Skill 1.1: Syntax (parallelism, coordination, subordination)

Syntax is the deliberate order and arrangement of words in a sentence. It takes into account grammatical rules and structure needed for the sentence to have meaning. Words must be arranged in a specific way in order to convey the correct message.

Parallelism includes the concept of presenting ideas as equal thoughts. When ideas are listed in a parallel manner, the sentence flows and emphasis is shared across each idea. In contrast, when ideas are listed without parallelism, the sentence becomes choppy and incomprehensible.

Example:

Before boarding the plane she said goodbye to her husband, bought a coffee and went through the security checkpoint. *(parallel)*

Before boarding the plane she said goodbye to her husband, stopped at the coffee stand that had just opened for a drink, and went through the security checkpoint. *(non-parallel)*

Coordination and subordination combine ideas to give emphasis on a particular portion of a sentence. Coordination includes a coordinating conjunction and subordination includes a subordinating conjunction. Using either of these methods can change the emphasis of ideas and overall meaning of the sentence.

Coordinating conjunctions emphasize equal ideas: and, but, or, etc.

Subordinating conjunctions emphasize main ideas: although, because, before, though, etc.

Example:

The restaurant had a hostess, and they decided to keep the podium at the front door. *(coordination)*

The restaurant decided to keep the podium at the front door, because they had a hostess. *(subordination)*
Skill 1.2: Sentence boundaries (comma splice, run-ons, sentence fragments)  

Comma splices appear when two sentences are joined by only a comma. Run-on sentences, also known as fused sentences, appear when two sentences are run together with no punctuation at all. Fragments include a portion of a sentence, but they do not represent a complete thought. Complete sentences must include a subject (noun), predicate (verb), and they must represent a complete thought.

Examples:

a) *Error:* Dr. Sanders is a brilliant scientist, his research on genetic disorders won him a Nobel Prize.

*Problem:* A comma alone cannot join two independent clauses (complete sentences). The two clauses can be joined by a semi-colon, or they can be separated by a period.

*Correction:* Dr. Sanders is a brilliant scientist; his research on genetic disorders won him a Nobel Prize.

--- OR ---

Correction: Dr. Sanders is a brilliant scientist. His research on genetic disorders won him a Nobel Prize.

b) *Error:* Florida is noted for its beaches they are long, sandy, and beautiful.

*Problem:* The first sentence ends with the word beaches, and the second sentence cannot be joined with the first. The fused sentence error can be corrected in several ways: (1) one clause may be made dependent on another with a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun; (2) a semi-colon may be used to combine two equally important ideas; (3) the two independent clauses may be separated by a period.

*Correction:* Florida is noted for its beaches, which are long, sandy, and beautiful.

--- OR ---

Correction: Florida is noted for its beaches; they are long, sandy, and beautiful.

--- OR ---

Correction: Florida is noted for its beaches. They are long, sandy, and beautiful.
c) **Error:** Worked on the garage.

**Problem:** This is a fragment because there is no subject and this does not represent and complete thought. You may be asking yourself: who worked on the garage?

**Correction:** John worked on the garage.

**Skill 1.3: Recognition of correct sentences**

A fact is something that is true and can be proved.

An opinion is something that a person believes, thinks, or feels.

Examine the following examples:

Joe DiMaggio, a Yankees’ center-fielder, was replaced by Mickey Mantle in 1952.

*This is a fact. If necessary, evidence can be produced to support this.*

First year players are more ambitious than seasoned players.

*This is an opinion. There is no proof to support that everyone feels this way.*

**Skill 1.4: Concord/agreement (pronoun reference, case shift, and number; subject-verb; verb tense)**

A pronoun must correspond with the singular or plural form of the noun, called the antecedent, to which it refers. Similarly, a pronoun must be in the same person (1st, 2nd, 3rd) as the noun. A pronoun must refer clearly to a single word, not to a complete idea.

Pronouns, unlike nouns, change case forms. Pronouns must be in the subjective, objective, or possessive form according to their function in the sentence.

**Example:**

*Error:* A teacher should treat all their students fairly.

*Problem:* Since A teacher is singular, the pronoun referring to it must also be singular. Otherwise, the noun has to be made plural.

*Correction:* Teachers should treat all their students fairly.
For proper subject-verb agreement, a verb must correspond in the singular or plural form with the simple subject; it is not affected by any interfering elements.

