Writing Conventions Strand

5

In this section you are an editor, looking at questions and deciding how the sentences in the questions can be corrected or improved. You should look at capitalization, punctuation, grammar and usage, sentence construction, and paragraph structure. Let's see what you can do with 11 released questions from a previous administration of the CAHSEE

The CAHSEE uses 15 multiple-choice questions to test your knowledge of three writing conventions standards. They are:

WC 1.1	Identify and correctly use clauses (e.g., main and subordinate), phrases (e.g., gerund, infinitive, and participial), and mechanics of punctuation (e.g., semicolons, colons, ellipses, hyphens). [5 questions]
WC 1.2	Understand sentence construction (e.g., parallel structure, subordination, proper placement of modifiers) and proper English usage (e.g., consistency of verb tenses). [5 questions]
WC 1.3	Demonstrate an understanding of proper English usage and control of grammar, paragraph and sentence structure, diction, and syntax. [5 questions]

Grammar can be tricky. You have to learn many, many rules—remember them. California's Content Standards expect you to know how to follow the conventions (that means rules) for punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and usage. So let's see what we can do to help you through this part of the test. Some of the questions focus on choosing (and using) the right verb tenses. Others refer to misplaced modifiers.

You may be wondering, "What's a subordinate clause?" "Do modifiers have a proper place?" "How do I control grammar?" "I never heard of parallel structure." Quit worrying. Maybe you didn't quite understand phrases and clauses, and maybe you don't remember modifiers, but with a little common sense and a few rules, you can get through this. Trust us!

TENSE, PLACEMENT, AND PUNCTUATION

The directions for the next group of questions read:

Choose the answer that is the most effective substitute for each underlined part of the sentence. If no substitution is necessary, choose "Leave as is."

L00SA039

Released CAHSEE question

When our parents celebrate their silver wedding anniversary later this year, <u>they were married for twenty-five years</u>.

A. they will have been married for twenty-five years.

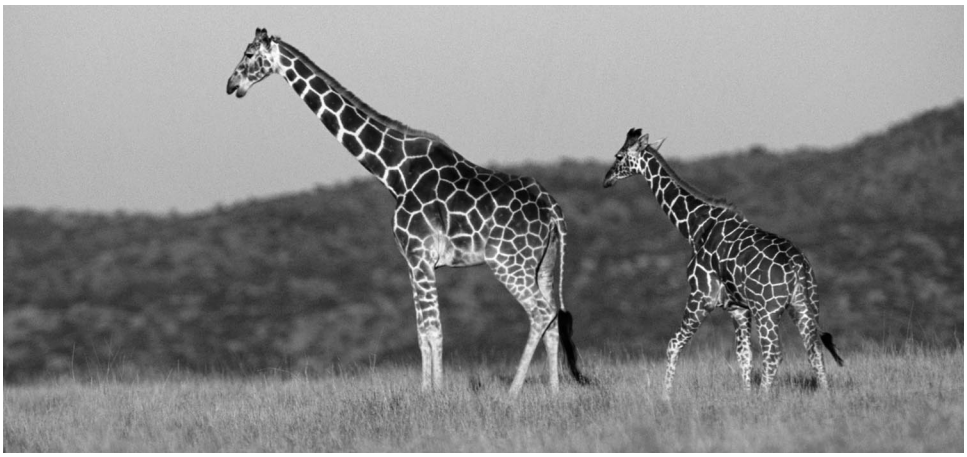
B. they have been married for twenty-five years.

C. they would have been married for twenty-five years.

D. Leave as is.

Solution

Remember *past tense, present tense,* and *future tense?* Present tense is happening now; past tense happened in the past. But if something is going to happen, that's "future," and in the future tense, you will find the word *will* or *shall.* In this question, something is going to happen "later this year." That is future. The correct answer is **A**. (WC 10.1.2)



L00SA134

Released CAHSEE question

Akia told us about her safari across the plains of East Africa in our geography class.

A. In our geography class, Akia told us about her safari across the plains of East Africa.

B. Akia told us about her safari in our geography class across the plains of East Africa.

C. In our geography class Akia told about her safari across the plains of East Africa to us.

D. Leave as is.

Solution

English teachers love misplaced modifiers because of the funny mental pictures they bring to mind. If you take the sentence in the question exactly the way it is written, you have to say that Akia's safari happened in geography class. So, in which choice is it clear that Akia is telling about the safari during geography class? The correct answer is **A**. (WC 10.1.2)

L00SA201

Released CAHSEE question

"Why should I wear a sweater?" grumbled the boy as his mother reminded him again of the cold weather.

A. 'Why should I wear a sweater'?

B. "Why should I wear a sweater"

C. "Why should I wear a sweater"?

D. Leave as is.

Solution

This one is correct the way it is. Why? The part that is quoted is a question, so the question mark goes inside the quotation marks. Answer A has two problems: First, it uses single quotes instead of double quote marks; then, in A and in C, the question mark is outside the quotation marks. In B the writer left out the question mark completely. So the answer is **D**. (WC 10.1.1)

L00SA043

Released CAHSEE question

The Alaskan rivers are clear and sparkling <u>in summer however; they are frozen in winter</u>.

A. in summer, however they are frozen in winter.

B. in summer; however, they are frozen in winter.

C. in summer: however they are frozen in winter.

D. Leave as is.

Solution

This is a run-on sentence—two sentences run together without punctuation between them—and needs to be fixed. "However" is a conjunction that needs to be set off by commas. It would be possible to put in a period and a capital *H* on *however*. But that is not one of the choices. You don't join two complete thoughts that are equally important with commas or colons. The preceding sentence joins two complete thoughts that could be separated into two sentences. What punctuation mark joins the two thoughts into one sentence? A semicolon joins them. The correct answer is **B**. (WC 10.1.1)

L00SA073

Released CAHSEE question

When Tom <u>arrived at school he</u> was carrying all his books with him.

A. arrived at school, he

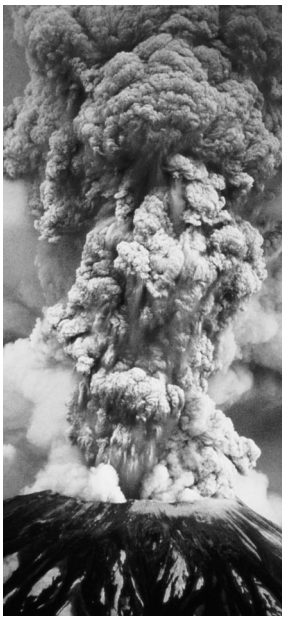
B. arrived, at school he

C. arrived at school he,

D. Leave as is.

Solution

Read the sentence four times, once for each choice. As you read it, stop for a breath where the comma is. Only one reading will make sense. What would happen if you put the clause in the choices back at the end of the sentence? B would read like this. "At school he was carrying all his books with him when Tom arrived." C would read, "Was carrying all his books with him when Tom arrived he." Therefore, the correct answer is **A**. (WC 10.1.1)



L00SA032

Released CAHSEE question

<u>After, the volcano erupted, the</u> tiny tropical island was quiet and devastated.

A. After the volcano erupted, the

B. After the volcano erupted the

C. After the volcano erupts, the

D. Leave as is.

Solution

Same rule. Place a comma where you need to pause for the sentence to make sense. Try reading each answer, stopping for a breath at each comma. Try moving the clause to the end of the sentence. Answer C changes a past tense verb to a present tense verb, so it doesn't matter much how it reads; it's not correct. A present tense verb and a past tense verb in the same sentence usually don't work. The correct answer is **A**. (WC 10.1.1)

L00SA036

Released CAHSEE question

<u>A dog bit Tom's ankle while riding a bicycle</u>.

A. Riding a bicycle, a dog bit Tom's ankle.

B. While riding a bicycle, a dog bit Tom's ankle.

C. While Tom was riding a bicycle, a dog bit his ankle.

D. Leave as is.

Solution

When you see a misplaced modifier, you should laugh, or at least grin a little. Written as is, the sentence suggests that a dog is riding a bicycle. Or maybe the ankle is riding a bicycle. This sentence should clearly say that Tom is riding the bicycle. In Answers A and B, who is riding the bicycle? Who is riding the bicycle in Answer C? The correct response is **C**. (WC 10.1.2)

PROPER CASE AND RULES TO REMEMBER

For the following questions, the CASHEE directions read as follows:

Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

L00SA076

Released CAHSEE question

The musician played Wendy's favorite waltz for her husband and _____.

A. I

B. he

C. she

D. her

Solution

The rule is, "Use the objective case for objects of prepositions." The trick is this: Which one would you use if you took out "her husband and"? Let's try it. The musician played Wendy's favorite waltz for *I*. The musician played Wendy's favorite waltz for *he*. The musician played Wendy's favorite waltz for *she*. The musician played Wendy's favorite waltz for *her*. The correct answer is **D**. (WC 10.1.3)

L00SA078

Released CAHSEE question

_____ going to be late if they don't hurry.

A. They're

B. Their

C. There

D. They'll

Solution

This sentence needs a subject. **Who** is going to be late? **They** are going to be late. What is the contraction for *they are?* A contraction runs words together and leaves out letters. An apostrophe goes where the letters are left out. *They're* going to be late. The correct response is **A**. (WC 10.1.3)

L00SA016

Released CAHSEE question

When she _____ the award, she blushed and quickly returned to her seat.

A. excepted

B. accepts

C. accepted

D. excepts

Solution

You need to know two things here. First, do you want past tense or present tense? In the sentence, she "blushed" (past tense) and "returned" (past tense). The event is over, so use the past tense to be consistent with the other verbs in the sentence. That narrows our choices to *excepted* and *accepted*. These two words sound very much alike when you talk. You just have to learn and remember that *accepted* means *received*. The correct response is **C**. (WC 10.1.3)

L00SA031

Released CAHSEE question

The frightened pilot's face was ashen as he gingerly lowered the plane onto the Smiths' private _____ that time was running out for his ailing friend.

A. runway: he knew

B. runway, he knew

C. runway. He knew

D. runway but he knew

Solution

Read this one out loud, inserting the missing words. How many sentences do you have? Do you have one complete thought or two complete thoughts? How do you end a sentence? How do you begin a new sentence? You know this, don't you? Only one of these answers includes a period and a capital letter. The correct answer is **C**. (WC 10.1.1)