

# The Method for SAT Writing and Language Questions

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Efficiently apply the SAT Writing and Language Method

## How to Do SAT Writing and Language

The Writing and Language section of the SAT tests a limited number of grammar errors and style or logic issues. You should feel empowered in knowing that you can familiarize yourself with these recurring errors and learn to spot them and address them quickly and efficiently. We'll describe the issues that you're likely to see on test day and how to deal with them in the next two chapters. In this chapter, we'll present a simple series of steps for tackling Writing and Language questions.

Take a look at the passage and questions that follow and think about how you would approach them on test day. Then compare your approach to the recommendations presented.

Questions 1 and 2 refer to the following passage.

### Child Expenditures

A report from the United States Department of Agriculture estimates that the average cost of raising a child born in 2015 until age seventeen is over \$230,000. This cost includes housing, food, transportation, health care, child care, and education; the overall cost varies considerably from family to family. **1** Therefore, with the average cost of raising a child set at nearly a quarter million dollars, and with additional children in the family raising that financial expenditure accordingly, it becomes clear that parenthood is a major undertaking. When planning a family, **2** financial considerations should be kept in mind by future parents.

1. A) NO CHANGE  
B) However,  
C) Moreover,  
D) Subsequently,
2. A) NO CHANGE  
B) financial considerations should be at the forefront of parents' thinking.  
C) future parents should keep financial considerations in mind.  
D) future parents should consider financial issues to be of paramount importance in the process of their preparations.

There is no need to read the entire passage before you start to answer questions. Instead, answer them as you read. When you see a number, finish the sentence you are reading and then look at the corresponding question. If you can answer the question based on what you've read so far, do so—this will likely be the case if the question is testing grammar. If you need more information—which may happen if the question is testing organization or relevance—keep reading until you have enough context to answer the question.

Sometimes the issue being tested will be obvious to you when you look at the underlined segment. If it isn't, glance at the answer choices to help you determine what the test maker is after. For instance, in question 1, a transition word plus a comma is underlined. Is the question testing the transition or the punctuation? A quick glance at the choices makes it obvious that it's the former, given that they all include the comma but feature different transition words. **Identifying the issue**, using the choices if necessary, is step 1 of the Writing and Language Method.

To find the correct transition, use the surrounding text. The previous sentence addresses the variability of child expenditures, while the sentence that includes the transition word draws a conclusion from the *average* expenditure, not from the variability. The correct transition must highlight this contrast, so the sentence is incorrect as written, and you can eliminate (A). Among the remaining choices, there is only one contrast word: "However." Of the other choices, "Moreover" conveys continuation and "Subsequently" conveys a sequence in time. Neither fixes the error, so eliminate both and choose **(B)** as the correct answer to question 1.

**Eliminating answer choices that do not address the issue** is step 2 of the Writing and Language Method.

Sometimes there will be more than one choice that addresses the issue. When that happens, you'll need to base your final response on three considerations: conciseness, relevance, and the potential of a given choice to introduce a new error. Question 2 is an example of a question in which more than one choice addresses the issue. This question features an underlined segment immediately following an introductory phrase—a signal to check for a modification error. Indeed, it is future parents who would be planning a family, so the phrase "future parents" should be right next to the introductory modifying phrase. That eliminates (A) and (B), but you still have to decide between (C) and (D), both of which fix the misplaced modifier. Both of these choices are grammatically correct and relevant to the surrounding context. However, **(C)** is more concise and is therefore the correct answer for question 2. **Choosing the most concise and relevant response from those that are grammatically correct** is step 3 of the Writing and Language Method.

Here are the steps we just illustrated:

The Method for SAT Writing and Language Questions	
Step 1.	Identify the issue (use the choices if need be)
Step 2.	Eliminate answer choices that do not address the issue
Step 3.	Plug in the remaining answer choices and select the most <i>correct, concise, and relevant</i> one

**Correct, concise, and relevant** means that the answer choice you select:

- Has no grammatical errors
- Is as short as possible while retaining the writer's intended meaning
- Is relevant to the paragraph and the passage as a whole

Correct answers do *not* change the intended meaning of the original sentence, paragraph, or passage, or introduce new grammatical errors.

### Try on Your Own

**Directions:** Take as much time as you need on these questions. Work carefully and methodically. Practice using the steps that you just learned.

