

**PREVIEW DEDICATED TO THE PREPOSITION**

**Find the preposition:** The test writer uses prepositional phrases, which are used to modify nouns, in order to obscure subject/verb agreement and comparisons. So, let's start by identifying prepositions (the ones most used on the SAT are often the same as those used on this page: **of, in, for, by, on, and to**). Next, please find the noun that is the object of the preposition (every prepositional phrase contains a noun that is the object of the preposition, and that noun can't be the subject of the sentence).

- 1) Although the specifics of the agreement has not yet been announced, it is likely that labor officials will accept the proposed lunchroom regulations for veteran employees.
- 2) Study of diverse plant species show that the most successful in the quest for survival are those that are most adaptable to changes in their world.
- 3) In North America, the industrial use of plastics is greater than steel, zinc, and bronze combined.
- 4) In the shadow of Lookout Point Mountain is the sources of a river whose origin was not discovered until recently.
- 5) The message in her novels is clear: unless we restore the dignity of the workman, all contact with our cultural past will disappear.
- 6) Mastery of CPR and other life-saving techniques are mandatory for police officers and firefighters as well as rescue squad volunteers.
- 7) The introduction of elevators in hotels meant that previously undesirable rooms on the top floors, away from the bustle and noise of the street, became sought after and more expensive than the lower floors.
- 8) The record left by fossils, the prehistoric remains of animals and plants, provide researchers with their most important source of knowledge about the Earth's ancient history.
- 9) The number of certificates given recently to accountants accentuate the significant gains being made in the study of creative bookkeeping.
- 10) Commentators agree that reforms in congressional oversight has not managed to slow the increase of our nation's spending on military hardware that, all evidence to the contrary, the Pentagon deems necessary to its well-being.

**Answers:** 1) of the agreement, for veteran employees; 2) of diverse plant species, in the quest, for survival, to changes, in their world; 3) in North America, of plastics; 4) in the shadow, of Lookout Point Mountain, of a river; 5) in her novels, of the workman, with our cultural past; 6) of CPR and other life-saving techniques, for police officers and firefighters as well as rescue squad volunteers; 7) of elevators, in hotels, on the top floors, away from the bustle and noise, of the street; 8) by fossils, of animals and plants, with their most important source of knowledge, about the Earth's ancient history; 9) of certificates, to accountants, in the study, of creative bookkeeping; 10) in congressional oversight, of our nation's spending, on military hardware, to the contrary, to its well-being.





### DEDICATED TO THE PREPOSITION

**Quick shortcut:** In subject/verb agreement problems, the subject is the word immediately to the left of the preposition!

- 1) **A.** Because “agreement” is the object of the preposition “of,” we need to look elsewhere for our subject. If you bracketed “of the agreement,” you were left with “Although the specifics has not ....”
- 2) **A.** Bracketing the prepositional phrase “of diverse plant species” leaves “Study show ...” If you haven’t bracketed, will you start?
- 3) **C.** The test maker uses prepositions to create improper comparisons. Here, what’s compared? Isn’t it the industrial use [of various materials]? So, shouldn’t the second half of the comparison read, “greater than the industrial use [of steel, zinc] ...”? Or, we can use a demonstrative pronoun for “industrial use” by writing the sentence, “greater than that [of steel, zinc] ....”

### PLEASE RETURN AND FINISH PROBLEMS 4 THROUGH 10

- 4) **A.** Prepositional phrases that affect subject/verb agreement tend to show up in the first line. Here we are faced with a double prepositional phrase: “In the shadow” is followed by “of Lookout Point Mountain.” So, where’s the subject? Whenever a sentence seems to be written “backward,” try rewriting it in the classic “subject, verb, etc.” order. So, wouldn’t this sentence read, “The *sources* [of a river] whose origin was not discovered until recently *is* [in the shadow of Lookout Point Mountain]”? So, “sources,” which is plural, turns out to be the subject.
- 5) **E.** Yes, the test writer can play on your prepositional paranoia—here, “in her novels” can’t be used for agreement; the subject must be “message,” which agrees with the verb “is.” If you thought “workman” was wrong, it’s actually a singular noun that refers to an undefined group of people, as when the president says that he would like to help “the auto worker.”
- 6) **B.** Any object of a preposition (and this is a long prepositional phrase, “of CPR and other life-saving techniques”) cannot be the subject of the sentence! So, what’s to the left of “of”? Why, “mastery,” of course. Is that a noun? Yep.
- 7) **D.** First, bear with me as I put brackets around all the prepositional phrases in this sentence: ***The introduction [of elevators] [in hotels] meant that previously undesirable rooms [on the top floors], [away from the bustle and noise] [of the street], became sought after and more expensive than the lower floors.*** Note that what’s left doesn’t make sense; then we notice that “the top floors” is the object of a preposition, so we try adding “on” before “the lower floors.” That by itself doesn’t work, but it gives us an idea. What if we added “rooms” before “on,” leaving us with “more expensive than **rooms on** the lower floors”?

