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GMAT IDIOM EBOOK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Section 1: Idioms & Prepositions

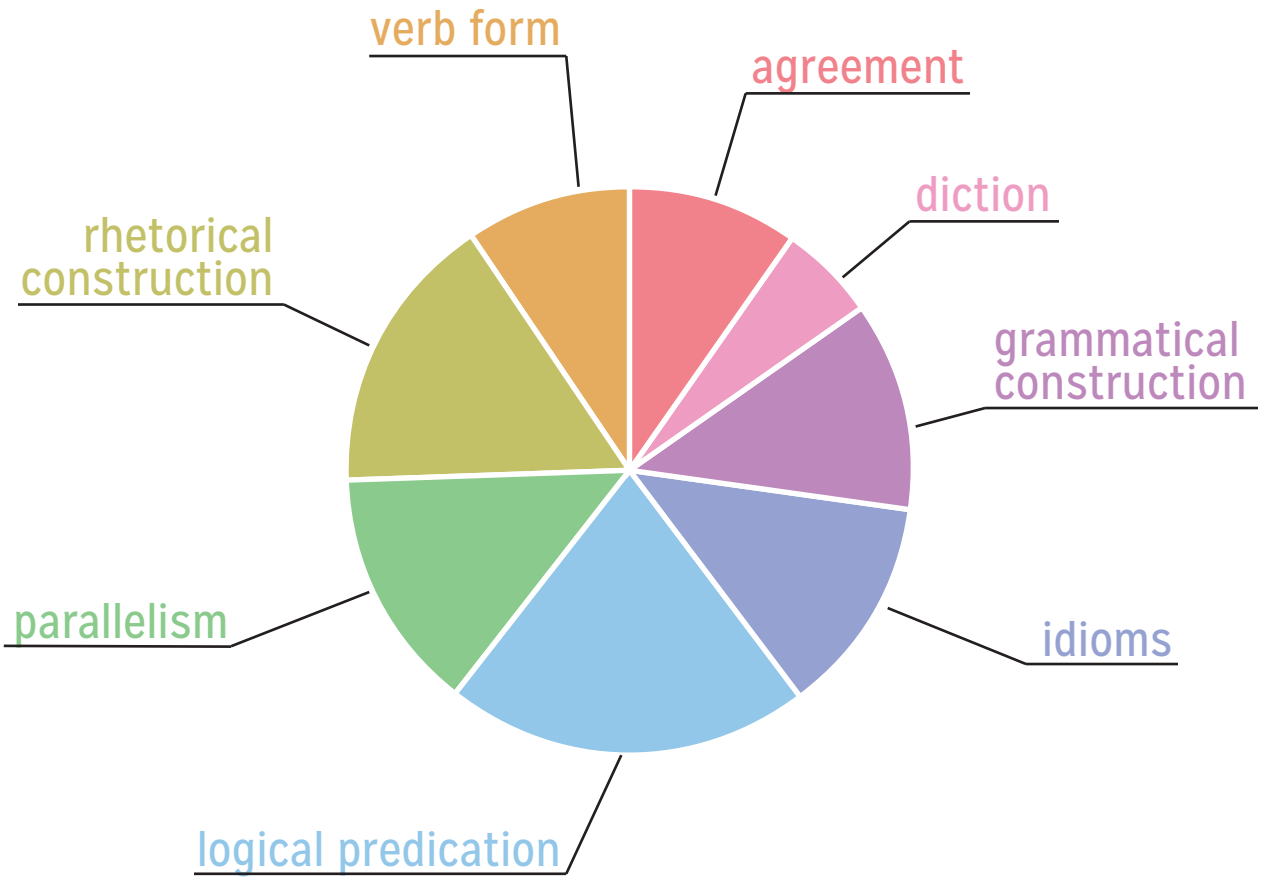
Section 2: Clauses & Organizations of a Sentence

Practice Questions

INTRODUCTION

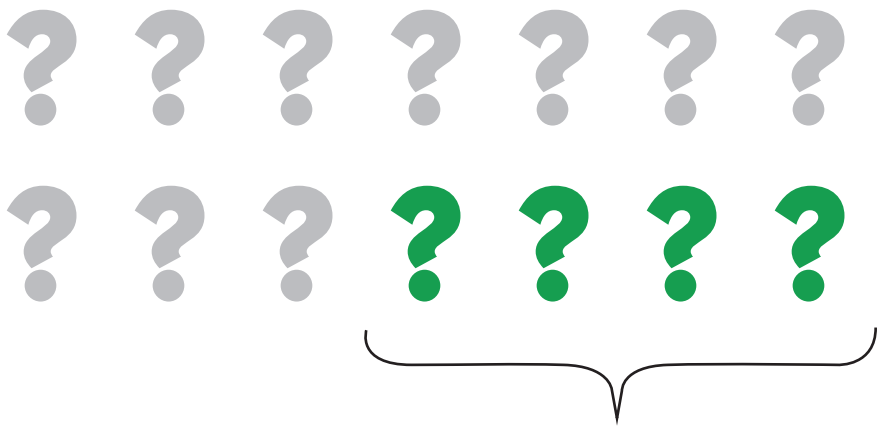
how important
are idioms for the GMAT sentence correction?

Idioms appear just as frequently as parallelism so... *VERY IMPORTANT!*



INTRODUCTION

based on the OG, of the 13-14 Sentence Correction questions you see on the GMAT Verbal Section...



about 3-4 of them should test idioms

The chance that, of the 14 sentence correction questions on the real GMAT, you do not see an idiom question is about **1 in 100.**

