

**The Ultimate Guide to  
SAT<sup>®</sup> Grammar  
3<sup>rd</sup> Edition**

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## DEDICATION

To Emma and Joey, for whom these exercises were first written. I know you never asked to have a *grammar* book dedicated to you, but I hope you'll accept the gesture. And to Jane, Joe, Lily, and Frisco, for food, company, inspiration, and hilarity.



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## Introduction: How to Use This Book

This book has two purposes. The first purpose is to teach you a number of fundamental grammar concepts that you will undoubtedly use in your own writing, both in high school and beyond. The second purpose, of course, is to teach you to take the SAT®. More specifically, it is to teach you to apply the concepts covered throughout this book to the specific ways in which they are tested on the SAT. To that end, this book is intended to complement official College Board/Khan Academy material. Instead of simply providing lots of practice questions for you to blaze through, it is designed to teach you to quickly identify just what each question type is really testing; to reduce seemingly complicated questions down to the simplest terms possible; and to provide ample practice for you to practice each concept. Moreover, this book is designed to allow you to target your areas of weakness in the most efficient way possible. Core concepts – those guaranteed to be tested on every exam – are presented first, while less frequently tested concepts are presented later.

If you have a limited amount of time to prepare for the SAT, you should work as follows: take a College Board practice test as a diagnostic. Mark your errors, and compare them to the list of questions by test on p. 240. Note the category of each error you make. Then, read the explanations in the appropriate chapter, and do the corresponding exercises. (You can also consult the “Questions by Category” list on p. 237 for College Board examples.) When you feel you have a good grasp of those concepts, take another test and repeat the process. Keep working this way until you are consistently scoring in your target range on full-length, timed exams.

The four College Board practice tests, released in conjunction with Khan Academy, can be downloaded from the following links:

Test 1: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sat-practice-test-1.pdf>  
Answers: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sat-practice-test-1-answers.pdf>

Test 2: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sat-practice-test-2.pdf>  
Answers: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sat-practice-test-2-answers.pdf>

Test 3: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sat-practice-test-3.pdf>  
Answers: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sat-practice-test-3-answers.pdf>

Test 4: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sat-practice-test-4.pdf>  
Answers: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sat-practice-test-4-answers.pdf>

If you are starting six months to a year before you plan to sit for your first exam, however, you may simply want to work through this book in order. While that approach will require a substantial time commitment, it will also allow you to acquire a very solid foundation. Knowing why you are answering questions correctly – rather than simply relying on your ear – will improve both your speed and your confidence. Otherwise, you risk second-guessing yourself if a concept is tested from an unfamiliar angle.

While the passaged-based format of the redesigned SAT Writing section obviously looks very different from the primarily sentence-based format of the old exam, the reality is that many of the same concepts will continue to be tested. The new test will likely include a few unpredictable questions, but in general, the vast majority of the material tested can be safely anticipated. The goal of this book remains to teach you how to anticipate it.

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New York City  
June 2015

## SAT Writing Cheat Sheet

1. Shorter is better.
2. Being = WRONG.
3. Period = Semicolon = Comma + and/but.
4. 2 commas/dashes = non-essential clause. If the information between the commas or dashes is crossed out, the sentence will still make sense.
5. Its, their = possessive; it's = it is; they're = they are; there = a place.
6. Colon = list or explanation. A complete, standalone sentence is required before but not after.
7. All items in a list must match (noun, noun, noun; verb, verb, verb, etc.).
8. Comma before preposition = WRONG.
9. Comma + *it, this, he, she, they* usually = comma splice = WRONG.
10. Than = comparison; then = next.
11. Singular verbs end in *-s*; plural verbs do not end in *-s* (e.g. *she reads, they read*).
12. *This, that, these, and those* should be followed by a noun.
13. Keep pronouns consistent: one = one; you = you; a person = he or she; people = they.
14. Transition questions: cross out the transition and determine the relationship (continue, contradict, cause-and-effect) between the two sentences/parts of a sentence BEFORE you look at the answer choices.
15. Insert/Delete: reread the surrounding sentences and state the topic **in your own words** before checking the answers. If the sentence is directly relevant to that topic, it belongs. If not, it doesn't belong.

