or blue, the color of its flames _____ the chemical composition of the combustible material.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. Indicate
- B. Indicates
- C. Have indicated
- D. Are indicating

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Notice that the choices include *four forms of the same verb*. One of the verbs is singular ("indicates"), while the rest are plural. This tells us that the question is focused on **subject-verb agreement**.

Since we only have control of the verb, we need to make sure it matches the subject. **But what is the subject here?**

the color of its flames

This is the entire noun phrase that comes before the verb. Because the plural noun "flames" appears closest to the verb, we might think the verb should also be plural. **However**, "flames" is actually the object of the preposition phrase "of its flames", so it can't serve as the subject.

The subject (what actually does the "indicating") is actually the singular noun "color".

We need a singular verb to match, so our only option is **choice B**, which uses the singular verb "indicates".

Choice B is the answer.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

- **What can make subject-verb agreement errors difficult to spot?**

When a verb follows directly after its subject, agreement is pretty easy to verify ("apples **is**" vs "apples **are**"). However, when sentence structures become more complex, subject-verb agreement errors can be much harder to spot.

Be extra cautious when you notice any of the following:

➤ *Extra words between the subject and verb*

When additional words, especially other nouns, come between a subject and verb, agreement errors are much easier to miss.

Incorrect:

- Istanbul, the most populous of all European cities, **were founded** in the first millennium BCE.

Correct:

- Istanbul, the most populous of all European cities, **was founded** in the first millennium BCE.

While the **plural** noun "cities" is close to the verb, it's not the subject of the verb. The phrase "the most populous of all European cities" is describing the **singular** noun "Istanbul", which is the subject of the verb.

This becomes clearer if we simply **eliminate the descriptive phrase:**

Istanbul . . . **was founded**

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

If you notice extra words or phrases, eliminate them from the sentence, and try reading the subject straight into the verb.

➤ Inverted sentences

Sometimes a subject will come *after* the verb. When this is the case, agreement errors are trickier to identify.

Incorrect:

- Separating the roads **were** a concrete median.

Correct:

- Separating the roads **was** a concrete median.

The **plural** noun “roads” comes right before the helping verbs “was/were”, but it's not the subject! The subject of the verb is actually the **singular** noun “median”, which comes later.

This is much clearer if we **flip the subject and verb:**

A concrete median **was** separating the roads.

If you notice a subject that comes after its verb, try flipping the sentence and reading the subject straight in to the verb.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

Top tips

1. Place subject and verb side-by-side

Any time you're not sure if a subject and verb agree, place them next to each other and see how they sound together. This tip helps cut through complex sentence structures and tends to make subject-verb agreement errors much more obvious.

2. Look out for prepositions

Prepositions like "with", "of", and "from" are often used to start phrases that describe the subject of a sentence. These phrases can cause confusion, as the object of the prepositional phrase ends up closer to the verb, and it's often a noun with a different number.

For example: "The sound of the trumpets **was** deafening."

The prepositional phrase "of the trumpets" may include a plural noun, but it describes the **singular** subject "sound", so we need to use the **singular** verb "was".

3. Plurals and the letter 's'

If you're a fluent speaker of English, you'll often be able to pair plural nouns with plural verbs based purely off of instinct and sound. But if that doesn't work, you need to be able to identify singular and plural verbs.

With nouns, plurals are usually formed by adding an 's' to the end of the word:

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

elephant → **elephants**

With verbs, though, the pattern is exactly the opposite. Typically, we form a plural verb by *removing* an 's':

- The elephant **runs**.
- The elephants **run**.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. A Neapolitan pizza made with San Marzano tomatoes _____ considered more traditional than one made with any other type of tomatoes.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. Are
- B. Have been
- C. Is
- D. Were

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

2. The sum of money one donates to registered nonprofit organizations _____ a deduction that can be made from one's taxable income.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. represent
- B. Represents
- C. are representing
- D. have represented

3. Called *embouchure*, the shape of a skilled trumpet player's lips _____ for playing a wide range of notes with clear tone and without muscle strain.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. allows
- B. are allowing
- C. allow
- D. have allowed

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-verb agreement

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Choice **(C)** is the best choice. The singular verb “is” agrees in number with the singular subject “pizza”.

Notice that "made with San Marzano tomatoes" is an extra descriptive phrase that comes between the subject and verb. If we get rid of that extra descriptive phrase, then subject-verb agreement is easier to identify: "A pizza . . . **is** considered".

QUESTION 2:

Choice **(B)** is the best choice. The singular verb “represents” agrees in number with the singular subject “sum”.

Notice that "of money one donates to registered non-profit organizations" is an extra descriptive phrase that gets between the subject and verb. If we get rid of that descriptive phrase, subject-verb agreement is easier to identify: "The sum . . . **represents**".

QUESTION 3:

Choice **(A)** is the best choice. The singular verb "allows" agrees with its singular subject "shape".

Notice that "of a skilled trumpet player's lips" is an extra phrase that comes between the subject and verb. If we get rid of that descriptive phrase, then subject-verb agreement is easier to identify: "the shape . . . **allows**".

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-modifier placement

- **What is subject-modifier placement?**

Subject-modifier placement refers to a convention of Standard English that requires a **modifier and its subject** to *be next to one another*.

Incorrect:

- **Consumed in the form of sugars and starches, *the human body*** uses carbohydrates as its primary source of energy.

In this version of the sentence, the modifying phrase "consumed in the form of sugars and starches" is next to "the human body". However, the sentence isn't meant to suggest that "the human body is consumed in the form of sugars and starches".

This is a modifier placement error.

Correct:

- **Consumed in the form of sugars as starches, *carbohydrates*** serve as the primary source of energy for the human body.

In this version of the sentence, the modifying phrase "consumed in the form of sugars and starches" is logically followed by the noun it describes: "carbohydrates".

Subject-modifier placement may be tested in one of the [Form, structure, and sense](#) questions that you encounter on test day.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-modifier placement

- **How to identify subject-modifier placement questions**

When approaching form, structure, and sense questions, it's important to identify which Standard English conventions are being tested.

