

## 9.0 Sentence Correction

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Sentence correction questions appear in the Verbal section of the GMAT® exam. The Verbal section uses multiple choice questions to measure your ability to read and comprehend written material, to reason and evaluate arguments, and to correct written material to express ideas effectively in standard written English. Because the Verbal section includes passages from several different content areas, you may be generally familiar with some of the material; however, neither the passages nor the questions assume detailed knowledge of the topics discussed. Sentence correction questions are intermingled with critical reasoning and reading comprehension questions throughout the Verbal section of the test. You will have 75 minutes to complete the Verbal section or about 1¾ minutes to answer each question.

Sentence correction questions present a statement in which words are underlined. The questions ask you to select the best expression of the idea or relationship described in the underlined section from the answer options. The first answer choice always repeats the original phrasing, whereas the other four provide alternatives. In some cases, the original phrasing is the best choice. In other cases, the underlined section has obvious or subtle errors that require correction. These questions require you to be familiar with the stylistic conventions and grammatical rules of standard written English and to demonstrate your ability to improve incorrect or ineffective expressions. Sentence correction questions may include English language idioms, which are standard constructions not derived from the most basic rules of grammar and vocabulary, but idioms are not intended to measure any specialized knowledge of colloquialisms or regionalisms.

You should begin these questions by reading the sentence carefully. Note whether there are any obvious grammatical errors as you read the underlined section. Then read the five answer choices carefully. If there was a subtle error you did not recognize the first time you read the sentence, it may become apparent after you have read the answer choices. If the error is still unclear, see whether you can eliminate some of the answers as being incorrect. Remember that in some cases, the original selection may be the best answer.

### 9.1 Basic English Grammar Rules

Sentence correction questions ask you to recognize and potentially correct at least one of the following grammar rules. However, these rules are not exhaustive. If you are interested in learning more about English grammar as a way to prepare for the GMAT exam, there are several resources available on the Internet.

#### Agreement

Standard English requires elements within a sentence to be consistent. There are two types of agreement: noun verb and pronoun.



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*Noun verb agreement:* Singular subjects take singular verbs, whereas plural subjects take plural verbs.

*Examples:*

Correct: "I walk to the store." Incorrect: "I walks to the store."

Correct: "We go to school." Incorrect: "We goes to school."

Correct: "The number of residents has grown." Incorrect: "The number of residents have grown."

Correct: "The masses have spoken." Incorrect: "The masses has spoken."

*Pronoun agreement:* A pronoun must agree with the noun or pronoun it refers to in person, number, and gender.

*Examples:*

Correct: "When you dream, you are usually asleep." Incorrect: "When one dreams, you are usually asleep."

Correct: "When the kids went to sleep, they slept like logs." Incorrect: "When the kids went to sleep, he slept like a log."

Diction

Words should be chosen to reflect correctly and effectively the appropriate part of speech. There are several words that are commonly used incorrectly. When answering sentence correction questions, pay attention to the following conventions.

*Among/between:* *Among* is used to refer to relationships involving more than two objects. *Between* is used to refer to relationships involving only two objects.

*Examples:*

Correct: "We divided our winnings among the three of us." Incorrect: "We divided our winnings between the three of us."

Correct: "She and I divided the cake between us." Incorrect: "She and I divided the cake among us."

*As/like:* *As* can be a preposition meaning "in the capacity of," but more often is a conjunction of manner and is followed by a verb. *Like* is generally used as a preposition, and therefore is followed by a noun, an object pronoun, or a verb ending in *ing*.

*Examples:*

Correct: "I work as a librarian." Incorrect: "I work like a librarian."

Correct: "Do as I say, not as I do." Incorrect: "Do like I say, not like I do."

Correct: "It felt like a dream." Incorrect: "It felt as a dream."

Correct: "People like you inspire me." Incorrect: "People as you inspire me."

Correct: "There's nothing like biking on a warm, autumn day." Incorrect: "There's nothing as biking on a warm, autumn day."

*Mass and count words:* *Mass* words are nouns quantified by an amount rather than by a number. *Count* nouns can be quantified by a number.

*Examples:*



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Correct: "We bought a loaf of bread." Incorrect: "We bought one bread."

Correct: "He wished me much happiness." Incorrect: "He wished me many happinesses."

Correct: "We passed many buildings." Incorrect: "We passed much buildings."

*Pronouns:* *Myself* should not be used as a substitute for *I* or *me*.

*Examples:*

Correct: "Mom and I had to go to the store." Incorrect: "Mom and myself had to go to the store."

Correct: "He gave the present to Dad and me." Incorrect: "He gave the present to Dad and myself."

### Grammatical Construction

Good grammar requires complete sentences. Be on the lookout for improperly formed constructions.

