5 Joining Sentences and Fragments

In addition to knowing how to use various types of punctuation to join and separate sentences, you must be able to do the same for sentences (independent clauses) and fragments (dependent phrases or clauses). There are several options, all of which are fair game on the SAT.

1) Comma
2) Colon
3) Dash

Note that a **period** or **semicolon** **cannot** be used to separate a sentence from a fragment.

Subordinating Conjunctions

To reiterate from Chapter 3, clauses that begin with subordinating conjunctions are always dependent.

After	Before	Since	When
Although	Despite	Though	Whenever
As	Even though	Unless	Whereas
Because	If	Until	While

When a dependent clause begun by one of the above conjunctions comes before an independent clause, **a comma** must **be placed between the clauses**.

Incorrect: Although Frank Sinatra never studied music formally and learned his songs by **ear he** became one of the most famous singers of the twentieth century.

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

Incorrect: Because Frank Sinatra, one of the most famous singers of the twentieth century, never learned to read **music he** learned his songs by ear.

Correct: Because Frank Sinatra, one of the most famous singers of the twentieth century, never learned to read **music, he** learned his songs by ear.

When the independent clause comes first, the comma is **usually unnecessary**, except in the case of "strong" subordinating conjunctions such as *though, although,* and *even though.*

Incorrect: Frank Sinatra became one of the most famous singers of the twentieth **century although** he never learned to read music.

Correct: Frank Sinatra became one of the most famous singers of the twentieth **century, although** he never learned to read music.

Another option is to use an *-ing* word (participle) to join the clauses.

Incorrect: Frank Sinatra, one of the most famous singers of the twentieth century, never studied music **formally learning** his songs by ear.

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

Note that the construction ***with ... -ing*** can be used as an alternative to *and + verb*. A comma is always placed before the word *with.*

For example, the sentence below can be written two ways:

Correct: The Mid-Autumn Festival, a popular harvest festival, dates back 3,000 years to China's Shang Dynasty, **and** celebrations usually **take** place on the fifteenth day of the eighth month.

Correct: The Mid-Autumn Festival, a popular harvest festival, dates back 3,000 years to China's Shang Dynasty, **with** celebrations usually **taking** place on the fifteenth day of the eighth month.

Because these two constructions are equivalent, you will not be asked to choose between them. You should, however, be able to recognize that the second version is grammatically acceptable and have a general understanding of how it is used.

In addition, ***which*** can be used to join an independent and a dependent clause. The clause begun by *which* is always dependent and must follow a comma.

Correct: The Mid-Autumn Festival, a popular harvest festival, dates back to China's Shang **Dynasty, which** lasted from 1600 BCE until 1064 BCE.

Incorrect: The Mid-Autumn Festival, a popular harvest festival, dates back to China's Shang **Dynasty which** lasted from 1600 BCE until 1064 BCE.

Double Conjunctions

As a rule, in any two consecutive clauses, only **one** subordinating or coordinating (FANBOYS) conjunction can be used—it is grammatically incorrect to use two. Otherwise, the sentence will lack a main clause.

Incorrect: **Although** the Antarctica interior is home to some of the most pristine landscapes on earth, **but** its climate is too harsh to sustain animal life.

Correct: **Although** the Antarctica interior is home to some of the most pristine landscapes on earth, its climate is too harsh to sustain animal life.

Correct: The Antarctica interior is home to some of the most pristine landscapes on earth, **but** its climate is too harsh to sustain animal life.

If you encounter a question testing this concept on the digital SAT, note that **both transitions are unlikely to appear in the answer choices**. Rather, you will most probably be responsible for **backing up to the beginning of the sentence** and noticing that it begins with a transition, making a second one incorrect.

For example, consider the following question.

Most of the marine life that inhabits the tropics is characterized by a lack of fat reserves; however, this is not true for all species. For example, although the pompano has a substantial layer of fat beneath its _____ it is typically found in the warm waters around Florida and the Gulf of Mexico.

1 Mark for Review

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

Ⓐ skin, but

Ⓑ skin and

Ⓒ skin that

Ⓓ skin,

If you focus only on the blank and the area immediately surrounding it, you are likely to get tricked by the contrasting information before and after the blank and opt for (B).

If you back up to the beginning of the sentence, however, you can see that the clause with the blank begins with *although*. As a result, the following clause cannot begin with a FANBOYS conjunction (*but* or *and*). The only way to create a grammatically acceptable statement is to omit the second transition and use a comma alone. As a result, (D) is correct.

On the next page, we're going to look at a more challenging version of the question.

Most of the marine life that inhabits the tropics is characterized by a lack of fat reserves; however, this is not true for all species. For example, although the pompano, a toothless, small-scaled fish prized for its taste, has a substantial layer of fat beneath its _____ it is typically found in the warm waters around Florida and the Gulf of Mexico.

