



Civil Service Employees Association
Local 1000 AFSCME, AFL-CIO
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Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation

The CSEA Examination Preparation Booklet Series is designed to help members prepare for New York State and local government civil service examinations. This booklet is designed for practice purposes only and its content may not conform to that of any particular civil service examination.

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Introduction

This study guide is divided into three sections: grammar, usage, and punctuation. Each section begins with an explanation of what you need to know about the topic. Then you are given some practice questions similar to questions you are likely to find on Civil Service exams. Answers and explanations are included in the back of the book.

As you work on the practice questions, you might decide to use a separate sheet of paper for your answers. That way you can work with the same questions more than once. If you answer a question wrong, study the explanation for the correct answer until you understand why it is correct.

Don't be discouraged if you answer several questions wrong on the first try. The more you practice with these questions, the better you will understand the subjects they address.

Good luck!

Grammar

This section of the exam tests your understanding of English grammar. The questions will probably not deal with the subtleties of grammar, such as using split infinitives or ending a sentence with a preposition. Rather they will focus on commonly recognized grammatical issues, such as:

- making the subject and the verb in a sentence agree in number
- using the correct form of personal pronouns (I, we, me, us, he, she, him, her, they, them)
- making pronouns agree in number with the nouns they refer to
- using adjectives to modify nouns and using adverbs to modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs
- using tenses consistently
- making sure that modifiers are placed properly in a sentence
- using parallel structure
- arranging the words in a sentence in a logical order

The next three pages contain some basic information about grammar. Study these pages before you try the practice questions beginning on page 6.

Almost Everything You Need to Know About Grammar

Parts of speech

Nouns are the names of persons, places, things, or ideas. Examples: *Fred, school, basket, peace*.

Verbs are action words and the various forms of the word “be” (*is, are, was, were, am*). Examples: *jump, think, skate*.

Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns. Examples: *he, she, we, you, they*.

Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns. Examples: *careful, sweet, happy*.

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Most adverbs end in *-ly*. Examples: *carefully, sweetly, happily*. There are also a number of adverbs that do not end in *-ly*. Examples include *well, very, too, rather, so, quite, more, most, less, least, almost, often, and seldom*.

Prepositions show possession or direction or location. Examples: *to, from, under, of*.

Conjunctions join parts of a sentence. Examples: *and, but, or*.

Parts of a sentence

The **subject** is what the sentence is about. The subject is a noun or a pronoun. It usually appears before the verb. You find the subject of a sentence by putting the questions “who?” or “what?” before the verb. Example: *Gwen* hit the ball. *Gwen* is the subject of this sentence.

The **predicate** is the verb and all the words related to it. Example: Elvis *has left* the building. The predicate is *has left*.

The **direct object** is a noun or pronoun that usually follows the verb and receives the action of the verb. Example: Gwen hit the *ball*. The direct object is *ball*.

A **prepositional phrase** is a preposition followed by a noun or pronoun and all the words that refer to the noun or pronoun. The noun or pronoun is called the object of the preposition. Example: She put the apples *in a large basket*. The prepositional phrase is *in a large basket*.

A **modifier** is a descriptive word or phrase. Modifiers give the words they describe more specific meaning, clarity, or detail. Examples: *As a new employee*, you will face *many difficult* challenges. *As a new employee* is a modifier. It modifies “you.” The words *many* and *difficult* are also modifiers. They modify “challenges.”

Common grammatical problems

Subject-verb agreement. If the subject of a sentence is singular, the verb should be singular. If the subject is plural, the verb should be plural.

Example:

Reappraisal of their aims and objectives *is* mandatory.

The verb in this sentence should be singular (*is* not *are*) because the subject (*reappraisal*) is singular.

Confused tenses. Be careful about shifting tenses and getting past and present mixed up.

One of our clients *approached* Fred and *tells* him that the shipment was late.

This sentence shifts from past tense (*approached*) to present tense (*tells*). The verb *tells* should be changed to *told*.

Using the wrong form of pronouns. These pronouns are used only as subjects in a sentence: *I, we, he, she, they, who*. These pronouns are used only as objects: *me, us, him, her, them, whom*.

Alvin and *I* received awards at the ceremony.

The correct pronoun here is *I* because it is the subject of the sentence.

Between you and *me*, we should be able to solve this problem.

The correct pronoun here is *me* because it is an object, the object of the preposition *Between*.

Noun-pronoun agreement. Pronouns always refer to nouns. Pronouns should agree in number with the nouns they refer to.

The average *American* believes in good nutrition, but *they* rarely practice it.

The pronoun *they* is plural, but it refers to a singular noun (*American*). Correct this by making the whole sentence plural: *Most Americans believe in good nutrition, but they rarely practice it*.

Parallel structure. Use the same grammatical form for items in a list or items in a comparison.

The accident victim suffered a broken arm, broken ribs, and *one of her lungs was punctured*.

To make this list parallel, change *one of her lungs was punctured* to *a punctured lung*.

Misplaced modifiers. A modifier is a descriptive word or phrase. Modifiers give the words they describe more specific meaning, clarity, or detail. Modifiers should refer to what they are closest to in the sentence. If they don't, they are called *misplaced modifiers*.

Ribs were served to the guests covered in sauce.

The phrase *covered in sauce* does not refer to *guests*. You could change this to: *Ribs covered in sauce were served to the guests*.

Adjective or adverb? Use adjectives to refer to nouns and pronouns. Use adverbs to refer to verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

He spoke very *softly* (not *soft*). He has done *well* (not *good*) so far.

Confused word order. The words in a sentence should be arranged in a logical way.

Parker's radical reputation made to the Supreme Court his appointment unlikely.

Change this to: *Parker's radical reputation made his appointment to the Supreme Court unlikely.*

Questions 1 through 15. For each of the following groups of sentences, select the sentence that represents the best example of English grammar.

1.
 - a. I have a question about your figures on the new buildings that you sent us last week.
 - b. After the students left the classrooms, the custodian cleaned them.
 - c. Each woman should choose their own approach to the problem.
 - d. Send a copy of your report to Jane and me.
2.
 - a. I read steady for almost three hours.
 - b. The attention of the committee members wanders out the window.
 - c. They blame we smokers for the problem.
 - d. Seven sections of the code needs to be revised.
3.
 - a. Coming around the corner, the tree stood directly in their path.
 - b. We expect three things from our elected officials: honesty, integrity, and that they be fiscally responsible.
 - c. Each student must submit a complete transcript of their grades.
 - d. One of the buildings was destroyed in the earthquake.
4.
 - a. We first soaked the sample in distilled water, and then we weigh it on a laboratory scale.
 - b. As we were leaving the harbor, the radio weather report predicted high winds, heavy rain, and that tides would be abnormally high.
 - c. She tried to keep it a secret from Simon and me.
 - d. The papers are on the desk which you should mail immediately.
5.
 - a. Jerome told Sam that he was the leading candidate for the job.
 - b. Shannon has played well this season.
 - c. I have enclosed two checks for refunds on overpayments that you should cash immediately.
 - d. When only seven years old, Jim's father taught him algebra.

6.
 - a. If anyone has information about the missing documents, they should contact the commissioner's office immediately.
 - b. Who recommended her for this job?
 - c. Angela left the slides on his desk, which he needed for his presentation.
 - d. Prejudice and intolerance is the cause of most book burnings.
7.
 - a. His proposal was confusing to Roberto and I.
 - b. The garbage from all the homes, office buildings, and factories in three counties are dumped in the landfill.
 - c. Whom did you meet at the concert?
 - d. While driving to Albany, their luggage was damaged by the rain.
8.
 - a. Rosa said during the meeting Karen made many rude remarks.
 - b. She gave Jane and I some sound advice.
 - c. One of the laser printers that he ordered was damaged in shipping.
 - d. While lighting a cigarette, the car swerved dangerously close to the guard rail.
9.
 - a. Chris and she are going to be out of the office next week.
 - b. Carmen asked us before we left to call on her.
 - c. The credit union approves loans to reliable individuals of any size.
 - d. While studying for the exams, the library stays open late.
10.
 - a. Her and I are good friends.
 - b. I tried to persuade my son to drive more careful.
 - c. Tell Carl when he comes home I want to see him.
 - d. The books on my desk are all very valuable.

11. a. After working in Albany for many years, the tactics of lobbyists were familiar to him.
b. Us students think that we should be given more freedom.
c. Gerald and his brother are trying to raise money for a new car.
d. Did you think that Carol and her were friends?
12. a. Coming down from the mountain, the building looks smaller than it really is.
b. Several of my friends enjoy classical music.
c. Irregardless of his concerns, we must choose the most promising course of action.
d. Ed told Walter to leave his books on the table.
13. a. The reasons for his concern are not clear to me.
b. Who told Sharon and she about the meeting?
c. The report revealed growth in sales but that profits had dropped.
d. He bought special designed shoes for the race.
14. a. The manager said Tuesday sales were below normal.
b. Why did you leave Maria and her alone?
c. One of the alarms he installed were defective.
d. If you have any questions, call your school nurse, whose name and number is listed in the school calendar.
15. a. The achievements of the most recent immigrants deserves to be recognized in our schools.
b. When changing the printer cartridge, the power should be turned off.
c. He asked Janice and her to finish the report before Monday.
d. Angela notices that the supervisor was smiling in an odd way as she came into the office.

Questions 16 through 25. In these sentences, there may be a problem with English grammar. If a problem does exist, select the letter that indicates the most effective change. If no problem exists, select choice a.

16. Only one of the seven schools do not offer advanced placement courses.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *do not* to *don't*
 - c. delete the word *Only*
 - d. change *do* to *does*
17. The supervisor offered Jane and I new job assignments, but we told her we were happy where we were.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. insert the word *to* before *Jane*
 - c. change *Jane and I* to *I and Jane*
 - d. change *I* to *me*
18. Since leaving school, several employers have offered her jobs.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *several employers have offered her jobs* to *she has been offered jobs by several employers*
 - c. change *have offered her jobs* to *have offered jobs to her*
 - d. change *have* to *had*
19. Alice and me like the food at that restaurant, but the prices are very expensive.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *me* to *I*
 - c. change *that* to *the*
 - d. change *but* to *and*

20. I think you should give the award to the person who has done the best job.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *who* to *whom*
 - c. insert the word *that* after *think*
 - d. change *think* to *believe*
21. The inspector spoke to the landowner that the pipeline crossed.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *the landowner that the pipeline crossed to the owner of the land that the pipeline crossed*
 - c. change *spoke* to *has spoken*
 - d. delete the word *that*
22. To prevent further health risks, the inspector ordered that all the contaminated produce be destroyed.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *be destroyed* to *ought to be destroyed*
 - c. delete the word *further*
 - d. change *further* to *farther*
23. Can you or him give your information to Sara and me so that we can use it in our report?
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *me* to *I*
 - c. change the question mark to a period
 - d. change *him* to *he*
24. This list of revisions and deletions have not yet been circulated.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *have* to *has*
 - c. delete the word *yet*
 - d. change *revisions and deletions* to *deletions and revisions*

25. Sara reads quicker than any of the other students.
- a. no changes are necessary
 - b. change *reads* to *has read*
 - c. change *quicker than any of the other students* to *the quickest of the other students*
 - d. change *quicker* to *more quickly*

Usage

Questions in this section test your ability to distinguish between words that sound alike (or almost alike) but are spelled differently and have different meanings. Read the following list of problem words before trying the practice questions starting on page 17. Read this list again shortly before the exam.

Problem Words

accept, except. *Accept* means to receive. *Except* means “but.”

He *accepted* her resignation.

Everyone *except* Martin was invited.

adapt, adopt. To *adapt* is to modify something for a new purpose. To *adopt* is to take something over as it is. A new manager who *adopted* her predecessor’s policy would take it over without change. If she *adapted* her predecessor’s policy, she would use it with modifications.

advice, advise. *Advice* is a noun. *Advise* is a verb. When people *advise* you, they give you *advice*.

affect, effect. *Affect* means to influence. Your religious beliefs may *affect* your political opinions. *Effect* as a noun means a result or consequence. Doctors worry about the *effects* of smoking on health. As a verb, *effect* means to create or to bring about. The new tax law may *effect* radical changes in the way people use their credit cards.

all ready, already. *All ready* means everything or everyone is ready. *Already* means previously.

The trainees are *all ready* for their first assignment.

They have *already* completed their first assignment.

allusion, illusion. An *allusion* is an indirect reference. In his speech he made an *allusion* to his opponent’s record. An *illusion* is an unreal or false impression. The film director created an *illusion* of choppy seas.

appraise, apprise. *Appraise* means to estimate the value of. *Apprise* means to notify.

He appraised the damage at five million dollars.

The lieutenant apprised the officers of the new regulations.

averse, adverse. *Averse* means opposed. *Adverse* means unfavorable.

Many people are *averse* to gun control legislation.

The boat left the harbor in extremely adverse weather.

between, among. Use *between* when referring to two items. Use *among* when referring to more than two.

He had to choose *between* two unsatisfactory alternatives.

Carol has a reputation *among* her peers as an exceptionally hard worker.

break, brake. *Break* means to shatter or destroy. *Brake* means to stop or slow a vehicle. A *brake* is the device that stops or slows a vehicle.

capital, capitol. *Capitol* refers only to the building in which a legislative body meets. *Capital* is the correct word in all other cases. Albany is the *capital* of New York State. In some states murder is a *capital* offense. To start a business, you need to raise *capital*.

censer, censor. A *censer* is a vessel in which incense is burned. A *censor* is a person who has the authority to restrict the publication of dangerous or objectionable material.

cite, sight, site. *Cite* means to refer to or to recognize, to mention in an official document, or to summon. *Sight* means something that is seen. A *site* is a location.

The officer *cited* Section 32.3 of the Motor Vehicle Code to support the arrest.

The accident was a depressing *sight*.

The business has been located at that *site* for 54 years.

complement, compliment. A *complement* completes something or makes a fitting addition to something. Her scarf *complements* her hair. A *compliment* is a bit of flattery.

comprehensible, comprehensive. *Comprehensible* means understandable. *Comprehensive* means including many things.

comprise, compose. *Comprise* means to contain or include. The parent corporation *comprises* three major divisions. *Compose* means to make up. Three major divisions *compose* the parent corporation. The parent corporation is *composed* of three major divisions.

conscience, conscious. *Conscience* means a sense of what is right and wrong. *Conscious* means aware.

Some criminals seem to have no *conscience*.

I am *conscious* of your efforts to improve morale.

council, counsel. A *council* is a group or a committee. A *counsel* is an attorney. *Counsel* also means advice; as a verb, to *counsel* means to give advice. When a *counsel* *counsels* you, she is giving you *counsel*.

descent, decent. *Descent* means a downward path or a line of ancestry. *Decent* means moral or humane.

Their *descent* from the mountain was treacherous.

He is of Irish *descent*.

She is a *decent* human being.

discreet, discrete. *Discreet* means tactful or judicious, careful about what you say and do. *Discrete* means separate and distinct.

disinterested, uninterested. *Disinterested* means impartial. *Uninterested* means indifferent, not interested.

elicit, illicit. *Elicit* means to draw out. *Illicit* means illegal.

His statement *elicited* boos from the audience.

Traffic in *illicit* drugs has declined in the past five years.

ensure, insure, assure. *Ensure* means to make certain. *Insure* means to provide insurance, such as life insurance or health insurance. *Assure* means to state as a certainty.

The law *ensures* that there will be enough money to complete the project.

The company *insures* more than a million individuals and corporations.

He *assured* us that there was no sign of foul play.

flaunt, flout. *Flaunt* means to parade. *Flout* means to treat with contempt.

formally, formerly. *Formally* means in a correct or prescribed manner.

Formerly means previously.

Sergeant Grasso was *formally* recognized for his bravery.

This building was *formerly* the site of one of the city's oldest department stores.

imply, infer. A speaker *implies*. A listener *infers*.

its, it's. *Its* is a possessive pronoun. *It's* is a contraction for "it is."

lead, led. *Led* is the past tense of lead.

lie, lay.

Lie means to rest or recline. It never takes an object. You never *lie* something down.

Present: Stan *lies* down after lunch every day.

Past: The book *lay* on the table.

Perfect: Jan has *lain* in a sick bed for days.

Lay always takes an object. You *lay* something down.

Present: *Lay* the book on the table.

Past: She carefully *laid* the tomatoes on the counter.

Perfect: I have *laid* the foundation for my house.

loose, lose. *Loose* is the opposite of tight. *Lose* means to be defeated or to misplace.

Loose clothing will help keep you warmer.

I was afraid I might *lose* my wallet.

We expect to *lose* tonight's game.

ordnance, ordinance. *Ordnance* means weaponry. An ordinance is a law.

precede, proceed. *Precede* means to go before. *Proceed* means to continue.

An argument *preceded* the assault.

The meeting *proceeded* without further interruptions.

principle, principal. A *principle* is a basic belief or truth. A *principal* is the head of a school. The *principal* is the part of a loan on which you pay interest. As an adjective, *principal* means main or most important.

stationary, stationery. *Stationary* means fixed in one place. *Stationery* means writing paper.

there, their, they're. *There* means in that place. *Their* is the possessive form of them. *They're* is a contraction for they are.

to, too, two. *To* means in that direction. *Too* means also. *Two* is a number.

who's, whose. *Who's* is a contraction for "who is." *Who's* minding the store?
Whose is the possessive of "who." *Whose* glasses are these?