- 8) **A.** First off, we need to cross out unused portions of the sentence that the test writer has set off with commas. Here, we can get rid of, "the prehistoric remains of animals and plants," right? So, now we have "The record left [by fossils] provide ...," which doesn't sound so bad except that "fossils" can't be the subject since it's the object of "by." So what's our subject? Record? It is. When in doubt, always at least consider the first noun in the sentence, OK?
- 9) **B.** In this sentence, we can eliminate "of certificates" and "to accountants," leaving "number" as the only possible subject.
- 10) **B.** We should be getting good at this by now. We note that "in congressional oversight" is weighty but still a prepositional phrase. So, "reforms has not ..."



## WRITING EXERCISE—PARALLEL POSSESSIVES

The car <b>of</b> my uncle [preposition]	My uncle's car [possessive]
<b>That</b> of my uncle [demonstrative pronoun]	<b>His</b> car [possessive pronoun]

The table above shows four ways we can refer to the same car, which, if you haven't noticed, belongs to my uncle.

The crops <b>of</b> Italy [preposition]	Italy's crops [possessive]
<b>Those</b> of Italy [demonstrative pronoun]	<b>Its</b> crops [possessive pronoun]

A thing can "possess" another thing. So, we can use the same four methods.

Let's try a few "parallel possessive" exercises. Some of the following comparisons are legal and should be marked "OK." The others are flawed and should be marked "not OK."

1. Like Mike's skis, Hannah's skis are red.
2. Like Mike, Hannah owns red skis.
3. Like Mike's skis, Hannah owns red skis.
4. Like Mike, Hannah's skis are red.
5. Like the skis of Mike, Hannah's skis are red.
6. Like Mike's skis, Hannah is red.
7. Like the skis of Mike, those of Hannah are red.
8. Like Mike's skis, Hannah's are red.
9. Like his, her skis are red.
10. Like Mike's skis, those of Hannah are red.
11. Like him, her skis are red.
12. Like Mike's, Hannah's skis are red.
13. Like those of Mike, Hannah's skis are red.
14. Like his skis, Hannah's skis are red.
15. Like his skis, her skis are red.

After you check the explanations, try another set:

16. Like Japan, America is a major manufacturing power.
17. Like Japan's industry, America is a major manufacturing power.
18. Like the industry of Japan, American industry is a strong economic force.
19. Like Japan's industry, America's industry is a strong economic force.
20. Like that of Japan, American industry is a strong economic force.
21. Like the industry of Japan, that of America is a strong economic force.
22. Like its industry, the American monetary system is a strong economic force.
23. Like that of Japan, America's is a strong economic force.
24. Like Japan's, the industry of America is a strong economic force.
25. Like its industry, Japan's services sector is very strong.
26. Like the industry of Japan, American is a strong economic force.
27. Like Japan, American industry is a strong economic force.
28. Like that of Japan, America is a major manufacturing power.
29. Like its industry, America is a major manufacturing power.
30. Like Japan's, that of America is a strong economic force.



