

# The Ultimate Guide to SAT<sup>®</sup> Grammar

Fourth Edition

Erica L. Meltzer

▲ THE CRITICAL READER

New York



Copyright © 2011-2017 Erica Meltzer

Cover © 2017 Tugboat Design

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author.  
For information, please send correspondence to [thecriticalreader1@gmail.com](mailto:thecriticalreader1@gmail.com).

SAT® is a trademark registered by the College Board, which is not affiliated with, and does not endorse, this publication.

ISBN- 13: 978-0-9975178-6-6

ISBN-10: 0997517867



## 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.



# Table of Contents

.....

Introduction: How to Use This Book	7
SAT Writing Cheat Sheet	8
Parts of Speech	9
Preliminary Exercise	12
1. Is it Relevant? Adding, Deleting, and Revising	16
2. Sentence and Paragraph Order	31
3. Infographics	40
4. Shorter is Better	53
5. Diction, Idioms, and Register	61
6. Sentences and Fragments	71
7. Combining and Separating Sentences: Periods, Semicolons, Commas, and Conjunctions	85
8. Transitions	95
9. Non-Essential and Essential Clauses	113
10. Additional Comma Uses and Misuses	134
11. Colons and Dashes	139
12. Question Marks: Direct vs. Indirect Speech	143
13. Apostrophes: Plural vs. Possessive	144
14. Pronoun and Noun Agreement	153
Cumulative Review: All Punctuation and Transitions	163

15. Verbs: Agreement and Tense	170
16. Word Pairs and Comparisons	193
17. Parallel Structure	200
18. Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers	210
19. Relative Pronouns: Who(m), Which, That, Where & When	218
Practice Test	227
Answer Key	240
Appendix A: Official Guide Questions by Category	253
Appendix B: Official Guide Questions by Test	258
About the Author	263



## Introduction: How to Use This Book

This purpose of this book is to prepare you for the full range of grammar and rhetoric (style) concepts covered on the redesigned SAT®. More specifically, it is to teach you to apply those concepts to the specific ways in which they are tested on the exam. Instead of providing explanations and examples for a single version of a rule and leaving you to deduce its subtler or more complex applications, this book walks you through multiple iterations of each concept, showing you how it can be tested from various angles and in combination with other concepts.

At the same time, however, this book is intended to teach you to simplify – that is, to quickly identify just what each question type is testing so that you do not become distracted by irrelevant details, and to reduce seemingly complicated questions down to their essential terms. Concepts guaranteed to be tested on every exam are presented first, while less frequently tested ones are presented later. In addition, concepts that could plausibly be tested but that have not (yet) appeared on a released exam are noted as such in the text.

In order to make your transition to the actual test as smooth as possible, this book is intended to complement the eight official College Board Guide/Khan Academy practice exams (<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat/full-length-sat-1/paper-sat-tests/a/full-length-sats-to-take-on-paper>).

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. 258. Note the category of each error. Then, read the explanations in the appropriate chapter, and do the corresponding exercises. If you want to look at some authentic examples as well, you can use the list of questions by category on p. 253 to find specific Official Guide/Khan Academy questions that test particular error types. 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.

If you do not plan to sit for your first exam for a while, however, I strongly encourage you to work through this book in order. While that approach will obviously require more time, 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 in an unfamiliar way.

While the College Board is still in the process of making adjustments to the redesigned exam, the Writing and Language Test is likely to remain one of its more predictable components. It is of course possible that the particular exam you take will contain a “wild card” question or two, but in general, the vast majority of the material tested can be safely anticipated. The goal of this book is to teach you how to anticipate it.

-Erica Meltzer

## SAT Writing Cheat Sheet

1. Shorter is better (grammar questions only).
2. Comma + *it, this, he, she, they* usually (but not always) = comma splice = WRONG.
3. Period = semicolon = comma + and/but.
4. 2 commas/2 dashes/2 parentheses = non-essential clause. If the information between these punctuation marks 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. Being = WRONG.
10. Affect = verb, effect = noun; than = comparison, then = next.
11. Singular verbs end in -s; plural verbs do not end in -s (e.g. *she reads, they read*).
12. Keep verb tense/form consistent. An underlined verb should stay parallel to the surrounding verbs unless there is a clear reason for the tense to change. Check verbs in the sentence/paragraph for context.
13. Add/Delete/Revise: 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.
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** checking the answers. Eliminate answers that are synonyms for one another as well as answers from the wrong transition category.
15. Infographics: Take a moment and determine the "point" of the graphic before you start to answer the question. You can sometimes eliminate answers based on a big-picture understanding.

