Standard English Conventions

Original skill preparation; versioned source scope

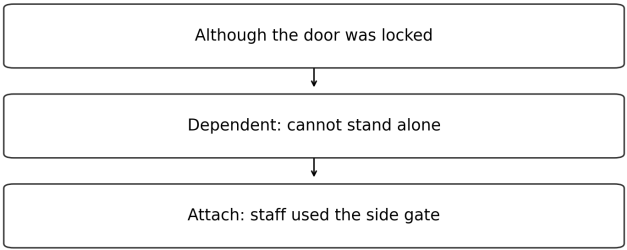
Standard English Conventions on the SAT

- Mark each **sentence boundary** 句子边界 correctly.
- Use commas, a **colon** 冒号, semicolons and dashes with complete and incomplete **clauses** 分句.
- Check subject–verb agreement, pronouns and verb forms.
- Place modifiers next to what they describe.

Clauses

- An independent clause has a subject and a **finite verb** 限定动词 and can stand alone: "The door was locked."
- A dependent clause cannot: "Although the door was locked".
- A dependent clause before the main clause is followed by a comma: "Although the door was locked, staff used the side gate."

Figure: Clauses



- Worked steps: Although the door was locked → Dependent: cannot stand alone → Attach: staff used the side gate
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

Joining independent clauses

- A full stop, or a semicolon.
- A comma plus a coordinating conjunction: and, but, or, so, yet, for, nor.
- Not by a comma alone (a comma splice), and not by nothing (a run-on).
- "However" is not a conjunction: write "; however," or ". However,".

Colons, dashes and nonessential information

- A colon must follow a complete clause. It introduces a list, an explanation or an example: "One part needed replacement: the hinge."
- Nonessential information is marked with a matching pair: two commas, two dashes or two brackets. Do not mix them.
- Essential information that identifies which one is meant takes no commas: "The student who won spoke first."

Agreement and form

- A verb agrees with its subject, not with a noun just before it: "The box of tools is heavy."
- A pronoun agrees with the noun it replaces: "The committee gave its report."
- A modifier at the start of a sentence describes the subject that follows: "Walking home, she saw...", not "Walking home, the rain...".

Worked example: punctuation in a paragraph

1. Comma: an introductory dependent clause.
2. Semicolon or full stop: two independent clauses. A comma alone would be a splice.
3. Colon: a complete clause introduces the item.

Worked example: agreement

- The subject is "list", singular; "of approved suppliers" is a phrase in between.
- So the answer is "is", not "are".
- Test by removing the phrase: "The list is updated every month."

Common errors

- Joining two independent clauses with a comma alone.
- Using a colon after an incomplete clause ("The items are: ...").
- Opening nonessential information with a comma and closing it with a dash.

Common errors (2)

- Matching the verb to the nearest noun instead of the subject.
- Leaving a modifier with nothing it can describe.

Key terms

- **sentence boundary**: The point where one complete sentence ends and the next begins.
- **finite verb**: A verb with tense that can act as the main verb of a clause.
- **clauses**: Groups of words with a subject and a verb.
- **colon**: A punctuation mark (:) that follows a complete clause and introduces what explains or lists it.

Check yourself

- Correct: "The test was hard, most students finished it."
- Choose: "Each of the players ____ a number." (has / have)
- Is this colon correct: "We need: flour, eggs and milk."?