Questions 26 through 35. In the following groups of sentences, select the sentence in which the underlined word is used correctly.

26. a. They need to raise additional capitol for their business.
b. The company is reconsidering it's decision to build a new warehouse.
c. The store sells office products and stationery.
d. The players left there helmets on the bus.
27. a. The officer sited Section 21 of the Motor Vehicle Code.
b. The votes have already been counted.
c. His theory violates the principals of physics.
d. Who's glasses are these?
28. a. Lose clothing will help keep you warmer.
b. Lisa offered him some sound advise.
c. The president decided to accept the ambassador's resignation.
d. She complemented him on his choice of colors.
29. a. In 1944, General Eisenhower lead the invasion of Normandy.
b. Doctors worry about the affects of smoking on health.
c. The workers used sledge hammers to break up the pavement.
d. The teacher gave her students wise council.
30. a. This building was formerly the site of one of the city's oldest department stores.
b. In his position, Albert must be very discrete in handling confidential information.
c. He was to tired to continue the race.
d. Each of his mortgage payments was about evenly divided between principle and interest.

31. a. Carol decided to lay down for a while after dinner.
b. No one is sure how the new laws will effect taxpayers.
c. Two new members were elected to the city council.
d. The police confiscated a large quantity of elicit drugs.
32. a. Please lay the packages on the sofa.
b. Their are many reasons why you should stay in school.
c. I need to replace the breaks on my car.
d. The principle decided to send the students home early.
33. a. I appraised the committee members of the new procedures.
b. Each cat has its own dish.
c. Please advice Harold on the new procedure for recording expenses.
d. Carol excepted the award on behalf of her mother.
34. a. The police spent several hours at the cite of the accident.
b. A majority of the public support capitol punishment.
c. The magician used mirrors to create a convincing illusion.
d. The heiress flouted her wealth by wearing expensive jewelry.
35. a. The engineers will decide how to adapt the old equipment for this new purpose.
b. Firefighters often have to work in extremely averse conditions.
c. The judge told the attorney to precede with his opening statement.
d. Divide the work equally between Sara, Luke, and Todd.

Punctuation

Questions in this section test your ability to recognize standard punctuation. The following summary will help you prepare for questions like these.

A Guide to Standard Punctuation

The Comma

Use commas to separate items in a series.

The leading candidates are Peekskill, Hornell, and Westbury.

Many publications, especially newspapers, omit the comma before “and” in a sentence like this. The safer thing to do (for the purpose of Civil Service exams) is to use a comma before “and.”

Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives, if you pause between the adjectives.

It was a long, intense meeting.

The award went to the young Greek scientist.

In the first sentence, you use a comma between the adjectives *long* and *intense* because you pause between them. In the second sentence you do not use a comma between the adjectives *young* and *Greek* because you do not pause between them.

Here is another way to approach this decision. If you could insert the word *and* between two adjectives, put a comma between them. If you could not insert the word *and* between two adjectives, do not put a comma between them.

Use a comma to separate independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction. Independent clauses are clauses that could stand alone as sentences. The coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *yet*, and *so*.

The residents of Lake George are concerned about pollution, but the developers insist that pollution will not be a problem.

Use a comma to set off a long introductory clause from the rest of the sentence.

Before you leave on your vacation, be sure to inform your neighbors.

Use a comma or a pair of commas to set off transitional words.

Ultimately, the decision is up to you.

In some cases, however, it may be necessary to conduct a formal investigation.

Use commas to set off parenthetical words or phrases in a sentence.

Please tell Ms. McCarthy, our receptionist, that you will be staying late.

Use a comma to separate the name of a city from the name of a state or country.

Albany, New York

London, England

Use a comma to separate a date from a year.

July 4, 1776

The Semicolon

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction.

To the unthinking person war may be a romantic adventure; to the wise person it is a foolish and dirty business.

Use semicolons to separate items in a series if the items contain commas.

I plan to travel to San Jose, California; Fort Worth, Texas; and Albany, New York.

The Colon

Use a colon to introduce a list or an explanation.

We have narrowed our list to three applicants: Ms. Gomez, Mr. Rafferty, and Ms. Blake.

We have only one alternative: we must oppose the initiative with all our might.

The Dash

Use a dash to introduce a list or an explanation.

We have narrowed our list to three applicants—Ms. Gomez, Mr. Rafferty, and Ms. Blake.

We have only one alternative—we must oppose the initiative with all our might.

Use dashes for rhetorical effect to set off a phrase that interrupts a sentence:

The best solution—and perhaps the only solution—is to raise taxes.

The Apostrophe

Add an apostrophe and an “s” to form the possessive of a singular noun.

the boy’s bike, Albany’s airport, the warden’s message

Add an apostrophe after the “s” to form the possessive of a plural noun.

the employees’ committee, the airlines’ justification

Do not use an apostrophe to form the plural of a noun.

Questions 36 through 50. In the following groups of sentences, select the sentence that is punctuated incorrectly.

36. a. All of the students except Shirley failed last week's test.
b. She is angry with me for some reason, I don't know why.
c. Russell asked Maria Ramone, his supervisor, if he could change his work hours.
d. Several of the council members believe that the new development plans will cause greater traffic congestion near the shopping mall.
37. a. The residents of Lake George are concerned about pollution, however the developers say that pollution will not be a problem.
b. The agency has branch offices in Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo.
c. Anyone who has information about the missing equipment should contact the security office immediately.
d. Several of the changes that my manager suggested do not seem necessary, but I plan to make them anyway.
38. a. This weeks objective is to upgrade all of the computers in our office.
b. Before you order expensive new office furniture, you should consult the people who are going to use it.
c. Karen Kaminski, the most experienced person in our office, knows more about this software than anyone.
d. The new dollar coins have not gained wide acceptance by the public.
39. a. If you have no further use for those clothes, why don't you donate them to the Salvation Army?
b. The purchasing department favors staying with our current vendor; I disagree.
c. The state government had a budget surplus because revenues were greater than expected.
d. Which of these colors do you like best.