kinds of idioms on the GMAT

Ability to do X

Prevent from doing X

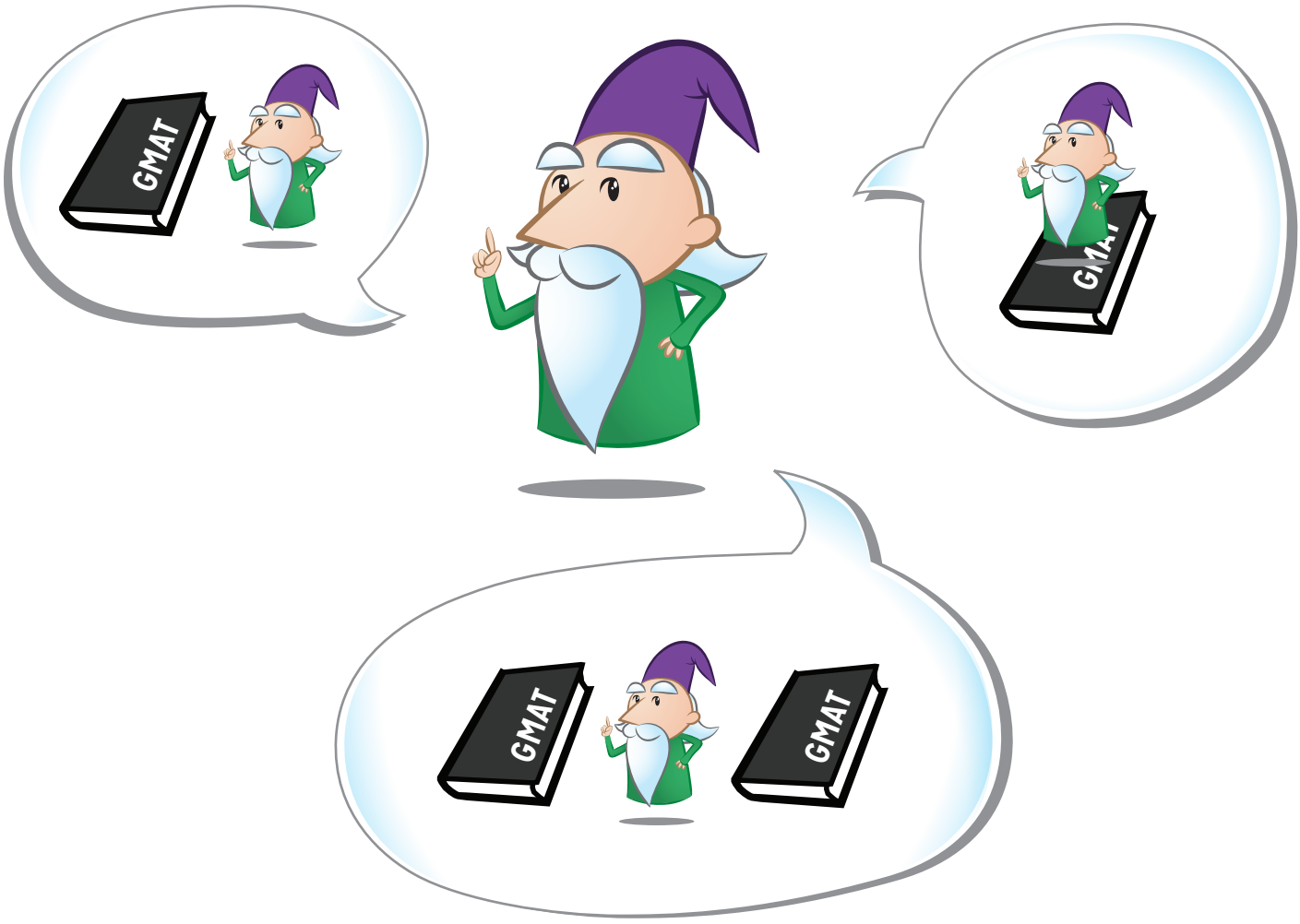
Scarcer than hen's teeth

Raining cats and dogs

WHAT THIS EBOOK COVERS

The articles in this ebook cover idioms as well as a bit about diction and a bit about rhetorical construction. Idioms are about unique combinations of words, which words always "belong together". Diction concerns the meaning of individual words, and whether this single word is used properly in a sentence. Rhetorical construction concerns the overall flow of a sentence, how a sentence is put together for the most clarity and power, but no ambiguity. Discussion of idioms necessarily reaches into these other two areas, so topics in diction and rhetorical construction will appear throughout the ebook.

IDIOMS INVOLVING PREPOSITIONS



"FROM"

the preposition "from"

The word "from" is a preposition. This means, it must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) The SEC prohibits folks with inside information about a company from trading that company's stocks and options.

2) The state senator strove to distinguish his party's nuanced position on immigration from what the controversial fringe group advocates.

In sentence #1, the object of "from" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving the word "from."

verbs + "from"

Some verbs require the word "from." Some of these verbs involve some kind of spatial separation, at least in their literal sense:

isolate from

separate from

descend from

For other verbs, the separation is not literal and spatial, but conceptual

differ from

prevent A from B

prohibit A from B

"FROM"

verbs + "from"

For both "prevent" and "prohibit", the object of "from" is almost always a gerund —- "to prevent someone from talking", "to prohibit citizens of one state from suing a another state."

Another unusual "from" idiom involves the verb "to choose". When a person chooses an action, we say that person "chooses to do X" — the action is expressed as an infinitive. When we are discussing the various options available to the person choosing, we use the idiom:

choose from

Here, the object of "from" is the set or list of available options.

3) Congress balked when President Reagan chose Robert Bork from all available federal judges.

Here, the phrase "all available federal judges" gives the array of options from which the choice was made.

spacial relationships

The words "to" and "from" are used for approach and receding, from A to B, both literally and figuratively.

4) General Sherman marched from Atlanta to Savannah, destroying everything along the way.

5) Whereas a modern American feast is said to go "from soup to nuts", an ancient Roman banquet went ab ovo usque ad pomo ("from the egg to the apple").

6) Sviatoslav Richter's repertoire ranged from works by eighteenth century Baroque composers, such as Bach and Handel, to contemporary compositions, by Soviet composers such as Shostakovich and Prokofiev, some of whose works Richter premiered.

Notice, in that last sentence the idiom "to range from A to B", a way of talking about the literal or figurative extent of something.

"difference"

Above, I cited a verb idiom involving the preposition "from": **to differ from**

The adjective form "different" also follows this form: **different from**

7) Few can say whether a chaconne is truly different from a passacaglia.

Sometimes a root word retains the same idiom as it changes from one grammatical form to another.

Another idiom the verb differ follows is **to differ in.** Here, we are not describing the two parties who differ, but rather the field or discipline in which they differ

8) Representative Hostettler and Representative Frank differ in their position on gay marriage.

The noun form "difference" shares this latter idiom with the verb and follows its own idioms: **difference in, difference between, and difference with respect to.**

9) The president and prime minister have no difference in standing on the proposed trade bill.

10) Ethicists ordinarily underscore the difference between "white lies', designed to protect the feelings of others, and lies of malice motivated by venal self-interest.

11) Since the Senator's reelection, political commentators have remarked on subtle differences with respect to his portrayal of the tax reform.

The "between" idiom indicates the parties that differ, while the "in" or "with respect to" describe the subject or field of the difference: either one of these latter can be combined with the "between" idiom:

12) The difference in hitting technique between Babe Ruth and Ted Williams is the subject of endless debate.

13) Between the original 1937 movie and the current remake, critics have noted differences with respect to the murderer's motivations.

"TO"

the preposition "to"

The word "to" is a preposition. This means, it must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) I attribute my lack of acumen to staying up late every night for the past five nights.

2) He acknowledges no responsibility to whoever may use the room after him.

In #1, the object of "to" is a gerund phrase, and in #2, the object of "to" is a substantive clause. Both of these sentences follow idiomatic structures we will examine below.

The preposition "to" also begins infinitive. An infinitive is something very different from a prepositional phrase. This blog article is discussing preposition phrases involving "to", including words and phrase that idiomatically demand this preposition. There's a whole other post on verbs that idiomatically require infinitives, another topic necessarily for performing well on GMAT Sentence Correction.

The preposition "to" generally connote motion toward something, and many of its uses retain something of that connotation.

verbs + "to"

Again, just to be perfectly clear: this section is about verbs that require a prepositional phrase beginning with "to" — see pp. 43-44 for verbs that require infinitives. The following two verbs require a prepositional phrase beginning with "to":

attribute to

conform to

contribute to

verbs + "to"

When we attribute something (A) to someone (B), we are saying that we think person B has the quality or skill or talent of A; that something, A, can also be a real-world achievement or accomplishment. The "credit" for the talented or achievement, as it were, "travels" to the person to whom the attribution was made: this is why the preposition "to" is used.

3) Despite initial controversies, mathematicians now universally attribute the proof of Fermat's Last Theorem to Andrew Wiles.

When we contribute something (A) to someone (B), we are giving (A) a gift or donation to B. In most contexts including the GMAT, when the object contributed is otherwise unspecified, it is assumed to be money. The gift or whatever is contributed "moves toward" the one who receives it.

4) Warren Buffet contributes substantially to philanthropic and charitable organizations.

5) In one of the remarkable collaborations of music history, Paul McCartney would contribute more complex and interesting harmonies to John Lennon's songs, and in turn, Lennon would contribute mind-bending phrases to McCartney's lyrics.

The idiom involving the verb "conform" is a little more unusual. When I say I conform A to B, then A is usually something under my control (my behavior, my habits, etc.), and B is some kind of more universal standard or set of rules. The connotation is that B is based in some sort of authority, and A is something which should be governed by this authority.

6) Professor Higgins argued that status of the various races, with respect to the American legal system, still does not conform to the Fourteenth Amendment's lofty idea of "equal protection under the law."

7) The CFO estimated that Fomalhaut Corporation would have to spend more than $7 million in order to conform completely to the full panoply of EPA regulations.

comparisons with "to"

Of course, the GMAT Sentence Correction loves comparisons. The following comparative forms use the preposition "to"

compare A to B
compare to
compared to (or compared with)
in contrast to A, B

Here are some exemplary sentences to demonstrate proper usage.

15) In *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller compared the activities of the HUAC to the Salem witch trials.

16) Warren G. Harding won one of the largest landslide victories in American presidential history, but in retrospect, his administration does not compare well to those of virtually all other presidents.

17) Compared to/with California, New Jersey has a relatively small coast.