### And two general points:

**First, make sure you actually read the passage.** You don't need to read closely, but you shouldn't just skip from question to question. Otherwise, you're likely to miss information you need to answer questions.

**Second, before you choose an answer, plug it back into the passage to make sure that it fits.** An answer that makes perfect grammatical sense on its own may create an error in the context of the passage.

## Parts of Speech

There are eight parts of speech in the English language, seven of which are directly relevant to the SAT. If you are not comfortable identifying them, you should 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. 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 English verbs; as a result, they are tested frequently on the SAT. Because they are **irregular**, their conjugated forms are different from their infinitives. *To be* is also unique in that it is conjugated in both the present and past. To answer many verb questions accurately, you must be able to recognize and distinguish between these verbs’ singular and plural forms.

Conjugation of *to be*, **present**:

Singular	Plural
I am	We are
You are	You (pl.) are
It, s/he, one is	They are

Conjugation of *to be*, **past**:

Singular	Plural
I was	We were
You were	You (pl.) were
It, s/he, one was	They were

Conjugation of *to have*, **present and past**:

Singular	Plural
I have	We have
You have	You (pl.) have
It, s/he, 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 indicates when an action occurred.

It is = Present	It would be = Conditional
It has been = Present perfect	It would have been = Past conditional
It was = Simple past	It will be = Future
It had been = Past perfect	It will have been = Future perfect

## 2. Noun

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

Note that in addition to physical objects, nouns can refer to ideas/concepts and things that cannot be touched. These nouns, known as **abstract nouns**, frequently end in *-ment*, *-tion*, and *-tude*.

**Examples:** bicycle, supervisor, Julia Child, Chicago, notion, development, latitude

- 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

- 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:

Singular	Plural
1 <sup>st</sup> person = I	1 <sup>st</sup> person = We
2 <sup>nd</sup> person = You	2 <sup>nd</sup> person = You
3 <sup>rd</sup> person = S/he, It, One	3 <sup>rd</sup> person = They

## 4. Preposition

Prepositions are **time** and **location** words. They indicate where things/people are, where they're going, and when events happened. They are always followed by nouns.

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

About	Among	Beside	In	Opposite
Above	Around	Between	Inside	Outside
Across	Before	By	Near	Toward
After	Behind	During	Next to	Under
Against	Below	For	Off	With
Along	Beneath	From	On	Without

## 5. 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** later she went to the candy store.
- **Because** it rained yesterday, the ceremony was held indoors.

## 6. Adverb

Adverbs modify verbs, phrases, and other adverbs. Many common adverbs end in *-ly* (e.g. *slowly*, *loudly*, *strongly*), but the SAT is primarily concerned with **conjunctive adverbs**: adverbs that serve as transitional words.

Although many of these words have the same meaning as conjunctions, they can only be used at the beginning of a sentence or clause.

**Examples:** however, therefore, thus, hence, moreover, indeed, furthermore, subsequently

- Alice went to the dentist. **However**, she later went to the candy store.
- It rained yesterday; **therefore**, the ceremony was held indoors.

## 7. Adjective

Adjectives modify (pro)nouns and other adjectives.

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

- The **big brown** dog growled menacingly as we approached.

## Preliminary Exercise: Identifying Parts of Speech (answers p. 240)

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

Although igloos are usually associated with

Alaskan Eskimos (Inuits), **1** they have mostly been constructed by people who lived in the central Arctic and Greenland's Thule region. Other Inuit Peoples **2** tended to use snow to insulate their houses, which were constructed **3** from whalebone and hides.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

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

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_

Today, igloos are used mostly for brief camping trips; **12** however, the principles behind their construction **13** 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 **14** purpose is snow blown by wind because **15** it contains interlocking ice crystals, which increase the amount **16** of weight the ice can support.

Because of snow's excellent **17** insulation properties, inhabited igloos are surprisingly comfortable and warm inside. Sometimes, a short tunnel is constructed at the entrance **18** to reduce heat loss when the door **19** is opened. Animal skins can also be used as door flaps to keep warm air in.

Architecturally, the igloo is unique **20** because it is a dome that can be constructed without an **21** additional supporting structure. Independent blocks of ice lean on one another and are polished to fit. **22** In the traditional Inuit igloo, the **23** heat from the *kudlik*, or stone lamp, causes the interior to melt slightly, creating a layer of ice that **24** contributes to the igloo's strength. In fact, a correctly-built igloo will support the weight of a person standing **25** on the roof.

