

Sentence Skills Review

The CPT sentence skills test measures students' editing skills. The minimum required score for this exam is 86%.

This booklet gives students the opportunity to review some basic grammar rules and provides some practice for the CPT test. **It does not include every rule found on the CPT exam. Some other helpful tools that will allow you to practice editing sentences are GED and SAT books.**

Subject/Verb Agreement

Singular subjects need singular verbs, and plural subjects need plural verbs because both must agree in number. Singular verbs in the present tense end in “s” or “es.” Usually in English the subject comes first and then the verb, but in many direct questions and when “here” or “there” begins the sentence, the verb comes first in the sentence. Prepositional phrases that follow the subject can be troublesome for students. Nothing in the prepositional phrase can be the subject of the sentence. Always eliminate prepositional phrases first, and then find the subject and verb.

Examples:

Everyone in our company (plans, plan) to go to the company picnic on Saturday.
Delete the prepositional phrase “in our company.” Find the subject “Everyone,” which is singular. Choose the singular verb “plans” to agree with the singular subject.

Here (is, are) the announcers for the local charity benefit taking place today.
“Announcers” is the subject; choose the plural verb “are” to agree in number with the plural subject “announcers.” “Here” is never a subject.

Modifiers

Dangling modifiers do not have anything to describe—they just dangle in sentences. If a modifier has nothing to modify (a dangling modifier), add or change words so that it has something to modify. If a modifier is in the wrong place (a misplaced modifier), put it as close as possible to the word, phrase, or clause it modifies.

Examples:

(1) Hanging from the ledge high over a mountain, Danielle saw the trees with their brightly colored fall leaves.

(Danielle is not hanging over the mountain—the trees are.)

Rewritten:

Danielle saw the trees with their brightly colored fall leaves hanging from the ledge high over a mountain.

(2) Studying for a test, the baby finally went to sleep.

(As worded, this sentence suggests that the baby is studying. Words need to be added to correct this dangling modifier.)

Rewritten:

Studying for a test, Molly was happy that her baby finally went to sleep.

Sentence Fragments

A fragment is a phrase or a dependent clause that is punctuated as if it is a complete sentence, beginning with a capital letter and ending with a period. A complete sentence must have a subject and a verb and express a complete thought. A fragment is missing one or both of these. Fragments are not necessarily short. So just because a group of words is long, do not assume that it is a complete sentence. Make sure it has both a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.

Examples:

(1) The ball over the fence.

(This group of words is missing a verb.)

Rewritten:

The ball went over the fence.

(2) Mary baking a cake from scratch.

(The ing-form of bake, baking, needs a helping verb in order to make the idea complete; therefore, the verb in this sentence is incomplete.)

Rewritten:

Mary is baking a cake from scratch.

(3) Because Jane likes ice cream.

(The subordinating conjunction "because" makes this group of words an incomplete thought.)

Rewritten:

Jane likes ice cream.

Comma Splice

A comma splice occurs when two complete sentences have a comma between them. A comma is not strong enough to stand alone as sufficient punctuation between two complete sentences *(a complete sentence contains both a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought)*. There are four basic ways to correct a comma splice:

Put a period between the two complete sentences, making sure that the first letter of each complete sentence is capitalized.

Use a comma **PLUS** an appropriate coordinating conjunction, such as **for, and, nor, but, or, yet,** or **so** between the two sentences.

Use a subordinating conjunction, such as **when, while, after, unless, even if, etc.** to turn either the first part or the second part into a dependent clause. If the dependent clause is the first part, put a comma after the **entire** dependent clause. If the dependent clause is in the second part, no comma is needed.

Use a semicolon between the two complete sentences. This is especially effective if the two sentences are closely related.

Examples:

(1) The test was on Monday, she spent her whole weekend studying for it.

Rewritten: The test was on Monday. She spent her whole weekend studying for it.

(A period was placed at the end of the first sentence.)