You may want to look for subject-modifier placement errors if

- the blank is longer than a few words
- the choices rearrange words or phrases into different orders

If you don't see one or both of these features, then the question likely doesn't deal with subject-modifier placement.

Let's look at a subject-modifier placement question now:

SUBJECT-MODIFIER PLACEMENT EXAMPLE

Rabinal Achí is a precolonial Maya dance drama performed annually in Rabinal, a town in the Guatemalan highlands. Based on events that occurred when Rabinal was a city-state ruled by a king, _____ had once been an ally of the king but was later captured while leading an invading force against him.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. *Rabinal Achí* tells the story of K'iche' Achí, a military leader who
- B. K'iche' Achí, the military leader in the story of *Rabinal Achí*,
- C. there was a military leader, K'iche' Achí, who in *Rabinal Achí*
- D. there was a military leader, K'iche' Achí, who in *Rabinal Achí*

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-modifier placement

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Notice that the blank in this question follows an introductory modifying phrase. Also, notice that the choices are fairly complex and place words in very different orders. These are strong indications that the question will require us to avoid an error in **subject-modifier placement**.

Let's look at the modifying phrase in this question:

"Based on events that occurred when Rabinal was a city-state ruled by a king,"

We need to place a noun directly after this phrase that can be logically described as "based on events". The only noun in the choices that could logically be described as "based on events" is the story itself: *Rabinal Achi*.

Only choice A places "*Rabinal Achi*" directly after the modifying phrase. **Choice A is the answer.**

Top tips

1. Double-check introductory modifiers

When modifying phrases come at the beginning of a sentence, our brains will often do the work of connecting the modifier to whichever noun it logically describes. But these modifying phrases don't apply to the whole sentence: they still need to be placed right next to their subjects.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-modifier placement

Any time you see a blank come after an introductory modifying phrase, double check the noun that follows to be sure it makes sense alongside the modifier.

Notice where the blank shows up in **our example question**:

- Based on events that occurred when Rabinal was a city-state ruled by a king, _____

The whole paragraph is focused on the dance drama *Rabinal Achí*, so it's easy to connect that subject to this introductory modifier. However, we still need to make sure that the noun phrase following the modifier makes sense in the context of that particular sentence.

Only choice A correctly places *Rabinal Achí* in that spot.

2. Beware possessive nouns

When a noun phrase starts with a possessive noun, it can make modifier placement extra confusing. Remember that possessive nouns really function as adjectives: the noun that follows the possessive is the actual focus of the noun phrase. *That's* the noun the modifier needs to describe.

Incorrect:

- Exhausted from running home in the rain, **Erin's jacket** was soaking wet.

Correct:

- Exhausted from running home in the rain, **Erin** pulled off her soaking wet jacket.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-modifier placement

In the first version of this sentence, the modifier illogically applies to the noun "jacket". It doesn't make sense to say that "Erin's jacket was exhausted". It's *Erin* that's exhausted.

We can fix this error in modifier placement by adjusting the second half of the sentence so that "Erin" is the noun that the modifier logically describes.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Having returned from the ocean to the stream where it was born, an adult salmon's life cycle ends when it spawns and dies, after which its offspring start the cycle anew.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. an adult salmon's life cycle ends when it spawns and dies,
- B. an adult salmon spawns and dies, completing its life cycle,
- C. the spawning and death of an adult salmon complete its life cycle,
- D. the life cycle of an adult salmon is complete when it spawns and die,

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-modifier placement

2. While popular depiction might characterize surfing as a summer sport, the reality is that winter conditions are considered better for surfing. Generated by seasonal storms far off the coast, _____

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A.** surfers highly prize the large, predictable sets of waves that are created by winter swells.
- B.** winter swells reach the shore as large, predictable sets of waves that are highly prized by surfers.
- C.** the shore causes large winter swells to break in predictable sets of waves highly prized by surfers.
- D.** winter is highly prized by surfers for large swells that break in large, predictable sets of waves.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

punctuation, as well as when to use or not use subordinating and coordinating conjunctions.

A good first step is *usually* to identify what types of clauses come before and after the blank. In this case, we have a transition word that falls in the middle of the sentence (“however”), so our first step should be to figure out which clause it goes with—the clause before or the clause after the blank.

Reading the entire text, we can see that “however” fits the transition from the previous sentence: A species that was thought to be extinct is called an ‘Elvis taxon’, *but*, just like an Elvis impersonator, it’s not the real thing. So “however” goes with the clause before the blank.

Now that we’ve figured that out, let’s identify the types of clauses:

- Like an Elvis impersonator who might bear a striking resemblance to the late musical icon Elvis Presley himself, an Elvis taxon is not the real thing, however
- It is a misidentified look-alike.

Are those clauses dependent or independent?

Both clauses can stand on their own as complete sentences, which means they’re both independent clauses.

How can we link two independent clauses?

Two independent clauses can only be linked in a few ways: with a comma + a coordinating conjunction, a semicolon, a colon, or a dash, or you can use a period and make them separate sentences.

Only (D) provides one of those ways. **(D)** is the answer.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Subject-modifier placement

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Choice **(B)** is the best choice. "An adult salmon" is appropriately placed so that it is logically described as "having returned from the ocean".

QUESTION 2:

Choice **(B)** is the best choice. "Winter swells" is effectively placed so that it's logically described as "generated by seasonal storms".

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

- **What are verb forms?**

Verbs can take many different forms. They can have different tenses and aspects. They can also be finite or non-finite. There are modal verbs, auxiliary verbs, and a dozen other possible categories.

The grammar science behind these different verb forms is complex. **Luckily, you don't need to actually do any of this tricky classification to succeed on the SAT.**

You've already been exposed to all these different verb forms in your everyday studies, and you likely use them all the time without thinking about it. If you rely on your instincts and familiarity with Standard English, choosing the correct verb form should come pretty naturally.