18) Compared to/with other writers of the early 20th century, James Joyce may seem to have produced a limited output, if one judges purely by number of books.

19) In contrast to politics throughout Europe, politics in America are influenced much more heavily by religion.

20) In contrast to the numerous theorems of Geometry readily accessible to high school students, most of the theorems of Number Theory are so sophisticated that only those with advanced degrees in mathematics can understand them.

The GMAT does not like the words "compared to" or "compared with" combined with other comparative words:

Compared to A, B is taller.
A has more money, compared to B.
When compared to A, ...

Also, adding the word "when" before the word "compared" is always 100% wrong.

adjectives + "to"

Two adjectives that idiomatically take a prepositional phrase beginning with the preposition are:

responsible to

subject to

The very idea of being "responsible" implies someone to whom one is accountable, the person to whom one is "responding" (the root meaning of "responsible"). That authoritative person is the object of the preposition "to." This relationship with the proposition carries over to the noun form, "responsibility."

8) The CEO of most corporations is responsible to the board that hired him.

9) The senior military leaders on the Joints Chiefs of Staff are responsible to the Secretary of Defense, and through this Secretary, to the President of the United States.

10) After the state intervened to save the city from bankruptcy, the mayor asked the state senators to clarify and delineate his responsibility to them.

The adjective "subject" implies being controlled by something else, either in a legal sense, or in the sense of a natural law, or experiences the consequences of something. A is subject to B if B is the controller or actor having influence on A.

11) Even the President is subject to the law of the land.

12) The former politician, no longer subject to vituperative attacks in the press, was considering the possibility of a new campaign.

13) The New York City Subway System, simply because of its gargantuan scale, is subject to a relatively high rate of delays.

14) Since the electron is not composed of quarks, it is not subject to the laws of Quantum Chromodynamics.

"WITH"

the preposition "with"

The word "with" is a preposition. This means, it must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) Despite an earlier attempt by Chancourois, historians of science general credit Dmitri Mendeleev with formulating the Periodic Table of the Elements.

2) The Federal Judge argued that his recent controversial ruling was consistent with what the framers of the US Constitution thought about a right to privacy.

In sentence #1, the object of "with" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving the word "with." The proposition "with", as an ordinary preposition, can carry a variety of connotations:

3) I fixed the table with hammer and nails. (indicates means)
4) I fixed the table with haste. (indicates manner)
5) I fixed the table with my friend Chris. (indicates accompaniment)

The idioms below reflect this diversity of usages.

verbs + "with"

Some verbs require the word "with." Here's a list of the most common verbs that require "with".

agree with, collaborate with, comply with, credit A with B, enamored with, provide with, sympathize with

The idioms involving "agree", "collaborate", and "sympathize" are most like the accompaniment use of "with", in #5 above: in all three of these, the object of "with" is a person with whom some has some kind of affiliation or affinity, or that person's view.

6) The Human Resources Director does not agree with the CFO's plans for redesigning the employee retirement options.

verbs + "with"

7) Brahms collaborated with the famous violinist Joseph Joachim in composing his Violin Concerto.

8) Despite a lifetime of opposition, the nun sympathized with her gravely ill opponent.

Similar to these is the idiom involving "enamored." To be "enamored with" someone or something is to really like it: it has a connotation of something like romantic infatuation or passionate enthusiasm.

9) For many years, Yeats was enamored with Maud Gonne, who rejected Yeats' marriage proposals on four different occasions.

10) Although Jefferson was enamored with the idea of liberty and equal rights for all, the Southern delegates to the Continental Congress were successful in demanding that phrases condemning slavery be removed from the Declaration of Independence.

The idiom involving "provide" is most like the means example, #3 above.

Here, the object of the proposition "with" is a physical or metaphorical support given to someone.

11) The resupply station provided the hungry soldiers with much-needed food.

12) A young Reagan secretly provided the HUAC with damning information about his fellow actors.

13) Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* provided Dante with a vast philosophical system within which to frame his famous drama.

The idiom involving both "credit" and "comply" is somewhat analogous to the manner example, #4 above, only insofar as the object of "with" is necessarily something abstract.

"WITH"

verbs + "with"

In the idiom "to credit A with B", A is the person who receives the credit, and B is the quality or accomplishment attributed to the person.

14) Even his political foes credit the prime minister with exceptional integrity.

15) Although Gregor Mendel enjoyed scant scientific recognition, current biologists universally credit him with the discovery of genetics.

In the idiom to "comply with X", the X is a law, a rule, or some other abstract authoritative principle.

15) The CEO fired the vice president for repeatedly failing to comply with company policy.

comparisons

Here are three idioms that, in one way or another, are used in how we would compare or relate two things.

compare A with B
contrast A with B
consistent with

One of the many ways to construct a grammatically correct comparison is to use the verb "compare" with the preposition with.

16) Early in his career, Darryl Strawberry's swing was compared with Ted William's.

17) Compared with most Old World wines, California wines are simpler and more fruit dominant.

This latter form, using the participle "compared" + "with", is common on the GMAT Sentence Correction — "Compared with A, B ..." — and of course, A and B must be in parallel. For the word "contrast", we need to be careful.

comparisons

If we are actively discussing a person who is performing the contrast, then we can say this person "contrasts A with B."

18) In the novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Mark Twain contrasts the utter privilege enjoyed by the aristocracy in the antebellum South with arbitrary and dismal fate of slaves.

Many times, especially on GMAT Sentence Correction, the sentence forms a contrast and who is doing the contrast is not important. By idiom and unlike with "compare", we do not use the participle form of the verb

Contrasted with A, B …

That will always be wrong. The correct idiom is "In contrast with A, B …"

19) In contrast with the single-book scriptures of each of the three great Western Religions, the Pali Canon, the standard collection of the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism, easily would fill a large bookcase, although ironically, Buddhism is much less text-based than are its Western counterparts.

The idiom involving the adjective "consistent" is similar, although discussion of consistency differs from comparisons per se. When we say A is consistent with B, we generally mean that B is some larger system or set of rules, and A is something that "fits into" this larger system.

20) In *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, the Supreme Court found that legally enforced segregation was not consistent with the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteen Amendment.

21) Euclid's fifth postulate, the notorious Parallel Postulate, is consistent with the other four postulates, although it cannot be deduced independently from them.

"OF"

the preposition "of"

The word "of" is a preposition. This means, it must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) No amount of talking about issues facing the homeless will satisfy their most basic needs in the short term.

2) We are now absorbing the unfortunate consequences of what last year's county administration thought would benefit us all.

In sentence #1, the object of the preposition "of" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving the word "of."

verbs requiring "of"

There are three very different verb idioms involving "of":

consist of
accuse A of B
think of A as B

In the idiom "A consists of B", A is the complete object or the finished product, and B is the material of which this product is composed. It can be used literally, for the actual physical material making up an object, or it can be used metaphorically for the content of something.

3) Atomic Theory states that all material objects consist of atoms and that the macroscopic properties of objects depend on the microscopic interactions of these atoms.

4) The candidate argued that his opponent's "New Horizons" program consisted of no more than a revision of the former governor's discredited ideas.

Notice that, idiomatically, we would use the present participle for this verb, "consisting of", but the past participle for two verbs with the same meaning: "made of" and "composed of."

verbs requiring "of"

Now, a totally different idiom. When someone accuses A of B, A is the person accused, and B is the crime or infraction.

5) Javert accused Valjean of various crimes.

6) The Inquisition never formally accused Galileo of heresy, only finding him "vehemently suspect of heresy."

The final idiom is particularly difficult: think of A as B. Here, A is the person or thing under consideration, and B is a role or a rank or a metaphor for A.

7) I think of my friend Chris as a walking dictionary and thesaurus.

8) Many Chinese think of Li Bai as the single greatest poet in their three-thousand year old civilization.

9) Some feminists think of chivalry as an outmoded set of behaviors and values that, despite their patina of gentility, promote damaging gender inequities.