### PARALLEL POSSESSIVES

1. OK. **Like Mike's skis, Hannah's skis are red.** This couldn't be better—it's a perfect match of comparative possessive nouns.
2. OK. **Like Mike, Hannah owns red skis.** A perfect comparison—this time of ski owners.
3. Not OK. **Like Mike's skis, Hannah owns red skis.** This sentence says that Hannah is like Mike's skis. This is a classic improper comparison.
4. Not OK. **Like Mike, Hannah's skis are red.** We're comparing a person (Mike) to another person's possession (Hannah's skis). You might ask, "But what if Mike is has been reddened by the sun while on the ski slopes?" Yes, Mike may be red, but you'll just have to find another way to communicate that fact, because doing so this way will confuse the reader, who will expect Mike to be as red as Hannah's skis.
5. OK. **Like the skis of Mike, Hannah's skis are red.** This seems to be English as a second (or possibly third) language, but the possessive preposition (of) is parallel with the possessive noun (Hannah's).
6. Not OK. **Like Mike's skis, Hannah is red.** As we saw in #4, a person can be red. That fact doesn't justify this comparison.
7. OK. **Like the skis of Mike, those of Hannah are red.** This is perfectly legal, since both halves of the comparison make use of the possessive preposition (of), and the second half uses the demonstrative pronoun (those) to stand in for "skis."
8. OK. **Like Mike's skis, Hannah's are red.** When we read #7, this is probably the way we wanted to rewrite it. Since the first half of the comparison uses a possessive noun (Mike's), when we see parallel possessive noun in the second half (Hannah's) we can assume (legally) that both possessive nouns modify "skis."
9. OK. **Like his, her skis are red.** This sentence is intended to show you a legal if slightly confusing parallel possessive comparison that you'd never use in real life unless you were being charged by the word.
10. OK. **Like Mike's skis, those of Hannah are red.** We can use the possessive noun (Mike's) and a demonstrative pronoun (those) with the possessive preposition (of).
11. Not OK. **Like him, her skis are red.** As we saw in #4, Mike may indeed be red, but because confusing the reader is severely frowned upon, it's improper to compare a person to another person's possession.
12. OK. **Like Mike's, Hannah's skis are red.** Note how similar this is to #9; however, since as readers we're more comfortable comparing possessive nouns than possessive pronouns, this comparison is much less likely to confuse the reader.
13. OK. **Like those of Mike, Hannah's skis are red.** This is a variation on #5; here, we're using a demonstrative pronoun (those) to create a parallel construction with a possessive noun (Hannah's).
14. OK. **Like his skis, Hannah's skis are red.** This is fine as long as Mike has been identified earlier in the story.
15. OK. **Like his skis, her skis are red.** Again, like #14, this is fine as long as we can identify the people to whom this refers as "his" and "hers."

How's it going so far? Head back to the sentences for one more set ...

16. OK. Like **Japan**, **America** is a major manufacturing power. Note that we can only compare things that are comparable. Here, Japan is compared to America—they're both countries!!
17. Not OK. Like **Japan's industry**, **America** is a major manufacturing power. This sentence says that **America** is like **Japan's industry**. Note the difference from sentence 16, where one country was compared to another. We can compare one country to another, and we can compare one country's industry to another country's industry, but we cannot compare a country to an industry.
18. OK. Like **the industry of Japan**, **American industry** is a strong economic force. This sentence is legal. Note that "of Japan" is a possessive modifying "industry"; similarly, in the second half of the comparison, "American" modifies "industry." So, this sentence compares one industry to another—pretty easy once you get the hang of it, eh?
19. OK. Like **Japan's industry**, **America's industry** is a strong economic force. This is a variation on sentence 18; note that we can use "the industry of Japan" and "Japan's industry" interchangeably. Also, we could substitute "Japanese" for "Japan's" and/or "American" for "America's" here, although matching the format of the modifiers is stronger than mixing, say, "Japanese" with "America's."
20. OK. Like **that of Japan**, **American industry** is a strong economic force. This is the same comparison we just saw in sentences 18 and 19. Here, we're using a demonstrative pronoun (that) to stand in for "industry."
21. OK. Like **the industry of Japan**, **that of America** is a strong economic force. This isn't the smoothest way to make this comparison, but it's legal. Note that the demonstrative pronoun "that" is parallel to (and stands in for) "the industry."
22. OK. Like **its industry**, **the American monetary system** is a strong economic force. The possessive can create the parallel construction ("Like Hannah's skis, her ski hat is blue"). Here, "its" is parallel with "American"; "industry" is parallel with "monetary system."
23. Not OK. Like **that of Japan**, **America's** is a strong economic force. This could be usable if the essay's subject were the industries or economies (or something) of both countries. However, we need to know what we're comparing.
24. OK. Like **Japan's**, **the industry of America** is a strong economic force. Here, it's clear that "Japan's" refers to that country's industry, and as we've noticed, it's legal to compare one country's industry to that of another.
25. OK. Like **its industry**, **Japan's services sector** is very strong. Here, the possessive pronoun clearly refers to Japan, which allows a legal comparison between two sectors of the Japanese economy.
26. Not OK. Like **the industry of Japan**, **American** is a strong economic force. You're unlikely to run into this sort of sentence, because even though the possessives (the