Incorrect:

- Yesterday, I **am running** to the lake.

Correct:

- Yesterday, I **ran** to the lake.

The verb phrase "am running" is in the **present** tense and the **progressive** aspect. However, the sentence tells us the action happened "yesterday", so we should use the **past** tense and the **simple** aspect: "ran".

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

	Past	Present	Future
Simple	I ran	I run	I will run
Perfect	I had run	I have run	I will have run
Progressive	I was running	I am running	I will be running
Perfect- progressive	I had been running	I have been running	I will have been running

Verb forms may be tested in one of the [Form, structure, and sense](#) questions that you encounter on test day.

• How to identify verb form questions

When approaching form, structure, and sense questions, it's important to identify which Standard English conventions are being tested.

➤ You'll know to look for verb form errors if

1. different choices use different verb tenses (past/present/future)
2. some choices add or remove helping verbs .If you don't see one or both of these differences among the choices, then the question doesn't deal with verb forms.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

Let's look at a verb forms question now:

While many spiders use webs to catch their food, others capture prey using hunting or burrowing techniques. Spiders from the family Ctenizidae, often called trapdoor spiders, _____ their burrows with doors, using their silk for hinges.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. cover
- B. are covering
- C. will have covered
- D. had covered

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Notice that each choice includes the same verb conjugated in a different tense. This tells us that the question is focused on **verb forms**.

So what verb form should we be using here? Well let's look for context clues.

Nothing suggests that this sentence is happening at a certain point in time (e.g., the past or the future). Instead, this sentence states a fact that is *generally true regardless of time*. This means we should use the *simple present tense*.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

Only choice A uses the simple present tense. Choice **A** is the answer.

- **What can make verb form errors difficult to spot?**

➤ Complex sentence structures

Verb form errors in simple sentences tend to be pretty obvious. But as sentences become more complex, it becomes easier to miss those little context clues that tell us when and how the verb is taking place.

Incorrect:

- Author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, whose active period spanned from 1925 to 1950, famously **writes** many different types of literary works, including novels, plays, and essays.

Correct:

- Author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, whose active period spanned from 1925 to 1950, famously **wrote** many different types of literary works, including novels, plays, and essays.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

In this sentence, we're told that Hurston was actively writing from 1925-1950. This information lets us know that we should use the **past tense** verb "wrote".

➤ Missing helping verbs

Only simple verbs can function without help.

Incorrect:

- Phosphorous, an impurity which can cause steel to be too brittle, **commonly found** in raw iron ore.

Correct:

- Phosphorous, an impurity which can cause steel to be too brittle, **is commonly found** in raw iron ore.

The first version of this sentence lacks a main verb. The past tense verb "found" is being used as an adjective to describe the phosphorous, so it can't function as a main verb. We need to add the helping verb "is".

When a helping verb is missing from any other type of verb phrase, that verb phrase can no longer function as the main verb of the sentence. This often creates a sentence fragment error.

When we're reading quickly, our brains have a tendency to fill in these missing verbs, which can cause us to overlook the error. Take your time as you read and make sure that each verb phrase has everything it needs to function.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

Top tips

1. Conjugate in context

To determine if an action happens in *the past, present, or future*, we'll need to rely upon context clues in the sentence. The same goes for whether an action is completed or ongoing. Common context clues include dates, times, and other conjugated verbs.

2. Match other verbs

If you're not sure how to conjugate a verb, match the tense of other verbs in the same sentence or paragraph. Verb tense *usually* stays consistent unless some shift in time occurs within the passage.

3. Simple present tense for general facts

General statements of fact use simple present tense (e.g., "the sky **is** blue"). So, if there are no context clues that suggest a shift in tense or aspect, simple present tense is likely the best way to go.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Botanists recognize over fifty different species of sunflower, and variance exists even in those species. One species, the silverleaf sunflower, _____ both an early-flowering ecotype that tends to grow in coastal areas and a late-flowering ecotype that grows inland.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. encompassing
- B. to encompass
- C. encompasses
- D. having encompassed

2. Antarctic pearlwort, a low-growing shrub with characteristic yellow flowers, is one of only two native flowering plants which _____ in Antarctica.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. were occurring
- B. occur
- C. are occurring
- D. will have occurred

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

3. Before the museum closed permanently, it faced financial challenges that _____ a large deficit and declining ticket sale revenues.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. include
- B. will include
- C. would include
- D. included

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Choice **(C)** is the best choice. The simple present tense verb "encompasses" is used appropriately to state a general fact.

QUESTION 2:

Choice **(B)** is the best choice. The simple present tense "occur" is appropriate for describing a general fact (like this sentence does). Also, notice that "occur" matches the simple present tense "is" used earlier in the sentence.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense: Verb forms

QUESTION 3:

Choice **(D)** is the best choice. The simple past tense verb "included" matches the past tense verb "faced" and corresponds to the time frame indicated by the sentence ("*before* the museum closed").

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. When they were first discovered in Australia in 1798, duck-billed, beaver-tailed platypuses so defied categorization that one scientist assigned them the name *Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*: “paradoxical bird-snout.” The animal, which lays eggs but also nurses ____ young with milk, has since been classified as belonging to the monotremes group.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. it’s
- B. their
- C. they’re
- D. its

2. Classical composer Florence Price’s 1927 move to Chicago marked a turning point in her career. It was there that Price premiered her First Symphony—a piece that was praised for blending traditional Romantic motifs with aspects of Black folk music—and ____ supportive relationships with other Black artists.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. developing
- B. developed
- C. having developed
- D. to develop

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

3. In 1881, French chemist Camille Faure redesigned the rechargeable lead-acid battery. Faure’s design greatly increased the amount of electricity that the original battery, which the French physicist Gaston Planté _____ fifteen years earlier, could hold.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. is inventing
- B. will invent
- C. had invented
- D. invents

4. In 2015, a team led by materials scientists Anirudha Sumant and Diana Berman succeeded in reducing the coefficient of friction (COF) between two surfaces to the lowest possible level—superlubricity. A nearly frictionless (and, as its name suggests, extremely slippery) state, _____

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. reaching superlubricity occurs when two surfaces' COF drops below 0.01.
- B. superlubricity is reached when two surfaces' COF drops below 0.01.
- C. when their COF drops below 0.01, two surfaces reach superlubricity.
- D. two surfaces, when their COF drops below 0.01, reach superlubricity.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Form, structure, and sense questions ask us to fill in a blank in a way that “conforms to the conventions of Standard English”.