Questions 1–4 refer to the following passage.

#### Bebop Jazz

For a jazz musician in New York City in the early 1940s, the most interesting place to spend the hours between midnight and dawn was probably a Harlem nightclub called Minton’s. After finishing their jobs at other clubs, young musicians like <sup>1</sup> Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Clarke, Thelonious Monk would gather at Minton’s and have jam sessions, informal performances featuring lengthy group and solo improvisations. The all-night sessions resulted in the birth of modern jazz as these African American artists together forged a new sound, known as bebop.

Unlike swing, the enormously popular jazz played in the 1930s, bebop was not dance music. It was often blindingly fast, incorporating tricky, irregular rhythms and discordant sounds that jazz audiences had never heard before. Earlier jazz used blue notes but, like much of Western music up to that time, generally stuck to chord tones to create melodies. Bebop, in contrast, relied heavily on chromatic ornamentation and borrowed notes from altered <sup>2</sup> scales. Thereby, it opened up new harmonic opportunities for musicians.

The musicians who pioneered bebop shared two common elements: a vision of the new music’s possibilities and astonishing improvisational skill—the

1. A) NO CHANGE  
B) Charlie Parker; Dizzy Gillespie; Kenny Clarke; and Thelonious Monk  
C) Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and Kenny Clarke and Thelonious Monk  
D) Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Clarke, and Thelonious Monk
2. Which choice most effectively combines the sentences at the underlined portion?  
A) scales, thereby, it opened up  
B) scales, and thereby opening up  
C) scales, opening up  
D) scales, thereby opening up

ability to play or compose a musical line on the spur of the moment. After all, **3** improvisation, within the context of a group setting, is a hallmark of jazz. Parker, perhaps the greatest instrumental genius jazz has known, was an especially brilliant improviser. He often played double-time, twice as fast as the rest of the band, and his solos were exquisitely shaped, revealing a harmonic imagination that enthralled his listeners.

Like many revolutions, unfortunately, the bebop movement encountered heavy resistance. Opposition came from older jazz musicians initially, but also, later and more lastingly, from a general public alienated by the **4** music's complexity and sophistication. Furthermore, due to the government ban on recording that was in effect during the early years of World War II (records were made of vinyl, a petroleum product that was essential to the war effort), the creative ferment that first produced bebop was poorly documented.

3. A) NO CHANGE  
B) improvisation within the context of a group setting is a hallmark  
C) improvisation within the context of a group setting, is a hallmark  
D) improvisation, within the context of a group setting is a hallmark
4. A) NO CHANGE  
B) musics  
C) musics'  
D) music

## Answers and Explanations

1. D

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Category:** Sentence Structure: Commas, Dashes, and Colons

**Getting to the Answer:** Use commas to separate three or more items forming a series or list. This series contains four items. Separate each item with a comma and use a comma with the conjunction “and” to separate the final item from the rest of the series. Choice (D) is correct.

2. C

**Difficulty:** Hard

**Category:** Conciseness

**Getting to the Answer:** Consider the relationship between the sentences in order to determine how best to combine them. The second sentence contributes useful information regarding the results of using the “chromatic ornamentation” and “altered scales.” Making the second sentence a modifying phrase and connecting it to the first with a comma will eliminate unnecessary words and more clearly and smoothly show the relationship between the ideas. Choice (C) is correct. Choice (D) is similar and may be tempting, but since “opening up vast new harmonic opportunities” now directly modifies “altered scales,” the word “thereby” is redundant.

3. B

**Difficulty:** Medium

**Category:** Sentence Structure: Commas, Dashes, and Colons

**Getting to the Answer:** When you see a phrase set off by commas, always read the sentence without the phrase to determine if the phrase is nonessential. Although the sentence is still grammatically correct without the information that is set off by the commas, an essential part of the meaning is lost. The author is stating that it is the group setting that characterizes the type of improvisation important to jazz. Choice (B) properly removes the commas that set off the phrase.

4. A

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Category:** Agreement: Modifiers

**Getting to the Answer:** When an underlined section features an apostrophe after a noun, check the noun’s number. This sentence is correct as written. Although there are many styles of music, the noun “music” is a collective noun and singular. Choice (A) correctly uses the singular possessive.