10) Fundamentalist Christians in the US think of Evolution as merely an opinion held by some scientists, whereas most scientists writing in peer-reviewed journals think of it as established truth beyond any doubt.

potpourri "of" idioms

The diversity of idioms involving "of" is mind-boggling. One collection has to do with the composition or constituency of things:

consisting of
made of
composed of
a collection of
a number of
an amount of

potpourri "of" idioms

The first three were discussed in the previous section. Most other collective nouns (organization, association, crowd, team, herd, flock, etc.) follow this pattern. The object of the preposition "of" are the people or items or material that compose the group or the whole. Remember to use "number" for things you can count, and "amount" for uncountable bulk.

11) A large number of coal miners develop pneumoconiosis.

12) The amount of revenue that the United States government collects from payroll taxes in the US is approximately equal to the amount of revenue from personal income taxes.

Another closely related idiom:

chance of
probability of

When we speak of a "chance of A" or a "probability of A", A is the event whose probability we are discussing. This event A may be an ordinary noun, or even a gerund or gerund phrase, but the GMAT does not like the construction

[preposition][noun][participial phrase]

If you want to talk about that much action, you need a full "that" clause with a [noun] + [verb]. Don't try to wedge a full action into a preposition phrase using a noun & a participial phrase: chance that or probability that

13) On a five card draw from a full deck, the chance of drawing a "royal flush" is 649,740 to 1.

14) The probability that a player will hit four homeruns in a single baseball game is very low: this feat has happened only sixteen times in the history of Major League Baseball.

If this last sentence had been phrased "The probability of a player hitting …", that would be the form to which the GMAT objects.

One idiom metaphorically related to the "constituency" idiom above is:

capable of

potpourri "of" idioms

Here, when we say A is capable of B, A is the person and B is an action. Metaphorically, A "contains" or "is made of" the capacity to do B. Often, this plain statement, "A is capable of B", can be rephrased more concisely using "can." Nevertheless, this flexible idiom can appear in a number of other guises:

15) The detective considered the culprit capable of cold-blooded murder.

16) The swan, capable of flying long distances, is much more frequently depicted on water than in the air.

Two words follow a very different idiom with "of"

result of
consequence of

Whether we say A is a result of B or A is a consequence of B, we are saying B is the cause and A is the effect.

17) Skin cancer is often the result of many years of sunbathing.

18) Unemployment is often an unintended consequence of raising interest rates.

Once again, it's fine to have a gerund or gerund phrase, but if the case involves both a noun and a verb, we could no longer use the preposition "of" — we would have to change around the entire sentence.

compounds

Many prepositions consist of only one word, but in a few instances, two words together function as a single preposition. Four of these involve "of":

because of
instead of
as of
out of

compounds

For the first two, again it is important to remember: a preposition can have as its object either an ordinary noun or (more likely on the GMAT) a gerund phrase, but if we want to put a full noun + action phrase, the GMAT frowns on having a [noun] + [participle] follow a preposi! tion. This latter structure demands a full subordinate clause. In fact, this is precisely the difference between "because of" and "because."

19) Because of the uncertainty surrounding the new tax law being debated in Congress, the stocks dropped for a third consecutive day.

20) Instead of invading the Italian peninsula by sea, as all previous aggressors had done, Hannibal travelled over the Alps to invade by land from the north.

The idiom "as of" is particular tricky: it is used to denote the precise time of a particular transition. The object of "as of" is always either a time or an event whose time is well known.

21) As of next Wednesday, Phophon Stores will no longer accept the competitor's coupons.

22) As of the enactment of the 26th Amendment in June, 1971, all citizens between the ages of 18 and 21 have been eligible to vote in all elections.

The idiom "out of" can be used for the physical movement from a place —- think of Isak Dinesen's memoir *Out of Africa* — but more often it is used metaphorically for the source material of some creation:

23) Out of innumerable Slavic folk melodies, Tchaikovsky fashioned some of the finest masterpieces of the classical repertoire.

24) Out of the seemingly intractable contradictions between Newtonian and Maxwellian physics, Einstein created the Theory of Relativity.

special combinations

Finally, here are three particular combinations of terms with prepositions that you need to know:

in danger of
in violation of
on account of

In the idiom in danger of A, A is some penalty or unfortunate consequence.
25) The sophomore who hosted all the keg parties was in danger of failing all of his classes.

26) If the government of Greece defaults on its national loans, the country will be in danger of losing its Eurozone membership.

In the idiom in violation of A, A is the law or principle that the agent is violating.

27) Republicans have argued that the PPACA is in violation of the Commerce Clause.

28) The cultural critic pointed out that the behavior depicted on prime-time television is in violation of most of the Commandments.

29) In Euclidean Geometry, a triangle whose angles had a sum other than 180° would be in violation of the Parallel Postulate.

Finally, a very tricky case: the idiom on account of is roughly synonymous to the idiom because of. The latter is more natural in most cases, and usually lends itself to a more concise phrasing. The former is more pretentious and verbose, which makes it appropriate, say, for legal-ese, but not particularly appropriate for the GMAT.

30a) On account of the stock market's sudden and precipitous rise, the bond market has rallied over the past few days.
30b) Because of the stock market's sudden and precipitous rise, the bond market has rallied over the past few days.

Technically, both versions of the previous sentence are correct. Nevertheless, I have never seen the idiom "on account of" part of a correct answer on the GMAT Sentence Correction. On the one hand, be suspicious if you see Sentence Correct answer choices involving "on account of", but on the other hand, know that it is technically correct.

"FOR"

the preposition "for"

The word "for" is a preposition. This means, it must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) Someone who doesn't understand baseball well is likely to mistake running as part of a hit-and-run play for stealing a base.

2) The teachers chaperoning the dance are not responsible for whatever may happen on the way home afterwards.

In sentence #1, the object of the preposition "for" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving the word "for."

uses of "for"

First of all, the word "for" can be used in an indirect object construction, and so one can "do a favor for someone", "say a prayer for someone", "bake a cake for someone", etc. This construction tends to arise in either narrative or in informal day-to-day conversation, so it is unlikely to appear in the academic and professional passages on the GMAT. Nevertheless, this structure gives a hint to some of the core meanings of its uses. If one is "for a cause", then one supports that cause and is in favor of it. Many of the uses of "for" carry this supporting or favorable connotation.

verbs requiring "for"

Two verbs with idioms that require a "for" prepositional phrase are

argue for
allow for

verbs requiring "for"

The structure argue for is very much in line with the "for a cause" idiom mentioned above. If I argue for X, that X is some position or perspective or opinion or point-of-view that I support.

3) The senator argued for naming the new veteran's hospital in his state after Omar Bradley.

The opposite idiom — if one person argues for X, then his opponent may argue against X. The prepositions "for" & "against" form a natural pair of opposites.

The structure allow for is far more complicated and subtle. One use is the structure P allows for Q, where P is a law or set of rules and Q is some activity or specific case consistent with these rules.

4) The First Amendment allows for free speech, even speech critical of the government.

5) The Heisenberg Uncertainty Relation allows for momentary violations of fundamental laws of Physics, such as Conservation of Energy.

A second use is to allow X for Y, where X is some resource (time, money, room, etc.) needed to accommodate Y.

6) The county budget does not allow any additional funds for unemployment services.

7) After beginning construction, the developer discovered that the state's water allocation system would not allow sufficient drinking water for his planned housing development.

8) Baseball's unique structure allows essentially unlimited time for the resolution of events at the end of a game.

A more abstract use of this idiom to allow for J has the meaning: to acknowledge extenuating conditions, to give consideration to contingencies. In this construction, J is the quality or characteristic that would excuse or provide mitigating conditions for someone.

9) Allowing for the young person's rash judgment, the police decided to drop all charges.

10) The career numbers Ted Williams produced are even more extraordinary when we allow for his two long stints in the armed services during his prime.

verbs requiring "for"

Three further verbs form a set of related idioms involving "for"

substitute A for B
mistake A for B
sacrifice A for B

In all three, A is someone or something that "takes the place" of B. When we say we are going to substitute A for B, we are saying that, in some context, we will replace B with A. This is precisely how we use the terminology in math: "substitute (2x + 7) for y." We use it with the very same meaning in any one of a number of other contexts:

11) On the World Series roster, the manager substituted a rookie for the injured veteran.