There are a number of different conventions that can be tested in these questions, so a good first step is to identify the particular grammar rule that each question is focused on by looking at the choices and seeing what changes between them.

In this case, the main thing that changes in the choices is the pronoun and the option to make it possessive. That tells us that we’re looking at a pronoun-antecedent agreement question that also tests our knowledge of possessive pronouns!

Pronoun-antecedent agreement requires that a pronoun agrees in number with the noun it stands in for. So our focus should be on finding the appropriate antecedent.

In other words, can you identify the noun that the pronoun represents? Is it singular or plural?

Once you’ve identified the antecedent and its number: **should it be possessive?**

The antecedent is “the animal”, a singular noun, so we need a singular pronoun. And the “young” *belong* to the animal (we’re talking about the *animal’s* young), so the pronoun should also be possessive.

Which choice provides a singular possessive pronoun?

(D) uses the singular possessive pronoun “its”, which agrees with the singular “animal” and indicates that the “young” belong to it.

(D) is the answer.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

QUESTION 2:

Form, structure, and sense questions ask us to fill in a blank in a way that “conforms to the conventions of Standard English”. There are a number of different conventions that can be tested in these questions, so a good first step is to identify the particular grammar rule that each question is focused on by looking at the choices and seeing what changes between them.

In this case, the main thing that changes in the choices is the form of the verb “develop”. We'll need to look for context clues in the surrounding sentence to figure out which form is most appropriate.

Is there a way to shorten the sentence in question to make the form of the missing verb more clear?

This sentence has a nonessential supplement: we can tell because it's separated from the rest of the sentence by a pair of dashes. Let's remove that supplement to get a clearer look at the main grammatical structure of the sentence:

It was there that Price premiered her First Symphony and _____ supportive relationships with other Black artists.

Now we can see that the missing verb is part of the same clause as the verb “premiered”, and “Price” is the subject of both: “Price premiered her symphony and _____ relationships with other Black artists.”

So we need a form of the verb that matches “premiered”. **Which choice gives us the correct form?**

(B) offers the past-tense verb “developed”, which matches the past-tense verb “premiered”. (B) is the answer.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

QUESTION 3:

Form, structure, and sense questions ask us to fill in a blank in a way that “conforms to the conventions of Standard English”.

There are a number of different conventions that can be tested in these questions, so a good first step is to identify the particular grammar rule that each question is focused on by looking at the choices and seeing what changes between them.

In this case, the main thing that changes in the choices is the tense of the verb "invent".

The answer to this question will be a form of the verb that agrees with the tense of the verbs around it or the logic of the sentence. So let's look at the rest of the sentence. **What tense is it written in? When is the ‘inventing’ taking place, relative to the other events in the sentence?**

The sentence starts by describing an event that took place in the past: “in 1881, Faure redesigned the battery”. Then it says that the original battery was invented “fifteen years *earlier*”.

So we need to use a tense that indicates a past occurrence that took place *before* another past occurrence.

Which choice gives us the correct tense?

(C) gives us the past perfect “had invented”, which correctly indicates that Planté invented the original before Faure redesigned it in 1881. (C) is the answer.

Unit 4- Lesson 1 – Form, Structure, and Sense

QUESTION 4:

Form, structure, and sense questions ask us to fill in a blank in a way that “conforms to the conventions of Standard English”.

There are a number of different conventions that can be tested in these questions, so a good first step is to identify the particular grammar rule that each question is focused on by looking at the choices and seeing what changes between them.

In this case, the choices offer different ways of wording the same clause, with different subjects at the beginning of each phrase. This is a clue that we’re probably looking at a subject-modifier placement question.

Subject-modifier placement requires a modifier and its subject to be next to one another. Knowing this, **can you spot any errors in word order among the choices?**

The modifier before the blank is “a nearly frictionless state”. Whatever subject it’s describing must go next to it, so that needs to be the first word in the blank.

What word should that be? What makes sense with this modifier?

The modifier must be describing the state of “superlubricity”, so “superlubricity” needs to be the first word in the blank. Only (B) puts “superlubricity” first. **(B)** is the answer.

UNIT 4

STANDARD ENGLISH CONVENTIONS

LESSON 2: BOUNDARIES

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

OVERVIEW

- **What are "boundaries" questions?**

On the SAT Reading and Writing Test, some questions will present you with a short passage that contains a blank. The question will then ask you to complete the text in a way that **conforms to the conventions of Standard English**.

On the SAT, these Standard English conventions are broken down into two categories:

- **Form, structure, and sense (discussed in the previous lesson)**
- **Boundaries**

Boundaries questions focus on how phrases, clauses, and sentences are linked together in written English.

- **Which Standard English conventions will be tested in boundaries questions?**

Boundaries questions focus on these Standard English conventions:

- Linking clauses

You may be asked to link clauses using coordination, subordination, or end punctuation.

- Supplements

You may be asked to format and punctuate supplemental information provided within a sentence.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

➤ Punctuation

You'll need to know when and where to use (and *not* use) different punctuation marks. Correct punctuation is essential for all boundaries questions.

• **How to approach boundaries questions**

Because each question will focus on a specific convention of Standard English, it's a great first step to **identify which grammar rule is being tested**.

Here's one way to do that:

➤ **Step 1:** *Investigate the blank*

Read the text closely. Where does the blank appear? Within a sentence? Between clauses?

Compare the choices. What changes from choice to choice? Are conjunctions added or removed? Is different punctuation used?