**Remember: before you choose an answer, plug it back into the passage to make sure that it works. An answer that makes perfect grammatical sense on its own may create a serious error when considered in context of the passage.**

# Parts of Speech

There are eight parts of speech in the English language, seven of which are relevant to the SAT. If you are not comfortable identifying them, it is suggested that you begin by reviewing this section. Although portions of these definitions are repeated throughout the guide, familiarizing yourself with these terms before you begin will help you move through the explanations and exercises more easily.

The seven parts of speech tested on the SAT are as follows:

## 1. Verb

Verbs indicate **actions** or **states of being**.

**Examples:** To be  
To have  
To seem  
To go  
To speak  
To believe

The “to” form of a verb is known as the **infinitive**. All of the verbs listed above are infinitives. If you are uncertain whether a word can be used as a verb, try placing *to* in front of it to form an infinitive.

Verbs are not always used as infinitives, however. In order to indicate who is performing an action, we must **conjugate** the verb and provide its **subject**.

*To be* and *to have* are the most common verbs. Because they are **irregular**, their conjugated forms are different from their infinitives; you must therefore be comfortable distinguishing between their singular and plural forms. *To be* is also unique in that it is conjugated in both the present and past.

Conjugation of the verb *to be*:

<u>Singular (pres.)</u>	<u>Plural (pres.)</u>	<u>Singular (past)</u>	<u>Plural (past)</u>
I am	We are	I was	We were
You are	You are	You were	You were
He, she, it, one is	They are	We were	They were

Conjugation of the verb *to have*:

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I have	We have
You have	You (pl.) have
He, She, It, One has	They have

The **number** of a verb indicates whether is singular or plural. **Singular** verbs end in *-s*. **Plural** verbs do not end in *-s*.

I, you, he, she, it, one speaks = Singular

We, you, they speak = Plural

The **tense** of a verb tells us when an action occurred.

She speaks = Present

She would speak = Conditional

She has spoken = Present Perfect

She would have spoken = Past Conditional

She spoke = Simple Past

She will speak = Future

She had spoken = Past Perfect

She will have spoken = Future Perfect

## 2. Noun

Nouns indicate people, places, objects, and ideas, and can always be preceded by *a(n)* or *the*.

**Proper nouns** indicate specific people and places.

**Examples:** house, bicycle, supervisor, idea, Julia Child, Chicago

The **girl** rode her **bicycle** down the **street** to her **house**.

In the **theater**, the **dancer** moved across the **stage** with her **arms** held above her **head**.

## 3. Pronoun

Pronouns replace nouns.

**Examples:** she, you, one, we, him, it(s), their, this, that, these, those, which, both, some, few, many, (n)either

Samantha loves basketball. **She** plays **it** every day after school.

Marco walks to school with Sherri and Ann. **He** meets **them** at the corner.

**Personal Pronouns** are often referred to in the following manner:

1st Person Singular = I

1st Person Plural = We

2nd Person Singular = You

2nd Person Plural = You

3rd Person Singular = He, She, It, One

3rd Person Plural = They

#### 4. Preposition

Prepositions indicate where someone/something is, or when something happened.

**Example:** The dog ran **under** the fence and jumped **into** the neighboring yard **in** only a matter of seconds.

Common prepositions include:

Of	To	Within/out	Over	Beside	Next to	Against
From	At	Between	Above	About	Toward(s)	Upon
In	For	Under	Along	Among	Before	Around
On	By	Beneath	Beyond	Near	After	Outside
Off	With	Below	Behind	Across	During	Through(out)

#### 5. Adjective

Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns.

**Examples:** large, pretty, interesting, solid, wide, exceptional, smart, dull, caring, simple

The class was so **boring** that I thought I would fall asleep.

The **stunning** view left him at a loss for words.

#### 6. Adverb

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. They frequently end in *-ly*.

**Examples:** rapidly, calmly, mildly, boldly, sharply, well, fast, very

She smiled **brightly** at him when he entered the room.

He received an **exceedingly** good grade on the test.

#### 7. Conjunction

Conjunctions indicate relationships between words, phrases, and clauses.

**Examples:** and, but, however, therefore, so, although, yet, when, because, since

Alice went to the dentist, **but** first she went to the candy store.