12) She substitutes maple syrup for cane sugar in her muffin recipes.

13) Critics of the Soviet Union argued that the Bolsheviks merely substituted one oppressive despotic system for another.

Notice, incidentally — when we substitute A for B, B is gone and A is part of the final product, but when we replace A with B, A is gone and B is part of the final product.

The idiom to mistake A for B is like a "substitution" that happens entirely in one person's head. If I mistake A for B, then A is the real person or situation at hand, and through my mistake, I don't recognize A — for whatever reason, I instead am under the mistaken impression that B is at hand, rather than A.

14) The students, seeing an image of Henry David Thoreau, mistook him for Lincoln.

15) The inexperienced investors mistook a short-covering rally for a major upturn in the market.

verbs requiring "for"

The idiom to sacrifice A for B also is like a kind of substitution. In this idiom, A is the resource or asset that one gives up, with the specific intention of attaining B, some desired condition or result.

16) The executive was not willing to sacrifice his integrity for the lucrative deal.

17) In the hindsight of history, Neville Chamberlain is seen as having sacrificed the Sudetenland for what he naively thought would be "peace for our times."

18) The think tank's paper argued that the federal debt, in effect, sacrifices the prosperity of future generations for our own unbridled consumption.

"responsible/responsibility for"

This idiom is an example of the same root word taking the same preposition in different forms. Both the noun responsibility and the adjective responsible take the preposition "for"

responsibility for
responsible for

In both cases, the agent who "is responsible" or who "has responsibility" is the person/thing on whom events depend, and the object of the preposition "for" is the process or event or person or thing that the subject controls or influences.

19) The President is ultimately responsible for the actions of the entire Executive Branch of the government.

20) While the Moon's gravitation is responsible for the overall cycle of the tides, the Sun's gravitation is responsible for the difference between spring tides and neap tides.

21) Patients' rights groups complained that the proposed medical malpractice reform essentially would absolve doctors of any responsibility for their professional decisions.

"for" every A, B

This idiom is unique. In a way, this is a grammatical idiom that derives from formal logic. When we say For every A, B, we are saying that A is some category with multiple members, and for some reason (legal or mathematical or scientific or …), we know that for each member in this category, B is true. Sometimes it is used to express ratios in a population ("For every 3 people who do X, 7 people do Y.")

22) For every high school baseball player who eventually rises to a career in the Major League, more than 360 other high school baseball players never go so far.

23) Because of the dominance of matter over antimatter, at least in our Solar System, some theoretical physicists doubt that there truly is a positron for every electron.

24) The Fundamental Theorem of Arithmetic states that for every natural number, the number's prime factorization is unique.

"AGAINST"

the preposition "against"

A preposition must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) Charles Lindbergh argued against entering World War II on the side of the Allies.

2) The CEO state he was prejudice against whoever thought his predecessor's Seven-Point Plan was a sound way to run the corporation.

In sentence #1, the object of the preposition "against" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving these prepositions.

The preposition "against" has connotations of conflict and opposition. The most important idioms associated with "against" are:

prejudiced against
protect from/against
argue with/against
fight with/against
victory over/against

prejudiced "against"

Etymologically, the word "prejudice" simply means to pre-judge, and that pre-judging could be favorable or unfavorable, but in modern English, the word "prejudice" carries the connotation of having pre-judged in a way that is unfavorable. The most discussed kind of prejudice is racial prejudice, though of course one could be prejudice about many other issues. Because of the negative connotation, we use the preposition "against" with "prejudice."

3) Prejudiced against short term securities, she only invested in options with more than a year before expiration.

"AGAINST"

"argue with/against"

The pair of idioms "argue with" vs. "argue against" is tricky. If we are speaking about the manner of one's arguing, then we always use "with":

6) The charismatic lawyer always argued his case with tremendous persuasive powers.

If we are discussing the idea or cause one opposes, then we always use "against."

7) Glenn Gould argued against the strict necessity for using original instruments in performance of Baroque music.

8) Athanasius spent his life arguing against the Arian interpretation of Christianity.

If the object of the preposition is a person, then the difference between "argue with [person]" vs. "argue against [person]" is subtle. In general, if the affiliation or bond between two people is stronger than their conflict —- the relationship is ongoing, and the conflict is temporary by comparison —- then we would use "with" — husband & wife argue with one another; brother argues with sister; student argues with teacher. In general, if the conflict is the essential defining feature of the relationship — if A didn't have an argument with B, then A would not be have any relationship at all with B —- then we would use "against." This is not a hard-and-fast rule, and in some contexts, either would be correct.

9) In the famous Scope trial, conservative Christian William Jennings Bryan argued against progressive libertarian lawyer Clarence Darrow.

"fight with/against"

The distinction between these two is very much like the distinction between "argue with" vs. "argue against." We certainly would use "with" to describe either a quality of the fighting ("he fought with dignity") or a physical tool used in fighting ("he fought with brass knuckles"). We use "against" for any idea or cause or movement one opposes.

10) *The Song of Roland* depicts Roland's enemies as Muslims, but in reality, at the Battle of Roncevaux Pass, Roland fought against Basque Christians.

"AGAINST"

"fight with/against"

11) Tycho Brahe hoped to use his extensive observational data of planetary positions to fight against the Copernican system.

As with "argue", we tend to say "fight with [a person]" if the ongoing relationship is more enduring and/or more essential than the nature of the conflict; we tend to say "fight against [a person]" if the conflict is the primary mode of relating. Again, this is not a strict rule, and in some contexts, either would be correct.

12) In the "Thrilla in Manila", on October 1, 1975, Muhammad Ali's fought with Joe Frazier for the third and final time.

13) Behind closed doors, the CFO argued with the head of the corporation's legal team about potential impact of the new policy, but publicly, they presented a united front of support.

14) In 1942, General Montgomery was assigned to North Africa to fight against Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the "Desert Fox."

15) After the Second Triumvirate collapse, Octavian fought against Marc Antony and Cleopatra, defeating them decisively at the Battle of Actium.

"victory over/against"

These two are virtually identical — the latter seems somewhat more common in sports journalist. For the purposes of GMAT Sentence Correction, both victory over and victory against are correct and imply no discernible difference in meaning. Both are used to describe the party or thing defeated in the victory.

16) The passage of the Twenty First Amendment, repealing the Eighteenth, was a decisive victory against the temperance movement.

17) Arising from highly controversial ideas about the physical world, Quantum Mechanics consolidated a clear victory over Classical Mechanics in the 1920s.

the preposition "on"

A preposition must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) The CEO refused to expend any more capital on saving the failing divisions.

2) Washington well understood that his long-term success in the War of American Independence might well depend on whether Franklin would be able to persuade the French to join as allies.

In sentence #1, the object of the preposition "on" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving these prepositions.

The preposition "on" literally denotes the surface supporting something ("the book is on the table"), and metaphorically, it can refer to a circumstance or the topic of a talk.

3) On formal occasions, the general wore his ceremonial saber.

4) An acknowledged authority on eighteenth century literature, the professor was asked to lead a seminar on post-modern poetry.

The three most important idioms involving "on" are

based on

expend (time/money/energy) on

depends on (whether)

"based on"

First of all, the idiom P is based on Q means would literally mean that Q is the physical foundation on which P sits. This idiom is rarely used in its strictly literal sense. More often, Q is the evidence or philosophical underpinning that supports P.

5) The schema of punishments described in Dante's *Inferno* is based on the theology of Thomas Aquinas.

Similarly, the idiom based on Q, P is a perfectly valid participial modifier construction. Again, Q is the thing doing the supporting, and P is the thing supported.

6) Based on 25 years of research in the field, the doctor had a hunch that the new medicine would be successful.

Here, the participial phrase "based on 25 years of research in the field" modifies the noun it touches, the noun "doctor" — the doctor, in his capacity as a medical problem-solver, is supported by his years of research. This is perfectly correct.

This idiom, though, is wantonly abused in colloquial speech.

7) Based on their losing recording alst year, the team doesn't have a chance this year.