Any patterns we can identify will be useful in the next step.

➤ **Step 2:** *Find the focus*

Based on our observations in the previous step, we should be able to identify which Standard English convention is being tested.

For example, if the blank comes between two independent clauses, and the choices offer a mix of commas and conjunctions, we should focus on avoiding errors with *linking clauses*.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

If we can narrow our focus to the specific convention being tested, we'll have less to think about. This can save both time and brainpower.

➤ **Step 3:** *Eliminate the obvious errors*

Now it's time to take a closer look at the choices!

Plug each choice into the blank, and read the passage through. Keeping in mind the grammar rules we identified as the focus, eliminate any choice that creates an obvious error.

Once we eliminate choices that create errors, we'll be left with only one remaining choice. We can select it with confidence!

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

- **What are clauses?**

A **clause** is a series of words that contains a subject and a conjugated verb. There are two main types of clauses:

- An **independent clause** can stand on its own as a complete sentence.

Dolores went to the grocery store.

This independent clause has a subject ("Dolores") and a verb ("went") and makes sense on its own as a complete thought.

- A **dependent clause** must be linked to an independent clause.

Where she bought milk and eggs

This dependent clause has a subject ("she") and a verb ("bought"), but it wouldn't make sense on its own. To create a complete sentence, this clause would need to be linked to an independent clause:

Dolores went to the grocery store, *where she bought milk and eggs.*

The SAT focuses on how clauses can be linked together (or kept apart). These conventions may be tested in [Boundaries](#) questions that you encounter on test day.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

• Linking clauses

There are several ways to link clauses. The SAT focuses on end of sentence punctuation, coordination, subordination, and semicolons.

Let's look at each in turn:

➤ End of sentence punctuation

Using end punctuation (like a period or question mark) is the simplest way to separate clauses. You should be very familiar with using end punctuation in your own writing.

There are only two rules for end punctuation:

1. The punctuation mark must match the function of the sentence it follows.

Incorrect:

- I've often wondered **how are birds able to navigate?**

Correct:

- I've often wondered **how birds are able to navigate.**

This sentence is a statement: "I've often wondered."

The incorrect version confuses the purpose of the sentence, phrasing the second half like a question and ending things with a question mark. The correct version appropriately phrases the sentence to function as a statement, ending things with a period.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

2. End punctuation can only be used to separate two **independent clauses**.

Incorrect:

- After sliced bread was introduced to the market in 1928. It quickly eclipsed the popularity of unsliced bread.

Correct:

- After sliced bread was introduced to the market in 1928, it quickly eclipsed the popularity of unsliced bread.

The first clause in the sentence ("After . . . 1928") is a *dependent* clause. It can't stand on its own as a sentence, so using a period creates an error.

➤ **Coordination**

Coordination involves the linking of two independent clauses within a single sentence. To coordinate independent clauses, we must use two things:

1. a comma (,)
2. a coordinating conjunction

The *only* coordinating conjunctions in English are known as the **FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)**.

➤ **Subordination**

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

Subordination involves linking two clauses by making one of the clauses dependent. To subordinate an independent clause, we must use two things:

1. a subordinating conjunction
2. a comma (,)*

Subordinating conjunctions are words that turn an independent clause into a dependent clause. There are many subordinating conjunctions, but some examples include *although, since, because, while, when, and after*.

Incorrect:

- Broccoli, kale, and kohlrabi may seem like very different **vegetables, they** are all cultivars of the same plant species.

This version of the sentence links two independent clauses using only a comma, creating a *comma splice error*.

Correct:

- *Though* broccoli, kale, and kohlrabi may seem like very different **vegetables, they** are all cultivars of the same plant species.

By adding the subordinating conjunction "though", the first clause is made dependent. It can then be linked to the second clause with just a comma.

- **Note: Some subordinating conjunctions can link clauses without a comma, but only if the dependent clause comes second.**

- I went to the store **because** I ran out of peanut butter.
- I will go to the store **if** I run out of peanut butter.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

➤ Semicolons

Semicolons can be used to link two independent clauses without any conjunction.

Incorrect:

- The Green Zebra tomato ripens without turning **red**; **which** makes it difficult to know when one is ready to eat.
- The Green Zebra tomato ripens without turning **red**; **and this** makes it difficult to know when one is ready to eat.

The first version of the sentence uses a semicolon to connect an independent clause to a *dependent* clause, which creates a punctuation error. The second version uses both a semicolon *and* a conjunction, which is unnecessary and unconventional.

Correct:

- The Green Zebra tomato ripens without turning **red**; **this** makes it difficult to know when one is ready to eat.
-

➤ How to identify linking clauses questions

When approaching boundaries questions, it's important to identify which Standard English conventions are being tested.

You may want to look for errors in linking clauses if

- the choices add or remove commas and FANBOYS conjunctions

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

- the choices add or remove end punctuation like periods or question marks
- any choice contains a semicolon

If you don't see any of these features, then the question likely doesn't deal with linking clauses.

Let's look at a linking clauses question now:

LINKING CLAUSES EXAMPLE

Detroit natives Timothy Paule and Nicole Lindsey have combined their two passions, Detroit and beekeeping, to improve the health of their city's flowers and other vegetation. In 2017, the couple converted a vacant lot in the city into an ____ in the years that followed they acquired nine additional lots and established more than 35 hives.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. apiary
- B. apiary,
- C. apiary and
- D. apiary, and

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Notice that the choices only vary by adding or eliminating two things: the comma, and the coordinating conjunction "and". This tells us that the question is focused on **linking clauses**.

- First, we should determine whether what comes before the blank and what comes after are independent clauses:

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

- In 2017, the couple converted a vacant lot in the city into an apiary

That's **an independent clause**; it can stand on its own as a sentence.

- In the years that followed they acquired nine additional lots and established more than 35 hives

That's also **an independent clause**; it can stand on its own as a sentence.