(2) Cindy wants to be a teacher, she does not want to spend four years in college.

Rewritten:

Cindy wants to be a teacher, but she does not want to spend four years in college.

(This was rewritten with a comma plus an appropriate coordinating conjunction.)

(3) Mark was angry that his little brother spilled the drink, he helped him clean it up.

Rewritten:

Even though Mark was angry that his little brother spilled the drink, he helped him clean it up.

(This was rewritten with a subordinating conjunction at the beginning.)

(4) My answer is simple, I will not go.

Rewritten:

My answer is simple; I will not go.

(Now a semicolon is used to fix the comma splice.)

Coordination

Coordination is used to join two closely related sentences that are equal in importance.

One way to join two closely related sentences is to put a semicolon between them.

Another way is to use a comma and a coordinating conjunction between the two sentences. The seven coordinating conjunctions are **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so**.

Examples:

(1) Harold felt pressured to score. His team was just one point away from victory.

Rewritten:

Harold felt pressured to score; his team was just one point away from victory.

(This was rewritten using a semicolon between the complete sentences)

(2) Barbara wanted to make her friend's birthday party special. She ordered balloons.

Rewritten: Barbara wanted to make her friend's birthday party special, so she ordered balloons.

(This was rewritten using a comma and a coordinating conjunction.)

Semicolon

The semicolon is used to separate two **complete** sentences. This may be accomplished simply by placing a semicolon between the two complete sentences or by using a semicolon plus a conjunctive adverb **and** a comma. The conjunctive adverb is used to make the relationship between the two sentences clearer.

Below is a list of some common conjunctive adverbs and their meanings.

Addition: in addition, also, besides, furthermore, likewise, moreover

Alternative: instead, otherwise

Contrast: however, nevertheless, nonetheless

Emphasis: indeed, in fact

Result: accordingly, consequently, hence, therefore, thus

Time: meanwhile

Examples:

(1) Susie ate the apple instead of the piece of cake. She wanted to lose weight.

Rewritten:

Susie ate the apple instead of the piece of cake; she wanted to lose weight.

(This was rewritten by simply placing a semicolon between the two complete sentences)

(2) Frank finished his exam early. He had time to look over it before handing it in.

Rewritten:

Frank finished his exam early; therefore, he had time to look over it.

(This was rewritten by using a semicolon plus a conjunctive adverb)

Subordination

Subordination is used when a writer wants to join two closely related ideas but want to emphasize one point more than the other. In order to make one idea less important than another, a subordinating conjunction is used. A subordinating conjunction makes a sentence incomplete and therefore dependent on a complete sentence to finish the idea.

Example:

Bob hit the ball.

(This is a complete sentence; however, if "although" is added in front of "Bob hit the ball," the idea is no longer complete. The addition of the subordinating conjunction "although" makes the once complete sentence now dependent on something else to complete it.)

Remember: When the dependent clause comes in the beginning of the combined sentence, a comma is used after the entire dependent clause to set it apart from the complete thought. When the dependent clause comes in the second part of the combined sentence, no comma is necessary.

Several common subordinating conjunctions and the relationships that they show are listed below:

Time: when, whenever, while, as, after

Reason or cause: because, since

Purpose: in order that, so that, that

Condition: even if, unless, if

Contrast: although, even though, whereas

Location: where, wherever

Choice: rather than

Examples:

(1) The teacher told the class to be quiet. The principal made an announcement over the intercom.

Rewritten:

The teacher told the class to be quiet whenever the principal made an announcement over the intercom.

(The subordinating conjunction “whenever” emphasizes the time that the teacher told the class to be quiet. Notice that the subordinate or dependent clause is in the second half of this combined sentence, so no comma is needed.)

(2) Her mother sang a lullaby. The baby fell asleep.

Rewritten:

Because her mother sang a lullaby, the baby fell asleep.

