



LAST MINUTE ACT REVIEW

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THE WRITING TEST





THE BASICS

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- The ACT writing test looks a lot like the district writing assessment you've done for years: it's a 40 minute argumentative response to a question involving three perspectives.
- High-scoring essays are:
 - More than one-page long
 - Contain multiple points of view
 - Have strong details
 - Contain a clear thesis

ACT SAMPLE WRITING PROMPT

- The relationship between religious liberty and individual rights has often been a problematic one throughout American history. Today, for example, many businesses feel compelled to refuse service to homosexuals because of the religious beliefs of the business owners. Some argue that this refusal of service constitutes unlawful discrimination. Public school boards are often uncertain which religious holidays to add to the academic calendar. Should a Christian student, for instance, have to miss school because of a Jewish holiday? How should the state balance the need to respect religious liberty with need to preserve the rights of all members of society?



PERSPECTIVES FOR SAMPLE

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- Perspective 1: The state must accommodate all religions to the fullest extent possible. This means school days off for all major religious holidays and protecting the right of business owners to refuse service based on religious beliefs.
- Perspective 2: The government has no special obligation to protect religious liberties when they interfere with the freedoms and well-being of the public at large.
- Perspective 3: Government should seek, to the greatest extent possible, ways to accommodate both religious liberty and individual rights when the two find themselves in conflict.



STRATEGIES

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- If you can develop your argument without relying directly on the perspectives, you should. ACT scorers are going to grade thousands of these essays. Make yours stand out by taking a unique point of view.
- Take a position you are passionate about; this will make writing the essay easier.
- Offer a STAMPy intro and a clear, compelling thesis. This (and a conclusion that bookends it) are **VERY IMPORTANT**.



STRATEGIES

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- Give yourself 2-3 minutes to revise, focusing on your first paragraph and topic sentences.
- I would recommend a standard concession structure: “Although....”
- Use specific, detailed examples. These give you essay substance and make it more engaging. You can even make them up as long as they sound plausible.
- Reference the perspectives as **naysayers** in the body of your essay.



USING NAYSAYERS

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- A naysayer is simply introducing another point of view in a body paragraph and responding to it.
- An example on the ACT might look like this: “While those who agree with Perspective 1 might argue that school uniforms will make us safer, the evidence is clear that school uniforms only strip away our freedom without enhancing our security.”

THE READING TEST



GENERAL INFORMATION

- The ACT reading test is a 40-question, 35-minute test that measures your reading comprehension. The test questions ask you to derive meaning from several texts by (1) referring to what is explicitly stated and (2) reasoning to determine implicit meanings.
- Key Ideas and Details make up 55% of the questions, so these are the most important things to focus on in your reading and annotation.
- Read the passage quickly, but not so fast that you fail to discern its meaning.



READING TEST STRATEGIES

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- ▶ Do light annotation of text as you read, no more than 1-2 words for each section or paragraph. I typically annotate the names of characters, new scenes, major claims, and significant events.
 - ▶ This will keep you focused and help you answer questions.
 - ▶ As you read, pay close attention to the author's point of view.
 - ▶ Do not read the questions first and then go to the passage. You will run out of time.



READING TEST STRATEGIES

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- Try to anticipate the answer before you look at the options.
- There is always one right answer to every question. The ACT will disguise questions, but it is always about one right answer:
 - The author would **most likely** agree with which of the following statements?
 - The first paragraph **primarily** serves to:
 - In line 20, 'dark' **most nearly** means:
- Eliminate wrong answers. Typically, there are 1-2 obviously wrong answers. Even if you guess between two, you increase your odds.



READING TEST STRATEGIES

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- ▶ You can do the passages in any order. If you know you're weakest on the **science reading**, consider doing it last. Typically, the literary narrative passage is the easiest to read and understand.
- ▶ After each nine minutes, you should move on to the next passage. You've got 8:45 for each passage.