Since we have two independent clauses, we can link them in the following ways:

- end punctuation
- semicolon
- coordination

Based on the choices, only coordination is an option. **We need to select a choice that uses both a comma and a coordinating conjunction.**

Only choice D uses both. **Choice D is the answer.**

Top tips

1. Use the before and after test

When you see choices that offer a variety of punctuation options, check if what comes before and after the blank are independent clauses. If one side of the blank is *not* an independent clause, then you're likely dealing with a supplements or punctuation question (which focus on different rules).

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. It is tempting to glamorize the hunt for dinosaur ____ majority of fieldwork is characterized by a daily routine of heat, insects, and tedious labor.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. fossils, the
- B. fossils the
- C. fossils but the
- D. fossils, but the

2. Though Paul Revere is best known today for his "midnight ride" during the American ____ was famous in his own day as a prosperous silversmith and businessman.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. Revolution; he
- B. Revolution, but Revere
- C. Revolution, he
- D. Revolution he

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: linking clauses

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Choice **(D)** is the best choice. The coordinating conjunction "but" grammatically links the two independent clauses while logically indicating the contrast between them.

QUESTION 2:

Choice **(C)** is the best choice. It appropriately uses a comma to link a dependent clause to an independent clause without introducing any logic or redundancy errors.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

- **What punctuation marks are tested on the SAT?**

Punctuation appears as part of a variety of questions on the SAT. Whether we're linking clauses or adding supplements to a sentence, we'll need to appropriately employ punctuation. We may also need to identify instances where *no punctuation is necessary*.

The SAT may test your knowledge of

- **Commas (,)**
- **Semicolons (;)**
- **Colons (:)**
- **Dashes (—)**

Appropriate punctuation will be essential to all [Boundaries](#) questions that you encounter on test day.

- **Punctuation marks**

Different punctuation marks have different uses and different rules. Let's look at each in turn.*

Note: some punctuation marks have additional uses not named here (e.g., formatting dialogue with commas). This book focuses only on how these punctuation marks are tested on the SAT.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

1. Commas (,)

Commas should only be used to...

A. Separate list items

Crafting a chessboard requires a **table saw, a sander, and lots of glue.**

B. Separate nonessential elements from the sentence

The Bay of Fundy, a **body of water between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick**, experiences the world's highest tidal range.

C. Link dependent clauses to independent clauses

While they were once endangered by commercial **whaling**, **humpback** whale populations have recently grown at a rapid rate.

D. Link independent clauses with help from a coordinating (FANBOYS) conjunction

Almonds are the world's most consumed tree **nut**, **but** walnuts are a close second.

Commas should **not**...

A. Split a subject and a verb

Incorrect:

- Mountain goats, are very nimble.

Correct:

- Mountain goats are very nimble.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

- Mountain goats, **which are only distantly related to domestic goats**, are very nimble.

Explanation: A comma shouldn't separate the subject "goats" from its verb "are". The only exception is if *two* commas are being used to set off a nonessential descriptive phrase.

B. Come before prepositions

Incorrect:

- The chicken crossed, **to** the other side of the road.
- The chicken crossed to the other side, **of** the road.

Correct:

- The chicken crossed to the other side of the road.

C. Separate items in a list of two

Incorrect:

- Learning archery requires **skill, and practice**.

Correct:

- Learning archery requires **skill and practice**.

Using a comma in any of these ways creates an error.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

2. Semicolons (;)

Semicolons should only be used to...

A. Link independent clauses (*without a conjunction*)

Humans have always been troubled by dry **skin**; **lotions** and moisturizers have a history reaching back into ancient times.

B. Separate list items that already *contain commas*

Incorrect:

- While the United Nations is headquartered in New York City, it also has central offices in **Nairobi, Kenya, Geneva, Switzerland, and Vienna, Austria.**

Correct:

- While the United Nations is headquartered in New York City, it also has central offices in **Nairobi, Kenya; Geneva, Switzerland; and Vienna, Austria.**

Explanation: Since we already use a comma when identifying a city and country, a list of cities and countries can get confusing. We can use semicolons to more clearly distinguish between cities in the list.

Note: We *only* use semicolons in a list if they're absolutely needed. Otherwise, using commas is always the better choice.

Any other use of a semicolon creates an error.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

3. Colons (:)

Colons can only come at the end of an independent clause. They can introduce...

A. Explanations and extra information

Many upstart tech companies fail for the same **reason: a lack** of market need for their product.

B. Lists

The advent of cellular biology has led to the classification of organisms into three distinct **domains: bacteria**, archaea, and eukaryota.

Any other use of a colon creates an error.

4. Dashes (—)

A. Dashes should only be used to separate nonessential elements from the rest of the sentence.

There are three characters—**the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion**—that accompany Dorothy on her way to Oz.

There are three characters that accompany Dorothy on her way to Oz—**the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion**.

Any other use of a dash creates an error.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

• How to identify punctuation questions

When approaching boundaries questions, it's important to identify which Standard English conventions are being tested.

You may want to look for errors in punctuation if

- the choices add or remove punctuation
- the choices offer a variety of punctuation marks

If you don't see either of these features, then the question likely doesn't deal with punctuation.

PUNCTUATION EXAMPLE (SUPPLEMENTS)

According to Naomi Nakayama of the University of Edinburgh, the reason seeds from a dying dandelion appear to float in the air while _____ is that their porous plumes enhance drag, allowing the seeds to stay airborne long enough for the wind to disperse them throughout the surrounding area.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. falling,
- B. falling:
- C. falling;
- D. falling

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Notice how the only thing that changes in the choices is what type of punctuation mark is used. That tells us this question focuses on **punctuation**.

Let's look at what comes before and after the blank:

- Before the blank, there is a long and complicated noun phrase ("the reason . . . while falling")
- After the blank is a verb ("is")

Both semicolons and colons must follow an independent clause. Neither side of the blank is an independent clause, **so we can eliminate choices B and C**.

We know that a comma *shouldn't come between a subject and verb*, so we don't want a comma here either. **We can eliminate choice A**.