8) Based on your behavior, I am going to punish you.

Both of these might be said colloquially, both are 100% WRONG. In #7, the team is not supported by its losing record last year — it would be far more accurate to say something like "Because the team had a losing record last year, we suspect that …." The authoritarian speaker of #8 is certain not supported by his interlocutor's bad behavior. Again, a "because" clause would be far more accurate.

"expend... on"

The verb "to expend" means, in essence, the same thing as the verb "to spend." When we spend or expend, we are giving away a resource (money, time, energy, etc.) and thereby acquiring some good. In the idiom to expend P on Q, P is the "price", the resource spent in this interaction, and Q is the good "purchased" with this expenditure. The noun form of this same idiom is the expenditure of P on Q. (For more on verb-forms vs. noun-forms, see this post.)

9) The United States has expended over eight-hundred billion dollars on the post-9/11 War in Iraq.

10) Having already won a Nobel Prize and garnered international fame, Einstein expended the last three decades of his life on an apparently fruitless search for a Unified Field Theory.

11) In the late rounds of a match, a skilled boxer will be parsimonious with powerful punches, preferring not to expend valuable energy on blows that don't substantially damage his opponent.

"depends on"

If P depends on Q, then Q is the condition or circumstance that either will allow P to happen or will affect the quality of P. In other words, knowing Q will answer some vitally important question about P.

12) The location of their wedding reception will depend on the weather.

13) A baseball player's hitting prowess depends more on his visual abilities than on anything else.

In more complex sentences, either P or Q — or both! — from this structure could be a substantive clause, most typically beginning with the word "whether."

14) Lincoln felt that issuing the *Emancipation Proclamation* should depend on whether the Army of the Potomac would be able to drive the Confederate forces out of Maryland.

"depends on"

15) Whether any individual particle decay sequence occurs depends on whether all relevant conversation laws permit it.

16) How easily a name is remembered does not depend on the qualities of that person.

17) What a person fundamentally believes depends surprisingly little on how much that person has in her bank account.

18) How soundly a person sleeps on any given night depends on what that person eats in the hours immediately before retiring.

Substantive clauses galore! This idiom lends itself well to them.

"IN & BY"

the preposition "in"

A preposition must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) The lower tariffs, guaranteed by the worldwide treaty, resulted in opening entirely new markets to American imports.

2) The premium of a call option is not at all determined by how many open interest contracts on that option exist at any given time.

In sentence #1, the object of the preposition "in" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object of the preposition "by" is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving these prepositions.

The preposition "in" denotes containing and inclusion ("in a box", "in my hand", "in this book"), and this can be metaphorically extended to geographic location ("in Germany"), an area of employment ("in retail sales"), or an academic discipline ("in gender studies"). Two important idioms involving "in" are

result in
aid in

The first is easy. The verb "to result" idiomatically takes the preposition "in"

3) Alpha decay results in a nucleus with two fewer protons.

4) Gorbachev's program of *Perestroika* ultimately resulted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

idioms involving "aid"

This is a very tricky little word. When "aid" is used as a verb, the subject is the person providing help, the direct object is the person helped, and an "in" preposition can be used with a gerund to indicate the activity in which help was offered.

"IN & BY"

idioms involving "aid"

5) US Marshalls aided James Meredith in attending the University of Mississippi.

When "aid" is used as a noun, the recipients of the help can be objects of either "to" or "for" ("aid to refugees", "aid for victims of the disaster"). Again, the "in" preposition is followed by a gerund and denotes the activity in which help is provided.

6) His aid in stuffing the envelopes was invaluable.

6a) His aid to stuff the envelopes was invaluable.

7) The agency's aid in tracking down "deadbeat dads" should not be underestimated.

The noun "aid" can be followed by a "to" preposition to indicate a recipient, but it is a mistake to follow "aid" with an infinitive. This is a classic idiom-mistake on the GMAT.

"by"

This verb is used in the general passive construction. The complement of the structure P [active verb] Q is Q [passive verb] by P.

8) Fred eats the meal. The meal is eaten by Fred.

9) Dostoyevsky wrote *Crime and Punishment*. *The Brothers Karamazov* was written by Dostoyevsky.

As a general rule, the GMAT frowns on most passive constructions for the main verb of the sentence. BUT — notice that if we use the verb in its past participle form (i.e. "written"), we could denote a subject with a "by" preposition and use the participle to modify a noun. This is a much more acceptable structure on the GMAT Sentence Correction.

10) Written by Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov is one of the most philosophical novels ever composed.

"IN & BY"

"by"

11) Feeling unappreciated by the Revolutionary American leadership, Benedict Arnold decided to join the British.

12) The "Caprice in A minor", originally composed by Paganini as a virtuoso piece for solo violin, served as the basis of solo piano works by Schumann and Brahms as well as an extended concert work by Rachmaninov.

All of these use modifiers of the form [past participle]"by"[actor] — clearly, most active verbs in English could be plugged into this formula. Two special cases deserve further attention: determined by and fascinated by.

"determined by"

One verb that particularly lends itself to the [past participle]"by"[actor] modifier structure is the verb "to determine." If the "determining" is the main fact in a sentence, the GMAT would far prefer to see it in the active voice than in the passive voice —– "Moon phrases determine tides", rather than "Tides are determined by Moon phases." It's the nature of this verb, though, that it's much more frequently in a modifying role I a complex GMAT-like sentence — hence, its frequent appearance in the aforementioned modifier structure.

13) Determined primarily by Moon phase, ocean tides take on bizarre and idiosyncratic patterns in enclosed harbors, such as New York Harbor and the San Francisco Bay.

14) A human is not responsible for his face during youth, a face determined almost exclusively by genetics, but arguably is responsible for his wizened face in old age, a face determined largely by lifelong emotional patterns.

15) Determined strictly by the Black-Scholes model, the price of a stock option will rise significantly when the underlying stock enters a period of volatility.

"fascinated by" & "fascination with"

Finally, let's sort out tricky idiom issue, the fascinating issue of the verb "to fascinate." As with all other verbs, this verb can be plugged into the modify formula: [past participle]"by"[actor]. For this verb, this is the idiom fascinated by. This idiom, by itself, is not surprising.

16) Fascinated by the peculiarities of Dublin, Joyce filled his novels with a myriads reference to every corner of the city.

It gets trickier when we consider the noun form, "fascination." The noun "fascination" idiomatically takes the preposition "with" —- fascination with. This is an important case in which the required idiomatic preposition changes when the word changes from verb to noun.

17) A lifelong fascination with the *Dies Irae* theme haunts all of Rachmaninov's major works.

Both fascinated by and fascination with are correct idioms, and very predictable mistake patterns on the GMAT Sentence Corrections are these two with the prepositions swapped —– "fascinated with" and "fascination by" — both 100% incorrect.

four more prepositions

A preposition must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) Most people worry about speaking in front of large groups.

2) The dictator was surprisingly indifferent towards whoever criticized his policies.

In sentence #1, the object of the preposition "about" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object of the preposition "towards" is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving these prepositions.

"indifferent/indifference towards"

The word "indifferent" and its idiom indifferent towards are tricky. The meaning of the word "indifferent" has absolutely nothing to do with the meaning of the word "different." The word "indifferent" means "having no particular concern, interest, or sympathy." The word can have the connotation of "callous, unfeeling", as when one is "indifferent towards another's suffering." The word also can have the connotation of healthy balance and good emotional boundaries, as when one is "indifferent towards mindless criticism." The noun form takes the same preposition: indifference towards. This idiom lends itself well to substantive clauses beginning with "whether" or "how".

3) A student indifferent towards the niceties of grammar cannot expect to do well on GMAT Sentence Correction.

4) In the Overland Campaign, Grant pushed relentlessly forward, seemingly indifferent towards how many men he lost.

5) The Viet Cong fought bitterly for three decades, indifferent towards whether their enemy was the French, the Americans, or the South Vietnamese.

"model after"

This is a tricky idiom. When we say to model P after Q or Q is modeled after P, Q is the product or creation that's the focus of the sentence, and this creation Q was fashioned with some earlier product or creation, P, in mind. P is the model on which Q is based.

