



***SAT Grammar  
Punctuation***

**Rule: Two independent clauses must be separated by more than a comma.**

For example: Generally speaking, the secret society didn't allow members to nominate their friends, they wished to keep the induction process impartial.

The sentence contains two independent clauses: "the secret society didn't allow members to nominate their friends" and "they wished to keep the induction process impartial." An independent clause is a clause that could stand alone as a sentence. It is incorrect to link two independent clauses with only a comma. Instead, use either a comma plus an appropriate conjunction or a semicolon. The sentence should be rewritten: Generally speaking, the secret society didn't allow members to nominate their **friends; they** wished to keep the induction process impartial."

**Rule: A dependent clause only needs a comma if it starts the sentence.**

For example: The referendum was unsuccessful, because the advocacy group completely neglected its campaign until less than a week before the vote.

The sentence contains a punctuation error because the dependent clause "because the advocacy group..." follows the independent clause "the referendum was unsuccessful," but they are separated by a comma. It is only appropriate to separate the dependent and independent clauses with a comma when the dependent clause comes first in a sentence. This sentence must be rewritten: "The referendum was **unsuccessful because** the advocacy group completely neglected its campaign until less than a week before the vote."

**Rule: Surround non-essential descriptive phrases with commas.**

For example: Our Spanish teacher, who had spent fifteen years building houses in Guatemala was everyone's favorite because of his easy-going personality.

Because the sentence would still be complete if the phrase "who had spent fifteen years building houses in Guatemala" was removed, this information should be surrounded by commas. This is also true because the main verb must come immediately after the main subject in a sentence, excepting these parenthetical phrases which can be ignored. Without a second comma at the end of the descriptive phrase, the verb does not directly follow the subject. The sentence should be rewritten: "Our Spanish teacher, who had spent fifteen years building houses in **Guatemala,** was everyone's favorite because of his easy-going personality."

**Rule: Make complex lists more clear with semicolons.**

For example: The prosperous travel agency sent its frequent customers on a complimentary trip that made stops in Barcelona, Spain, Paris, France and Brussels, Belgium.

This sentence incorrectly indicates that "Barcelona, Italy, Paris, France and Brussels, Belgium" are five separate locations; however Barcelona is in Italy and Paris is in France, so there are only three items in this list. When the items in a list already use commas, they should be separated by semicolons for clarity. The sentence should be rewritten: "The prosperous travel agency sent its frequent customers on a complimentary trip that made stops in **Barcelona, Spain; Paris, France; and Brussels, Belgium.**"



**SAT GRAMMAR TAKE AWAY**

**On the SAT:**

- Identify the dependent and independent clauses in the sentence.
- Make sure that dependent clauses and descriptive phrases preceding an independent clause are offset by a comma.
- Make sure that non-essential phrases in the middle of sentences are offset by surrounding commas.
- Make sure that commas are paired with appropriate conjunctions to separate two independent clauses.
- Make sure that two independent clauses are separated either by a comma plus an appropriate conjunction or by a semicolon.
- If items in a list contains commas, separate the items with semicolons.