**Because** it rained yesterday, the ceremony was held indoors.

## Preliminary Exercise: Identifying Parts of Speech (answers p. 224)

**Directions: identify and write the part of speech (e.g. noun, verb, adverb) for each underlined word.**

Although igloos are usually associated with 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
Alaskan Eskimos (Inuits), they have mostly been  
<sup>1</sup>  
constructed by people who lived in the central  
Arctic and Greenland's Thule region. Other Inuit  
peoples tended to use snow to insulate their 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>2</sup>  
houses, which were constructed from whalebone 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>3</sup>  
and hides.

Traditionally, three types of igloos were 4. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>4</sup>  
constructed. Small igloos were constructed as  
temporary shelters and used only for one or two 5. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>5</sup>  
nights. These were built and used during hunting 6. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>6</sup>  
trips, often on open sea ice. Medium-sized igloos  
were usually single-room family dwellings that 7. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>7</sup>  
housed one or two families. Often, several of these  
igloos were located in a small area, forming an Inuit 8. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>8</sup>  
village. The largest igloos were normally built in  
pairs: one of the buildings was a temporary 9. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>9</sup>  
structure for community feasts and dances, while  
the other was intended for living. These igloos 10. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>10</sup>  
could be constructed from several smaller igloos  
attached by tunnels. 11. \_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>11</sup>

Today, igloos are used mostly for brief camping  
trips; however, the principles behind their

12. \_\_\_\_\_

construction remain the same. The snow used to  
build an igloo must have enough strength to be cut  
and stacked correctly. The best snow to use for this

13. \_\_\_\_\_

purpose is snow blown by wind because it  
contains interlocking ice crystals, which increase

14. \_\_\_\_\_

15. \_\_\_\_\_

the amount of weight the ice can support.

16. \_\_\_\_\_

Because of snow's excellent insulation  
properties, inhabited igloos are surprisingly  
comfortable and warm inside. Sometimes, a short  
tunnel is constructed at the entrance to reduce  
heat loss when the door is opened. Animal skins  
can also be used as door flaps to keep warm air in.

17. \_\_\_\_\_

18. \_\_\_\_\_

19. \_\_\_\_\_

Architecturally, the igloo is unique because it  
is a dome that can be constructed without an

20. \_\_\_\_\_

additional supporting structure. Independent  
blocks of ice lean on one another and are polished

21. \_\_\_\_\_

to fit. In the traditional Inuit igloo, the heat from  
the *kudlik*, or stone lamp, causes the interior to

22. \_\_\_\_\_

23. \_\_\_\_\_

melt slightly, creating a layer of ice that

contributes to the igloo's strength. In fact, a  
correctly-built igloo will support the weight of a

24. \_\_\_\_\_

person standing on the roof.

25. \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapters 1-2 are based on the following passage

### Maria Tallchief: All-American Ballerina

– 1 –

“A ballerina takes steps given to her and makes them her own. Each individual brings something different to the same role,” the great ballerina Maria Tallchief once said. Tallchief combined great individualism and extraordinary talent, creating a remarkable and vital chapter in American dance.

– 2 –

Maria Tallchief was born Elizabeth Marie Tall Chief on an Indian reservation in Fairfax, Oklahoma on January 24, 1925. A member of the Osage tribe, she became a trailblazer for Native Americans in the world of ballet. The Osage language is similar to the language spoken by members of the Sioux tribe. When Maria was five years old, she began music lessons and soon discovered that she had perfect pitch. It was dance that captured the young girl’s heart, though. After five years of study, she joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, where she quickly became a soloist. It was during her time with the Ballet Russe that she became known professionally as Maria Tallchief, combining the two parts of her Indian name.

– 3 –

[1] Balanchine then brought Tallchief home to his Ballet Society, the company that would become New York City Ballet. [2] Her immense popularity with the American public grew in part from the demands the company made on its phenomenally gifted principal dancer. [3] Tallchief was called upon to dance as many as eight performances a week.

[4] In fact, many audience members did not realize how technically difficult the part was until much later, when they saw other great ballerinas attempt to perform it.

[5] Audiences were awed by her dedication to her art.