THE ENGLISH TEST





GENERAL STRATEGIES

- Answer every question.
- If you feel pressed for time, consider skipping some of the more time consuming or challenging questions (i.e. the ones that ask what order sentences should be placed in or the ones that ask you to consider the rhetorical purpose of a question).
- The simplest, complete answer is always the right answer.



GENERAL STRATEGIES

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- *Use the answers as clues for questions when you don't know the answer. Often, two of the answers will have similar problems that demonstrate neither can be right.*
- *Eliminate obviously wrong choices to narrow your options.*
- *Each question is worth the same number of points: focus on getting the answers you can get right rather than wasting time on questions you don't understand.*
- *Sometimes, you'll need to look as much as a line or two ahead or behind to find the right answer.*

CUT OUT THE FAT METHOD

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- ▶ Many sentences will often contain unnecessary words or phrases that are meant to confuse and distract you and cause you to not see the error. As you read the sentence, cross out any “fatty” or unneeded phrases. These include prepositional phrases, comma phrases, appositive phrases and anything between two commas.
- ▶ Dr. Phil, ~~an English scholar and author of many books,~~ went for a run with his new puppy.

GRAMMAR AND USAGE





SENTENCE ERRORS

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- A **fragment** is an incomplete sentence. Watch out for a sentence that begins with a subordinate conjunction (although, if, despite, since, because, while, after, before, when, where, why, and how).
- A **comma splice** is two sentences joined together with only a comma; a run-on is two sentences joined together without any punctuation. Separate the two sentences using either a period, or a semicolon, or a comma and a coordinate conjunction (and, but, or, nor, yet, so).

Clauses & Phrases

A **phrase** is part of a sentence which does not contain its own subject and predicate.

A **clause** is part of a sentence which contains its own subject and predicate.

An **independent (main) clause** makes sense on its own.

A **dependent (subordinate) clause** does not make sense on its own.

After school, Larry studied this ACT book and took the practice tests.

P

IC

After he finished studying, Larry went to baseball practice.

DC

IC

Larry felt a lot better after he studied for the test.

IC

DC

Comma Splice

A **comma splice** is like a run-on sentence, except that a comma separates the two clauses. **Comma splices must be corrected.**

Comma Splice: The computer is an invaluable tool, it links together millions of people.

Corrected: The computer is an invaluable tool because it links together millions of people.

The computer is an invaluable tool; it links together millions of people.

The computer is an invaluable tool. It links together millions of people.

Sentence Fragments – Dependent Clause

A single word may change an independent clause to a dependent clause. Be particularly alert for clauses beginning with words such as **although, as, because, despite, what, when.**

A dependent clause usually leaves you feeling up in the air, as though you were waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Independent clause: Ann went to the football game.

Dependent clause: As Ann went to the football game.

Fragment: The football game continued. While the band played in the background.

Corrected: The football game continued while the band played in the background.
While the band played in the background, the football game continued.
The football game continued. The band played in the background.
The football game continued; the band played in the background.

SENTENCE ERRORS EXAMPLES

10. The college's plans for expansion included a new science building and a new dormitory if the funding drive was successful there would be enough money for both.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. dormitory, if
- H. dormitory; if,
- J. dormitory. If

12. I never really enjoyed science math is my favorite class.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. science, math
- H. science, math,
- J. science; math

13. Three other kinds of beavers lived around Agate in the early Miocene epoch, but their bones have never been found in the burrows, in fact, no one knows what they did for homes.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. burrows. In fact, no one
- C. burrows, no one, in fact
- D. burrows, the fact of the matter is in fact no one



MODIFIER ERRORS

- A descriptive phrase (modifier) needs to be as near as possible to the word it describes.
- Look out for participial constructions that may have a misplaced modifier.
- Place a present or past participle phrase right before or right after the word it describes.
- Place an adjective clause right after the word it describes.

Modifiers

Modifiers **develop** sentences. Modifiers may be either words, phrases, or clauses. Modifiers can come either before or after the words they modify.

Basic sentence: The sun rose.

Word modifier: The warm sun rose.

Word modifier: The warm sun rose slowly.

Phrase modifier: The warm sun rose slowly from the east.