- 12. \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. \_\_\_\_\_
- 16. \_\_\_\_\_
- 17. \_\_\_\_\_
- 18. \_\_\_\_\_
- 19. \_\_\_\_\_
- 20. \_\_\_\_\_
- 21. \_\_\_\_\_
- 22. \_\_\_\_\_
- 23. \_\_\_\_\_
- 24. \_\_\_\_\_
- 25. \_\_\_\_\_





## Honey: A Natural Superfood

– 1 –

While excavating ancient Egyptian tombs, modern archaeologists have often found something unexpected among the artifacts: pots of honey. Although these pots are thousands of years old, the honey remains as sweet and edible as it was during the time of the Pharaohs. There are a few other foods, such as uncooked rice, that keep indefinitely. Honey, though, is unique: no one would consume raw rice or plain salt, but a thousand year-old jar of honey could be eaten without preparation. Honey can also be used in a variety of salad dressings, glazes, and spreads. Moreover, honey's longevity provides medicinal properties not found in other long-lasting foods.

– 2 –

One reason that honey does not spoil involves the chemical make-up of the substance itself. Honey is extremely acidic, with a pH that falls between 3 and 4.5, depending on its floral source. As a result, invading microorganisms are unable to grow. Honey also contains very little water in its natural state, preventing bacteria from flourishing.

– 3 –

[1] Finally, bees play a key role in honey's durability.  
[2] Nectar, the first material collected by bees to make honey, is made up primarily of water – anywhere from 60 to 80%.  
[3] In addition to this behavior, the chemical makeup of a bee's stomach plays a large part in honey's resilience.  
[4] During the honey-making process, however, the bees

remove much of this moisture by flapping their wings. [5] When the bees regurgitate the nectar from their mouths into combs to make honey, an enzyme called glucose oxidase mixes with the nectar. [6] The result is hydrogen peroxide, which is thought to promote healing.

– 4 –

A jar of honey's seal, it turns out, is another factor in creating a long shelf life. While honey is undoubtedly a super-food, it's still subject to the laws of nature – if left unsealed in a damp environment, it will go bad. Jars must therefore be sealed airtight or vacuum-packed in order to eliminate any possibility of contamination.

– 5 –

The earliest recorded use comes from Sumerian clay tablets, which indicate that honey was used in more than a quarter of all prescriptions. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians also used honey regularly in ointments for skin and eye diseases. Locally produced honey can be an effective treatment for seasonal allergies. The medical device company Derma Sciences sells MediHoney, bandages covered in honey, to hospitals in over 25 countries. In fact, honey has been shown to prevent the growth of food-borne pathogens such as E. coli.

# 1

## Is it Relevant? Adding, Deleting & Revising

.....

In keeping with the redesigned SAT’s focus on supporting evidence, questions that ask you to add, delete, or revise information make up the largest component of the Writing and Language Test. You can expect around 12 of these questions per exam, or three per passage. Add/Delete/Revise questions can be phrased in a variety of ways, but **they all test essentially the same thing**: whether information is **relevant** or **irrelevant** to the main topic of a paragraph or passage.

Most questions will therefore require that you consider the context of the surrounding sentences and/or paragraphs. The process for answering them can be divided into the following three 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 do not need to spend time rereading the entire passage.** Instead, focus on a 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 answers. 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 provide detailed answers. Just 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 Add/Delete/Revise 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 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 fifth paragraph from our passage.

**1** The earliest recorded use comes from Sumerian clay tablets, which indicate that honey was used in more than a quarter of all prescriptions. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians also used honey regularly in ointments for skin and eye diseases. Locally produced honey can be an effective treatment for seasonal allergies. The medical device company Derma Sciences sells MediHoney, bandages covered in honey, to hospitals in over 25 countries. In fact, honey has been shown to prevent the growth of food-borne pathogens such as E. coli.

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.** (If there is a NO CHANGE option, you can even cross out the first sentence – lightly and in pencil – if you think it will distract you.)

If we had to sum up the paragraph above, we might say something like "medical uses of honey," or "honey = medicine." B) is the only answer that mentions that idea, and it's almost exactly what our summary says. So it's correct.

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

The earliest recorded use comes from Sumerian clay tablets, which indicate that honey was used in more than a quarter of all prescriptions. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians also used honey regularly in ointments for skin and eye diseases. Locally produced honey can be an effective treatment for seasonal allergies. The medical device company Derma Sciences sells MediHoney, bandages covered in honey, to hospitals in over 25 countries. **1** In fact, honey has been shown to prevent the growth of food-borne pathogens such as E. coli.

**1**

Which of the following provides the best introduction to the paragraph?

