4 Joining and Separating Sentences

In Chapter 1, we looked at transitions in terms of meaning. In this chapter, we're going to look at them in terms of grammar. We're also going to consider the various ways in which two sentences can be punctuated.

There are three main ways to separate two complete sentences (independent clauses) from one another:

1) Period or Semicolon
2) Comma + Coordinating (FANBOYS) Conjunction
3) Colon or Dash

Note that two sentences **cannot** be separated by a comma alone.

We're going to explore these options in detail in this chapter, but first we're going to look at how "separating sentences" questions (i.e., sentence-boundary questions) work on the SAT.

Very important: No matter where in a passage the blank occurs, make sure to back up to the beginning of the sentence and read from the beginning all the way through to the period. Otherwise, you might not notice that there are two sentences rather than one.

As a general rule, it is a good idea to check answer choices that contain one of the above types of punctuation first. This is particularly true if a **period** or **colon** appears. When you are given the option of creating two sentences, there is a good chance the question is testing your ability to do just that.

When answering these questions, you must be particularly careful with phrases that make sense at the end of one sentence but that must belong to the following sentence for grammatical reasons.

There are several common types of phrases/clauses that are especially likely to be involved in this construction.

- Prepositional phrase
- *-ing* (participial) phrase
- Subordinating conjunction (e.g., *because*, *when*)

Starting on the next page, we're going to look at some examples.

Example #1: Prepositional Phrase

To reiterate, a prepositional phrase is a phrase that begins with a preposition, e.g., *from, of, to, in, for, with, to, between, about.*

This type of phrase can easily make sense at either the end of one sentence or the beginning of the next, making it crucial for you to get the full context before choosing an answer.

A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for her powerful, psychologically revealing _____ she depicted a wide range of subjects, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street. As a result, she became known for challenging the conventions of her genre.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ	portraiture over the course of her career
Ⓑ	portraiture. Over the course of her career,
Ⓒ	portraiture, over the course of her career,
Ⓓ	portraiture over the course of her career,

Because the phrase "over the course of her career" initially seems to make sense after "portraiture", as part of the same sentence, many test-takers will immediately pick (A) and move on to the next question without a second thought. What they will not do is read all the way to the period. Take a moment now, and just read the entire sentence in isolation:

> **A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for her powerful, psychologically revealing portraiture over the course of her career she depicted a wide range of subjects, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street.**

Can you spot the problem now? If the phrase "over the course of her career" is left without any punctuation, the sentence is far too long. In fact, there are two sentences, not one:

As discussed, two complete sentences must be divided by a period or a semicolon, not a comma. The only answer that creates two sentences is (B).

When the phrase "over the course of her career" is attached to the beginning of the second sentence rather than the end of the first, the sentences make perfect sense.

Sentence #1: A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for her powerful, psychologically revealing portraiture.

Sentence #2: Over the course of her career, she depicted a wide range of subjects, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street.

Example #2: -ING Word

You should also be on the lookout for "separating sentences" questions that require you to identify the correct punctuation around an *-ing* phrase.

For example, consider the following question. We're going to keep working with the same passage so that you can see how certain structures lend themselves to the same error tested in slightly different ways.

A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for her powerful, psychologically revealing _____ a wide range of subjects, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street, she became known for challenging the conventions of her genre.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ	portraiture depicting
Ⓑ	portraiture, depicting
Ⓒ	portraiture. Depicting
Ⓓ	portraiture depicting,

If you read only the section of the passage immediately surrounding the blank, the *-ing* word *depicting* makes sense at the end of the first sentence: That would seem to make (A) correct.

If you read the no-punctuation option in context of the full passage, however, you again get a massive run-on sentence that needs to be divided in two.

> **A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for her powerful, psychologically revealing portraiture depicting a wide range of subjects, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street, she became known for challenging the conventions of her genre.**

A comma cannot replace a period, so both (B) and (D) are out. (C), however, correctly uses a period to divide the sentences.

Sentence #1: A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for her powerful, psychologically revealing portraiture.

Sentence #2: **Depicting a wide range of subjects**, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street, she became known for challenging the conventions of her genre.

Example #3: Subordinating Conjunction

Clauses beginning with subordinating conjunctions, e.g., *because* or *although*, are also a potential target for questions asking you to divide a lengthy run-on.

For example, consider this version of the passage.

A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for the scope of her _____ a wide range of subjects, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street, she also became known for challenging the conventions of her genre.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ	portraiture because she depicted
Ⓑ	portraiture, depicting
Ⓒ	portraiture. Because she depicted
Ⓓ	portraiture, her depiction of

If you read only the section of the passage immediately surrounding the blank, the subordinating conjunction *because* makes sense at the end of the first sentence: *A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for her powerful, psychologically revealing portraiture because she depicted a wide range of subjects.* That would seem to make (A) correct.

If you read the no-punctuation option in context of the full passage, however, you get a massive run-on sentence that yet again needs to be divided in two.

> **A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for the scope of her work because she depicted a wide range of subjects, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street, she also became known for challenging the conventions of her genre.**

A comma cannot replace a period, so both (B) and (D) are out. (C) correctly uses a period to divide the sentences.

Sentence #1: A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," the American painter Alice Neel (1900–1984) is acclaimed for the scope of her portraiture.

Sentence #2: **Because she depicted a wide range of subjects**, from her family and friends to prominent critics, artists, and strangers she met on the street, she also became known for challenging the conventions of her genre.

So far, we've just looked at sentence-division questions that use periods—but there are other types of punctuation that can also be used to divide sentences. In the next section, we're going to look at the various options in detail.

A. Period = Semicolon

For the purposes of the SAT, **periods and semicolons are grammatically identical**: both are used to separate two complete sentences. (The first letter after a period is capitalized, while the first letter after a semicolon is lower case, but these constructions will always be given correctly in the answer choices.)

Correct: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking. Farmers** around the world grow them in both fields and greenhouses.

Correct: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking; farmers** around the world grow them in both fields and greenhouses.

"Strong" Transitions

Certain transitions—formally known as conjunctive adverbs—are considered "strong" enough to begin a sentence. Common examples include *however, therefore, thus, consequently, moreover,* and *nevertheless.* **When used to begin a clause, these transitions must follow a period or semicolon, never a comma.**

Incorrect: The tomato is often treated as a vegetable**, however,** it is actually a fruit.

Correct: The tomato is often treated as a vegetable**. However,** it is actually a fruit.

Correct: The tomato is often treated as a vegetable**; however,** it is actually a fruit.

B. Comma + Coordinating (FANBOYS) Conjunction

As discussed in the previous chapter, complete sentences can also be joined by *comma + coordinating conjunction*. These conjunctions are also known by the acronym **FANBOYS**:

For, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et, **S**o.

The three most common FANBOYS conjunctions are *and, but,* and *so.* They should be your primary concern, but you should be aware of the others as well.

When a FANBOYS conjunction is used without a comma to join two sentences, the result is a **run-on sentence**. Note that a sentence does not have to be long to be a run-on.

Run-on: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking and they** are grown around the world in both fields and greenhouses.

Correct: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking, and they** are grown around the world in both fields and greenhouses.

Likewise, a FANBOYS conjunction should not be used after a period or a semicolon.* Any answer choice that contains one of these constructions can be automatically eliminated.

Incorrect: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking. And they** are grown around the world in both fields and greenhouses.

Incorrect: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking; and they are** grown around the world in both fields and greenhouses

*Although it is technically incorrect to begin a sentence with a FANBOYS conjunction, in everyday writing this construction is generally accepted when used for occasional stylistic effect.

When the subject is the same in both clauses and is **not** repeated in the second clause, do **not** use a comma.

Incorrect: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking, and are** grown around the world in both fields and greenhouses.

Correct: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking and are** grown around the world in both fields and greenhouses.

You can also think of the above rule this way: because *comma + and* = period, simply replace *comma + and* with a period, and see if you have two complete sentences:

Incorrect: Tomatoes are used in many different types of **cooking. Are** grown around the world in both fields and greenhouses.

Because the statement after the period is not a sentence, no comma should be used before *and*.

Very Important: Semicolon = Period = Comma + FANBOYS

Because a period, a semicolon, and *comma + FANBOYS conjunction* are grammatically identical, you will not be asked to choose among them. **If more than one of these constructions appear as choices, you can eliminate all of them because no question can have more than one right answer.** For example:

Astronomers have long suspected that the tilt of Saturn's rings comes from gravitational interactions between Saturn and Neptune. Recent modeling suggests that although the orbits of Saturn and Neptune were once _____ has escaped Neptune's pull.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ in sync, Saturn

Ⓑ in sync. Saturn

Ⓒ in sync; Saturn

Ⓓ in sync, but Saturn

In this case, (A) is the only possible option because the period in (B), semicolon in (C), and comma + *but* in (D) are all grammatically equivalent. In this case, (A) is correct because it places a comma between a dependent clause (*Recent modeling suggests that although the orbits of Saturn and Neptune were once in sync*) and an independent clause (*Saturn has escaped Neptune's pull*). As a rule, you should always double-check the remaining option to ensure it fits, but in general you can assume it will be correct.

C. Colon = Dash

It is also possible to separate two independent clauses with a colon or dash, **but only when the second clause explains or describes a result of the first**. Based on the preliminary material released by the College Board, **the colon is particularly likely to appear in correct answers**. For example:

Astronomers have long suspected that the tilt of Saturn's rings comes from gravitational interactions between Saturn and _____ gyrates, like a spinning top, at nearly the same rate as the orbit of Neptune.

: a Sentn. fragment

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ Neptune, Saturn's tilt

Ⓑ Neptune: Saturn's tilt explanation

Ⓒ Neptune, whereas Saturn's tilt

Ⓓ Neptune that Saturn's tilt S+V+O

The second sentence provides an explanation for the first: it describes why scientists have long suspected that the tilt of Saturn's rings is affected by Neptune (it gyrates at the same rate as Neptune's orbit). As a result, a colon can acceptably be placed between the two sentences, making (B) the answer.

Note: Though unlikely, it is not impossible that you will be asked to choose between a colon and a semicolon or period. To reiterate, a colon can only separate two sentences when the second defines or explains the first. If that is not the case, a semicolon or period must be used instead.

The production of ceramics in China, which began during the Neolithic period, has continued until the present _____ range from bricks and tiles, to hand-built pots and jars fired in kilns, to the refined porcelain wares made originally for the imperial court and later for export.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ day, although construction materials

Ⓑ day, construction materials

Ⓒ day: construction materials

Ⓓ day; construction materials

In this case, the second sentence builds on the first sentence by giving additional information about the topic; however, it does not actually provide an explanation. As a result, a colon cannot be used to separate the two statements. (D) rather than (C) must be the answer.

Comma Splices and How to Avoid Them

When a comma alone is used to separate two independent clauses, the result is known as a **comma splice**. **Comma splices are always incorrect**.

In most cases, comma splices are caused by two specific constructions:

1) Pronoun as subject

2) Adverb at the start of a clause

Pronoun as Subject

As discussed in the previous chapter, a sentence whose subject is a noun (e.g., *the tomato grows*) and a sentence whose subject is a pronoun (e.g., *It grows*) are grammatically identical, even if the second version does not make sense out of context.

Because there is so much confusion around this concept, it has traditionally been one of the most commonly tested errors on the SAT. While it is unclear how heavily the digital SAT will focus on it, you should make sure that you are comfortable identifying errors involving this construction.

Shortcut: commas splices are often signaled by the construction ***comma + pronoun*** (e.g., *it, he, she, they, one*). Whenever you see this construction underlined, you should immediately be on your guard.

For example, consider the question below:

Euripides is identified with many theatrical innovations that have profoundly influenced modern _____ for the representation of heroes as ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinary circumstances.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ	drama; and he is particularly known
Ⓑ	drama, he is particularly known
Ⓒ	drama particularly being known
Ⓓ	drama. He is particularly known

The construction *comma + he* in (B) is a signal that a comma splice is most likely involved and that that answer can be eliminated right away. The simplest fix is to replace the comma with a period or semicolon, so you should start by looking for an answer that includes one of those constructions. (D), the correct answer, uses a period, so it is correct.

Adverb at the Start of a Clause

As mentioned earlier, certain "strong" transitions (conjunctive adverbs) must be placed after a period or semicolon when used to begin a clause. This is also true of many "time" words, e.g., *today, currently, later.*

Logical Relationship	Time or Sequence
Besides	After
Consequently	Currently
Furthermore	Finally
However	First
In addition	Later
Meanwhile	Next
Moreover	Now
Nevertheless	Today
Otherwise	Subsequently
Rather	Then
Still	
Therefore	
Thus	

A sentence that begins with an adverb is **grammatically identical** to one that does not.

Sentence: Almost twenty of Euripides' plays survive.

Sentence: **However**, almost twenty of Euripides' plays survive.

Sentence: **Today**, almost twenty of Euripides' plays survive.

Let's look at a test-style example.

Euripides, one of the three ancient Greek dramatists whose plays have survived, is identified with many theatrical innovations that have profoundly influenced modern _____ he is particularly known for the representation of heroes as ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinary circumstances.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ drama today

Ⓑ drama, today

Ⓒ drama; today,

Ⓓ drama today,

Today he is particularly known for the representation of heroes as ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinary circumstances is a full sentence and must follow a semicolon or period, making (C) correct.

To summarize:

In many cases, you will be given the option of using only a period, semicolon, colon, or dash to correctly join two complete sentences.

Period: George Westinghouse, who was one of Thomas Edison's main rivals, was something of a scientific **prodigy. He** created his first major invention, the rotary steam engine, before the age of twenty.

Semicolon: George Westinghouse, who was one of Thomas Edison's main rivals, was something of a scientific **prodigy; he** created his first major invention, the rotary steam engine, before the age of twenty.

Colon: George Westinghouse, who was one of Thomas Edison's main rivals, was something of a scientific **prodigy: he** created his first major invention, the rotary steam engine, before the age of twenty.

Dash: George Westinghouse, who was one of Thomas Edison's main rivals, was something of a scientific **prodigy—he** created his first major invention, the rotary steam engine, before the age of twenty.

In some cases, you may also have the option of **adding a transition**:

- Comma + FANBOYS
- Semicolon + Conjunctive Adverb

Correct: Frank Sinatra, one of the most famous singers of the twentieth century, never studied music **formally, so** he learned his songs by ear.

Correct: Frank Sinatra, one of the most famous singers of the twentieth century, never studied music **formally; therefore,** he learned his songs by ear.

Exercise: Joining and Separating Sentences
(answers p. 204)

In the following sentences, correct any error involving run-on sentences, comma splices, or FANBOYS conjunctions by adding or changing only one punctuation mark (adjusting the capitalization as necessary). Some of the sentences do not contain an error.

1.	Lake Superior is the largest freshwater lake in the world by surface area and the third largest by volume, it holds around 10% of the world's fresh surface water.
2.	Very early printed books left spaces for commentary, miniature illustrations, and illuminated initials, all of which would have been added later by hand.
3.	CRISPR tools can be programmed to target and cut virtually any DNA sequence; however, they have been limited by the requirement that they first recognize a short sequence surrounding the targeted section.
4.	Ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax believed that remote places contained extraordinary pieces of culture; he traveled the globe in search of songs and stories.
5.	Introduced in 1678, the term "conscious" acquired at least five definitions in fifty years, and its ambiguity has not faded in more recent times.
6.	Historically, the silk produced by silkworms has been used in fashion as a material for luxury robes; today, silk-based materials are more likely to be found in a doctor's office or operating room.
7.	The Qing Dynasty attained the height of its power under the Qianlong Emperor; beginning in 1755, he led Ten Great Campaigns that extended Qing control into Inner Asia and personally supervised a number of Confucian cultural projects.
8.	Between 1920 and 1929, the number of motor vehicles in the United States tripled, by the end of the decade, Americans owned more than 80% of the automobiles in the world.

9	Bats can perceive and stalk their prey in complete darkness: they use a system of ultrasonic sounds to produce echoes that identify its location.
10.	As an undergraduate, Theodore Roosevelt began a systematic study of the United States Navy's role in the War of 1812, assisted by two uncles, he studied original source materials and official records, ultimately publishing *The Naval War of 1812* in 1882.

Now try some test-style questions. (Additional questions are located at the end of the following chapter.)

11. A computer scientist who specializes in natural language processing, Yejin Choi has dedicated much of her recent research to commonsense knowledge and _____ on developing artificial intelligence systems that can reason with common sense.

- Ⓐ reasoning. She also works
- Ⓑ reasoning, also she works
- Ⓒ reasoning, she also works
- Ⓓ reasoning she also works

12. Interacting with animals, particularly dogs, is known to help people cope with _____ the prefrontal cortex helps individuals regulate and process social and emotional interactions, neuroscientists believe that it might be particularly relevant to their research.

- Ⓐ stress, because
- Ⓑ stress: because
- Ⓒ stress because
- Ⓓ stress because—

13. Contemporary theatrical performers in the United States draw influences from across the globe. For example, the choreographer and dancer Savion Glover aims to restore the African roots of tap dance by eliminating hand _____ he focuses on the feet as the primary source of movement instead.

- Ⓐ gestures throughout his works,
- Ⓑ gestures, throughout his works,
- Ⓒ gestures. Throughout his works,
- Ⓓ gestures throughout, his works

14. Food waste has been identified as the most prominent type of hospitality waste. Roughly 1.3 billion tons of food is lost or is thrown away annually—the equivalent of one third or even up to one half of all food intended for human _____ food waste is a major environmental, social, and economic issue.

Ⓐ	consumption, therefore,
Ⓑ	consumption, therefore
Ⓒ	consumption therefore,
Ⓓ	consumption; therefore,

15. In surveys, a significant majority of people usually agree that cycling is a desirable means of transit, especially in densely populated areas. Practically speaking, however, there is often a large gap between desired and actual _____ for example, only 20% of short-distance trips in residential environments are made by bicycle.

Ⓐ	numbers in Germany
Ⓑ	numbers: in Germany
Ⓒ	numbers, in Germany,
Ⓓ	numbers in Germany,