

Grammar Lesson and Practice

What Is an Idiom?

Idioms are common phrases with quirky, nonliteral meanings. Most idioms, like *carry through*, *across the board*, *come on strong*, *get your feet wet*, *bang for the buck*, *all ears*, *pull your leg*, *eat crow*, etc., are so ingrained in our language that we hardly notice that their meanings are so nonliteral. We appreciate our idioms when we hear someone speak who has just learned English, since the idioms take the longest to learn.

Watch Your Prepositions

The SAT won't expect you to memorize the thousands of idioms in the English language, but it does expect you to recognize *preposition errors*. Remember from Lesson 2 that prepositions are words like *to*, *from*, *of*, *for*, *by*, *in*, *before*, *with*, *beyond*, and *up* that show relative position or direction. Certain idiomatic phrases, like *arguing with*, require a particular preposition. (That is, saying something like *She was arguing against her brother* is not a proper idiom.) The choice of preposition is not usually a matter of logic, as in the sentence

The house was on fire, so the firefighters put it out.

This sentence contains two prepositions, *on* and *out*, but neither is used literally or logically: the house wasn't really "on" a fire, and the firemen didn't put the fire "out." But if you tried to make the sentence literal and logical, it would sound ridiculous or overly stilted:

The house was aflame, so the firefighters extinguished the blaze.

So idioms are an important part of clear and effective language.

When you notice a preposition in a sentence, always ask: "Is that preposition necessary, and if so, is it the correct preposition for that particular phrase?"

Wrong: *We were no longer satisfied at the level of service we were receiving.*

The prepositions are *at* and *of*. The idiom *level of service* is correct, but the idiom *satisfied at* is not. The correct idiom is *satisfied with*.

Right: *We were no longer satisfied with the level of service we were receiving.*

ESP: Eliminate Superfluous Prepositions

Casual speech often uses extra prepositions. When you write, however, try to eliminate unnecessary prepositions. Notice that in phrases like the following, the preposition is unnecessary and thus "nonstandard."

Examples:

The pole did not extend ~~out~~ far enough.

Since my injury, it hurts to climb ~~up~~ the stairs.

Although clearly angry, the students were not yet ready to fight ~~against~~ the ruling.

We were unsuccessful in our attempt to extract ~~out~~ the chemical from the venom.

The illness can make one dizzy and prone to falling ~~down~~.

If you don't hurry, you'll miss ~~out-on~~ all the fun!

There were plenty of volunteers to help ~~out~~ with the race.

Before we prepare the steaks, we should fry ~~up~~ some peppers.

Her speed and strength helped her to dominate ~~over~~ her opponents.

Choose the correct preposition or phrase (if any) to complete each of the following sentences. If no word or phrase is required, circle the dash (—).

1. *I prefer spaghetti (to/over/more than/—) linguine.*
2. *The students were protesting (against/over/—) the decision to cut financial aid.*
3. *We are all concerned (about/with/—) your decision to drop out of school.*
4. *It took nearly an hour to open (up/—) the trunk.*
5. *Eleanor has always been concerned (with/about/—) feminist issues.*
6. *We all agreed (on/with/about/—) the decision to go skiing rather than hiking.*
7. *She would not agree (to/on/with/about) the plea bargain.*
8. *We found dozens of old photographs hidden (in/—) between the pages.*
9. *Good study habits are necessary (to/for/in) academic success.*
10. *The new house color is not very different (from/than/to/—) the old one.*
11. *His girlfriend was angry (with/at/—) him for not calling sooner.*
12. *It will be many years before we fill (up/—) all the pages in this photo album.*
13. *They were both angry (about/at/with) the boys' behavior.*
14. *You should plan (to come/on coming) before 6:00 pm.*
15. *Matt was kicked off (of/—) the team for drinking at a party.*
16. *We will make sure that your contract complies (with/to/—) the laws of your state.*
17. *After the operation, Denise was no longer capable (of playing/to play) the violin.*

Consider the idiom in each sentence and fill in the correct preposition, if one is required.

1. *The interview provided insight _____ what great directors think about.*
2. *We were very angry _____ him for ignoring our phone calls.*
3. *Her tests include questions that seem very different _____ those that we see in the homework.*
4. *My mother preferred my singing _____ my practicing guitar.*
5. *Detective Simone ran in pursuit _____ the perpetrators.*
6. *We had to shoo the cat off _____ the car.*
7. *When she arrived on campus, she felt truly independent _____ her parents for the first time.*
8. *They scoured the bedroom in search _____ the missing bracelet.*
9. *We were very angry _____ the exorbitant price of gasoline at the corner gas station.*
10. *Although they were friends, they always seemed to be arguing _____ each other.*
11. *I am concerned _____ your failure to pass the last few quizzes.*
12. *We all agreed _____ the color scheme for the wedding.*
13. *Tony had to climb _____ the ladder to get to the top bunk.*
14. *As a public defender, he was very concerned _____ the legal issue of search and seizure.*
15. *It was hard not to agree _____ her offer of a free movie ticket.*
16. *The vaccine was intended to protect everyone working on the project _____ disease.*
17. *I could hardly pay attention in class because I was daydreaming _____ the prom.*
18. *Allison and her sister both excel _____ dance and music.*
19. *I could never dream _____ confronting the coach with such a trivial concern.*
20. *I arrived at the meeting too late to raise my objection _____ the proposal.*
21. *The third edition of this book really doesn't differ very much at all _____ the first two.*
22. *I beg to differ _____ you, but your story does not fit my recollection at all.*
23. *If we don't act soon, we may miss _____ the opportunity to lock in the lowest rates.*

Avoid the Choices That Are True but Wrong

Too often students make the mistake of choosing an answer that *makes a true statement* but *does not answer the question correctly*. How can that be? Imagine that you've read a passage written by an art critic praising a museum that has been harshly criticized by others. The passage acknowledges certain flaws in the planning and design of the building but on the whole praises the building for its innovations. Then you read a question like this:

The author uses the term “monstrosity” (line 4) primarily in order to

- (A) justify the building of the museum
- (B) characterize the opinion of certain critics
- (C) express his dismay about certain decisions made by the planners
- (D) disparage the work of certain architects
- (E) praise the museum for its innovative design

Looking back to line 4, you read: “They could not understand how such a monstrosity could have been erected under their noses.” When you look at the passage as a whole, you see that the author does, in different places, “justify the building of the museum” (choice (A)), “characterize the opinion of certain critics” (choice (B)), “express his dismay about certain decisions made by the planners” (choice (C)), and “praise the museum for its innovative design” (choice (E)).

These are all basically “true” statements. So how do you pick the right answer? Read the question *carefully*. It asks why the author uses the term “monstrosity.” Does the author think the museum is a monstrosity? No, because the passage as a whole *praises* the museum. The sentence in line 4 says that *they*—other critics—thought it was a monstrosity. Therefore, this word is being used to (B) *characterize the opinion of certain critics*.

Some choices may make statements that are *true* without being the *correct* answer to the question. Read the question very carefully to be sure you've answered what it asks. Carefully note the question type, as discussed in Lesson 5.

Underline Your Evidence

It's worth repeating: To check your answers, *underline your evidence* in the passage. This forces you to focus on what is *in the passage* and not what is just *in your head*. The right answers are always right there in the passage, if you look for them. You *never* need to draw on outside knowledge or read between the lines.

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

Always check your progress in terms of your score goal. Unless you've got a realistic shot at an 800, you don't need to get every question right. Don't get bogged down on tough questions. If you can't decide between two answers, make your best guess and move on. Keep in mind that to break 500, you need only to get about half of the questions right, and to break 600, you need to get only about two-thirds of the questions right. To break 700, though, you'll need to get more than 86% of the questions right.

In addition to checking individual answers, check that you've carefully attacked at least the number of questions that you should according to your “SAT Study Plan.”

Learn to Deal with “Space-Outs”

Nearly everyone “spaces out” from time to time when they read. Have you ever suddenly realized that you've “read” three paragraphs but nothing has sunk in? This is costly *only if you panic* and let it distract you for the rest of the test.

If you space out a little on the SAT reading, relax. It happens to everyone, and you'll be fine if you don't panic. Just calmly go back to where you left off, and reread normally. To minimize space-outs, just focus on answering the three key questions and summarizing each paragraph. When your brain has a conscious task, it doesn't space out.

The following passage is taken from a book written in 2002 about the evolution of human intelligence.

We are a bright species. We have gone into space and walked on the moon. Yet you would never have guessed that if you traveled back to between 100,000 and 40,000 years ago. At that time our ancestors and Neanderthals coexisted. Neanderthals were like us but physically stronger, with large bones and teeth, protruding brows and face, and hardly a chin. Perhaps what we lacked in brawn we made up for in brains. But for most of our history, our species was not bright enough to act very differently from the Neanderthals, let alone be more successful than they were. Only around 40,000 to 32,000 years ago, in Western Asia and Europe, did Neanderthal people disappear, to be replaced by our species.