(The subordinating conjunction “because” lets the reader know the reason why the baby fell asleep. Notice that the subordinate or dependent clause is in the first half of this combined sentence, so a comma is used.)

Parallelism

Parallelism is used to make all ideas in a sentence parallel or equal in structure. In other words, the same grammatical form is used for each idea. Each idea may be a noun, a verb in the same tense, an adjective, a prepositional phrase, etc. Parallel sentences are much smoother and easier to read than nonparallel sentences.

Examples:

(1) Paul washed the car, groomed the dog, and was mowing the lawn all in the same day.

Rewritten:

Paul washed the car, groomed the dog, and mowed the lawn all in the same day.

(This sentence is parallel: each verb is in the past tense form. It is much easier to read.)

(2) Sarah wanted to study accounting, draw some pictures, and look into becoming a nurse while she was in college.

Rewritten:

Sarah wanted to study accounting, art, and nursing while she was in college.

(This sentence is parallel: the simple noun form of each college subject is used. It is much easier to read.)

Making Complete and Logical Comparisons

When making comparisons in writing, make sure that they are complete and logical. Sometimes when we talk, the way that we compare things or ideas can be incomplete because the listener may already know the surrounding situation or context of the comparison. In writing, however, the reader may not have such context, so you will want to be clear in your comparisons. Also, when using pronouns such as I/me, she/her, he/him, we/us, and they/them, it is important to choose the one that completes your comparison logically and accurately.

Examples:

(1) Jim appreciates Monday night football more than his wife.

(Does Jim appreciate Monday night football more than he does his wife or more than his wife appreciates Monday night football?)

Rewritten:

Jim appreciates Monday night football more than he does his wife.

(This is one idea that the writer could mean)

OR

Jim appreciates Monday night football more than his wife does.

(This is another idea that the writer could mean.)

(2) Barbara likes ice cream more than me.

(Does Barbara like ice cream more than she likes me or does she like ice cream more than I do?)

Rewritten:

Barbara likes ice cream more than she likes me.

(This is one idea that the writer could mean.)

OR

Barbara likes ice cream more than I do.

(This is another idea that the writer could mean.)

Avoid Wordy Phrasing

Avoiding wordy phrasing will make your writing much clearer. First, avoid wordy phrases when you can use one word to mean the same thing. Some common examples of wordy phrases include: **due to the fact that, at this point in time, in this day and age, in the event that, on account of the fact that, it is evident from the fact that, etc.** Second, avoid redundant phrases. Redundant phrases are phrases in which the same idea is repeated. Some common examples of redundant phrases are: **clear and distinct, true-to-life realism, smart and intelligent, cleverly skillful, genuinely authentic, the field of mathematics, the science of physics, the art of ceramics, etc.** Usually, only one word out of these phrases will be enough to say what you mean.

Examples:

(1) At this point in time, I would like to introduce our speaker.

Rewritten:

Now, I would like to introduce our speaker.

(Now gets across the same idea as at this point in time much more directly.)

(2) Mark gave Mary a genuinely authentic diamond to celebrate their engagement.

Rewritten:

Mark gave Mary a genuine diamond to celebrate their engagement.

(Since genuine and authentic mean the same thing, only one of these words is necessary.)

Verb Tense Sequence

Verb tense lets us know when an action happened or will happen. When using more than one verb in a sentence, it is important to choose the right combination of tenses to get across the idea that you mean. Below are some guidelines to help you:

To Indicate Two Simultaneous Actions

If the **main clause** is in the **simple present tense**, use the **simple present tense** in the **subordinate clause**:

Mike never **works** late because he **values** time with his family.

If the **main clause** is in the **future tense**, use the **present tense** in the **subordinate clause**:

Mike **will continue** to come home on time if he **values** time with his family.

To Indicate an Earlier Action

If the **main clause** is in the **simple present tense**, use the **past tense** in the **subordinate clause**:

Dana **believes** that Marion **broke** her new watch.