[6] When she danced the lead role in *Pas de Dix* (1955), for example, she dazzled audiences with her radiance and impeccable technique.

– 4 –

In the 1950s, Tallchief became one of the first ballet dancers to make regular appearances on television. They first worked together in Paris in 1947 – the same year Tallchief became the first prima ballerina of the New York City Ballet – and Tallchief learned to keep her back straight, her head high, and her feet arched. These included *Orpheus*, *Night Shadow*, and *The Four Temperaments*. In 1954, Balanchine choreographed Tallchief in what would become her most famous role: the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*. Although it was an obscure ballet at the time, Tallchief’s extraordinary performance helped make it an instant classic.

– 5 –

In 1965, Maria Tallchief surprised the world by announcing her retirement. She had no intention of dancing past her prime and wanted to pass her love for her art to younger dancers. She was a revolutionary performer who broke many barriers for Native American women.



# 1. Is it Relevant?

## Adding, Deleting, & Revising Information

In keeping with the redesigned SAT's focus on supporting evidence, questions that ask you to add, delete, or revise information will make up the largest component of the Writing test. You can expect around 12 add/delete/replace questions per test, or three per passage. These can be phrased in a variety of ways, but **they all test essentially the same thing**: whether information is **relevant** or **irrelevant** to the topic of a paragraph or passage, or whether it is consistent with a particular emphasis indicated in the question.

Most questions will require that you consider the context of the surrounding sentences and/or paragraphs. These questions can be broken into the following steps:

- 1) Reread the paragraph
- 2) Briefly restate the topic in your own words
- 3) Check each answer choice against that topic

**When a question asks you to take the entire passage into account, you should not spend time rereading the entire passage.** Instead, focus on couple of key places: the beginning of the passage, where the main idea or theme is most likely to be presented, and the surrounding sentences (usually the preceding sentence), among which the sentence in question must fit logically.

It is important that you go through these steps on your own before you look at the answer choices. Otherwise, you are more likely to be distracted by plausible-sounding choices that don't actually answer the question.

To be clear, you do not need to answer the questions in great detail. You should simply take a few moments to get a general idea of the paragraph's focus and determine what sort of information the correct answer should contain. If you keep those things in mind, you'll generally get to the answer pretty quickly. If you don't, however, then relatively straightforward questions can become unnecessarily confusing and time-consuming.

Some insert/delete/change questions will ask you to identify the information that best **begins** or **concludes** a given paragraph. Although these questions ask about different parts of the paragraph, they are both essentially testing whether you understand the topic and main idea of the paragraph or passage, and they should be approached the same way.

The general purpose of both the topic sentence and the concluding sentence is to present or reinforce the main idea of the paragraph/passage. The fact that one is at the beginning while the other is at the end is incidental; **the information in the middle is what you actually need to focus on.**

Remember also that topic sentences and concluding sentences tend to contain main ideas; as a result, **answers that include specific details are less likely to be correct.**

Let's start by looking at a "topic sentence" question, using the fourth paragraph from the passage on p. 14.

**1** In the 1950s, Tallchief became one of the first ballet dancers to make regular appearances on television. They first worked together in Paris in 1947 – the same year Tallchief became the first prima ballerina of the New York City Ballet. Eventually, Tallchief inspired a number of Balanchine's ballets. These included *Orpheus*, *Night Shadow*, and *The Four Temperaments*. In 1954, Balanchine choreographed Tallchief in what would become her most famous role: the Sugar Plum fairy in *The Nutcracker*. Although it was an obscure ballet at the time, Tallchief's extraordinary performance helped make it an instant classic.

- 1**
- Which choice provides the most effective introduction to the paragraph?
- A) NO CHANGE
  - B) Throughout her career, Maria Tallchief was known for her collaborations with choreographer George Balanchine.
  - C) The people of Oklahoma honored Tallchief with statues and a day in her honor.
  - D) The New York City Ballet was founded by George Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein in 1946.

Although this question asks about the introduction – i.e. the topic sentence – you cannot answer it until you know what the rest of the paragraph is about. **That means you need to read the rest of the paragraph, or at least the next few sentences.** You can even cross out the first sentence (in pencil) if it is likely to distract you.

