14 Comparisons

Faulty Comparisons

Always compare people to people and things to things. Watch out for questions that compare people to things and vice-versa.

Singular Comparison

Let's start with the sentence below. Observe that the possessive forms can be written several ways, with and without an apostrophe.

Correct: Even though humans and owls can perceive a similar range of sounds, at certain frequencies the hearing of an owl is ten times more sensitive than **the hearing of a person**.

Correct: Even though humans and owls can perceive a similar range of sounds, at certain frequencies an owl's hearing is ten times more sensitive than **a person's (hearing)**.

The noun *hearing* can also be replaced with the pronoun *that*.

Correct: Even though humans and owls can perceive a similar range of sounds, at certain frequencies the hearing of an owl is ten times more sensitive than **that of a person**.

An apostrophe and a pronoun **cannot** both be used, however.

Incorrect: Even though humans and owls can perceive a similar range of sounds, at certain frequencies the hearing of an owl is ten times more sensitive than **that of a person's**.

On the SAT, comparisons may not be kept strictly parallel: one side of the comparison may use a *noun of noun* or an apostrophe, whereas the other may use *that* or *those*. This is acceptable because the different constructions are **equivalent in meaning**.

Incorrect: Even though humans and owls can perceive a similar range of sounds, at certain frequencies an owl's hearing is ten times more sensitive than **a person**.

Correct: Even though humans and owls can perceive a similar range of sounds, at certain frequencies an owl's hearing is ten times more sensitive than **that of a person**.

Plural Comparison

Plural comparison can also be formed with nouns or apostrophes, or with the phrase *those of*.

Correct: While birds are not known for their intelligence, recent findings have established that the **skills of parrots** are often similar to **the skills of** human toddlers.

Correct: While birds are not known for their intelligence, recent findings have established that the **skills** of parrots are similar to **human toddlers' (skills)**.

Correct: While birds are not known for their intelligence, recent findings have established that parrots often possess **skills** similar to **those of human toddlers**.

Again, one side of the comparison may use *nouns of nouns* or an apostrophe, while the other side will more probably include *those of*. To reiterate, it is incorrect to use both an apostrophe and a pronoun.

Incorrect: While birds are not known for their intelligence, recent findings have established that **parrots' skills** are similar to **human toddlers**.

Incorrect: While birds are not known for their intelligence, recent findings have established that **parrots' skills** are similar to **human toddlers'**.

Correct: While birds are not known for their intelligence, recent findings have established that **parrots' skills** are similar to **those of human toddlers**.

Alternately, *that of* may be incorrectly used to refer to a plural noun.

Incorrect: Recent findings have established that parrots often possess **skills** similar to **that of human toddlers**.

Correct: Recent findings have established that parrots often possess **skills** similar to **those of human toddlers**.

Those of may also be incorrectly used to refer to a singular noun.

Incorrect: Recent findings have established that parrots often possess **a level of intelligence** similar to **those of human toddlers**.

Correct: Recent findings have established that parrots often possess **a level of intelligence** similar to **that of human toddlers**.

Furthermore, when two things are compared, they must be the same type of thing.

Incorrect: Unlike **a train, the length** of a tram is usually limited to one or two cars, which may run either on train tracks or directly on the street.

Correct: Unlike **the length of** a train, **the length** of a tram is usually limited to one or two cars, which may run either on train tracks or directly on the street.

Correct: Unlike **that of** a train, **a tram's length** is usually limited to one or two cars, which may run either on train tracks or directly on the street.

Note: the following concepts may or may not be tested on the digital SAT.

Word Pairs

The following sets of words must be paired together.

A. As...as – indicates that two people or things are equal.

Incorrect: Among pioneers of modern dance, Isadora Duncan is **as** renowned a dancer and choreographer **than** Martha Graham.

Correct: Among pioneers of modern dance, Isadora Duncan is **as** renowned a dancer and choreographer **as** Martha Graham.

B. Not only...but (also) - in addition to

Incorrect: Martha Graham was **not only** a great dancer **and** (also) a great choreographer.

Correct: Martha Graham was **not only** a great dancer **but also** a great choreographer.

C. More/–ER...than, Less...than

Incorrect: At 25 feet, a python named Medusa is **longer as** any other snake in the world.

Correct: At 25 feet, a python named Medusa is **longer than** any other snake in the world.

D. Either...or, Neither Nor

Incorrect: **Neither** Nikola Tesla **or** James Joule is as well-known as Thomas Edison.

Correct: **Neither** Nikola Tesla **nor** James Joule is as well-known as Thomas Edison.

Comparing Amounts

Used with Plural Nouns	Used with Singular Nouns
Many Fewer	Much Less

Incorrect: Because Antarctica is characterized by extreme temperatures and harsh living conditions, it supports **less** animal species than any other continent does.

Correct: Because Antarctica is characterized by extreme temperatures and harsh living conditions, it supports **fewer** animal species than any other continent does.

Incorrect: Despite the harsh conditions, **much** more types of animals inhabit the African savannah than inhabit other, more moderate environments.

Correct: Despite the harsh conditions, **many** more types of animals inhabit the African savannah than inhabit other, more moderate environments.

Exercise: Comparisons (answers p. 219)

1. The reproduction of ciliates, in contrast to _____ occurs when a specimen splits in half and grows a completely new individual from each piece.

Ⓐ other organisms,
Ⓑ that of other organisms,
Ⓒ those of other organisms,
Ⓓ those of other organisms',

2. Although he is no longer a household name, the nineteenth-century English naturalist Richard Owens coined the term *Dinosauria* to describe the prehistoric lizards whose fossils had begun to be unearthed. He also published more than 600 articles and made discoveries _____

Ⓐ rivaling Charles Darwin.
Ⓑ that rivaled Charles Darwin.
Ⓒ rivaling those of Charles Darwin.
Ⓓ which rivaling Charles Darwin.

3. Directed by Tsering Perlo, Lynn True, and Nelson Walker, *Summer Pasture* is a 2012 documentary that follows a family of nomads living in the grasslands of eastern Tibet. The film suggests that its subjects' lives are, for all their difficulties, ultimately no more stressful _____

Ⓐ than most modern city dwellers'.
Ⓑ than most modern city dwellers.
Ⓒ as those of most modern city dwellers.
Ⓓ as those of most modern city dwellers.

4. Unlike that of other organisms, _____ rather than the visual field. In addition, the pupils of smaller predators that hunt during the day narrow to vertical slits, allowing them to block sunlight and judge distances precisely.

Ⓐ predators' vision is designed to maximize depth perception
Ⓑ the maximization of depth perception occurs in predators
Ⓒ the design of predators' vision maximizes depth perception
Ⓓ depth perception is maximized in predators' vision

5. Although her academic credentials were far less impressive _____ Melanie Klein shaped the field of psychology by studying the impact of early life experiences on personality development.

Ⓐ	than her male colleagues,
Ⓑ	than that of her male colleagues,
Ⓒ	as her male colleagues,
Ⓓ	than those of her male colleagues,

6. While the cubic zircon is very similar in appearance to the diamond, the two stones have different refractive indexes: unlike the diamond, which gives off a bright white light, _____ produces a multicolored hue.

Ⓐ	the cubic zircon
Ⓑ	that of the cubic zircon
Ⓒ	the cubic zircon's
Ⓓ	but the cubic zircon