- preposition “of” and “American”) seem to be parallel, the sentence itself makes no sense? American what?
27. Not OK. **Like Japan, American industry is a strong economic force.** This is a classic SAT-type error, which says that **Japan** is like **American industry**. We make this mistake all the time when we say something like, “Our football team is better than Deering.”
28. Not OK. **Like that of Japan, America is a major manufacturing power.** This is the flip side of #27, since it compares a possessive (that of) with America.
29. Not OK. **Like its industry, America is a major manufacturing power.** I have no idea what this one means (and I wrote it!), so remember the editor’s rule #1, “Don’t confuse the reader.” How about this? “Like his ski hat, Bob’s family is close-knit.”
30. Not OK. **Like Japan’s, that of America is a strong economic force.** As opposed to #21, which told us what was being compared, here we don’t have a clue.



**SAT ESSAY WORKSHOP**

Two readers each score your 25-minute SAT essay holistically on a 1-6 scale—that means each reader doesn't take "half a point off here, a quarter point off there," but rather gives you a number grade that sums up the reader's overall impression of your essay. Your score is the sum of those two assessments, and comprises 30% of your Writing score.

Let's face it, even the best SAT essays are no more than well-organized first drafts. In school, you're taught to improve your essay through several drafts. In the first draft, you assemble the raw material that you can then edit and polish through subsequent drafts to end up with something substantial and readable. Nobody's ever taught you how to write a reasonable first draft in 25 minutes—that's why you're not so good at it right now.

**THE COURAGE TO BE SPECIFIC**

In your essay you will be tempted to use hypothetical evidence, in which you refer in a general way to an individual or group, trusting the reader to supply her own specifics. Using hypothetical evidence is a losing strategy, however, because your reader knows that if you felt confident using specific evidence you would have done so.

Did you know that SAT readers are instructed not to hold historical inaccuracy against the essay writer? During a seminar on how to teach SAT essay writing, I asked The College Board's representative how inaccurate one might be without losing points. "What if," I asked her, "I said that I admired Abraham Lincoln because he was the first American on the moon?" She replied that such "evidence" should not be held against me.

Now remember, The College Board issues guidelines, but two independent readers, who could be in Montana and Fiji, produce your essay grade, and as long as the grade each one gives you differs from the other by no more than one point, there's no review by anybody higher in The College Board's food chain. So, I wouldn't go crazy and make, say, George W. Bush a Renaissance painter.

However, this frees you to use what you know, even if you're sketchy about the details, because you're OK whether you contend that the great artist Georgia O'Keeffe lived in Arizona or New Mexico (or even Cleveland!). Just write the specifics as you remember them; anything specific is better than referring to "a female artist who painted in the southwestern United States."

Every opinion you have is generated in one of three ways: (1) General opinions you have developed by witnessing actual events (you have seen historical footage of white people using dogs to terrorize their black neighbors; you have developed an opinion that doing so is wrong); (2) imitation (your mother hated spiders so you do too); or (3) exposure to media propaganda (you have heard so often from our leaders and sympathetic television commentators that normally evil actions aren't so bad when Americans perform them that you're at least partially convinced, aren't you?). In your essay, you should stick to (1).

Here's an actual prompt: "Is criticism—judging or finding fault with the ideas and actions of others—essential for personal well-being and social progress?" We all have different experience sets, so ask yourself: What kind of evidence can I generate to support either side of this argument?

Although SAT essay prompts can almost always be discussed on the "micro" (small) or the "macro" (big) level, choosing the micro level often leads quickly to hypothetical evidence. Unless you want to discuss how liberating it was for your Aunt Polly when she started criticizing everything your Uncle Jim did, you'll be reduced to statements like, "If a person criticizes someone, the person who is criticizing can feel clean and truthful ..." or similar nonsense. Note that that "hypothetical evidence" isn't really evidence at all but merely disguised argument.

So, let's look on the macro level. Where in our society do we locate criticism? It would appear most often in the opinion columns in newspapers, on partisan television shows (Fox News and The Daily Show come to mind), and in political debates. We can also find criticism in works of fiction, for a story without conflict of any kind is confusing, very short, or both. What books have you read this year? Do any of those books contain no criticism (either expressed or implied)?

In the real world, is criticism beneficial to the individual? How about to the society? Let's consider its opposite—no criticism. Throughout history, as you may have read, criticism of one's government usually leads to danger to one's well-being and only occasionally social progress. In much of the world today (we can use China here although there are examples closer to home), criticism of many governments' actions often has been equated with a lack of patriotism, even treason.