If we had to sum up the paragraph, minus the first sentence, we might say something like "Maria Tallchief worked with George Balanchine," or even just "Maria Tallchief and George Balanchine." B) is the only answer that mentions both Tallchief and Balanchine, and it's almost exactly what our summary says. So it's correct.

Now we're going to look at a "conclusion" question:

In 1965, Maria Tallchief surprised the world by announcing her retirement. She had no intention of dancing past her prime and wanted to pass her love for her art to younger dancers. **1** Throughout her life, she broke many barriers for Native American women.

- 1**
- The writer wants a concluding sentence that restates the main idea of the passage. Which choice best accomplishes this goal?
- A) NO CHANGE
  - B) She eventually became the artistic director of the Chicago City Ballet.
  - C) Her remarkable grace and stunning technique continue to inspire dancers around the world.
  - D) Some people have criticized her dancing for being too athletic and modern.

When a lot of people encounter a question like this, they aren't quite sure what to do. Because they've been focusing on the details as they read, they don't have a particularly strong sense of the passage as a whole, and they don't particularly want to go back and read the whole thing. At that point, they usually guess. Needless to say (I hope!), that's usually not a very good idea.

The bad news is that if you're not totally sure what the passage was about, you do have to go back and do some rereading. The good news, however, is that you won't usually have to reread very much – often only a few sentences.

To reiterate: **“Big picture” information will virtually always be presented right at the beginning of the passage.** Because passages are so short, main ideas tend to come first by necessity; there isn't room to take time getting to the point. **Rereading the title can also help focus you. After all, its purpose is to tell you what the passage is going to be about.**

For “conclusion” questions, you can also **focus on the sentence right before the last sentence.** Even though these questions ask you to think about the big picture, the concluding sentence must still follow logically from the sentence before it. Any answer that is unrelated to the information in that sentence must be incorrect.

In this particular case, you don't get a whole lot of information from the title. *Maria Tallchief: All-American Ballerina* just doesn't provide that much to go on. If you skim through the first paragraph, however, you get everything you need: *Tallchief combined great individualism and extraordinary talent, creating a remarkable and vital chapter in American dance.* That's the main idea right there.

Based on that information, you can eliminate D) immediately. The main idea is very positive, so the conclusion should be positive as well. The word *criticized* indicates that D) is negative.

You can also be suspicious of B) because it mentions a specific event, and concluding sentences are usually much more general.

Be careful with A). The second paragraph does mention that Tallchief was Native American, but there's nothing about that in either the title or the introduction, suggesting it's actually not the main focus of the passage. If you skim through the rest of the passage, you'll also see that it isn't mentioned anywhere else; and by definition, **an idea that only shows up in one part of the passage can't be a main idea.**

So that leaves C), which is positive, a broad statement, and consistent with the main idea.

Other “main idea” questions will be presented in a less direct manner. In fact, they may involve sentences that appear in the middle of a paragraph. In such cases, you will be asked to identify the answer that correctly “sets up” or “transitions” to the information/examples that follow. Although these questions may not include the phrase “main idea,” they are in fact asking you to identify the general claim or idea that the information afterward would support.

For example:

In the 1950s, Tallchief became one of the first ballet dancers to make regular appearances on television. They first worked together in Paris in 1947 – the same year Tallchief became the first prima ballerina of the New York City Ballet – and Tallchief **1** learned to keep her back straight, her head high, and her feet arched. These included *Orpheus*, *Night Shadow*, and *The Four Temperaments*. In 1954, Balanchine choreographed Tallchief in what would become her most famous role: the Sugar Plum fairy in *The Nutcracker*. Although it was an obscure ballet at the time, Tallchief’s extraordinary performance helped make it an instant classic.

**1** Which choice provides the best transition to the information that follows?

OR:

Which choice most effectively sets up the examples that follows?

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) became well known outside the United States.
- C) eventually inspired a number of Balanchine’s ballets.
- D) grew very fond of Balanchine.

Don’t be fooled if a question asks about a “transition,” which implies a relationship to the information that comes before and after. Unless you are specifically directed to look at the information before, these questions are really asking which choice is most relevant to the information that **follows**. It doesn’t matter whether an option makes sense on its own, or even in context of what comes before. **What counts is what comes after.**

What comes after here? A list of ballets. So we’re looking for something that’s going to set up that list – presumably it’s a list of ballets that Maria Tallchief danced in.

