

Official SAT Practice

Lesson Plans

for Teachers by Teachers

LESSON 16

Writing and Language— Effective Language Use

Subscore: Expression of Ideas, Words in Context

Focus: Revising a text for effective language use

Objective:

Students will recognize the effect that language choices—diction and syntax in particular—can have on a reader.

Before the Lesson:

- Preview and print (if necessary) the student materials.

Introductory Activity | 10 minutes

1. Remind students that in previous Lesson 5 and Lesson 6 they examined how the development of writing will be assessed on the Writing and Language Test. A third aspect of writing development that students will practice in this lesson will be on **effective language use**, specifically the following:
 - *Precision*: Making word choice more exact or more appropriate for the context
 - *Concision*: Making word choice more economical by eliminating wordiness and redundancy
 - *Style and tone*: Making word choice consistent with the overall style and tone of a passage or accomplishing some particular rhetorical goal
 - *Syntax*: Combining sentences to improve the flow of language or to accomplish some particular rhetorical goal
2. To give students a sense of how this looks in the context of the SAT®, ask students to look at the excerpt from an article they may have already read about a painter named Dong Kingman and focus on the use of the word **vacated**. Does it fit? Why or why not? What might be a different or better word for it? What about each of these following words: *evacuated*, *departed*, *retired*? Would any fit better? Why or why not? “Departed” is probably the best answer here.
3. In addition to word choice—often called “diction”—effective language choice also focuses on “syntax,” which refers to the ways that sentences are constructed. Ask students to look at the second passage; this one is from another excerpt they may have already read about traffic. They should pay close attention to the ways in which the first three sentences are constructed. What patterns do students notice about the sentence construction? Where is that pattern continued and where is it broken? Then, ask students to look at Question 1, which offers different choices for students to revise the third sentence in the paragraph. Discuss the rationales if necessary:

Rationale for #1:

Explanation: Choice C is the best answer because it most closely maintains the sentence pattern established by the two preceding sentences, which begin with a noun and passive verb phrase (“A subway system is expanded,” “A bike-sharing program is adopted”).

Choice A is not the best answer because it does not maintain the sentence pattern established by the two preceding sentences. Instead, it begins the sentence with an infinitive phrase.

Choice B is not the best answer because it does not maintain the sentence pattern established by the two preceding sentences. Rather, it begins the sentence with a gerund.

Choice D is not the best answer because it does not maintain the sentence pattern established by the two preceding sentences. Rather, it shifts the placement of a modifying prepositional phrase, “in a congested downtown area,” from the end of the sentence to the beginning of the sentence.

4. Summarize for students that questions about use of language focus on diction and syntax, and ask about how sentences can be revised to be precise, consistent with established structures, and appropriate for the context and tone of the piece.

Pair/Group Activity | 15 minutes

1. Ask students to read the first two paragraphs about sleeping at work. As they read, they should pay close attention to diction and syntax. Where are the words appropriate or not? Where is the syntax unclear or awkward? Also ask them to discuss who the intended audience for the piece might be, and the level of formality or informality that might be expected for that audience?
2. Then, they should answer Questions 1 and 2, which ask about diction and syntactic choices. Discuss the rationales, focusing specifically on how the audience can affect how formal the diction needs to be.

Rationale #1:

Choice C is the best answer because it states the situation succinctly and is free of redundancies. Choices A, B, and D are incorrect because all three contain a redundancy in which a reference to the annual nature of the loss is stated twice; for example, Choice A states “yearly” and “annually.”

Rationale #2:

Choice D is the best answer because the use of language is correct for standard written English and matches the formal tone of the passage. Choices A and C are incorrect because both rely on colloquial language, specifically “big” and “huge,” which strays from the formal tone of the article. Additionally, “things” in Choice C is vague and informal. Choice B is incorrect for the same reason.

3. Ask students to look through other parts of the passage and to substitute alternative word choices. Then, discuss how the substituted words may or may not be appropriate. Possible words for substitution might include: lazy, morale, colleagues, unproductive.

Independent Practice | 10 minutes

1. Ask students to read two paragraphs from a text they may have read before about the disappearance of bees. As they read, they should annotate for diction and syntax, focusing on how both are appropriate or inappropriate for audience and purpose.
2. Then, they should answer Questions 17 and 19, both of which ask about effective language use. Discuss the rationales as needed.

Rationale #17:

Choice A is the best answer. It adequately introduces the paragraph's main topic in a grammatically complete and standard manner. In addition, its use of the passive voice ("Studies have offered") establishes a pattern that the next sentence maintains ("One reason that is often cited"). Choices B and C are incorrect because each is redundant. In B, there is no need to refer to bees vanishing and "this trend" in the same sentence. In C, there is no need to specify that "reasons . . . may explain." Choice D is incorrect because if the paragraph were to begin with the sentence "One reason that is often cited . . .," the writer's discussion of studies of CCD would not be introduced smoothly and effectively.

Rationale #19:

Choice D is the best answer because the diction is consistent with the article's tone and style. Choices A, B, and C are incorrect because the casual tone and style of the phrases "is not to be scoffed at," "is a pretty big deal," and "can't be put on the back burner" deviate from the more formal tone and style established in the rest of the article.

3. Ask students to reflect on their current abilities to answer questions about effective language use.

Homework | 20 minutes

- As students continue to practice Writing on Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy®, they should make note of the questions that ask about language use. Pay close attention to the ways that diction and syntax create an appropriate level of formality.

Student Materials—Lesson 16

Introductory Activity

14 parts, “king” and “man”; Cantonese for “scenery” and “composition” [6] As Kingman developed as a painter, his works were often compared to **15** paintings by Chinese landscape artists dating back to CE 960, a time when a strong tradition of landscape painting emerged in Chinese art. [7] Kingman, however, **16** vacated from that tradition in a number of ways, most notably in that he chose to focus not on natural landscapes, such as mountains and rivers, but on cities. **17**

A Life in Traffic

A subway system is expanded to provide service to a growing suburb. A bike-sharing program is adopted to encourage nonmotorized transportation. **1** To alleviate rush hour traffic jams in a congested downtown area, stoplight timing is coordinated. When any one of these changes **2** occur, it is likely the result of careful analysis conducted by transportation planners.

1

Which choice best maintains the sentence pattern already established in the paragraph?

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) Coordinating stoplight timing can help alleviate rush hour traffic jams in a congested downtown area.
- C) Stoplight timing is coordinated to alleviate rush hour traffic jams in a congested downtown area.
- D) In a congested downtown area, stoplight timing is coordinated to alleviate rush hour traffic jams.

Pair/Group Activity

A Nod to Nodding Off

With 30 percent of United States workers not getting enough sleep at night, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, US companies **1** lose a yearly sum of \$63.2 billion annually due to the drop in employee productivity resulting from sleep-deprivation. Sleep-deprived workers generally have lower morale and are less able to retain information than their better-rested colleagues.

[1] One of the **2** big reasons behind workers' lack of sleep is the work itself. [2] To combat the problem of sleep deprivation in a demanding work environment, some companies have begun allowing workers to take naps. [3] The hours the average American **3** spend working have increased dramatically since the 1970s, making it hard for many workers to get a good night's sleep. [4] Although employees who sleep on the job are often considered lazy and unproductive, napping in the workplace has been shown to improve workers' efficiency and quality of life. [5] As long as companies continue to demand long hours from **4** workers, and managers should champion napping as a means to keep employees happy, healthy, and functional. **5**

1

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) see an annual loss of \$63.2 billion each year
- C) loss of \$63.2 billion annually
- D) have a yearly loss of \$63.2 billion annually

2

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) main things leading up to
- C) huge things about
- D) primary causes of

Independent Practice

17 studies have offered several possible reason that bees are vanishing. One reason that is often cited is the use of pesticides called neonicotinoids, which are absorbed by plants and linger much longer than do topical pesticides. **18** Chemicals such as herbicides and fungicides may also play a role, contaminating the pollen that bees typically feed on and inhibiting healthy insect maturation.

Given the role that honeybees play in agriculture, the impact of this loss of hives on fruit, vegetable, seed, and nut crops **19** is not be scoffed at. A reduction in bee numbers leads to less pollination, which in turn leads to smaller harvests and higher food prices. Some farmers have resorted to renting hives from beekeepers to pollinate their **20** crops; when there is a shortage of bees this being an expensive proposition. Other farmers have increased **21** they're dependence on costly hand-pollination by human worker. Furthermore, there may be sociological repercussions. Agroecologist Alexandra-Maria Klein has suggested that rising produce prices could lead to an increase in obesity as people turn to cheaper, less wholesome fare.

17

Which choice most smoothly and effectively introduces the writer's discussion of studies of CCD in this paragraph?

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) Bees are vanishing, and according to studies there are several possible reasons for this trend.
- C) Several possible reasons, offered by studies, may explain why bees are vanishing.
- D) DELETE the underlined sentence.

19

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) is a pretty big deal
- C) can't be put on the back burner.
- D) cannot be ignored