Why did we coexist with Neanderthals for 60,000 years—a far longer case of hominids

living side by side than any other in human history? And why did we eventually win out? Brains alone cannot provide the answer, as Neanderthals may in fact have had the larger ones. Perhaps they lacked the long vocal chamber needed for speech. Equal certainty exists among those who study the base of their skulls that they did and that they did not. If they did lack one, then this could be the explanation, but maybe not, since even without a voice box, gestures can communicate, as can be seen among the deaf. Indeed, hunters find advantages in using sign language (speech sounds would warn off potential prey), and not just while hunting but in everyday life. Anthropologists find that hunter-gatherers use sophisticated sign languages to complement their speech. Sign language might even have other advantages—evidence even suggests that it is easier to learn than speech: deaf children start to pick up signs earlier than hearing ones learn to speak. So “spoken speech” is not in all ways superior to “signed speech.” It is not something that can explain our replacement of the Neanderthals.

The reason we—anatomically modern humans—won out lies, we suspect, not in being brighter or better able to speak but in our very physical frailty and our resulting need to exploit

our minds. Neanderthals, stronger than us, did not need to take this route. They could survive with their physical strength rather than tapping into the potential of their brains. An analogy is with countries: the richest ones, such as Switzerland, Finland, Singapore, and Japan, are not blessed with, but rather lack natural resources. Without them, they have been forced to use their brains to innovate, providing products and services ranging from mobile phones to diplomacy.

1. The main purpose of the second paragraph (lines 17–43) is to
 - (A) make a suggestion
 - (B) examine some claims
 - (C) explain a situation
 - (D) present information objectively
 - (E) tell a story
2. In line 20, the phrase “win out” most nearly means
 - (A) become justified
 - (B) defeat their foes by force
 - (C) come to dominate
 - (D) become politically successful
 - (E) become more popular
3. The evidence in lines 34–36 (“Anthropologists find . . . speech”) is presented primarily in order to
 - (A) refute the misconception that hunter-gatherers were not good communicators
 - (B) explain how modern humans replaced the Neanderthals
 - (C) support the claim that hunter-gatherers have larger brains than Neanderthals
 - (D) suggest that long vocal chambers may not provide an advantage to a particular species
 - (E) show why some humans prefer gestures to spoken language

John R. Skoyles and Dorion Sagan, *Up from Dragons*. © 2002 McGraw-Hill. Reprinted by permission of The McGraw-Hill Companies.

4. The “physical frailty” in line 47 is
- (A) the reason our ancestors struggled to survive
 - (B) the result of a harsh physical environment
 - (C) an ironic advantage to modern humans
 - (D) something the Neanderthals exploited
 - (E) a trait that arose late in human history
5. In line 58, “mobile phones” and “diplomacy” are mentioned as examples of
- (A) innovations that are used worldwide
 - (B) different ways of communicating
 - (C) luxuries that are denied to the physically frail
 - (D) inventions that Neanderthals could never use
 - (E) products or services that require intellectual rather than natural resources

Verbal HW# 27

Problems with Prepositions Quiz 1

Correct the following sentences by adding, removing, or changing the prepositions. Place a check mark in front of sentences that are correct.

1. Our ship leaves August 15.
2. I could of danced all night.
3. Where did you get this from?
4. If we split it evenly between the three of us, no one will be unhappy.
5. You can't just walk in the house without knocking.
6. He will be back the tenth.
7. Take your plate off of the table.
8. Cut the pie up into six slices.
9. Like the invitation stated, we'll see you the tenth for our reunion.
10. I don't know what you are talking about.
11. You could of told me about the mistake earlier.
12. I don't know where he is at or I would tell you.

Problems with Prepositions Quiz 2

Correct the following sentences by adding, removing, or changing the prepositions. Place a check mark in front of the sentences that are correct.

1. Tell me where you found this at.
2. Sami will meet him May 18 at the Washington Hotel in downtown Seattle.
3. I should of known he would steal money from my purse.
4. We hiked into the woods and fell off of a log while crossing a creek.
5. That lie is still coming between the two of them.
6. Like I said, I am sorry for the muddy prints her paws left on the carpet.
7. I should of wiped her paws first.
8. The robbery happened just like you said it did.
9. She is the most enthusiastic student a teacher could hope for.
10. His brother's birthday is June 14.