If the **main clause** is in the **past tense**, use **past perfect tense** in the **subordinate clause**:

Dana **refused** to let Marion borrow anything else because she **had broken** her new watch.

If the **main clause** is in the **future tense**, use **past tense** in the **subordinate clause**:
Dana's anger **will increase** because Marion also **tore** her blouse.

To Indicate Action That Will Come in the Future

If the **main clause** is in the **present tense**, use the **future tense** in the **subordinate clause**:

David **hopes** to pass his biology exam because tomorrow his parents **will be** ready to take him to his college interview.

If the **main clause** is in the **future perfect tense**, use the **simple present** or **present perfect tense** in the **subordinate clause**:

David **will have made** all A's in high school when he **applies** to colleges.

OR

David **will have made** all A's in high school before he **has applied** to colleges.

Sentence Skills Practice Test

This test measures your knowledge of sentence structure—of the ways parts of a sentence are put together and of what makes a sentence complete and clear. There are two sections to the test. Be sure to read the directions carefully for each section.

Section I.

Directions: Select the best version of the underlined part of the sentence. Choice (A) is the same as the original sentence. If you think the original sentence is the best, choose answer (A).

1. To shop, dancing, and swimming are sixteen-year-old Isabella's hobbies.
 - A. To shop, dancing, and swimming
 - B. Shopping, dancing, and swimming
 - C. To shop, to dance, and swimming
 - D. To shop, to dance, and also swimming

2. Hanging sideways, the picture looked as if it would fall off the wall.
 - A. Hanging sideways, the picture looked
 - B. The picture was hanging sideways, looked
 - C. Hanging sideways, I looked
 - D. The picture, hanging sideways, looked

3. The student was obviously getting nervous about the test, then Ariel did what he could to calm the student.
 - A. test, then Ariel did
 - B. test, Ariel did
 - C. test; Ariel, therefore, did
 - D. test; Ariel, trying to do

4. After Alexis heard that her teacher was leaving, she wrote a poem.
 - A. After Alexis heard that her teacher was leaving, she wrote a poem.
 - B. After Alexis heard that her teacher was leaving she wrote a poem.
 - C. Hearing that Alexis' teacher was leaving, a poem was written by Alexis.
 - D. Alexis heard that her teacher was leaving, she wrote a poem.

5. Driving home, Athena's favorite song was listened to by her.
A. Driving home, Athena's favorite song was listened to by her.
B. Listening to her song, the radio played Athena's favorite song.
C. Driving home, Athena listened to her favorite song on the radio.
D. Listening to Athena's song, it played all the way home.
6. When she took the mechanic's class, she learned how to change a flat tire, however, when she actually had a flat tire, she was unable to change it.
A. a flat tire, however, when
B. a flat tire, when
C. a flat tire; when
D. a flat tire; and when

Section II

Directions: Rewrite each sentence on paper or in your head. Your new sentence should have essentially the same meaning as the original sentence given to you.

7. Raphael heard no animal sounds when he listened in the woods.

Rewrite beginning with
Listening in the woods,

The next words will be

- A. no animal sounds could be heard.
B. then Raphael heard no animal sounds.
C. and hearing no animal sounds.
D. Raphael heard no animal sounds.
8. When a student is learning how to write a paper, the textbook can be a valuable resource.

Rewrite beginning with
The textbook is a valuable resource . . .

The next words will be

- A. when you write a paper.
B. learning how to write a paper.
C. for students, when they are learning how to write a paper.
D. when a student is learning how to write a paper.

9. Although the maiden waited patiently, the handsome prince galloped away on his horse.

Rewrite beginning with

Although the handsome prince . . .

The next words will be . . .

- (A) galloped away on his horse, the maiden waited patiently until he returned.
 - (B) galloped away on his horse, and the maiden waited patiently until he returned.
 - (C) galloping away on his horse, the maiden waited patiently until he returned.
 - (D) galloped away, on his horse, the maiden waited patiently until he returned.
10. Students must be able to write good English papers, so many students must take a developmental English class.

Rewrite beginning with

Because students must be able . . .

The next words will be

- (A) to write good English papers; therefore, many students must take a developmental English class.
- (B) to write good English papers, many students must take a developmental English class.
- (C) to write good English papers, and many students must take a developmental English class.
- (D) to write good English papers, so that many students must take a developmental English class.

11. Reviewing for a test is not always easy nor is it easy to repeat a class.

Rewrite beginning with

While reviewing for a test is . . .

The next words will be

- (A) not always easy; it is not fun to repeat a class either.
 - (B) not always easy, it is not easy to repeat a class either.
 - (C) not always easy it is not easy to repeat a class either.
 - (D) not always easy, and it is not fun to repeat a class either.
12. The temperature in the desert was soaring in the hot afternoon heat, but the lizards seemed to enjoy the sun.

Rewrite beginning with

Even though the temperature in the desert was soaring . . .

The next words will be . . .

- (A) in the hot afternoon heat, and the lizards seemed to enjoy the sun.
- (B) in the hot afternoon heat the lizards seemed to enjoy the sun.
- (C) in the hot afternoon heat, the lizards seemed to enjoy the sun.
- (D) the lizards, in the hot afternoon heat, seemed to enjoy the sun.

13. We had to change our plans. We could not take our cruise until the end of the month.

Rewrite beginning with

We could not take our cruise until the end of the . . .

The next words will be

- (A) month, because we had to change our plans.
 - (B) month, so we had to change our plans.
 - (C) month, we had to change our plans.
 - (D) month, then we had to change our plans.
14. George felt that his hypnotic sessions should have a strong receptive audience, and, because of that, he invited only people with a true interest in hypnosis.

Rewrite beginning with

George's invitations were

Your new sentence **will include**

- (A) the effect was that
 - (B) it resulted from
 - (C) since he felt
 - (D) it resulted from
15. Michael was a devoted and loving husband who wanted to keep his marriage together, but he had a mistress and decided to end the affair so that he could keep his marriage together.

Rewrite beginning with

Michael had a mistress . . .

Your new sentence **will include**

- (A) wanting to keep his marriage together
- (B) because he was a devoted
- (C) then he was a devoted
- (D) so devoting

These practice questions serve as practice only. They do not cover every rule found on the CPT placement test; therefore, don't spend your time just studying these practice questions.

Sentence Skills Answer Key

1. Correct answer: B
Primary skill tested: faulty parallelism
2. Correct answer: A
Primary skill tested: -ing modifiers
3. Correct answer: C
Primary skill tested: semicolon usage
4. Correct answer: A
Primary skill tested: using effective subordination
Secondary skills tested: -ing modifiers, comma splices
5. Correct answer: C
Primary skill tested: -ing modifiers
6. Correct answer: C
Primary skill test: semicolon usage
Secondary skill tested: effective subordination
7. Correct answer: D
Primary skill tested: -ing modifiers
Secondary skill tested: recognizing a complete sentence
8. Correct answer: D
Primary skill tested: using effective subordination
Secondary skill tested: pronoun reference
9. Correct answer: A
Primary skill tested: using effective subordination
Secondary skills tested: coordination, comma usage
10. Correct answer: B
Primary skill tested: using effective subordination
Secondary skills tested: coordination, comma usage
11. Correct answer: B
Primary skill tested: using effective subordination
Secondary skill tested: coordination
12. Correct answer: C
Primary skill tested: using effective subordination
Secondary skills tested: coordination, comma usage
13. Correct answer: B
Primary skill tested: using effective coordination
Secondary skill tested: recognizing run-ons
14. Correct answer: C
Primary skill tested: subordination
15. Correct answer: B
Primary skill tested: subordination