The only choice that avoids making any punctuation errors is choice D, which actually avoids including punctuation. **Choice D is the answer**.

Top tips

1. Use the before/after test for semicolons

Unless it appears in a list, a semicolon must have an independent clause both before and after it. If you think a semicolon might be right, check to make sure you have an independent clause on either side. If you don't, **you can't use a semicolon**.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

2. Use the before test for colons

A colon can only appear at the end of an independent clause. If you think a colon might be right, check to make sure what comes before is a complete independent clause. If it's not, **you can't use a colon.**

3. Double-check commas

Many writers overuse commas (or use them as a default punctuation mark). Double-check to make sure a comma is both necessary and appropriate before selecting it as your answer.

If the comma is linking clauses, make sure it has the coordinating or subordinating conjunction it needs to do so.

If the comma isn't linking clauses, make sure it serves a purpose and doesn't unnecessarily interrupt some other function of the sentence.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. An element's atomic number is _____ the number of protons in its nucleus, the number electrons in its uncharged state, and approximately half of its atomic mass.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English

- A. equal to:
- B. equal to;
- C. equal to,
- D. equal to

2. When he returned from the Galapagos islands in 1835, Charles Darwin brought back a young tortoise named _____ would live over 170 years before passing away at the Australia Zoo in 2006.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. Harriet, she
- B. Harriet; who
- C. Harriet she
- D. Harriet; she

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Punctuation

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Choice **(D)** is the best choice. It eliminates all unnecessary punctuation from the sentence.

QUESTION 2:

Choice **(D)** is the best choice. It appropriately uses a semicolon to link two independent clauses ("Charles . . . Harriet" and "she . . . 2006").

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

• What are supplements?

Supplements are words, phrases, and relative clauses that add extra information to a sentence, often for the purpose of description or elaboration. There are two main types of supplements:

1. **Essential elements** are necessary for the sentence to function and don't require punctuation.

“In a basketball game, the team **that scores the most points** will win.”

- Without the relative clause "that scores the most points", we wouldn't know *which* "team" the sentence was talking about. If we eliminate this information, the sentence wouldn't make any sense:

In a basketball game, the team will win.

2. **Nonessential elements** are *not* necessary for the sentence to function. They must be separated from the main sentence by punctuation.

“The basketball team, **which won the state championship last year**, got on the bus.”

- The relative clause "which won the state championship last year" adds an interesting description, but it's not essential to the sentence. If we eliminate this information, the sentence still makes sense:

The basketball team got on the bus.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

The SAT focuses on whether supplements should be separated from the rest of the sentence by punctuation, as well as what punctuation marks should be used. These conventions may be tested in [Boundaries](#) questions that you encounter on test day.

• How are supplements punctuated?

1. Essential or nonessential

The first question is *whether* a given supplement should be punctuated. Try reading the sentence without the supplemental information.

- If the sentence no longer makes sense, then the supplement is an essential element. **No punctuation should be used.**
 - If the sentence still makes sense, then the supplement is nonessential. **The supplement must be separated from the rest of the sentence by punctuation.**
-

2. Position in the sentence

Once you determine a supplement is nonessential, you must decide how to punctuate it.

- If the supplement begins or ends the sentence, it only requires one punctuation mark (between the supplement and the rest of the sentence).

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

- If the supplement comes in the middle of the sentence, **it requires punctuation on both sides.**

A striker with 62 goals in international play, Megan Rapinoe is known for her activism in addition to her soccer stardom.

Here, the supplement comes at the start of the sentence, so it only requires one punctuation mark.

Megan Rapinoe, **a striker with 62 goals in international play,** is known for her activism in addition to her soccer stardom.

Here, the supplement comes in the middle of the sentence, so it must be separated with punctuation on both sides.

3. Type of punctuation

Nonessential elements can be separated from the rest of a sentence using three different types of punctuation marks:

- *Commas (,)*
- *Parentheses ()*
- *Dashes (—)*

In formatting supplements, these punctuation marks are basically interchangeable. However, there is one important rule: **the same type of punctuation must appear before and after a nonessential element.**

In other words, we don't want to be mixing different punctuation marks together.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

Incorrect:

- The male chaffinch—**with its blueish cap and rusty red feathering**, is more colorful than its female counterpart.

Correct:

- The male chaffinch—**with its blueish cap and rusty red feathering**—is more colorful than its female counterpart.
- The male chaffinch, **with its blueish cap and rusty red feathering**, is more colorful than its female counterpart.

Either dashes or commas can be used to punctuate this supplement, **but we can't use one of each!**

• How to identify supplements questions

When approaching boundaries questions, it's important to identify which Standard English conventions are being tested.

You may want to look for errors in supplements if

- the choices add or remove commas, but not conjunctions
- the choices include multiple types of punctuation, like commas and dashes

If you don't see either of these features, then the question likely doesn't deal with supplements.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

SUPPLEMENTS EXAMPLE

Luci Tapahonso is the inaugural poet laureate of the Navajo Nation. Her book *Sáanii Dahataal/The Women Are Singing*—a combination of fiction and memoir, poetry and _____ serves as a testament to her versatility as a writer.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. prose-
- B. prose
- C. prose,
- D. prose;

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

Notice that, among the choices, we see both a comma and a dash. This is a strong sign that this question deals with **supplements**.

We know the supplement here is **nonessential for two reasons**:

1. The sentence still makes sense without it ("Her book . . . serves").
2. There is *already* punctuation at the start of the supplement that we can't change.

So, we know this supplement needs punctuation. **But which punctuation should we use?**

Remember: the punctuation before and after the supplement needs to match. Since the beginning of the supplement already uses a dash, **we should also use a dash in the blank.**

Only choice A uses a dash. **Choice A is the answer.**

Top tips

1. Be consistent!

SAT questions will often include just one side of a nonessential element in the underlined portion of the sentence. Be sure to check the other side of the element for consistency: the same punctuation mark should be used on both sides!