Clause modifier: The warm sun, which cast its rays on the river, rose slowly from the east.

Misplaced Modifiers & Shifts in Construction

Misplaced: The truck drove through the tunnel and **it was large**.

Corrected: The **large truck** drove through the tunnel.

The truck drove through the **large tunnel**.

Misplaced: The driver brought a delivery **to the store in a red container**.

Corrected: The driver brought **a delivery in a red container** to the store.

Misplaced: The driver shifted the van into first gear and **firmly drove** out of the parking lot.

Corrected: The driver **shifted the van firmly into first gear** and drove out of the parking lot.

Misplaced Modifiers & Shifts in Construction

Be sure the word being modified is in the sentence. To correct such errors, include the word being modified in the sentence.

Misplaced: While on vacation in Iowa, a tornado alert was issued.

Corrected: While **we** were on vacation in Iowa, a tornado alert was issued.
There was a tornado alert while we were on vacation in Iowa.

Misplaced: The wind was howling, which had to take cover under a highway overpass.

The wind was howling, **and we** had to take cover under a highway overpass.

MODIFIER ERROR EXAMPLES

18. While waiting for the plumber, the hot-water tank began to leak all over the basement floor.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. plumber, the hot-water tank begin
- H. plumber, the hot-water tank was beginning
- J. plumber, I saw the hot-water tank beginning

19. Walking to the pawnshop, Bob's watch dropped into the sewer.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. Bob's watch fell into the sewer
- C. Bob dropped his watch
- D. the watch dropped Bob

20. The paramedics covered the boy's forehead with a cold compress, which was bruised and swollen.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. forehead with a cold compress which was bruised and swollen
- H. forehead, which was bruised and swollen, with a cold compress.
- J. forehead with a cold compress.

21. At the end of the semester, I realized I only needed tutoring in one course.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. only I needed tutoring
- C. I needed only tutoring
- D. I needed tutoring only



PARALLELISM

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- Use the same grammatical form to express equal or parallel ideas. Look out for a list of nouns, verbs, adjectives, or phrases in a sentence. Keep all the items in the same grammatical form.
- The parallel structure rule regarding phrases is that the construction of a phrase on one side of a conjunction must match the construction of the phrase on the other side of the conjunction as closely as possible.
- The basic parallel structure rule is that the things in a list should be in the same grammatical form. If you're listing three things, the construction of that list should be noun, noun, noun, or verb, verb, verb. Any inconsistency within the list is an error in parallel structure.

PARALLELISM EXAMPLES

27. The grammar exercises are long, difficult, and contain absurdities.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - G. absurd.
 - H. are containing absurdities.
 - J. are also absurd.
28. One option the students have is to fail the test; the other is working long hours.
- F. NO CHANGE
 - G. work
 - H. to work
 - J. to have worked
29. You have to be smart, friendly, and show energy.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. have to show energy.
 - C. have to be energetic.
 - D. energetic.



CONJUNCTIONS

➤ Coordinate

➤ **FANBOYS:** These are the only words that can connect two independent clauses with a comma before it.

➤ **Correlative:** These travel in pairs and connect two equal ideas.

➤ either...or,

➤ neither...nor,

➤ not only...

➤ but also,

➤ both...and

CONJUNCTION EXAMPLES

31. The baby's hat is made of wool and it really seems to keep him warm.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. wool, and
- C. wool, and,
- D. wool and,

32. However, I don't have any cash on me, I still want to buy a ticket.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. Since,
- H. Although
- J. In conclusion,

33. I love cake, but I'm on a diet right now.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. cake but,
- C. cake, however
- D. cake. But



COMMAS

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- ▶ The serial comma is used to separate three or more words or phrases in a list or to separate two or more equal adjectives:
 - ▶ Sam brought his bat, ball, and glove to the game on Sunday. The violent, steely waves menaced the fishermen.
- ▶ The parenthetical comma is a pair of commas used to set off non-essential words or phrases in a sentence:
 - ▶ The sunset, glowing in the evening dusk, looked like a ball of fire. Teresa, my cousin, immigrated from France in 1998.
- ▶ The introductory comma separates an introductory phrase or clause from the rest. It is also used to set off a beginning subordinate clause or a beginning independent clause:
 - ▶ Yes, Mary is planning to attend the dance this Friday. Although she was good at business, she chose the profession of a teacher. I enjoyed watching the game, but my father thought it was too long.