- A) The carbohydrates in honey can easily be converted to energy because the body quickly digests this natural substance.
- B) As a result of this quality, along with a thickness that prevents wounds from becoming infected, honey has been used for medicinal purposes for centuries.
- C) In contrast to other sweeteners such as sugar, honey contains a number of vitamins and minerals.
- D) Some studies have found that honey can also raise blood sugar levels, but more slowly and by smaller amounts than other sweeteners do.

**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) People with insulin sensitivity should use caution when consuming honey because it causes blood sugar to rise.
- C) Whether its applications are confirmed by science or passed down through tradition, honey is as useful as it is delicious.
- D) However, honey should not be given to infants younger than 12 months old because it can contain dangerous botulism spores.

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 really 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 have to go back and do some rereading. The good news, though, is that you won't usually have to reread very much – usually only a few key sentences.

**To reiterate: “Big picture” information will virtually always be presented 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 last paragraph, particularly the second-to-last sentence.** Even though these questions ask 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, the title *Honey: A Natural Superfood* gives you a pretty good idea of what the passage is about. It also tells you that the passage will be extremely positive towards honey. As a result, you can assume that the answer to any question asking about the passage as a whole will be positive as well. And if you skim through the first paragraph, you get even more information: *Moreover, honey's longevity gives it medicinal properties not found in other long-lasting foods.* The last paragraph reiterates that idea.

Based on that information, you can eliminate B) immediately. The main idea is very positive, so the conclusion should be positive as well. The word *caution* indicates that B) is negative. It does not matter whether you know anything about insulin sensitivity – don't get caught up in the details.

D) is slightly negative as well. It's also completely off-topic.

Be careful with A). The fact that honey can *prevent the growth of food-borne pathogens* may seem consistent with the paragraph's focus on honey's medical uses, as well as with the preceding statement that *certain types of honey contain anti-inflammatory properties.*

The problem, however, is that the question asks you to identify the answer that restates a *main* idea of the passage. As a rule, concluding sentences that reflect main themes are pretty general, but A) provides a specific example (*E. coli*). If you skim through the rest of the passage, you'll also see that *E. coli* 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 “sets up” or “transitions” to the information/examples that follow. Although these questions may not include the phrase *main idea*, the correct answer must be consistent with the primary idea or claim conveyed by the information that comes after.

For example:

The carbohydrates in honey can easily be converted to energy because the body easily digests this natural substance. The earliest recorded use comes from Sumerian clay tablets, which indicate that honey was used in numerous remedies. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians also used medicinal honey regularly in ointments for skin and eye diseases. **1** Raw, locally produced honey can be an effective treatment for seasonal allergies. The medical device company Derma Sciences sells MediHoney, bandages covered in honey, to hospitals in over 25 countries.

1

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

OR:

Which choice most effectively sets up the example that follows?

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) When honey is over-processed, however, it loses its curative properties.
- C) Today, honey-based treatments are used around the world.
- D) Manuka honey has anti-bacterial properties and can even be used as a mouthwash.

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? An example of a company that distributes a honey-based treatment *to hospitals in over 25 countries*. So we're looking for something that's going to introduce that fact. Presumably, it will emphasize the fact that honey is used as a treatment internationally.

The original version doesn't make sense. There's no relationship between the fact that honey can treat seasonal allergies and a medical device company that distributes products all over the world.

B) and D) also don't fit: neither the fact that honey can lose its power when it is over-processed nor that a particular form of honey can be used as mouthwash has anything to do with one (modern) company's distribution of honey-covered bandages.

The only answer that makes sense is C): the phrase *over 25 countries* corresponds precisely to *around the world*. And logically, that type of distribution would only be possible in modern times.

“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 main idea.

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

One reason that honey does not spoil involves the chemical make-up of the substance itself. Honey is extremely acidic, with a pH that falls between 3 and 4.5, depending on its floral source. As a result, invading microorganisms are unable to grow. In addition, **1** honey contains very little water in its natural state, preventing bacteria from flourishing.

**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) molasses is a byproduct of cane sugar and has an exceptionally long shelf life.
- C) honey may cause bacterial infections in people with weakened immune systems.
- D) fructose and glucose are responsible for honey’s sweet taste.

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 topic sentence – which is where the purpose of the paragraph is made clear. It is certainly possible to answer the question without that information, but it is much easier to answer the question with it.

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

What is the point? That the chemical makeup of honey prevents it from spoiling. So the correct answer must provide an example of how honey’s composition allows the substance to stay fresh.

B) is off-topic. The first sentence makes clear that the paragraph is about honey, not molasses, so this answer can be eliminated.

