

Bem Vindo!

Welcome to part of a better way to prepare for this beast of an exam. What's here will be updated frequently. Some of what's here will be a permanent part of this link, for instance, the 9 Mantras. Check the date in the bottom right corner of this welcome to know when an update has been made.

Past the 9 Mantras, you'll find info bringing these ideas to life. Past that, you'll find analyses of official questions.

And if you have not already begun to do so, you should be heading to my Twitter feed(@chrisXcho) on a daily basis to find analyses of questions from the official big blue books. Ok, that's it. Vamos.

Last updated: 5/30

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The 9 Mantras

Reading

1. Choose Your Order
2. Write Notes
3. Trust Yourself

Writing

1. Shorter is Better
2. Don't Be Repetitive
3. No Unnecessary Punctuation

Math

1. Skip Around
2. Show Every Step
3. Be Flexible

9 core ideas. 23 total words.
Flat out memorize them all.

Bringing the 9 Mantras to Life

Reading

1. Choose Your Order

There are 5 Reading passages. We know that the first of the five will always be a Story (an excerpt of a novel) passage. We also know that one of them can be classified as history/government. And we know that one of them can be classified as science. The other two passages could be two additional science passages, one could be classified as social science, things will vary.

Savvy students will discover strengths and weaknesses before they sit for real exams. Savvy students will *choose* NOT to do the Story passage first. Stories can get weird; they can have metaphors. They can require interpretation; they are not great passages to begin with. What is a great passage to begin with? One that you feel comfortable first reading when it is 8-something in the morning, and you are about to sit through an hour-plus long section.

2. Write Notes

After every *normal-sized* paragraph, write something down. It can be one word. It can be a bit of a summary. It can be what a paragraph is doing, versus what it is saying. There is no “right” or “wrong” note to write. The sheer act of writing causes many great things to happen. If a paragraph is longer than usual, consider stopping roughly halfway and writing more than one note.

3. Trust Yourself

The test writers *craft* certain questions for us to answer them off the tops of our heads. If they did not do so, the time limit would be

unreasonable. You will learn when to *trust yourself* and answer a question without going back into the passage.

Writing

1. Shorter is Better

Within a given section of 44 questions, the idea of *shorter is better* could legitimately cross your mind a double-digit number of times. Let's now establish three general ideas tied to this exceptionally potent idea.

- A) This idea is based on WORD COUNT. So an option with one word is *shorter* than an option with two words.

Ex. BBB '18(1041 #18), BBB '20(715 #18)

- B) We do NOT think about *shorter is better* when a question has instructions/directions above the answer options.

Ex. BBB '18(1045 #28), BBB '20(719 #28)

- C) We do NOT think about Mantra #1 *anytime* something else comes to mind. For instance, once you learn what an Improper Comparison (IC) is, you won't think about *shorter is better* when you see you are dealing with an IC.

Ex. BBB '18(1166 #17), BBB '20(578#17)

2. Don't Be Repetitive

This Mantra certainly meshes well with the first, and in a good number of instances, either Mantra #1 or #2 could lead you to making the same decision. That said, there is a difference between the first two Mantras.

At the heart of this Mantra is the idea that the test writers do NOT craft correct answers that contain two different words that mean the same thing. For example, a correct answer would not use both the word "famous" and the word "well-known".

Ok, head to the examples below to bring Mantra #2 even more to life.

BBB '18: 777 #18, 1036 #1

BBB '20: 442 #1, 710 #1, 977 #18

3. No Unnecessary Punctuation

Within any exam, there will be answer options that are over-punctuated. But then, there are also answer options that contain punctuation that is definitely *necessary*. And so, one of the key skills you will develop will be discerning the difference between necessary and *unnecessary* punctuation.

We start below with examples of questions that contain answer options with *unnecessary* punctuation.