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

2. Don't worry about the difference between commas, parentheses, and dashes

While commas, parentheses, and dashes are sometimes better in particular contexts, the SAT *won't test you* on these minor differences. In other words, you'll never be asked to choose between two types of punctuation marks if the choices don't create other grammar errors. So don't sweat it!

3. Don't pair semicolons or colons!

Commas, parentheses, and dashes are the *only* options when separating a nonessential element from the rest of the sentence. We should never use two semicolons or colons around a nonessential element.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. The sandhill _____ to North America, has the longest fossil history of any extant bird at ten million years.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. crane a large native bird
- B. crane- a large native bird
- C. crane, a large native bird,
- D. crane, a large native bird

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

2. Saint Lucia—a sovereign island in the _____ the only country in the world named after a historical woman.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. Caribbean, is
- B. Caribbean - is
- C. Caribbean is
- D. Caribbean; is

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries: Supplements

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Choice **(D)** is the best choice. It appropriately uses a comma to separate a nonessential element ("a large . . . America") from the rest of the sentence. Notice that this comma matches the comma at the end of the element.

QUESTION 2:

Choice **(B)** is the best choice. It appropriately uses a dash to separate a nonessential element ("a sovereign . . . Caribbean") from the rest of the sentence. Notice that this dash matches the dash at the end of the element.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. The field of geological oceanography owes much to American ____ Marie Tharp, a pioneering oceanographic cartographer whose detailed topographical maps of the ocean floor and its multiple rift valleys helped garner acceptance for the theories of plate tectonics and continental drift.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. geologist
- B. geologist:
- C. geologist;
- D. geologist,

2. In 1959, marine biologist Dr. Albert Jones founded the Underwater Adventure Seekers, a scuba diving ____ that is the oldest club for Black divers in the United States and that has helped thousands of diving enthusiasts become certified in the field.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. club
- B. club, and
- C. club-
- D. club,

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

3. Emperor Ashoka ruled the Maurya Empire in South Asia from roughly 270 to 232 BCE. He is known for enforcing a moral code called the Law of Piety, which established the sanctity of animal _____ the just treatment of the elderly, and the abolition of the slave trade.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. life;
- B. life:
- C. life
- D. life,

4. In paleontology, the term “Elvis taxon” gets applied to a newly identified living species that was once presumed to be extinct. Like an Elvis impersonator who might bear a striking resemblance to the late musical icon Elvis Presley himself, an Elvis taxon is not the real thing, _____ is a misidentified look-alike.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A. however, it
- B. however it
- C. however but it
- D. however.It

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

ANSWER EXPLANATION: -

QUESTION 1:

Boundaries questions ask us to connect clauses and phrases in ways that “conform to the conventions of Standard English”. These questions require us to understand the rules around punctuation, as well as when to use or not use subordinating and coordinating conjunctions.

In this sentence, “a pioneering...drift” is just one long modifier for “Marie Tharp” — so, for the purposes of figuring out the blank, we can ignore it. Here’s the sentence without it:

- The field of geological oceanography owes much to American geologist
- Marie Tharp

What type of clause(s) do we have here? How does the word “geologist” fit in?

“The field of geological oceanography owes much to American geologist” is not an independent clause. In fact, it’s not even a complete thought. Without “Marie Tharp”, the sentence is unclear: we don’t know *which* American geologist we’re talking about.

That means “Marie Tharp” is essential information — it completes the first clause.

Knowing this, how do we link “Marie Tharp” to “American geologist”?

Since “Marie Tharp” is essential information that completes the first clause, we don’t want to set it off from “American geologist” with punctuation. (A) is the only choice that doesn’t use punctuation. **(A)** is the answer.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

QUESTION 2:

Boundaries questions ask us to connect clauses and phrases in ways that “conform to the conventions of Standard English”. These questions require us to understand the rules around punctuation, as well as when to use or not use subordinating and coordinating conjunctions.

A good first step is to identify what types of clauses come before and after the blank. Here we have:

- In 1959, marine biologist Dr. Albert Jones founded the Underwater Adventure Seekers, a scuba diving club
- that is the oldest club for Black divers in the United States and that has helped thousands of diving enthusiasts become certified in the field

What’s happening in these two parts of the sentence? What clause(s) can you identify?

The first part of the sentence could stand by itself as a complete sentence. However, the second part of the sentence is neither a dependent *nor* an independent clause: it’s an *essential supplement* that goes with the noun “scuba diving club”. In other words, we can think of “that...field” as part of the noun itself.

How are essential supplements punctuated?

Essential supplements do not need any punctuation. **(A)** is the answer.

Top Tip: Mind your thats and whiches! Relative clauses that begin with “that” almost always carry essential information and should not be set off with commas. So when you see a supplement beginning with “that”, remember *not* to add a comma before or after the supplement.

Unit 4- Lesson 2 – Boundaries

QUESTION 3:

Boundaries questions ask us to connect clauses and phrases in ways that “conform to the conventions of Standard English”. These questions require us to understand the rules around punctuation, as well as when to use or not use subordinating and coordinating conjunctions.

Here we have different options for punctuating the word “life.” Take a look at the clause that the word “life” falls in, beginning with the word “which”:

which established the sanctity of animal _____ the just treatment of the elderly, and the abolition of the slave trade

How does the word “life” fit into this part of the sentence? Is there any pattern that we should maintain?

The “which” clause gives us a list of three ideas that the Law of Piety established:

- The sanctity of animal life
- The just treatment of the elderly
- The abolition of the slave trade

So “the sanctity of animal life” is the first item in a list of three. Items in a list need to be separated from one another with the same kind of punctuation—usually commas, though semicolons can be used in some cases.

Which choice punctuates this list correctly?

We already have a comma between the second and third idea on this list, so we need to use a comma after “life” to separate the first and second idea. **(D)** is the answer.

QUESTION 4:

Boundaries questions ask us to connect clauses and phrases in ways that “conform to the conventions of Standard English”. These questions require us to understand the rules around