6) St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue in New York is modeled after the Cathedral of Cologne.

7) Beethoven modeled his *Third Piano Concerto*, in C minor, after Mozart's *K491 Piano Concerto*, also in C minor.

8) Many European intellectual landmarks, from Spinoza's *Ethics* to Newton's *Principia*, were modeled after the rigorous structure of Euclid's *Elements*.

"worry about"

The word "worry", in both its noun and verb form, idiomatically takes the preposition "about." An example with a gerund is given in #1 above, and this idiom also lends itself to substantive clauses.

9) The morning of the wedding, the bride worried about the weather.

10) Americans don't understand probability: people who smoke a pack a day worry about getting struck by lightning!

11) Unlike other great American generals, George Washington frequently had to worry about whether he would be able to pay his loyal troops.

"dated at"

This is a difficult construction. Most GMAT takers are familiar with the word "date" as a noun, and probably are familiar with "date" as a verb in the sense of an amorous encounter —- a use of the word highly unlikely to appear on the GMAT! —- but fewer are familiar with the verb "to date" meaning "to determine the date of." This usage is common in academic writing, and therefore is common on the GMAT. In the idioms to date P at Q and P is dated at Q, P is the historical event or object, and Q is always quite specifically a time —- either a year or period or anything else that indicated age.

12) Following comments by Herodotus, many historians date Homer at 7th or 8th centuries BCE.

13) Current evidence suggests the *Rigveda* is the oldest book in the world: it describes astronomical events dated at 4000 BCE.

14) Paleoanthropologists debate whether human control of fire can be dated at 400,000 years ago, the age of the *Homo erectus*.

COMPOUND PREPOSITIONS

prepositions

A preposition must be followed by a noun — or by something playing the role of a noun. This latter category includes gerunds and substantive clauses.

1) Prior to composing the early masterpiece *Der fliegende Holländer*, Wagner composed a few second-rate operas that critics today would consider hardly worthy of him.

2) According to whoever wrote these inane instructions, we cannot complete the papier mache house without a lathe!

In sentence #1, the object of the preposition "prior to" is a gerund phrase, and in sentence #2, the object of the preposition "according to" is a substantive clause. Incidentally, both of these are exemplary of idioms involving these prepositions.

compound prepositions

These seven are the most common compound prepositions in the English language:

According to
As of
Because of
Instead of
Next to
Out of
Prior to

To some extent it is a matter of debate whether some of them are "compound prepositions" — for example, "prior" is an adjective, so if we were to say "P is prior to Q", is that an adjective + preposition or a compound preposition before Q? Know that grammatical purists may debate such things. Because the answer to such questions doesn't impinge at all on preparing for the GMAT Sentence Correction, I am just going to plow forward treating all seven as compound prepositions. I will explain a bit about the usage of each. I will not discuss third, the idiom "because of", because that is treated in its own section on pg. 46.

COMPOUND PREPOSITIONS

"according to"

This structure is used almost always to cite an authority of some kind, either a person

"according to Aristotle"
"according to Margarette"

or an authoritative body

"according to the Russian Orthodox Church"
"according to the Oprah Magazine"

or a discipline or body of knowledge

"according to Quantum Chromodynamics"
"according to the Black-Scholes model"

The object of this preposition always has to be someone or something that could issue an opinion or support a position of some kind. Most often, this will be a simple noun, such as the ones cited in this paragraph, but the object could be a relative clause indicating an unknown or indefinite subject, as in example #2 above.

"as of"

This is a very specific idiom. It is used to indicate the time of some important transition. The object is always a time of some kind. The object could be a substantive clause beginning with "when" or "whenever", although this somewhat unusual construction is unlikely to appear on the GMAT.

3) As of July 1, 1997, Hong Kong has been fully a part of the People's Republic of China.

4) As of next Wednesday, our stores will no longer carry Eridanus products.

5) As of whenever she returns from work, we will start the party.

COMPOUND PREPOSITIONS

"instead of"

The structures "instead of" and "in place of" mean essentially the same thing and are interchangeable. Theoretically, the structure "A instead of B" would be correct if A & B were simple nouns. Typical mistakes involving "instead of" use the structure "A instead of B" to contrast prepositional phrases or larger grammatical constructions.

6a) These cookies are sweetend with citrus juices instead of with cane sugar.

That sentence will always be considered incorrect on the GMAT Sentence Correction.

6b) These cookies are sweetened with citrus juices rather than with cane sugar.

The GMAT loves to contrast an incorrect "instead of" structure with a correct "rather than" structure. The structure "instead of" seems never to appear on the GMAT in instances in which this structure would be correct.

"next to"

Literally, this structure indicates physical adjacency: "the lawnmower is next to the shed." This use is grammatically correct, but it is typically too simple to appear on the GMAT Sentence Correction.

In colloquial American English, the construction "next to" is used as a synonym for "compared to."

7a) Next to Haydn, Mozart had a relatively small output as a composer.

That will always be considered too casual and informal, and never will be correct on the GMAT.

7b) Compared to Haydn, Mozart had a relatively small output as a composer.

The compared to structure is the proper structure for such comparisons.

COMPOUND PREPOSITIONS

"out of"

Literally, this construction indicated spatial movement from something enclosed or interior to a wider expanse —– "out of Africa", "out of the University of Minnesota", "out of the boon-docks." Many of these statements are too colloquial and casual for the GMAT.

This construction is also used colloquially to denote "lacking", as in "out of gas", "out of breath", "out of his mind." These constructions will never appear on the GMAT.

The words "out of" can be used to denote ratios — "Seven out of ten employees said …" While slightly more formal than the other forms of "out of", even this is quite unlikely to appear on the GMAT sentence correction.

"prior to"

The words "prior to" mean "before", but there is a big difference. The words "prior to" function only as a preposition —- the object can only be a noun or something functioning as a noun (gerund or substantive clause). By contrast, the word "before" can function as a preposition, followed by a noun, or as a subordinate conjunction, followed by a full [noun] + [verb] clause. BEWARE — the GMAT doesn't approve of structure [preposition]+[noun]+[participial phrase] —- the GMAT doesn't like trying to cram that much action into a prepositional phrase. If you want to talk about that much action, use a full [noun] + [verb] clause, not just a preposition. Also, note: with simple clock times or times of day, the word "before" sounds more natural, and the phrase "prior to" sounds artificial.

8) Before dawn every day, the colonel would jog five miles.

The words "prior to" would sound awkward in this sentence. In the following sentences, notice the subtle changes between the paired sentences.

9a) Before he was 20 years, Mozart was renowned as a virtuoso performer and an accomplished composer.

COMPOUND PREPOSITIONS

"prior to"

9b) Prior to his twentieth year, Mozart was renowned as a virtuoso performer and an accomplished composer.

10a) Before Melville published his magnum opus, *Moby Dick*, he had been financially successful with a couple smaller novels.

10b) Prior to publishing his magnum opus, *Moby Dick,* Melville was financially successful with a couple smaller novels.

As long as the subject of the "before" clause and the subject of the main clause are one and the same, the construction "prior to" + [gerund] can be used. When these two subjects are different, though, problems arise.

11a) Before Shackleton could mount a second Antarctic expedition, Roald Amundsen became the first person to reach the South Pole.

11b) Prior to Shackleton mounting a second Antarctic expedition, Ronald Amundsen became the first person to reach the South Pole.

"BECAUSE VS. BECAUSE OF"

"because"

By itself, the word "because" is a subordinate conjunction. What does that mean? It means, this word opens a subordinate clause. A subordinate clause, like any clause, must have a complete [noun] + [verb] structure within it, like a mini-sentence: in fact, if you drop the subordinate conjunction, the rest of the subordinate clause should be able to stand alone as a sentence. Furthermore, the fact that this clause is subordinate (i.e. dependent) means there must be another main, independent clause providing the meat-and-potatoes of the sentence.

The general outline of a sentence involving the word "because" might be:

"Because" + [sub. noun] + [sub. verb], [main noun] + [main verb].