COMMA SAMPLES

38. A bright yellow shining light glowed from the lighthouse to warn travelers at sea.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. bright, yellow, shining light
 - C. bright, yellow, shining, light
 - D. bright, yellow, shining, light,
39. At the track meet we will sprint hurdle and vault our way towards a victory.
- F. NO CHANGE
 - G. we will sprint hurdle, and vault our way
 - H. we will sprint, hurdle, and vault our way
 - J. we will sprint hurdle and vault, our way
40. Among the guest speakers were an author an engineer a CEO and a journalist.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. were an author an engineer a CEO, and a journalist.
 - C. were an author an engineer a CEO and, a journalist.
 - D. were an author, an engineer, a CEO, and a journalist.

COMMA SAMPLES

41. We went to a great concert last night but the music was too loud.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. concert last night, but the music
- H. concert, last night but, the music
- J. concert, last night, but the music

42. To open the door properly you must turn the knob while pressing in firmly.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. properly you must turn the knob,
- C. properly, you must turn the knob
- D. properly, you must turn, the knob

43. William Brunet the police officer apprehended the suspect.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. Brunet, the police officer apprehended
- H. Brunet the police, officer apprehended
- J. Brunet, the police officer, apprehended



SEMICOLONS AND COLONS

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- Semicolons are used to connect two related independent clauses or sentences.
- Colons are used to announce, introduce, or direct attention to a list, a noun or noun phrase, a quotation, or an example/explanation.
- Don't use a colon:
 - Between a verb and its complement.
 - Between a preposition and its object.
 - after “such as,” “including,” “especially,” and similar phrases.

COLON AND SEMICOLON SAMPLES

47. If you want to go fishing, you need the following items: bait, tackle, net, and hooks.

F. NO CHANGE

G. item's, bait, tackle, net, and hooks.

H. items; bait, tackle, net, and hooks.

J. items: bait tackle net and hooks,

48. Almost all areas on earth have been explored by modern scientists; as a result, they have now begun research on the floors of the sea.

A. NO CHANGE

B. scientists; as a result they

C. scientists, as a result, they

D. scientists. As a result they



SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

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- A verb must agree with its subject in number. A singular verb is used with a singular subject and a plural verb is used with a plural subject.
- Identify the real subject, and ignore the words that come between the real subject and its verb.
- Use a plural verb with compound subjects that contain the word and/both.
- Use a singular verb with a compound subject connected by or/nor.

SUBJECT VERB AGREEMENT EXAMPLES

54. Mike, along with his friends, hope to study graphic design.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. have hoped
- H. are hoping
- J. hopes

55. Neither Mike nor Marty like anchovies in his pizza.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. likes
- C. do like
- D. don't like

56. There in the distance was the remains of the ghost town.

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. has been
- H. is
- J. were

PRONOUNS

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- A pronoun agrees with its antecedent (the noun it replaces) in number.
 - Singular pronouns (she) replace singular nouns (Joanna).
 - Plural pronouns (they) replace plural nouns (Janna and David).
- Pronouns used after anybody, everyone, someone, nobody, one, each, either, and neither should be singular.
- **FAKE ACT RULE:** Use whom when it is immediately after a preposition or the verb of a sentence.