The original version doesn’t make sense. There’s no relationship between Tallchief improving her technical skills and the list of ballets. B) and D) don’t fit either: Tallchief’s reputation outside the United States and her relationship with Balanchine have nothing to do with a list of ballets either.

The only answer that makes sense is C): logically, the list that follows is the list of ballets that Tallchief inspired.

“Topic sentence” and “conclusion” questions test your ability to determine main points from supporting ideas and pieces of evidence; **“supporting evidence” questions** do the opposite – that is, they test your ability to determine what type of information or examples support a larger idea.

Let’s look at how some “support” questions might be phrased:

[1] Balanchine then brought Tallchief home to his Ballet Society, the company that would become New York City Ballet. [2] Her immense popularity with the American public grew in part from the intense demands the company made on its phenomenally gifted principal dancer. [3] Tallchief was called upon to dance as many as eight performances a week and **1** learned roles in more than 30 different ballets. [5] Balanchine made use of her artistry to great effect. In fact, audience members did not realize how challenging the part was until much later, when they saw other great ballerinas attempt to perform it. [6] When she danced the lead role in *Pas de Dix* (1955), for example, she dazzled audiences with her radiance and impeccable technique.

**1**

Which choice gives a second supporting example that is most similar to the example already in the sentence?

OR:

Which choice provides the most relevant detail?

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) remained with the company until 1956.
- C) became known for her exceptional musicality.
- D) earned worldwide recognition.

The first version of the question gives us more information, but it does not tell us everything. While it directs us to the first example, it does not tell us to read the *previous* sentence – which is where the point is located. It is possible to answer the question without that information, but it is a lot easier to answer the question with it.

The second question is phrased even more vaguely, but it requires us to do exactly the same thing: back up to the previous sentence and determine the point. We can’t determine which answer is relevant to the point without knowing what the point is.

What is the point that we must support? The Ballet Society made intense demands on Tallchief.

- A) **learned roles in more than 30 different ballets** – That’s a pretty good example supporting the idea of intense demands. 30 ballets is a whole lot. So we’re going to keep it.
- B) **remained with the company until 1956** – No, this has nothing to do with intense demands.
- C) **became known for her exceptional musicality** – Again, completely off topic.
- D) **earned worldwide recognition** – This is consistent with the passage but not the sentence. So no.

That leaves us with A), which is the answer.

Let's look at another example:

Maria Tallchief was born Elizabeth Marie Tall Chief on an Indian reservation in Fairfax, Oklahoma on January 24, 1925. A member of the Osage tribe, she became a trailblazer for Native Americans in the world of ballet. **1** The Osage language is similar to the language spoken by members of the Sioux tribe. When Maria was five years old, she began music lessons and soon discovered that she had perfect pitch. It was dance that captured the young girl's heart, though. After five years of study, she joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, where she quickly became a soloist. It was during her time with the Ballet Russe that she became known professionally as Maria Tallchief, combining the two parts of her Indian name.

1

The writer is considering deleting the underlined sentence. Should it be kept or deleted?

- A) Kept, because it provides additional background information about Maria Tallchief's heritage.
- B) Kept, because it explains why Maria Tallchief developed an early interest in music.
- C) Deleted, because it does not provide specific examples of other Native American dancers.
- D) Deleted, because it detracts from the paragraph's focus on Maria Tallchief's early life and career.

Although the question only asks directly about one sentence, it's really asking us to look at the entire paragraph. The sentence itself is only important insofar as it is relevant – or not – to the surrounding information.

Because we have two “keep” options and two “delete” options, we're going to tackle the question in two steps.

- 1) Determine **whether** the sentence should be kept.
- 2) Determine **why** the sentence should or should not be kept.

The first thing we're going to do is therefore to forget the underlined sentence (preferably crossing it out – lightly, and in pencil, so that the line can be erased if necessary) and look only at the rest of the paragraph.