BBB '18: 776 #15, 1043 #22, 1177 #44

BBB '20: 589 #44, 717 #22, 976 #15

Math

1. Skip Around

If you do the questions in order, it really is foolish. The questions are clearly NOT in a precise order of difficulty. Moreover, no two of us would view a given section in precisely the same way. Here are reasons to skip past a question. And certainly keep in mind that skipping past a question can be a temporary thing; you can always return to the question later. The idea of initially skipping past a given question is to ensure that you are maintaining CONTROL over the section.

A) *...because it's part of a PAIRED QUESTION.*

BBB '18: 804-805 #16-18

BBB '20: 1004-1005 #16-18

B) *...because there is more than one shape.*

BBB '18: 1180 #4

BBB '20: 592 #4

C) ...because it's trig, and you don't like trig.

BBB '18: 1201 #36

BBB '20: 613 #36

D) ...because it is ANYTHING that does make you feel naturally comfortable.

BBB '18: 348 #27

BBB '20: 1246 #27

2. Show Every Step

One reason I have NOT made a single mistake within any of the five times I have taken the current version of the SAT is that I *show every step* within every question. Something straightforward, like what is below, is typically something very tempting to do in your head.

$$3x - 2 = 8$$

Doing so on test day is potentially one reason why you are making mistakes. Under the real conditions of the exam, which, for most of us, include feeling fatigue and some nervousness, it is easy to look at what's above and mistakenly write down $3x = 6$

If you want to push toward *guaranteeing* that you can execute virtually error-free work on test day, don't sleep on this simple, yet integral idea. (To see examples of me *showing every step*, click on the "SAT Handwritten" button.)

3. Be Flexible

At the heart of this Mantra is the idea that many questions provide opportunities to arrive at correct answers via routes that are NOT tied to conventional mathematics. A savvy test taker executes traditional math moves when they are all that's available, but is also able to *flexibly* execute a range of other skills when doing so would virtually guarantee success.

A) Sub Numbers (SN)

Within any exam that I personally take, I find myself employing this Alternative typically between 5-10 times.

BBB '18: 577 #30, 807 #21, 1052 #7
BBB '20: 726 #7, 1007 #21, 1133 #30

B) Use the Given Answers (UGA)

Within any exam that I personally take, I find myself employing this Alternative typically between 3-5 times.

BBB '18: 345 #19, 1064 #12, 1181 #10
BBB '20: 593 #10, 738 #12, 1243 #19

C) Trial & Error (TE)

D) Use the Given Diagram (UGD)

ALL diagrams are drawn accurately, unless we see the specific tagline of "Note: Figure not drawn to scale." It is definitely justifiable to select an answer based solely on an accurate diagram. Doing so once per exam would not be unusual.

BBB '18: 806 #19, 1074 #36
BBB '20: 748 #36, 1006 #19

#AskTheGoat

Writing

May 2019 #1

Consider the following sentence.

Roughly 65 million years ago, dinosaurs along with 65 to 70 percent of other plant and animal species on Earth, became extinct.

Now, let's launch into a full analysis of the actual question and its answer options. Understandably, someone who knows Mantra #3: *No Unnecessary Punctuation* would have leaned away from options (B) and (C) here. And in most situations, this would be the proper thing to do. But here, we have other things going on in regards to the commas. Let's explore.

Let's start by analyzing something that I strongly believe is making its first appearance within an SAT question: a comma that is used after an *opening time frame*. When a sentence STARTS with a *time frame*, there should be a comma right after the time frame.

Ex. *For the past ten months*, I have been posting free analyses on my Twitter feed: @chrisXcho.

The *opening time frame* is the "For the past ten months". And since the sentence is starting with such a phrase, we need the comma that is after "months".

Looking now at the question we are analyzing, the opening phrase of "Roughly 65 million years ago" is a time frame. Hence, we need that comma after "ago". Knowing this, we are now down to options (A) and (B).

Now let's discuss the comma after "dinosaurs". There are two thoughts we could have to explain why that comma is *necessary*. The first is that commas classically *set off descriptions*. And when a DESCRIPTION appears within the MIDDLE of a sentence, there should be a comma when the description starts and one when it ends.