1 Mark for Review

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

Ⓐ skin, but

Ⓑ skin, and

Ⓒ skin that

Ⓓ skin,

In this case, additional information in the form of a non-essential phrase (*a toothless, small scaled-fish prized for its taste*) has been inserted between the subject and the verb to distract from the error.

As we saw earlier, phrases and clauses set off by commas—one before, one after—can be crossed out without affecting the basic structure of the sentence. (We'll look at this in more detail in the following chapter). If we read the sentence without the non-essential information, we get… the previous question.

> *For example, **although** the pompano…has a substantial layer of fat beneath its _____ it is typically found in the warm waters around Florida and the Gulf of Mexico.*

Because the clause with the blank begins with *although*, the following clause cannot begin with *but* or *and*. Again, only a comma is needed, making the answer (D).

It is also possible that some questions will require you to jump ahead and notice that a transition is already present in the middle of a sentence. For example:

Most of the marine life that inhabits the tropics is characterized by a lack of fat reserves; however, this is not true for all species. For example, _____ has a substantial layer of fat beneath its, but it is typically found in the warm waters around Florida and the Gulf of Mexico.

1 Mark for Review

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

Ⓐ that the pompano

Ⓑ because the pompano,

Ⓒ although the pompano,

Ⓓ the pompano

The second clause (*but it is typically found…*) begins with the FANBOYS conjunction *but*, so the first clause cannot also begin with a transition. That eliminates (B) and (C). (A) creates nonsense, leaving (D).

Colon

As discussed in the previous chapter, a colon can be used like a period to separate two complete sentences. However, colons are not exactly like periods. **While the statement before a colon must be a complete, standalone sentence, the information after it can be either a sentence (explanation) or a fragment (list).**

Shortcut: any answer that places a colon before *such as* or *including* is almost certainly **incorrect**.

Incorrect: Photographer and filmmaker George Picker chronicled artists **such as:** folk singers, jazz musicians, and visual artists.

Incorrect: Photographer and filmmaker George Picker chronicled artists **including:** folk singers, jazz musicians, and visual artists.

Correct: Photographer and filmmaker George Picker chronicled a wide variety of **artists:** folk singers, jazz musicians, and visual artists were all among his subjects.

Because *Photographer and filmmaker George Picker chronicled artists such as*, and *Photographer and filmmaker George Picker chronicled artists including* do not make sense on their own as complete thoughts, a colon cannot be placed after them.

Dash

A **single dash** can also be used in place of a colon, to set off a definition or explanation.

In such cases, a complete, standalone sentence must come before the dash. Either a sentence or a fragment can follow it, however.

Correct: Impressionist paintings have several major **characteristics—a focus** on outdoor scenes, an emphasis on the interplay of light and dark, and a sense of movement.

Correct: The bowhead whale is thought to be the longest-living mammal in the **world—that is,** it can survive for up to 200 years.

The dash vs. colon distinction is purely stylistic. As a result, you will not be asked to choose between an answer with a colon and one with a dash unless one of the options is clearly preferable for other reasons.

In addition, a single dash can be used for stylistic purposes: to deliberately interrupt a statement or to create a dramatic pause or sense of suspense. In this usage, either a sentence or a fragment (as in the examples below) can follow the dash.

Correct: Universities have historically offered a wide variety of continuing education **classes—but** the ways in which those classes are offered is rapidly changing.

Correct: Only a few minerals are found in most places, but large concentrations of the rocks collect in a few **locations—Russia's Kola Peninsula,** for example.

This is not a construction you should worry about too much—you just need to know that it is acceptable so that you do not eliminate answers containing it simply because you find it odd.

Exercise: Joining and Separating Sentences/Clauses
(answers p. 205)

1. When light travels for billions of years, it stretches out into its full _____ light ranges from ultraviolet and visible into infrared radiation.

- Ⓐ spectrum, as the universe expands,
- Ⓑ spectrum. As the universe expands,
- Ⓒ spectrum as the universe expands,
- Ⓓ spectrum as the universe expands

2. The artist Lee Lozano was known for her experimental works, some of which were shocking to critics when they first appeared. In 1967, Lozano began her _____ of eleven massive paintings of undulating lines made with shimmery iron-oxide paint. Each piece measured 96 by 42 inches and was created in one sitting: *2 Wave* took eight hours, whereas *96 Wave* took three days.

- Ⓐ *Wave Series*, consisting
- Ⓑ *Wave Series*. Consisting
- Ⓒ *Wave Series*; which consisted
- Ⓓ *Wave Series*, it consisted

3. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, the largest national park in the United States, represents everything compelling about Alaska. It is _____ than Belgium. It showcases towering mountains such as Mount St. Elias, which stands more 18,000 feet tall, as well as glaciers.

- Ⓐ immense; larger, in fact,
- Ⓑ immense, larger—in fact
- Ⓒ immense—larger, in fact,
- Ⓓ immense—larger, in fact—

4. The "molecular trees" that biologists use to map out similarities between species often contradict the classifications that group organisms by their appearance. Researchers compared both kinds of trees and mapped them based on animals' _____ molecularly similar species were more likely to live near one another than those that looked similar.

- Ⓐ locations, and found that
- Ⓑ locations; finding that
- Ⓒ locations, they found that
- Ⓓ locations, finding that

5. African American life during the 1920s was documented in great detail by the writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance. Far less is known about it during the _____ the market for their work disappeared almost overnight when the stock market crashed.

Ⓐ Great Depression in the 1930s,

Ⓑ Great Depression, in the 1930s,

Ⓒ Great Depression: in the 1930s,

Ⓓ Great Depression in, the 1930s

6. The exact origins of human language remain a major question for evolutionary biologists. Unique to human language _____ to flexibly recombine a limited sound set into words and sequences, generating an endless series of new sentences. In contrast, the production of these types of sequences in other animals appears limited, stunting their ability to create meaning.

Ⓐ is: the capacity

Ⓑ is the capacity:

Ⓒ is the capacity—

Ⓓ is the capacity + ly,

7. Most of Earth's volcanic activity is concentrated in a few highly active regions. For example, the geologic instability known as the Pacific Ring of Fire has produced numerous _____ approximately 10,000 earthquakes annually, the ring is dotted with three-quarters of all active volcanoes on Earth.

Ⓐ faults causing

Ⓑ faults, causing

Ⓒ faults. Causing

Ⓓ faults, and causes

8. A novel method of air conditioning, which has been adopted by some of the world's most powerful corporations, uses the simple power of ice. The system works _____ when lower power usage means that energy is cheaper and lower temperatures require less power to freeze water.

S+V-

Ⓐ by making ice at night,

Ⓑ by: making ice at night

Ⓒ by making ice at night:

Ⓓ by—making ice at night

by doing.

9. Before the invention of modern refrigeration, hunger was a part of daily life at sea. The absence of cool, dry storage spaces put normal pantry staples such as flour and dried beans at a high risk of mold. The climate also presented preservation _____ fresh fruits and meats was next to impossible in warmer waters.

- Ⓐ problems keeping
- Ⓑ problems keeping,
- Ⓒ problems: keeping
- Ⓓ problems, keeping

10. Determined to create an original American architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright set the standard for what became known as the Prairie Style. Because the homes he designed had flat roofs, no attics or basements, and long rows of windows that further emphasized the horizontal _____ reflected the long, low fields on which they sat.

- Ⓐ theme; they
- Ⓑ theme, so they
- Ⓒ theme, they
- Ⓓ theme they

11. The northern snakehead is aptly _____ perhaps a mad scientist—had grafted a snake's head and several inches of scaly body onto a fish. Its fins hang unevenly from its body, as though they were tacked on as an afterthought. Given the fish's wild appearance, it is hardly a surprise that researchers refer to it as Frankenfish.

- Ⓐ named: its head tapers to a point, making it look as if someone—
- Ⓑ named, its head tapers to a point, making it look as if someone—
- Ⓒ named—its head tapers to a point, making it look as if someone
- Ⓓ named—its head tapers to a point, making it look as if someone,

12. Every spring, swarms of colorful, painted lady butterflies appear in California as they make their way from western Mexico to the Pacific Northwest. Some years, there are millions of migrating _____ need access to nutrients. Moreover, California is home to resident painted lady populations that require food sources year-round.

- Ⓐ butterflies, which all of them
- Ⓑ butterflies, all of them
- Ⓒ butterflies; all of which
- Ⓓ butterflies, all of which

13. The relationship between humans and the natural world is central to Ada Limón's _____ her collection *The Hurting Kind*, her narrators learn from nature how to understand and convey their feelings, reactions and memories.

- Ⓐ poetry in
- Ⓑ poetry, in
- Ⓒ poetry. In
- Ⓓ poetry in,

14. The appearance of mosaic—pictures made of many small pieces—has remained unchanged for thousands of years. However, the last few decades have seen the emergence of a new _____ three-dimensional stone wall murals. One such mural was produced by Janna Morrison in 2005. She combined the piecework of mosaic murals with traditional soapstone slab carving.

- Ⓐ style, colorful,
- Ⓑ style: colorful,
- Ⓒ style, colorful—
- Ⓓ style; colorful

15. Researchers have long believed that camels originated in North America, a theory that was first proposed after a camel fossil was discovered in Canada's Yukon Territory in 1913. As paleontologists eventually discovered, these camels were much larger than their modern _____ long, massive limbs and long spines on their backs, creating an enormous hump.

- Ⓐ counterparts, they had
- Ⓑ counterparts—they had
- Ⓒ counterparts; having
- Ⓓ counterparts they had