C) is off-topic as well, but less directly. Although this answer, like A), refers to bacteria, the context is completely different: the correct answer must focus on the characteristics of honey itself, whereas C) focuses on honey’s effect on people. So C) is out.

D) might be tempting as well because of the reference to fructose and glucose. Although those words might seem consistent with the idea of a chemical makeup, the correct answer must explain why honey does not spoil. Sweetness has nothing to do with that fact.

That leaves us with A), which is the answer. Logically, bacteria would cause honey to spoil. The absence of water would *prevent bacteria from flourishing*, thus keeping honey fresh.

Questions that test your understanding of main ideas can also be tested the other way around, namely in terms of **counterarguments**, or **counterpoints** – arguments that contradict a (main) idea or point. This concept tends to appear in answer choices, but it can be directly tested in questions as well.

Let's start with the first type:

The earliest recorded use comes from Sumerian clay tablets, which indicate that honey was used in numerous remedies. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians also used medicinal honey regularly in ointments for skin and eye diseases. Today, honey-based treatments are used around the world. The medical device company Derma Sciences sells MediHoney, bandages covered in honey, to hospitals in over 25 countries. **1** The benefits of this treatment aren't just folklore: studies show that certain types of honey have anti-inflammatory properties.

The question could also be asked this way:

The earliest recorded use comes from Sumerian clay tablets, which indicate that honey was used in numerous remedies. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians also used medicinal honey regularly in ointments for skin and eye diseases. Today, honey-based treatments are used around the world. The medical device company Derma Sciences sells MediHoney, bandages covered in honey, to hospitals in over 25 countries. **2**

Although these questions are phrased differently, they both test your understanding of counterarguments. What is the focus of the paragraph? The fact that honey has been used as medicine for thousands of years. What would be a reasonable objection to the example presented? Something along the lines of, "But honey is such a common food! Can it really do all of these amazing things?" The final sentence addresses (i.e. *acknowledges and responds to*) that possible reaction by suggesting that there is in fact scientific support for honey's healing powers. D) is thus the answer to the first example, and B) is the answer to the second.

1

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

- A) Yes, because it does not indicate which types of honey are most effective at reducing inflammation.
- B) Yes, because it does not explain how the Greeks and Egyptians knew that honey was an effective remedy.
- C) No, because it provides an explanation of how honey reduces inflammation.
- D) No, because it effectively anticipates and refutes a potential counterargument.

2

Which choice most effectively anticipates and addresses a counterargument to the examples in the paragraph?

- A) Because of the difficulties in controlling bees, a small proportion of any type of honey will come from a different nectar.
- B) The benefits of this treatment aren't just folklore: studies show that certain types of honey have anti-inflammatory properties.
- C) Despite varying regulations, the medical device market is projected to experience considerable growth in coming years.
- D) Topical honey can be used to treat both simple and complex injuries.

Now let's look at another type of DELETE example:

While excavating ancient Egyptian tombs, modern archaeologists have often found something unexpected among the artifacts: pots of honey. Although these pots are thousands of years old, the honey remains as sweet and edible as it was during the time of the Pharaohs. There are a few other foods, such as uncooked rice, that keep indefinitely. Honey, though, is unique: no one would consume raw rice or plain salt, but a thousand year-old jar of honey could be eaten without preparation.

**1** Honey can also be used in a variety of salad dressings, glazes, and spreads. Moreover, honey's longevity provides medicinal properties not found in other long-lasting foods.

**1**

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

- A) Kept, because it provides background information about traditional uses of honey.
- B) Kept, because it indicates that honey is an exceptionally versatile food.
- C) Deleted, because it contradicts the idea that honey can be consumed without preparation.
- D) Deleted, because it blurs the paragraph's focus on honey's ability to remain unspoiled over time.

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 KEPT and two DELETED 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 forget the underlined sentence (preferably crossing it out lightly and in pencil) and look only at the rest of the paragraph.

If we had to sum up the main topic of the paragraph in a few words, we might say something like "honey stays good forever," or "honey never goes bad."

What's the focus of the sentence to be added? That honey can be used in all different types of foods.

Although the sentence is still about honey, it has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that honey can stay fresh for thousands of year. So it should **not** be added. The fact that it sounds sort of okay in context is irrelevant.

Now for the "why:" simply put, the sentence is off-topic. It in no way contradicts the fact that honey can be consumed plain, so C) does not fit. Don't get thrown off by the phrase *blur the focus* in D). The College Board is partial to this phrase, presumably because so many test-takers are likely to find it confusing. It simply means "departs from the main focus," i.e. is off-topic. D) is thus correct.