We can contend that the phrase "along with 65 to 70 percent of other plant and animal species on Earth" is *describing* "dinosaurs". And so, there should be a comma after "dinosaurs", and a comma when the description is over, after the word "Earth", which is already built into the original sentence.

A second thought we can bring into this analysis is that when a phrase is brackets by commas within the MIDDLE of a sentence, we should be able to REMOVE the phrase from the sentence and what is left will still read as a proper full sentence. If we were to remove the phrase "along with 65 to 70 percent of other plant and animal species on Earth" from the original sentence, we would be left with "Roughly 65 million years ago, dinosaurs became extinct." Given that that is indeed a full sentence, we would be further justified in thinking that we want the comma that is after "dinosaurs".

The correct answer for this question is (B); this is not a simple question. Hence, the rating of “Try”. A rating of “MUST” means you *must* learn what we’re discussing. A rating of “Try” means, well...*try*. :)

Rating: Try

BBB '18 Cross-Reference: 1045 #27

BBB '20 Cross-Reference: 719 #27

May 2019 #13

Let’s start by acknowledging that this question has instructions/directions above the answer options (and it’s not the CQ), which means that Mantra #1: *Shorter is Better* is NOT in play. And so, we would not naturally be drawn toward (D).

What we need to do is carefully consider what the particular instructions here are compelling us to do: we need another example that is similar to the one that is already provided within the sentence.

Looking at the non-underlined portion of the sentence, we can see that it provides the example of Napoleon admiring the poems of Ossian. Seeing this, we could realize that we need another example of someone saying/doing something positive in regards to Ossian’s work.

All of the options outside of (B) focus solely on Ossian, which is likely the primary justification for selecting the correct answer of (B). In (B), we get the opinion of “Literary critics”, which would be similar to getting the opinion of Napoleon.

Ok, so (B) is the correct answer, and I suspect that you now understand why it is the correct answer. That said, it is very understandable if your initial thought of every option was that none of them really seemed relevant.

Rating: Try

BBB '18 Cross-Reference: 918 #37

BBB '20 Cross-Reference: 321 #16, 852 #37

May 2019 #32

Consider the following sentence.

Although postal banking is effective in other countries, many post offices are located in regions where banks are critically needed, some critics of the proposal contend that post offices are ill equipped to act as banks.

This sentence is part of a clever question, one that you *should* make a strong effort to master. Let's start with something on the straightforward side of the spectrum.

It would be *unusual* (not impossible) for the correct answer to be (D). Dashes *usually* come in pairs. And so, it would be *unusual* for the correct answer to create a lone dash within a given sentence. (Head to one of the CR questions referenced below to see a counterexample to this.)

Ok, from here, given Mantra #1: *Shorter is Better*, it is understandable why many students would have opted for (A) here. But the issue with (A) is that it is the classic grammar error known as a *run-on* sentence. A *run-on* is when TWO FULL sentences are combined with a comma.

Within this rather long sentence, the phrase that includes the beginning of the sentence up to the word "needed" would comprise a full sentence. After the comma after "needed", we already have another full sentence. Hence, the original sentence is a *run-on*, and it cannot be correct.

Down to (B) and (C), we have a couple of ways we could settle on the final correct answer of (B). The better way is likely to acknowledge that the Category1 transition word of "however" really does not work here. A word like "however" indicates that there is some sort of contrast or that something *opposite* is being stated. The opening comment of "postal banking is effective in other countries" and the comment "many post offices are located in regions where banks are critically needed" do not contrast/are not opposites.

A second reason to lean away from (C) is that it would typically be *repetitive* (Mantra #2) to start a sentence with "Although" and then use the word "however" so soon within the sentence. And I think we can leave things here *minha amiga*.

Rating: Should

BBB '18 Cross-Reference: 904 #1, 1172 #29

BBB '20 Cross-Reference: 584 #29, 838 #1

May 2019 #39

Consider the following sentence.

Having come to a fuller understanding of James's work, how to present it in the best way to museum visitors was what the curators had to determine.

There is a concept that we refer to as an Introductory Descriptive Phrase (IDP). This is not a formal grammar term; this is an acronym that I coined. The idea of an IDP is that when a sentence opens with a *description*, WHO or WHAT is getting described by that introductory phrase MUST come immediately after the comma.

Ex. Having studied for months, the SAT seemed less horrible.

This is an incorrect IDP. This sentence makes it seem like “the SAT” is studying for months. A correct version of what is above would be what’s below.

Ex. Having studied for months, Lauren thought the SAT seemed less horrible.

A way to detect that an IDP may be at the heart of a given SAT question is noticing that there is a verb ending in “-ing” at the beginning of a given sentence.

“Having come to a fuller understanding of James’s work, how to...”

Examining this sentence, we can first notice how the sentence begins with the “-ing” word “Having”. We can then acknowledge that the opening phrase “Having come to a fuller understanding of James’s work” is definitely describing a person. Therefore, it would be incorrect for the word right after the comma to be “how”.

Now, having ruled out (A), we would not need to fully read the remaining options. Looking at how they begin, only options (B) and (C) can be considered, as those are the two options that begin with people. And given the context of the passage, it should be clear that (C) is the correct final answer.

(A rating of “Should” means that you *should* likely feel confident about the question, but it is not quite a MUST.)

Rating: Should

BBB '18 Cross-Reference: 322 #24, 1168 #21

BBB '20 Cross-Reference: 580 #21, 1220 #24

May 2019 #43

Consider the following sentence.

According to Valerie Steele, chief curator of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, a costume curator’s job is to, “tell the story of

the meaning of the clothes.”

At some point, only an inexperienced student could select (B), which replaces the original comma with a semicolon(;). A semicolon must connect TWO FULL sentences. In the case of this sentence, if we put a semicolon where the original comma is, neither what is before nor what is after would be a full sentence. (Do you see *parallelism* here by the way?)

Now, by instinct, nearly everyone veers away from (C), and so it is unlikely that you selected this option. The option that, in all likelihood, possibly three quarters of the nation selected is (A).

Understandably, seeing the quotation marks, you might have recalled something that you were first told at some point in middle school: a comma should precede quotation marks. But this idea is NOT an automatic thing.

There are many instances in which quotation marks are NOT preceded by commas. For instance, if what’s being quoted is the *name* of something, there is no need for a comma before the quotation marks.

Ex. Amazing Pete played “The Star-Spangled Banner” on his harmonica.

As far as the SAT goes, you can think of things as a comma would only be required if the person who is saying something within quotes has just been stated.

Ex. Hannah noted, “The game is much more intricate than I first thought.”

And so, for this question, given that what’s within the quotation marks is NOT directly preceded by a person who is making the statement that is within the quotation marks, a comma is not necessary, leading us to the correct final answer of (D).

Rating: Should

BBB '18 Cross-Reference: 777 #17

BBB '20 Cross-Reference: 977 #17

Math

May 2019 #10 - No Calc

There are definitely questions that are worded in a manner to make it tougher to figure out what is getting tested; this is certainly one such question. Accordingly, though the correct answer of (C) is going to make sense to you once you've read through what's here, you should not likely consider this to be a key question.

The question is a play on the concept of *slope*, which can be thought of as RISE over RUN. To sift through the wording and help us determine that this is essentially a play on slope, it would help to remember that “ $f(x)$ ” can be thought of/rewritten as y .

Knowing this, we could read the second sentence within the question as, “For every increase of 5 units in x , y increases by 3 units.”, which would mean that when we go UP 3 (*rise*), we go OVER/RIGHT 5 (*run*). So, the *slope* of our line is $3/5$, which leads us to the correct final answer of (C).

Extra Nerd Bonus: There is something a touch unusual within this question....

Oh, and as a final comment, there really is no direct cross-reference question to this item, as its wording makes it rather unique. But to apply some of the skills involved within these questions, you can head to what's mentioned below.

Rating: 700+

BBB '18 Cross-Reference: 333 #12, 813 #34

BBB '20 Cross-Reference: 1013 #34, 1231 #12

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