40. a. Alexander Pope said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.
b. Most of the streets in Manhattan follow a uniform grid pattern because they were all laid out at the same time.
c. The bus left ahead of schedule, the driver wanted to finish his shift early.
d. The Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial are probably the two most famous landmarks in our nation's capital.
41. a. The original leaders of the movement changed their minds when they realized that they would not succeed.
b. Construction on the Erie Canal began near Utica New York.
c. Many college students major in marine biology, but only a few actually find jobs in this field.
d. Although saffron is a very expensive spice, most chefs believe that it is worth the price.
42. a. Todays cars produce much less pollution than cars did thirty years ago.
b. Dr. Kensington, the head of the department, is concerned about rumors of cheating on exams.
c. Many managers have tried to reorganize the department in a logical way; however, no one has been able to come up with a plan that actually works.
d. After she attended the long, intense meeting, she had second thoughts about joining the council.
43. a. While the answer I selected was acceptable, it was not the best of the four choices.
b. All of my brothers are police officers, but I have decided to become an attorney.
c. The investigation revealed that, both drivers were intoxicated at the time of the crash.
d. Ice cream is a popular dessert in America, but its high fat content may be causing health problems.

44. a. The Supreme Court ruled that privacy was not an issue in this case; the real issue was the right of the defendant to have an attorney.
b. The job offers excellent benefits but little opportunity for advancement.
c. How many consumers have been victimized by this type of false advertising.
d. She offered him a job, but he declined because he was looking for something more challenging.
45. a. The chairman resigned without warning, no one knew why.
b. The Internet is a valuable tool, but it is no substitute for personal interaction.
c. Many nations believe that the use of land mines should be abolished.
d. Tell Mr. McCarthy, our receptionist, that you need a new badge.
46. a. Pessimists would say the glass is half empty; optimists would say it is half full.
b. Before we submit our proposal, we should be sure we can do the work.
c. Janet Marx, the new manager has worked here for six years.
d. I tried using the company's website, but I found it very confusing.
47. a. Carlos has a long drive to work, he lives in Massachusetts.
b. While you were away on vacation, we decided to move your desk.
c. How many hours will your staff need to finish this job?
d. Tell Mr. Murray what you told me.
48. a. Karen Johnson, who used to work in this office, now works in the training department.
b. Earl lives in the old yellow house on the corner.
c. Some employees are motivated primarily by money but others are more concerned about doing rewarding work.
d. The broken, battered boat sank beneath the waves.

49. a. You should ask permission before you move a person's desk.
b. He left his car on the third level of the parking garage at the airport.
c. Whenever I feel the need to exercise, I lie down for awhile until the feeling passes.
d. The bad news is that times flies, the good news is that you're the pilot.
50. a. The desert looks barren, but it is actually teeming with life.
b. I am moving my snowmobile business to Jacksonville, Florida.
c. Laser printers are much less expensive than they used to be.
d. How many days of vacation do you have left.

Answer Key

1. d	18. b	35. a
2. b	19. b	36. b
3. d	20. a	37. a
4. c	21. b	38. a
5. b	22. a	39. d
6. b	23. d	40. c
7. c	24. b	41. b
8. c	25. d	42. a
9. a	26. c	43. c
10. d	27. b	44. c
11. c	28. c	45. a
12. b	29. c	46. c
13. a	30. a	47. a
14. b	31. c	48. c
15. c	32. a	49. d
16. d	33. b	50. d
17. d	34. c	

Answers and Explanations

1. The answer is choice d. You can approach this type of question in two ways: (1) look for the choice that is grammatically correct, or (2) eliminate choices that are grammatically incorrect.

Choice a is incorrect because it sounds like you sent some new buildings last week. This sentence contains what is called a “misplaced modifier.” A modifier should refer to what it is closest to in the sentence. The modifier “that you sent us last week” is closest to the word “buildings,” but obviously you did not send buildings, so this modifier is misplaced.

Choice b is incorrect because it is not clear what the custodian cleaned, the classrooms or the students. Whenever you use a pronoun (“them” in this sentence), it should always refer to a noun, and there should be no confusion about which noun it refers to.

Choice c is incorrect because the pronoun “their” in the second part of the sentence is plural but it refers to a singular noun (“woman”).

Choice d is correct. You might have thought that the sentence should say, “to Jane and I” rather than “to Jane and me.” But the pronoun “me” is correct because it is being used as an object (the object of the preposition “to.”) Some pronouns are used only as subjects (I, we, he, she, they), and some are used only as objects (me, us, him, her, them). When you see a compound like this, put your thumb over the first part of the compound (“Jane and”). You would not say, “Send a copy of your report to I.”

2. The answer is choice b.

Choice a is incorrect because the word “steady” should be “steadily.” This word is being used to modify the verb “read.” Adverbs (such as “steadily”) are used to modify verbs.

Choice c is incorrect because the pronoun “we” should be “us.” This pronoun is being used as an object in this sentence. The pronoun “we” is always used as a subject, and the pronoun “us” is always used as an object.

Choice d is incorrect because the subject of the sentence (“sections”) is plural, but the verb (“needs”) is singular. The subject and the verb in a sentence should agree in number. You might have thought that the subject of this sentence was “code,” but “code” is the object of the preposition “of.” A noun that follows a preposition is never the subject of a sentence.

3. The answer is choice d.

Choice a is incorrect because it sounds like the tree is coming around the corner. “Coming around the corner” is another example of a misplaced modifier. It should refer to what it is closest to in the sentence (“tree”), but it doesn’t.

Choice b is incorrect because the list at the end of the sentence is not parallel. Whenever you make a list, you should try to use the same grammatical form for each item. This is called “parallel structure.” This sentence should end, “honesty, integrity, and fiscal responsibility.”

Choice c is incorrect because the pronoun “their” is plural but it refers to a singular noun (“student”).

4. The answer is choice c.

Choice a is incorrect because the tenses of the verbs are confused. The first verb (“soaked”) is in past tense, but the second verb (“weigh”) is in present tense.

Choice b is incorrect because the list it includes is not parallel. The sentence should end, “high winds, heavy rain, and abnormally high tides.”

Choice d is incorrect because the modifier “which you should mail immediately” is misplaced. It sounds like you should mail the desk immediately.

Choice c is correct. You might have thought that it should say “Simon and I,” but the pronoun here is being used as the object of a preposition (“from”), and so it should be “me,” not “I.” When you see a compound like this, put your thumb over the first part of the compound (“Simon and”). You would not say, “She tried to keep it a secret from I.”

5. The answer is choice b.

Choice a is incorrect because it is not clear which person the pronoun “he” refers to. Who is the leading candidate, Jerome or Sam?

Choice c is incorrect because the modifier “that you should cash immediately” is misplaced. It should refer to what it is closest to in the sentence (“overpayments”), but it doesn’t.

Choice d also contains a misplaced modifier. It sounds like Jim’s father was seven years old when he taught Jim algebra.

Choice b is correct. The sentence uses an adverb (“well”) to modify the verb “has played.”

6. The answer is choice b.

Choice a is incorrect because the pronoun “they “ in the second part of the sentence is plural but it refers to another pronoun that is singular (“anyone”).

Choice c is incorrect because the modifier “which he needed for his presentation” is misplaced. It sounds like he needed the desk for this presentation, not the slides.

Choice d is incorrect because the subject is plural (“Prejudice and intolerance,” two things), but the verb is singular. The subject and the verb in a sentence should agree in number.

Choice b is correct. The pronoun “Who” is correct in this sentence because it is being used as a subject. “Who” is always used as a subject, and “whom” is always used as an object.

7. The answer is choice c.

Choice a is incorrect because the pronoun at the end of the sentence should be “me,” not “I.” This pronoun is being used as the object of the preposition “to.” The pronoun “I” is always used as a subject, and the pronoun “me” is always used as an object. When you see a compound like this, put your thumb over the first part of the compound (“Roberto and”). You would not say, “His proposal was confusing to I.”

Choice b is incorrect because the subject, “garbage,” is singular, but the verb, “are dumped,” is plural.

Choice d is incorrect because the modifier “While driving to Albany” is misplaced. It sounds like “their luggage” was driving to Albany. Modifiers should refer to what they are closest to in the sentence.

Choice c is correct. The pronoun “Whom” is correct in this sentence because it is being used as an object. “Who” is always used as a subject, and “whom” is always used as an object.

8. The answer is choice c.

Choice a is incorrect because it is not clear what the phrase “during the meeting” refers to. Did Rosa say during the meeting that Karen made some rude remarks, or did Rosa say that Karen made some rude remarks during the meeting?

Choice b is incorrect because the pronoun “me” should be used instead of “I.” This pronoun is being used as an object in this sentence. “I” is always used as a subject, and “me” is always used as an object. When you see a compound like this, put your thumb over the first part of the compound (“Jane and”). You would not say, “She gave I some sound advice.”

Choice d is incorrect because the modifier “While lighting a cigarette” is misplaced. It sounds like the car was lighting a cigarette.

Choice c is correct. The verb here is singular (“was damaged”) because the subject is singular (“One”).

9. The answer is choice a.

Choice b is incorrect because it is not clear what the phrase “before we left” refers to. Did Carmen ask us to call on her before we left, or did she ask us before we left to call on her?

Choice c is incorrect because the phrase “of any size” is misplaced. It sounds like the individuals are of any size.

Choice d is incorrect because the modifier “While studying for exams” is misplaced. It sounds like the library is studying for the exams.

Choice a is correct. “She” is the correct pronoun here because it is being used as a subject. “She” is always used as a subject, and “her” is always used as an object.

10. The answer is choice d.

Choice a is incorrect because the pronoun should be “She” not “Her.” This pronoun is being used as a subject in this sentence. “She” is always used as a subject, and “her” is always used as an object.

Choice b is incorrect because “careful” should be “carefully.” An adverb is needed here because this word is modifying a verb. “Careful” is an adjective; “carefully” is an adverb.

Choice c is incorrect because it is not clear what the phrase “when he comes home” refers to. Should you tell Carl when he comes home that I want to see him, or should you tell Carl that I want to see him when he comes home?

11. The answer is choice c.

Choice a is incorrect because the modifier “After working in Albany for many years” is misplaced. It sounds like the tactics have been working.

Choice b is incorrect because the pronoun at the beginning of the sentence should be “We” and not “Us.” This pronoun is being used as a subject in this sentence. The pronoun “we” is always used as a subject, and the pronoun “us” is always used as an object.

Choice d is incorrect because the pronoun in the second part of the sentence should be “she” not “her.” You might have thought that this pronoun was being used as an object, but it isn’t. There are two clauses in this sentence, and that means that there are two subjects and two verbs. “You” is the subject in the first clause, and “Carol and she” is the subject in the second clause.

12. The answer is choice b.

Choice a is incorrect because the modifier “Coming down from the mountain” is misplaced. It sounds like the building is coming down from the mountain.

Choice c is incorrect because there is no such word as “Irregardless.” The correct word here would be “Regardless.”

Choice d is incorrect because it is not clear if the word “his” refers to Ed or Walter.

13. The answer is choice a.

Choice b is incorrect “she” should be replaced with “her.” This pronoun is being used as an object in this sentence. The pronoun “she” is always used as a subject, and the pronoun “her” is always used as an object.

Choice c is incorrect because it needs parallel structure. That is, the same grammatical form should be used for both items that the report revealed. One way to revise it would be: “The report revealed higher sales but lower profits.”

Choice d is incorrect because the word “special” should be “specially.” This word is being used to modify the adjective “designed,” so it should be an adverb. “Special” is an adjective; “specially” is an adverb.

14. The answer is choice b.

Choice a is incorrect because it could be read in two different ways. Did the manager say on Tuesday that sales were below normal, or did the manager say that sales on Tuesday were below normal?

Choice c is incorrect because the subject (“One”) is singular but the verb (“were”) is plural.

Choice d is incorrect because the verb in the second part of the sentence (“is listed”) is singular but the subject (“name and number”) is plural.

Choice b is correct. The pronoun “her” is used here rather than “she” because it is being used as an object.

15. The answer is choice c.

Choice a is incorrect because the subject (“achievements”) is plural but the verb (“deserves”) is singular.

Choice b is incorrect because the modifier “When changing the printer cartridge” is misplaced. It sounds like the power is changing the printer cartridge.

Choice d is incorrect because it contains a confusing tense shift from present to past. The verb “notices” should be “noticed.”

Choice c is correct. The pronoun “her” is used here rather than “she” because it is being used as an object.

16. The answer is choice d. The subject of this sentence (*one*) is singular, so you need the singular form of the verb (*does*).
17. The answer is choice d. Change *I* to *me* because this word is being used as an object in this sentence. The pronoun *I* is used as a subject, and the pronoun *me* is used as an object. When you have a compound like this (*Jane and I*), put your thumb over the first part of the compound. You would not say, *The supervisor offered I new job assignments*.
18. The answer is choice b. This is an example of a misplaced modifier. Modifiers should refer to what they are closest to in a sentence. The modifier *Since leaving school* should refer to what it is closest to in the sentence, but it does not. It does not refer to *several employers*. It refers to *she*.
19. The answer is choice b. Change *me* to *I* because this word is being used as a subject in this sentence. The pronoun *I* is used as a subject, and the pronoun *me* is used as an object.
20. The answer is choice a. No changes are needed in this sentence. The word *who* is correct here because it is being used as a subject. It is the subject of the clause *who has done the best job*. *Who* is used as a subject; *whom* is used as an object.
21. The answer is choice b. This is an example of a misplaced modifier. Modifiers should refer to what they are closest to in a sentence. The modifier *that the pipeline crossed* should refer to what it is closest to in the sentence, but it does not. It does not refer to *the landowner*. The pipeline crossed the land, not the landowner.
22. The answer is choice a. No changes are necessary.
23. The answer is choice d. Change *him* to *he* because this word is being used as a subject in this sentence. The pronoun *he* is used as a subject, and the pronoun *him* is used as an object.
24. The answer is choice b. The subject of this sentence (*list*) is singular, so you need the singular form of the verb (*has*).

25. The answer is choice d. Change *quicker* to *more quickly*. You need an adverb here (*more quickly*) rather than an adjective (*quicker*) because the word is modifying a verb (*reads*). Adverbs modify verbs; adjectives modify nouns. You would say, *she is a quicker reader*, because in this sentence *quicker* modifies the noun *reader*. But you would say, *she reads more quickly*, because in this sentence *more quickly* modifies the verb *reads*.

Usage

26. The answer is choice c. In choice a, *capitol* should be *capital*. In choice b, *it's* should be *its* (the possessive of *it*). In choice d, *there* should be *their* (the possessive of them). In choice c, *stationery* is correct because it refers to paper products.
27. The answer is choice b. In choice a, *sited* should be *cited* (referred to). In choice c, *principals* should be *principles* (basic beliefs or truths). In choice d, *Who's* should be *Whose* (possessive of who). In choice b, *already* is correct because it means previously.
28. The answer is choice c. In choice a, *Lose* should be *loose*. *Lose* means to misplace; *loose* is the opposite of tight. In choice b, *advise* should be *advice*. *Advise* is a verb; *advice* is a noun. In choice d, *complemented* should be *complimented*. To *compliment* is to flatter; to *complement* is to go well with. In choice c, *accept* is correct because it means to receive.
29. The answer is choice c. In choice a *lead* should be *led*. *Led* is the past tense of *lead*. In choice b, *affects* should be *effects*. *Effect* means a result or consequence. In choice d, *council* should be *counsel*. A *council* is a group or committee; *counsel* means advice. In choice c, *break* is correct because it means to shatter or destroy.
30. The answer is choice a. In choice b, *discrete* should be *discreet*. *Discrete* means separate and distinct; *discreet* means cautious in word or deed, careful about what you say and do. In choice c *to* should be *too*. In choice d, *principle* should be *principal* (the amount of money on which interest is earned or paid). A *principle* is a basic belief or truth. In choice a, *formerly* is correct because it means previously.
31. The answer is choice c. In choice a, *lay* should be *lie*. *Lie* means to rest or recline. *Lay* means to put or place. In choice b, *effect* should be *affect*. *Affect* means to influence. In choice d, *elicit* should be *illicit*. *Elicit* means to draw out. *Illicit* means illegal. In choice c, *council* is correct. A *council* is a group or committee.
32. The answer is choice a. In choice b, *Their* should be *There*. *Their* is the possessive form of *them*. In choice c, *breaks* should be *brakes*. *Brakes* stop or slow a vehicle. To *break* is to shatter or destroy. In choice d, *principle* should be *principal*. A *principle* is a basic belief or truth. In choice a, *lay* is correct. *Lay* means to put or place.