*Fragments:* Parts of a sentence that are disconnected from the main clause are called fragments.

*Examples:*

Correct: "We saw the doctor and his nurse at the party." Incorrect: "We saw the doctor at the party. And his nurse."

*Run on sentences:* A run on sentence is two or more independent clauses that run together without proper punctuation.

*Examples:*

Correct: "Jose Canseco is still a feared batter; most pitchers don't want to face him."

Incorrect: "Jose Canseco is still a feared batter most pitchers don't want to face him."

*Constructions:* Avoid wordy, redundant constructions.

*Examples:*

Correct: "We could not come to the meeting because of a conflict."

Incorrect: "The reason we could not come to the meeting is because of a conflict."

### Idiom

It is important to avoid nonstandard expressions, although English idioms sometimes do not follow conventional grammatical rules. Be careful to use the correct idiom when using the constructions and parts of speech.

*Prepositions:* Specific prepositions have specific purposes.

*Examples:*

Correct: "She likes to jog in the morning." Incorrect: "She likes to jog on the morning."

Correct: "They ranged in age from 10 to 15." Incorrect: "They ranged in age from 10 up to 15."

*Correlatives:* Word combinations such as "not only ... but also" should be followed by an



element of the same grammatical type.

*Examples:*

Correct: "I have called not only to thank her but also to tell her about the next meeting."

Incorrect: "I have called not only to thank her but also I told her about the next meeting."

*Forms of comparison:* Many forms follow precise constructions. *Fewer* refers to a specific number, whereas *less than* refers to a continuous quantity. *Between ... and* is the correct form to designate a choice. *Farther* refers to distance, whereas *further* refers to degree.

*Examples:*

Correct: "There were fewer children in my class this year." Incorrect:

"There were less children in my class this year."

Correct: "There was less devastation than I was told." Incorrect: "There was fewer devastation than I was told."

Correct: "We had to choose between chocolate and vanilla." Incorrect:

"We had to choose between chocolate or vanilla." (It is also correct to say,

"We had to choose chocolate or vanilla.")

Correct: "I ran farther than John, but he took his weight training further than I did."

Incorrect: "I ran further than John, but he took his weight training farther than I did."

Logical Predication

Watch out for phrases that detract from the logical argument.

*Modification problems:* Modifiers should be positioned so it is clear what word or words they are meant to modify. If modifiers are not positioned clearly, they can cause illogical references or comparisons, or distort the meaning of the statement.

*Examples:*

Correct: "I put the cake that I baked by the door." Incorrect: "I put the cake by the door that I baked."

Correct: "Reading my mind, she gave me the delicious cookie." Incorrect:

"Reading my mind, the cookie she gave me was delicious."

Correct: "In the Middle Ages, the world was believed to be flat." Incorrect:

"In the Middle Ages, the world was flat."

Parallelism

Constructing a sentence that is parallel in structure depends on making sure that the different elements in the sentence balance each other; this is a little bit like making sure that the two sides of a mathematical equation are balanced. To make sure that a sentence is grammatically correct, check to ensure that phrases, clauses, verbs, and other sentence elements parallel each other.

*Examples:*

Correct: "I took a bath, went to sleep, and woke up refreshed." Incorrect:

"I took a bath, sleeping, and waking up refreshed."



Correct: “The only way to know is to take the plunge.” Incorrect: “The only way to know is taking the plunge.”

#### Rhetorical Construction

Good sentence structure avoids constructions that are awkward, wordy, redundant, imprecise, or unclear, even when they are free of grammatical errors.

##### Examples:

Correct: “Before we left on vacation, we watered the plants, checked to see that the stove was off, and set the burglar alarm.” Incorrect: “Before we left to go on vacation, we watered, checked to be sure that the stove had been turned off, and set it.”

#### Verb Form

In addition to watching for problems of agreement or parallelism, make sure that verbs are used in the correct tense. Be alert to whether a verb should reflect past, present, or future tense.

##### Examples:

Correct: “I went to school yesterday.” “I go to school every weekday.” “I will go to school tomorrow.”

Each tense also has a perfect form (used with the past participle—e.g., walked, ran), a progressive form (used with the present participle—e.g., walking, running), and a perfect progressive form (also used with the present participle—e.g., walking, running).

*Present perfect:* Used with *has* or *have*, the present perfect tense describes an action that occurred at an indefinite time in the past or that began in the past and continues into the present.

##### Examples:

Correct: “I have traveled all over the world.” (at an indefinite time)

Correct: “He has gone to school since he was five years old.” (continues into the present)

*Past perfect:* This verb form is used with *had* to show the order of two events that took place in the past.

##### Example:

Correct: “By the time I left for school, the cake had been baked.”

*Future perfect:* Used with *will have*, this verb form describes an event in the future that will precede another event.

##### Example:

Correct: “By the end of the day, I will have studied for all my tests.”

*Present progressive:* Used with *am*, *is*, or *are*, this verb form describes an ongoing action that is happening now.

##### Examples:

Correct: “I am studying for exams.” “The student is studying for exams.”



“We are studying for exams.”

*Past progressive:* Used with *was* or *were*, this verb form describes something that was happening when another action occurred.

*Examples:*

Correct: “The student was studying when the fire alarm rang.” “They were studying when the fire broke out.”

*Future progressive:* Used with *will be* or *shall be*, this verb tense describes an ongoing action that will continue into the future.

*Example:*

Correct: “The students will be studying for exams throughout the month of December.”

*Present perfect progressive:* Used with *have been* or *has been*, this verb tense describes something that began in the past, continues into the present, and may continue into the future.

*Example:*

Correct: “The student has been studying hard in the hope of acing the test.”

*Past perfect progressive:* Used with *had been*, this verb form describes an action of some duration that was completed before another past action occurred.

*Example:*

Correct: “Before the fire alarm rang, the student had been studying.”

*Future perfect progressive:* Used with *will have been*, this verb form describes a future, ongoing action that will occur before a specified time.

*Example:*

Correct: “By the end of next year, the students will have been studying math for five years.”

## 9.2 Study Suggestions

There are two basic ways you can study for sentence correction questions:

- **Read material that reflects standard usage.**  
One way to gain familiarity with the basic conventions of standard written English is simply to read. Suitable material will usually be found in good magazines and nonfiction books, editorials in outstanding newspapers, and the collections of essays used by many college and university writing courses.
- **Review basic rules of grammar and practice with writing exercises.**  
Begin by reviewing the grammar rules laid out in this chapter. Then, if you have school assignments (such as essays and research papers) that have been carefully evaluated for grammatical errors, it may be helpful to review the comments and corrections.



### 9.3 What Is Measured

Sentence correction questions test three broad aspects of language proficiency:

- **Correct expression**

A correct sentence is grammatically and structurally sound. It conforms to all the rules of standard written English, including noun verb agreement, noun pronoun agreement, pronoun consistency, pronoun case, and verb tense sequence. A correct sentence will not have dangling, misplaced, or improperly formed modifiers; unidiomatic or inconsistent expressions; or faults in parallel construction.

- **Effective expression**

An effective sentence expresses an idea or relationship clearly and concisely as well as grammatically. This does not mean that the choice with the fewest and simplest words is necessarily the best answer. It means that there are no superfluous words or needlessly complicated expressions in the best choice.

- **Proper diction**

An effective sentence also uses proper diction. (Diction refers to the standard dictionary meanings of words and the appropriateness of words in context.) In evaluating the diction of a sentence, you must be able to recognize whether the words are well chosen, accurate, and suitable for the context.

### 9.4 Test-Taking Strategies

1. **Read the entire sentence carefully.**

Try to understand the specific idea or relationship that the sentence should express.

2. **Evaluate the underlined passage for errors and possible corrections before reading the answer choices.**

This strategy will help you discriminate among the answer choices. Remember, in some cases the underlined passage is correct.

3. **Read each answer choice carefully.**

The first answer choice always repeats the underlined portion of the original sentence. Choose this answer if you think that the sentence is best as originally written, but do so *only after* examining all the other choices.

4. **Try to determine how to correct what you consider to be wrong with the original sentence.**

Some of the answer choices may change things that are not wrong, whereas others may not change everything that is wrong.

5. **Make sure that you evaluate the sentence and the choices thoroughly.**

Pay attention to general clarity, grammatical and idiomatic usage, economy and



precision of language, and appropriateness of diction.

6. **Read the whole sentence, substituting the choice that you prefer for the underlined passage.**

A choice may be wrong because it does not fit grammatically or structurally with the rest of the sentence. Remember that some sentences will require no correction. When the given sentence requires no correction, choose the first answer.

9.5 The Directions

These are the directions that you will see for sentence correction questions when you take the GMAT exam. If you read them carefully and understand them clearly before going to sit for the test, you will not need to spend too much time reviewing them once you are at the test center and the test is under way.

Sentence correction questions present a sentence, part or all of which is underlined. Beneath the sentence, you will find five ways of phrasing the underlined passage. The first answer choice repeats the original underlined passage; the other four are different. If you think the original phrasing is best, choose the first answer; otherwise, choose one of the others.

This type of question tests your ability to recognize the correctness and effectiveness of expression in standard written English. In choosing your answer, follow the requirements of standard written English; that is, pay attention to grammar, choice of words, and sentence construction. Choose the answer that produces the most effective sentence; this answer should be clear and exact, without awkwardness, ambiguity, redundancy, or grammatical error.