Note: A simple subject is never found in a prepositional phrase (a phrase beginning with a word such as of, by, over, through, until).

Example:

Error: Either the police captain or his officers is going to the convention.

Problem: In either/or and neither/nor constructions, the verb agrees with the subject closer to it.

Correction: Either the police captain or his officers are going to the convention.

Skill 1.5: Diction

Diction includes the deliberate selection of words to convey meaning. The message can be emphasized in the style of writing or through emphasis when read orally. The enunciation of selected words has the potential to emphasize meaning, and an accent may make the meaning difficult to understand.

For example, a passage read quickly in a New York accent may be difficult to understand, but it may convey that the passage resembles a time or place in New York. This can be critical to the context and character development. The same goes for a Shakespearean play. Words are most likely enunciated to provide emphasis in meaning in the script. This draws in the audience and assists them in comprehending the author’s intended message.

Skill 1.6: Modifiers

Particular phrases that are not placed near the one word they modify often result in misplaced modifiers. Particular phrases that do not relate to the subject being modified result in dangling modifiers.

Example:

Error: Weighing the options carefully, a decision was made regarding the punishment of the convicted murderer.

Problem: Who is weighing the options? No one capable of weighing is named in the sentence; thus, the participle phrase weighing the options
carefully dangles. This problem can be corrected by adding a subject of the sentence capable of doing the action.

Correction: Weighing the options carefully, the judge made a decision regarding the punishment of the convicted murderer.

**Skill 1.7: Idiom**

Dependent to figurative language, idioms are phrases that typically do not represent a literal meaning. They are created by native speakers and are not predictable by breaking down elements within the phrase. For example, a “birthday suit” has nothing to do with a birthday or a suit.

**Examples:**

- Beat around the bush
- Straw that broke the camel’s back
- Hit the nail on the head
- Killed two birds with one stone
- Piece of cake

- Whole nine yards
- Jump the gun
- Sick as a dog
- On thin ice
- Kick the bucket

**Skill 1.8: Active/passive voice**

The difference between active and passive voice lies in the action of sentence. When the subject performs the action, the sentence is using active voice. When the subject is acted upon by the verb, it is considered passive voice.

**Example:**

- He opened the window.
  
  *Active voice*

- The window was opened by him as it began to rain.
  
  *Passive voice*

*Note: It is common for sentences using active voice to be brief and concise, while the passive voice is typically a more lengthy sentence.*

**Skill 1.9: Lack of subject in modifying word group**

There are times when a subject may be implied. To find the subject, a reader often ask themselves “who” or “what” is completing the action. For example, if a sentence said, “The girl watches a movie” we are able to question who is
completing the action for the very “watching.” It’s clear to see that the girl is the subject in this sentence.

For a sentence such as “Sit down and watch the movie,” we can infer that the subject could be the word “you.” Other examples include:

(You) Watch your brother.
(You) Don’t forget to bring an umbrella.

The reader can use context clues and point of view to quickly determine an implied subject.

See also Skill 1.6.

Skill 1.10: Logical comparison

In order to draw logical comparisons and make conclusions, a reader must use prior knowledge and apply it to the current situation. A conclusion or inference is never stated. You must rely on your common sense.

Read the following passage.

The Smith family waited patiently around carousel number 7 for their luggage to arrive. They were exhausted after their 5 hour trip and were anxious to get to their hotel. After about an hour, they realized that they no longer recognized any of the other passengers’ faces. Mrs. Smith asked the person who appeared to be in charge if they were at the right carousel. The man replied, “Yes, this is it, but we finished unloading that baggage almost half an hour ago.”

From the man’s response we can infer that:

(A) The Smiths were ready to go to their hotel.
(B) The Smith’s luggage was lost.
(C) The man had their luggage.
(D) They were at the wrong carousel.

Since the Smiths were still waiting for their luggage, we know that they were not yet ready to go to their hotel. From the man’s response, we know that they were not at the wrong carousel and that he did not have their luggage. Therefore, though not directly stated, it appears that their luggage was lost. Choice (B) is the correct answer.
Skill 1.11: Logical agreement

Similar to logical comparison (Skill 1.10), logical agreement draws on prior knowledge. In addition for the conclusion to be logical, the grammatical makeup of the sentences must be logical as well.

- Logical- can be proven. (Factual)
- Non-logical- cannot be proven. (Opinion)
- Illogical- Can be proven wrong. (Factual)

To test for logic, a reader can put the scenario in a logical sequence, called the syllogism.

Claim: All leaves turn yellow in autumn.
Claim: Maple trees have leaves.
Agreement: The leaves on maple trees turn yellow in autumn.

Skill 1.12: Punctuation

Commas

Commas indicate a brief pause. They are used to set off dependent clauses and long introductory word groups. They are also used to separate words in a series. They are used to set off unimportant material that interrupts the flow of the sentence, and they separate independent clauses joined by conjunctions.

a) Error: After I finish my master’s thesis I plan to work in Chicago.
Problem: A comma is needed after an introductory dependent word-group containing a subject and verb.

b) Error: I washed waxed and vacuumed my car today.
Problem: Words in a series should be separated by commas. Although the word and is sometimes considered optional, it is often necessary to clarify the meaning.
Correction: I washed, waxed, and vacuumed my car today.

c) Error: She was a talented dancer but she is mostly remembered for her singing ability.
Problem: A comma is needed before a conjunction that joins two independent clauses (complete sentences).
Correction: She was a talented dancer but she is mostly remembered for her singing ability.

Semicolons and Colons

Semicolons are needed to divide two or more closely related independent sentences.

They are also needed to separate items in a series containing commas. Colons are used to introduce lists and to emphasize what follows.

a) Error: I climbed to the top of the mountain, it took me three hours.

Problem: A comma alone cannot separate two independent clauses. Instead a semicolon is needed to separate two related sentences.

Correction: I climbed to the top of the mountain; it took me three hours.

b) Error: In the movie, asteroids destroyed Dallas, Texas, Kansas City, Missouri, and Boston, Massachusetts.

Problem: Semicolons are needed to separate items in a series that already contains commas.

Correction: In the movie, asteroids destroyed Dallas, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; and Boston, Massachusetts.

c) Error: Essays will receive the following grades, A for excellent, B for good, C for average, and D for unsatisfactory.

Problem: A colon is needed to emphasize the information or a list that follows.

Correction: Essays will receive the following grades: A for excellent, B for good, C for average, and D for unsatisfactory.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used to show either contractions or possession.

a) Error: She shouldn’t be permitted to smoke cigarettes in the building.

Problem: An apostrophe is needed in a contraction in place of the missing letter.

Correction: She shouldn’t be permitted to smoke cigarettes in the building.
b) *Error:* The childrens new kindergarten teacher was also a singer.

*Problem:* An apostrophe is needed to show possession.

*Correction:* The childrens’ new kindergarten teacher was also a singer.

*Note:* The apostrophe after the s indicates that there are multiple children.

**Quotation Marks**

Use double quotation marks to enclose a direct quotation and to enclose the title of an article, a song, an essay, or a short story.

a) *Error:* Franklin Roosevelt once said, There is nothing to fear but fear itself.

*Problem:* Double quotation marks are needed to set off the quotation.

*Correction:* Franklin Roosevelt once said, “There is nothing to fear but fear itself”.


*Problem:* Double quotation marks are needed to set off the title of an article.

Competency 2: Revision Skills
Skill 2.1: Organization

The organizational pattern of a piece of writing is the way in which the author conveys the main idea and details. A list of organizational patterns commonly used on the test is given below.

- Addition - development of a subject point by point.
- Cause and Effect - demonstration of how an event came about due to certain conditions or causes.
- Classification - division of a subject into different categories or classes.
- Comparison and Contrast - pointing out of similarities and/or differences.
- Definition - explanation or clarification of the meaning of a word or term.
- Explanation - explanation of something said earlier.
- Generalization - making of a general statement, which includes the support of specific examples.
- Order - listing in order of things or events; may be in order of time, importance or some other element.
- Simple Listing - listing of items in no particular order.
- Summary - summation of what has already been said in greater detail.

Skill 2.2: Evaluation of evidence

Bias is defined as an opinion, feeling or influence that strongly favors one side in an argument. A statement or passage is biased if an author attempts to convince a reader of something. On the test, the terms valid and invalid have special meaning for the evaluation of evidence. If an argument is valid, it is reasonable. It is objective (not biased) and can be supported by evidence. If an argument is invalid, it is not reasonable. It is not objective. In other words, one can find evidence of bias.

Read the following passage:

Most dentists agree that Bright Smile Toothpaste is the best for fighting cavities. It tastes good and leaves your mouth minty fresh.