33. The answer is choice b. In choice a, *appraised* should be *apprised*. To *appraise* is to estimate the value of something. To *apprise* is to notify. In choice c, *advice* should be *advise*. *Advice* is a noun; *advise* is a verb. In choice d, *excepted* should be *accepted*. To *accept* is to receive. In choice b, *its* is correct. *Its* is the possessive form of *it*.
34. The answer is choice c. In choice a, *cite* should be *site*. To *cite* is to refer to. A *site* is a location. In choice b, *capitol* should be *capital*. The word *capitol* has only one meaning. It is the site where a legislative body meets. In choice d, *flouted* should be *flaunted*. To *flaunt* is to show off. To *flout* is to treat with contempt. In choice c, *illusion* is correct. An illusion is an unreal or false impression.
35. The answer is choice a. In choice b, *averse* should be *adverse*. *Averse* means opposed. *Adverse* means hostile or difficult. In choice c, *precede* should be *proceed*. To *precede* means to go before. To *proceed* means to continue. In choice d, *between* should be *among*. Use *between* with two items; use *among* with three or more. In choice a, *adapt* is correct. *Adapt* means to modify something for a new purpose.

Punctuation

36. The answer is choice b. The error in choice b is called a comma splice: two independent clauses are joined by only a comma with no coordinating conjunction. This sentence needs a conjunction: *She is angry with me for some reason, but I don't know why.*
- Choice a is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation.
- Choice c is punctuated correctly because the phrase "his supervisor" is parenthetic.
- Choice d is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation.
37. The answer is choice a. This is another example of a comma splice. Two independent clauses are joined by only a comma with no coordinating conjunction. (The word *however* is not a conjunction. The coordinating conjunctions are *and, but, or, nor, for, yet, and so.*)
- Choice b is punctuated correctly. Many publications, especially newspapers, omit the comma before "and" in a sentence like this. The safer thing to do (for the purpose of Civil Service exams) is to use a comma before "and."
- Choice c is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation. The phrase "who has information about the missing equipment" is not parenthetic here. It is essential to the meaning of the sentence.
- Choice d is an example of two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction ("but"). In a sentence such as this, you use a comma before the conjunction.
38. The answer is choice a. The word "weeks" should be "week's" (possessive not plural).
- Choice b is an example of using a comma after a long introductory clause.
- Choice c is punctuated correctly because the parenthetic phrase "the most experienced person in our office" needs a comma before and after it.
- Choice d is punctuated correctly because it needs no punctuation.

39. The answer is choice d. This sentence is a question, so it should end with a question mark, not a period.

Choice a is an example of using a comma after a long introductory clause.

Choice b is an example of joining two independent clauses with a semicolon. (Instead of using a semicolon you could have used a comma and a conjunction to join these two clauses: *The purchasing department favors staying with our current vendor, but I disagree.*)

Choice c is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation.

40. The answer is choice c. This is another example of a comma splice. Two independent clauses are joined by only a comma with no coordinating conjunction.

Choice a is punctuated correctly. If this sentence contained a direct quotation (word for word), it would be punctuated like this: *Alexander Pope said, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."*

Choices b and d are punctuated correctly because these sentences need no punctuation.

41. The answer is choice b. There should be a comma between the city and the state: *Utica, New York*.

Choice a is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation.

Choice c is an example of using a comma and a coordinating conjunction to join two independent clauses.

Choice d is an example of using a comma after a long introductory clause.

42. The answer is choice a. The word “Todays” should be “Today’s” (possessive not plural).
Choice b is an example of using a comma before and after a parenthetical phrase.
Choice c is an example of using a semicolon to join independent clauses. This sentence also illustrates the use of a comma after a transitional word (“however”).
Choice d is an example of using a comma after a long introductory clause. This sentence also illustrates the use of a comma between adjectives (“long, intense”).
43. The answer is choice c. It is incorrect to use a comma after the word “that” in this sentence.
Choice a is an example of using a comma after a long introductory clause.
Choices b and d are examples of using a comma and a coordinating conjunction to join two independent clauses.
44. The answer is choice c. This sentence is a question, so it should end with a question mark, not a period.
Choice a is an example of using a semicolon to join independent clauses.
Choice b is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation. You may have noticed that this sentence contains a conjunction (“but”), but the conjunction is used to join two nouns (“benefits” and “opportunity”), not two clauses. Therefore, no punctuation is needed.
Choice d is an example of using a comma and a coordinating conjunction to join two independent clauses.

45. The answer is choice a. This is another example of a comma splice. Two independent clauses are joined by only a comma with no coordinating conjunction.
- Choice b is an example of using a comma and a coordinating conjunction to join two independent clauses.
- Choice c is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation.
- Choice d is an example of using a comma before and after a parenthetical phrase.
46. The answer is choice c. The phrase “the new manager” is parenthetical. There should be a comma before and *after* the phrase.
- Choice a is an example of using a semicolon to join two independent clauses.
- Choice b is an example of using a comma after an introductory clause.
- Choice d is an example of using a comma and a conjunction to join independent clauses.
47. The answer is choice a. This is another example of a comma splice. Two independent clauses are joined by only a comma with no coordinating conjunction.
- Choice b is an example of using a comma after an introductory clause.
- Choice c needs no punctuation besides the question mark at the end.
- Choice d is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation.
48. The answer is choice c. There should be a comma after the word *money*. This sentence has two independent clauses. Use a comma and a conjunction to join independent clauses.
- Choice a is an example of using a comma before and after a parenthetical phrase.
- Choice b needs no punctuation. It is not necessary to use a comma after *old* because you do not pause after this word.
- Choice d is punctuated correctly. It is appropriate to use a comma after *broken* because you pause after this word.

49. The answer is choice d. This is another example of a comma splice. Two independent clauses are joined by only a comma with no coordinating conjunction.

Choices a and b are punctuated correctly because these sentences need no punctuation.

Choice c is an example of using a comma after an introductory clause.

50. The answer is choice d. This sentence is a question, so it should end with a question mark.

Choice a is an example of using a comma and a conjunction to join independent clauses.

Choice b is an example of using a comma to separate a city and a state.

Choice c is punctuated correctly because this sentence needs no punctuation.