So, keep it real. Examples abound, and later we'll work on generating some you can use again and again.

Let's see how preparation can help us write a more complex and interesting 25-minute essay. As we'll discover, pre-writing sample evidence in an "example generator" can help us save minutes that we might have spent brainstorming and reallocate them to our thesis statement, sentence structure, and transitions.

First, let's learn to organize and write a well-organized, readable first draft.

### **PART ONE: BUILDING A STRONG ESSAY BODY**

A short essay such as the one we need to write for the SAT consists of three parts: Introduction (including thesis statement), body paragraphs (in which you support your thesis with evidence), and conclusion. While a brilliant introduction or conclusion might impress a reader, you'll score most of your points in the body of the essay. To score those points, you'll need evidence—real evidence.

Often, SAT essay writers hold back evidence because they're afraid the evidence is inaccurate. Not to fear—as I said earlier, SAT essay graders are instructed not to hold "historical inaccuracy" against you. This means that you can use facts to support your thesis, even if you get those facts wrong.

#### **THE REASONABLE RULE**

If you're going to remember one thing about being reasonable, remember this:

A reasonable argument ("Criticism is often necessary to progress.") backed up by strong evidence ("Criticism by Hamilton and others of the inadequacies of the confederation system led to an American federal system.") scores well; an unreasonable argument ("Everybody agrees that criticism is necessary.") backed up by disguised argument in place of evidence ("If no one in America told the truth, then nobody would ever know what their truth was.") scores very badly. If you want a high essay score, be willing to keep your argument reasonable and provide the best evidence you can.

### **Evidence Is the Key**

First, let's work on the "body" of the essay. No matter how well you write your opening paragraph, if what you write after that is vague and wanders aimlessly you will not score well. Often, students tell me, "I couldn't think of anything to write about." We've all been there. However, after finishing the following exercise, you'll be able to avoid that particularly empty feeling on test day.

So, let's generate the kind of specific "evidence" that you can use to support your point of view. What's your point of view? Well, you don't know yet, but wouldn't it be great to have something specific to call upon the moment you do know?

If you work through the following “generator” enthusiastically, I guarantee that you will be able to say “for instance” and “for example” in future 25-minute first drafts a whole lot more confidently than you’re able to do now.

**First, list three novels that you would feel comfortable discussing in an essay.**

#	Novel	Author	Main Character(s)
1N			
2N			
3N			

**Next, list three periods of history that you feel you can discuss in an essay.**

#	Period in History	Main figures
1H		
2H		
3H		

**Next, list two scientists that you feel you can discuss in an essay.**

#	Scientist	Principal discovery or invention
1S		
2S		

**Finally, list two important personal experiences that you feel you can discuss in an essay.**

#	Experience

1P	
2P	

**Developing Your “Example Generator”**

Summarize each of the three novels that you listed (25-50 words each):

1N \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2N \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3N \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Summarize each of the three periods in history (25-50 words each):

1H \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2H \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3H \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tell us something about each scientist (25-50 words each—you can use a reference):

1S \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

2S \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

Summarize each of your two personal experiences (25-50 words each):

1P \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

2P \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

Anything you'd like to add about any of the above?

---

---

---

## Applying Your Examples to Real Prompts

Here are five recent SAT essay prompts. After each prompt, please list the initials of three discussion topics ("DTs").<sup>^</sup> Then feel free to elaborate on each choice.

Certainly anyone who insists on condemning all lies should think about what would happen if we could reliably tell when our family, friends, colleagues, and government leaders were deceiving us. It is tempting to think that the world would become a better place without the deceptions that seem to interfere with our attempts at genuine communication. On the other hand, perhaps there is such a thing as too much honesty.

Adapted from Allison Kornet, "The Truth About Lying"

**Assignment:** Would the world be a better place if everyone always told the complete truth?

DT #1 \_\_\_\_\_

DT #2 \_\_\_\_\_

DT #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Many people deny that stories about characters and events that are not real can teach us about ourselves or about the world around us. They claim that literature does not offer us worthwhile information about the real world. These people argue that the feelings and ideas we gain from books and stories obstruct, rather than contribute to, clear thought.

Adapted from Jennifer L. McMahon, "The Function of Fiction".

---

<sup>^</sup> An example would be "2N, 1H, 2S," which would stand for "Novel 2, Historical Period 1, Scientist 2." Please ask if you have any questions.

\* Please note that all prompts continue: "Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations."