SAT Test Tip Correct the Sentence Questions by Mark

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As part of your SAT preparation, you need to think about the Correct the Sentence (CTS) questions.

There are 25 CTS questions on each SAT exam. In the longer Writing section, you will start out with 11 of these questions. In the shorter Writing section you will encounter 14 or them. So itâ€™s a good thing to know how to handle them.

If we think of the SAT test Writing section as a stepladderâ€”the Identifying Sentence Errors questions are the first step because all we are doing for those questions is looking for errors.

Nothing more, nothing less.

Today we move up to the second step of the ladder. Now we are not only looking for errors, but also correcting those errors. That sounds like it should be harder, but remember this is a multiple choice test. The answer choices in this section provide great clues for youâ€”make sure to take advantage of those clues! Here is what youâ€™ll face in this section:

â€¢ CTS questions consist of a sentence with one portion of the sentence underlined (could be a lotâ€”or even allâ€”of the sentence, or could be just a few words).

â€¢ Each question has five answer choices, each of which representing the underlined part of the sentence, but written a little bit differently. Your job is to choose the answer choice that most improves the sentenceâ€”basically the choice that does not contain a grammar error.

â€¢ Answer choice (A) will always be exactly the same as the sentence was originally written in the question. So, basically, (A) is "no error."

So in a way, CTS questions are similar to ISE questionsâ€”you are looking for a grammar mistake in the part of the sentence that is underlined, and if you cannot find one, then you put (A). The difference now is, when there is an error, instead of just identifying the error, you must also pick the answer choice that corrects the mistake without making any new mistakes. Weâ€™ll discuss this more later, but basically this means that you can use the answer choices as clues for what the mistake might be.

A few key facts to keep in mind when approaching Correct the Sentence questions:

Correct the Sentence Tip #1: Trust Your Instinctsâ€”again

The first thing you should do when you get to this kind of question is read the sentence. This time, though, instead of listening to see where the sentence seems awkward, you want to listen very carefully to the part of the sentence that is underlined. Does something seem "off" about it? Is there a grammar mistake that jumps out? Be very careful to read the sentence exactly as it is written. Sometimes our minds like to fix the sentence in our heads without informing us, forcing us to gloss right over the mistake. Donâ€™t do thatâ€”read exactly whatâ€™s on the page, even if itâ€™s ridiculous.

Correct the Sentence Tip #2: Fix the problem

Before you even look at the answer choices, try to fix whatever is wrong with the underlined part of the sentence. Look at the parts of speech that are underlined and think about where it is in the

sentence, and run through your checklist of common grammar mistakes. If you can identify the problem before you look at the answers, you are one step ahead because you can eliminate all the answer choices that donâ€™t fix that problem! In fact, if you have located a problem, the first thing you can do is cross out (A)â€”because thatâ€™s the "no error" choice.

Correct the Sentence Tip #3: Read the answers

Now youâ€™re ready to take a look at the answer choices. Remember that (A) will be exactly the same as the original wording, so you donâ€™t need to read it again. Look at the rest of the answers, though, and check to see if there are any grammar mistakes within the answers. If there are answer choices with grammar mistakes, cross them outâ€”they canâ€™t be right. Chances are, there will be 1 or 2 ridiculous answer choices for each question. Try to find those choices and get rid of them. Otherwise, believe it or not, theyâ€™ll get tempting laterâ€”even though you would usually never put such silly answer.

Correct the Sentence Tip #4: Think about the ones you have left

Now think carefully about all the answer choices you have left. This is where they are such a big help. Plug each one into the sentence in the question and read the sentence with that answer choice in there (be careful not to add any extra words or let your mind fix any problems.) Do any choices sound too awkward or clunky to be right? If so, eliminate them. If you get it down to a couple choices, though, and they both seem the same, take a closer look. What is different about the answer choices? This is a huge clue for what the ETS is testing on that question. If one sentence says "he" and the other says "him," then they are testing pronoun case. All you have to do is go back to your rule and try to remember which is correct. Basically, isolate the differences in the answer choices and you will know exactly what your choices are. If you remember the rules, you will be all set.

Correct the Sentence Tip #5: A final check

Before you go with an answer, plug it in one last time to make sure it works. This is sort of like the Math section of the SATâ€”you can plug the answer in to make sure it is correct. Read the sentence with the answer choice in there and see how it sounds. Is it awkward? If so, you may want to re-think your answerâ€”or at least mark that question to take a closer look if you have time at the end of the section.

Correct the Sentence Tip #6: Things to look out for

Remember that you are "improving sentences" here. So if an answer choice "improves" the sentence, then it is the answerâ€”even if the original sentence isnâ€™t technically incorrect. This tip only applies to passive tense sentences.

If the original sentence is in the passive tense, that is not technically a "mistakeâ€¦." But, changing it to an active sentence would "improve" the sentence. So, if one of the answer choices is activeâ€”and does not contain any new grammar mistakesâ€”pick it.

Other categories to look out quite a bit in this section: parallelism, comparison errors, comma splices (transition errors), and dangling modifiers. They love to test those here. One other thing to keep an eye out for: they like to try to trick you by including an answer choice that "fixes" the problem in the question, but sneaks in a new grammar problem. Donâ€™t fall for thatâ€”when you choose an answer choice, make sure that it not only fixes the problem but also does not introduce a new one. Thatâ€™s one reason you have to plug your answer in and check before you put itâ€”hopefully you catch any new problem that might have sprung up.

Correct the Sentence Tip #7: Last but not least

If you have it down to two answer choices, and both seem right, and you cannot find a grammar

error in either choiceâ€¦pick the shorter one. A concise sentence is a "better" sentence and 9 times out of 10, the shorter answer choice will be correct. Remember, though, that this only works if there is no other grammar mistake in the one youâ€™re choosing.

Absorb these tips and master the 10 SAT writing categories and doing CTS questions will be as easy as taking candy from a baby.

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