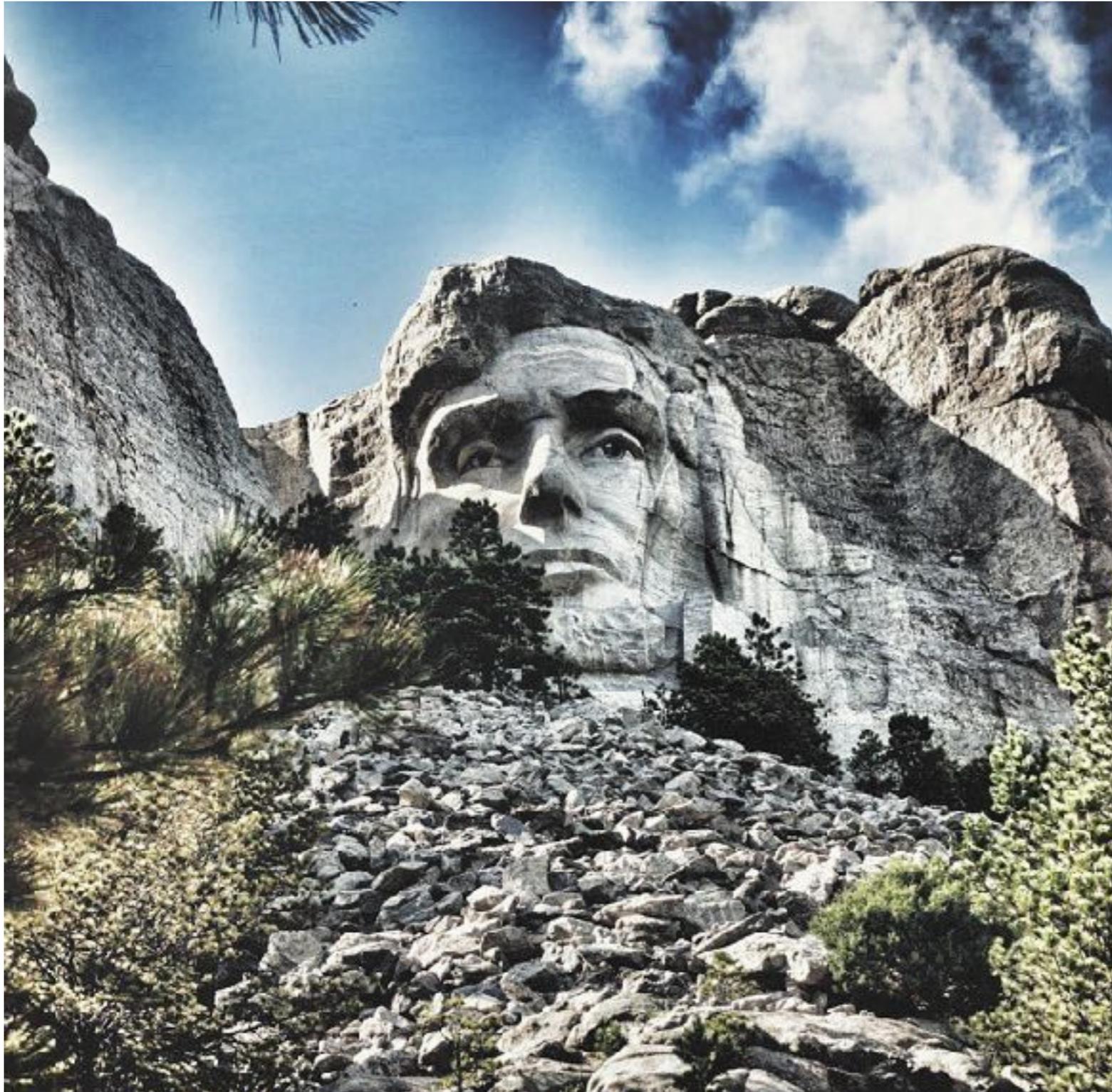


PRONOUN ERROR EXAMPLES

65. Each of the boys was determined they would attend practice everyday.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. he would
 - C. he will
 - D. them would
67. Although the American bald eagle has been on the endangered species list for years, they have been sighted in wildlife preserves much more frequently during that past two years.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. they are
 - C. it can be
 - D. it has been
68. The students, who had been studying the space program, were thrilled to witness the lunar landing.
- F. NO CHANGE
 - G. about whom had been studying the space program
 - H. whom had been studying the space program
 - J. who had been studying the space program

RHETORICAL SKILLS





PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE