# SAT Grammar Cheat Sheet

## PUNCTUATION | Find the sentence

A two-page quick reference for review alongside lessons and practice.

**What changes in the answer choices?**

| | |
|---|---|
| Punctuation | Check sentence boundaries, interruptions, and lists. **p. 1** |
| Verb forms | Check agreement, the main verb, and timing. **p. 2** |
| Pronouns | Find the noun they replace. **p. 2** |
| Noun after an opening phrase | Check who or what the description fits. **p. 2** |
| Apostrophes or noun endings | Check number and possession. **p. 2** |

**Find a subject, a complete main verb, and a complete thought.** “The kettle whistles.” is a sentence. “Although the kettle whistles.” is a fragment. Read the whole sentence before deciding.

### 1. Join complete sentences

Join complete thoughts with a period, semicolon, or comma plus a coordinating conjunction.

*The mural faded. Its outline remained.*
*The mural faded; its outline remained.*
*The mural faded, but its outline remained.*

***Wrong:*** *The mural faded, its outline remained.*
*A comma alone is a comma splice; no punctuation is a run-on.*

**FANBOYS:** for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.
A colon also works when the second thought explains the first (see 5).

### 2. Punctuate *however*

Between complete thoughts: semicolon + *however* + comma. A period can replace the semicolon.

***Correct:*** *The recipe looked simple; however, the dough required hours of rest.*

***Wrong:*** *The recipe looked simple, however, the dough required hours of rest.*

Within one clause: *The dough, however, needed rest.*

### 3. Set off extra information

Use matching punctuation around a mid-sentence aside: commas, dashes, or parentheses.

*The atlas, a retirement gift, lay open.*
*The atlas—a retirement gift—lay open.*

Without the aside: **The atlas lay open.** Do not pair a comma with a dash.

### 4. Keep identifying details attached

A name, title, or description that tells which person or thing is meant takes no surrounding commas.

*Mira’s novel Harbor Lights arrived today.*
*Mira’s first novel, Harbor Lights, arrived today.*

*The tents that leaked were replaced.*
*The tents, which leaked, were replaced.*

*First* already identifies the novel. For the tents, *that* identifies a subset; the *which* clause adds an aside about all of them.

### 5. Finish the setup before a colon

A colon follows a complete sentence and introduces a list, example, or explanation.

***Correct:*** *The kit lacked one item: a compass.*
***Wrong:*** *The kit lacked: a compass.*

A single dash can also introduce an explanation: *The kit lacked one item—a compass.*

After a colon, a full sentence is allowed but not required. A colon cannot join unrelated statements.

### 6. Give each comma a job

Commas mark introductions and list items: *When the fog lifted, we packed ropes, lamps, and gloves.*

No lone comma between subject and verb or verb and object. No comma before *and* when the second verb shares the subject: *Nora folded the map and left.*

*Use semicolons between items with internal commas: Stops included Bend, Oregon; Taos, New Mexico; and Ely, Nevada.*



SAT® is a trademark registered by the College Board, which is not affiliated with, and does not endorse, this product.

# SAT Grammar Cheat Sheet

## GRAMMAR | Match the parts

Check the subject, the complete verb, and the meaning before choosing an answer.

### 7. Find the main verb

An *-ing* form or *to + verb* cannot serve alone as a sentence's main verb.

***Fragment:*** *The balcony having two exits.*
***Sentence:*** *The balcony **has** two exits.*
***Fragment:*** *The railing being loose.*
***Sentence:*** *The railing **is** loose.*

A descriptive clause still needs a main clause: *The balcony that **faces** the harbor **has** two exits.*

*Having* can be correct in a phrase: *Having checked both exits, we entered.*

### 8. Match the verb to its subject

Ignore intervening descriptions when checking whether the subject is singular or plural.

*The **label** on the jars **is** faded.*
*The **jars** beside the sink **are** empty.*

***Each** of the lanterns **needs** a battery.*
*The **lamp and radio need** batteries.*

*The subject can follow the verb:*
*Behind the curtains **stand two ladders**.*

Ask what is doing or being something. The closest noun may not be the subject.

### 9. Follow the timeline

Use time clues and context. Verbs need not share a tense when the actions happen at different times.

***Finished past:*** *The ferry stopped running in 2008.*
***Past to present:*** *Volunteers have maintained the dock since 2009.*
***Earlier past:*** *By the time repairs began, the tide had risen.*

**Had + past participle** places an event before a past reference point. Do not simply copy a nearby verb's tense.

### 10. Trace each pronoun

Find the noun the pronoun replaces, even if it appears in the previous sentence. Match its number.

*The **carousel** needs repairs to **its** roof.*
*The **carousels** need repairs to **their** roofs.*

*Watch for a distracting nearby noun:*
*The **drawings** in the portfolio are fragile, so **they** must stay flat.*

Here, *they* refers to the drawings, not the portfolio. Check what the pronoun means, not just what comes before it.

### 11. Attach descriptions correctly

After an opening descriptive phrase, name the person or thing it describes.

***Wrong:*** *Wrapped in brown paper, Theo carried the vase upstairs.*
***Correct:*** *Wrapped in brown paper, the vase arrived intact.*

Ask: **What was wrapped?** The vase, not Theo.

When choices begin with different nouns after an opening phrase, test each noun against that description.

### 12. Separate number from ownership

Check number first, then possession.

***Plural:*** *the pilots*
***One owner:*** *the pilot's checklist*
***Several owners:*** *the pilots' checklists*
***Irregular plural:*** *the children's drawings*

***its*** *= possession;* ***it's*** *= it is / it has*
***their*** *= possession;* ***they're*** *= they are*
***there*** *= a place*
***whose*** *= possession;* ***who's*** *= who is / has*

Expand contractions to check them. Never *its'*.

Scope: College Board's Standard English Conventions framework. Original examples.



SAT® is a trademark registered by the College Board, which is not affiliated with, and does not endorse, this product.