If we had to sum up the topic of the paragraph in a few words, we might say something like “Maria Tallchief's childhood,” or “how Maria Tallchief started dancing.” Even if you said something slightly different, chances are it would have something to do with Maria Tallchief.

Let's come back to the sentence:

**The Osage language is similar to the language spoken by members of the Sioux tribe.**

Is this sentence about Maria Tallchief? No, it's about the Osage *language*. It has nothing to do with Maria Tallchief. So it doesn't belong. We can eliminate A) and B) right there.

Now for the “why:” simply put, it’s off-topic. The fact that the Osage language is related to the Sioux language has nothing to do with the rest of the paragraph. C) makes no sense: the passage indicates that Tallchief was a “trailblazer,” implying that she was the first Native American ballet dancer to become highly accomplished. There is thus no reason to provide other examples of Native American dancers.

D) fits perfectly – *detracts from the paragraph’s focus* is simply a fancy way of saying that the sentence is off-topic. So that is the answer.

The question could also be asked this way:

Maria Tallchief was born Elizabeth Marie Tall Chief on an Indian reservation in Fairfax, Oklahoma on January 24, 1925. A member of the Osage tribe, she became a trailblazer for Native Americans in the world of ballet. **1** When Maria was five years old, she began music lessons and soon discovered that she had perfect pitch. It was dance that captured the young girl’s heart, though. After five years of study, she joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, where she quickly became a soloist. It was during her time with the Ballet Russe that she became known professionally as Maria Tallchief, combining the two parts of her Indian name.

**1**

At this point, the writer is considering adding the following sentence.

The Osage language is similar to the language spoken by members of the Sioux tribe.

Should the writer make this addition here?

- A) Yes, because it provides additional background information about Maria Tallchief’s heritage.
- B) Yes, because it explains why Maria Tallchief developed an early interest in music.
- C) No, because it does not provide specific examples of other Native American dancers.
- D) No, because it detracts from the paragraph’s focus on Maria Tallchief’s early life and career.

Even though the question is phrased differently, the same logic still applies: the sentence in question is off-topic and should not be added, again making D) the correct answer.

## Specific Emphasis or Example

Sometimes, a question might also ask you to insert or change information to make it consistent with a particular emphasis or example. These questions can be tricky because the information in the passage will often both sound correct and make sense in context. If you don't pay close attention to the wording of the questions, you can easily assume that things are fine when they're actually not.

**Important:** with the exception of the **NO CHANGE** option, you should focus on the answer choices and their “fit” with the emphasis indicated in the question, not on the contextual information in the passage.

The process for answering these questions can be broken into two steps:

- 1) Underline the key word(s) or phrase – the information indicating what the writer wants to convey.
- 2) Check each answer against the key information and see whether it matches.

Let's look at an example:

[1] Balanchine then brought Tallchief home to his Ballet Society, the company that would become New York City Ballet. [2] Her immense popularity with the American public grew in part from the intense demands the company made on its phenomenally gifted principal dancer. [3] Tallchief was called upon to dance as many as eight performances a week and learned roles in more than 30 different ballets. [4] Balanchine made use of her artistry to great effect. [5] In fact, audience members did not realize how challenging the part was until much later, when they saw other great ballerinas attempt to perform it. [6] In *Pas de Dix* (1955), for example, she danced the lead role with radiance and **1** impeccable technique.

1

The writer wants to complete the sentence with information **conveying the sense of effortlessness** that characterized Maria Tallchief's dancing in *Pas de Dix*.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) many unique qualities.
- C) great delicacy.
- D) apparent ease.

What follows the word *conveying* in the question? *the sense of effortlessness*. So that's our key phrase. The correct answer must have something to do with **effortlessness**.

Now we're going to check each answer to see if it corresponds to that idea, remembering to start with the version already in the passage.



- A) **impeccable technique** – Even if you don't know what *impeccable* means, you can still make an educated guess that it means something like “really great.” We're looking for *effortless*, however, and someone can have great technique and still be clearly working very hard. So A) is out.
- B) **many unique qualities** – No, this is vague and off-topic. It has nothing to do with effortlessness.
- C) **great delicacy** – No, delicacy isn't effortlessness.
- D) **apparent ease** – Yes, ease is like *easy*; it means *effortless*. So D) is correct.