Answers

Grammar

1. I prefer spaghetti to linguine.
2. The students were protesting (none needed) the decision to cut financial aid.
3. We are all concerned about your decision to drop out of school. (Concerned about means worried about.)
4. It took nearly an hour to open (none needed) the trunk.
5. Eleanor has always been concerned with feminist issues. (Concerned with means occupied with or involved in.)
6. We all agreed on the decision to go skiing rather than hiking. (You agree on mutual decisions or plans.)
7. She would not agree to the plea bargain. (You agree to offers.)
8. We found dozens of old photographs hidden (none needed) between the pages.
9. Good study habits are necessary to (or sometimes for) academic success.
10. The new house color is not very different from the old one. (Use than only with **comparatives** like bigger; different is not a comparative.)
11. His girlfriend was angry with him for not calling sooner. (You get angry with people.)
12. It will be many years before we fill (none needed) all the pages in this photo album.
13. They were both angry about the boys' behavior. (You get angry about situations.)
14. You should plan to come before 6:00 pm. (Plan to means make a plan to, but plan on means rely on.)
15. Matt was kicked off (none needed) the team for drinking at a party.
16. We will make sure that your contract complies with the laws of your state.
17. After the operation, Denise was no longer capable of playing the violin.
1. The interview provided insight into what great directors think about.
2. We were very angry with him for ignoring our phone calls.
3. Her tests include questions that seem very different from those that we see in the homework.
4. My mother preferred my singing to my practicing guitar.
5. Detective Simone ran in pursuit of the perpetrators.
6. We had to shoo the cat off (none needed) the car.
7. When she arrived on campus, she felt truly independent of her parents for the first time.
8. They scoured the bedroom in search of the missing bracelet.
9. We were very angry about the exorbitant price of gasoline at the corner gas station.
10. Although they were friends, they always seemed to be arguing with each other.
11. I am concerned about your failure to pass the last few quizzes.
12. We all agreed on the color scheme for the wedding.
13. Tony had to climb (none needed) the ladder to get to the top bunk.
14. As a public defender, he was very concerned with the legal issue of search and seizure.
15. It was hard not to agree to her offer of a free movie ticket.
16. The vaccine was intended to protect everyone working on the project from disease.
17. I could hardly pay attention in class because I was daydreaming about the prom.
18. Allison and her sister both excel in dance and music.
19. I could never dream of confronting the coach with such a trivial concern.
20. I arrived at the meeting too late to raise my objection to the proposal.
21. The third edition of this book really doesn't differ very much at all from the first two.
22. I beg to differ with you, but your story does not fit my recollection at all.
23. If we don't act soon, we may miss (none needed) the opportunity to lock in the lowest rates.

Verbal

1. **B** Words and phrases such as “perhaps” (line 23), “if” (line 26), and “maybe not” (line 28) indicate that the second paragraph is examining hypotheses.
2. **C** The passage explores the question of how modern humans came to “win out” (line 20) over the Neanderthals, that is, how they came to thrive while the Neanderthals died out, or how they came to dominate them.
3. **D** The sentence “Anthropologists find . . . speech” (lines 34–36) is used to support the later claim that “‘spoken speech’ is not in all ways superior to ‘signed speech’” (lines 40–41), which would cast doubt on the advantages of the “long vocal chamber needed for speech” (lines 23–24).
4. **C** According to the final paragraph, the relative “physical frailty” (line 47) of modern humans compared to Neanderthals created a need for modern humans to “tapping . . . into the potential of their brains” (line 51), which led to their dominance over the Neanderthals.
5. **E** The “mobile phones” and “diplomacy” in line 58 are examples of how countries that “lack natural resources” (lines 54–55) can still “use their brains to innovate” (line 56).

Homework

Problems with Prepositions Quiz 1 Answers

1. Our ship leaves **on** August 15.
2. I could **have** danced all night.
3. Where did you get this?
4. If we split it evenly **among** the three of us, no one will be unhappy.
5. You can't just walk **into** the house without knocking.
6. He will be back **on** the tenth.
7. Take your plate off the table.
8. Cut the pie into six slices.
9. **As** the invitation stated, we'll see you **on** the tenth for our reunion.
10. I don't know what you are talking about. (CORRECT)
11. You could **have** told me about the mistake earlier.
12. I don't know where he is or I would tell you.

Problems with Prepositions Quiz 2 Answers

1. Tell me where you found this.
2. Sami will meet him **on** May 18 at the Washington Hotel in downtown Seattle.
3. I should **have** known he would steal money from my purse.
4. We hiked into the woods and fell off a log while crossing a creek.
5. That lie is still coming between the two of them. (CORRECT)
6. **As** I said, I am sorry for the muddy prints her paws left on the carpet.
7. I should **have** wiped her paws first.
8. The robbery happened just **as** you said it did.
9. She is the most enthusiastic student a teacher could hope for. (CORRECT)
10. His brother's birthday is **on** June 14.
11. Please take off your shoes when you come **inside**.
12. Where did she go?