Of course, all kinds of adjectives, adverbs, and other modifies can be added to this structure. The [sub. noun] + [sub. verb] provide the structure of the subordinate clause — and could stand on their own as a complete sentence. The sentence as a whole depends on the [main noun] + [main verb] as its core structure. For example,

2) Because teenagers are insatiably hungry, their parents are always buying food.

Notice that the [noun] + [verb] within the subordinate clause, "teenagers are insatiably hungry", could work as its own sentence: that's a great trick to test a clause on the GMAT Sentence Correction. Nevertheless, in this context, "their parents" is the main subject and "are … buying" is the main verb.

"because of"

The words "because of" is a preposition. Prepositions are designed to be followed by only a noun —- "because of the rain", "because of the parade", "because of the child's temper tantrum", etc. The object of this or any preposition can be a gerund or gerund phrase —- "because of waiting for the senator", "because of limited parking", "because of having eaten out every night this week", etc. That last example is getting to the limit of how much action, how much story, the GMAT likes to pack inside a prepositional phrase.

"BECAUSE VS. BECAUSE OF"

"because of"

On the Sentence Correction, the GMAT is adamantly opposed to the following structure:

[preposition] + [noun] + [participle]

Even though this could be grammatically correct in a technical sentence, many would be likely to find this in poor taste, and for GMAT Sentence Correction purposes, this is 100% wrong.

Example "Because of the President going to Myanmar …" = WRONG!

As far as the GMAT is concerned, this is just too much action, too much story, for a preposition to handle. If you are going to have both an action and the person/agent performing the action, then what you need is a clause, not merely a prepositional phrase.

practice question

Having read this section, take another look at the practice sentence above before reading the explanation below. Here's another practice Sentence Correction question involving this idiom:

http://gmat.magoosh.com/questions/3215

EXPLANATION

The structure—"so" [adjective] "that"—is a favorite on the GMAT. This is one proper way to express this idea.
(A) has "so brutal that" = perfectly correct.
(B) has "of such brutality so that" = incorrect ("of such brutality that" would be correct).
(C) has "being as brutal as to"—awkward and grammatically incorrect.
(D) has "this brutal so that"—there's no referent for the word "this", so it doesn't fit in context.
(E) has "so brutal as to" = correct, but we need a full verb "failed," not the participle "failing."
(A) is the best answer.

IDIOMS INVOLVING "AS"

cognitive idioms

Four prominent idioms concern the way we think about or perceive something:

define A as B
regard A as B
think of A as B
view A as B

In all four of these, A is the object of contemplation, the literal reference, and B is the idea or view we attribute to it. The last three of these are, essentially, synonymous.

1) *The Devil's Dictionary* defines a "bore" as "A person who talks when you wish him to listen."

2) Vladimir Horowitz regarded Sviatoslav Richter as the greatest of the Russian pianists.

3) Muhammad Ali thought of heavyweight champion Jack Johnson as the predecessor with whom he had the most in common.

4) Military historians view Nathanael Greene as one of greatest American generals, and yet the public knows next to nothing about him.

idioms of role

In this collection of idioms, the word "as" is used to denote the role of a person or the use of an object.

apprenticeship as
work as
use as
employ as

For the first idiom, see SC #135 in the OG13. In both of the next two idioms, the words "work" and "use" can be used as either nouns or verbs. (That's a quite self-referential sentence!)

IDIOMS INVOLVING "AS"

idioms of role

5) A 17-year-old Benjamin Franklin ran away from Boston, and went to Philadelphia, looking for work as a printer's aide.

6) Would a free weight work well as a hammer?

7) Einstein's revolutionary insight was to use the equivalence of inertial frames as the basis of his new paradigm.

8) The senator agreed with the court's basic ruling, but objected to its use as a political criticism of the current administration.

9) In 1723, the city of Leipzig employed Johann Sebastian Bach as Cantor, or music master, of the city's school and churches, a position he held until his death in 1750.

10) Did you know you can employ a substantive clause as the object of a prepositional phrase?

a comparisons idiom

The word "as" is used extensively in comparisons. One particular construction merits special mention.

same to P as to Q

11) While other mammals lack the cognitive capabilities associated with the human cerebral cortex, all mammals have a limbic system; therefore fundamental emotions are the same to other mammals as to humans.

The idiom so as to is roughly a synonym of so that — both are used to discuss the purpose of an action.

12) Like Hannibal and Charlemagne before him, Napoleon crossed the Alps so as to invade Italy by land from the north.

KNOW YOUR PREPOSITIONS

You know your idioms, right? You've studied a list—indeed you've veritably pored over it (not pored through it!)—so you can distinguish, with the unerring eye of a seasoned grammarian, the nuances of (or was that in?) idiom usage. Then, in the midst of a question and a flurry of words, you blank out.

It is what I call list lull—the tendency for your brain to be lulled to sleep by an seemingly endless series of words followed (or not followed) by a preposition, and for you to be lulled by the false complacency that you have learned the proper idiomatic construction. For when you open the Official Guide, you are suddenly stymied, *was it attributed to or attributed in*? (It's the latter).

To see if you truly know your idioms, I've concocted a nasty little quiz. Below are four sentences, each containing several idioms. You have to choose which idiom of the two (or three) is correct. Sometimes neither will be correct. Other times both will be correct.

Donning my math hat: If a sentence tests four idioms, and there are four different possibilities, the chances of guessing correctly are 1 in 256. So if you can answer all five correctly...well, you have a knack for (not towards!) idioms. Good luck!

1. The government **decreed/decreed that** anyone who dared **to break/breaking** the curfew be held accountable **on/for** their **disregard of/disregarding** the law.

2. Attributing the unprecedented drought **to/towards** changes in the solar cycle, the research team failed to **account for/take account of** the influence of any terrestrial culprits, namely our destruction **in/of** rainforests and our unbridled consumption **in/of** gasoline.

3. Prone **in/to** mistaking natural childhood impulsivity **as/for** attention deficit disorder (ADD), childhood psychologists are notorious **in/for** overmedicating children, creating a lifelong dependency **on/towards** certain medications.

4. **To cite/citing** the proliferation of smart phones as one of the chief **causes of/causes for** student inattention, many high schools are cracking down **on/upon** the **use of/use in** handheld devices by **requiring that/requiring** students to **submit/submit to** a metal detection test.

Answers:
1. decreed that, both, for, disregard of
2. to, account for, of, of
3. to, for, for, on
4. Citing, both, on, use of, requiring, submit to

IDIOMS INVOLVING CLAUSES & SENTENCE ORGANIZATION

VERBS THAT REQUIRE INFINITIVES

the infinitive

The infinitive forms of verbs are the "dictionary form" of the verb, the form you would find if you looked the verb up in a standard dictionary. We construct the infinitive as follows: "to" + [the infinitive form]. For almost every verb in English, the infinite form is identical to the present tense of the verb, what we would use after the pronoun "I" in the present tense —- I walk, I eat, I listen —– these become the infinitives: to walk, to eat, to listen. The only verb for which the infinitive form is wildly different from any of the present tense forms is the most irregular verb in the entire language: the verb "to be", with present test forms am/is/are.

The infinitive itself acts as a noun in a sentence. Nevertheless, since the infinitive is the form of a verb, it can take adverbs & direct objects. When we attach all these other forms to the infinitive, we create an infinitive phrase.

verbs + infinitives

Certain English verbs idiomatically demand the infinitive: that is to say, the only grammatically correct construction that can follow them is an infinitive or an infinitive phrase. Here are a few important examples of these verbs:

* **allow** A to do X
* **choose** to do X
* **decide** to do X
* **forbid** A to do X
* **persuade** A to do X
* **try** to do X

Notice, those six verbs are all about volition and intention. These verbs are common in English, and common on the GMAT Sentence Correction. The GMAT wants you to know these idioms: each one of these six verbs must have an infinitive, and it is an idiom mistake to follow them with anything else —- "I persuaded her into …", "I forbid him from doing …." —all automatically incorrect.

VERBS THAT REQUIRE INFINITIVES

verbs + infinitives

Another verb that requires special mention is the verb "to **want**." In most constructions you are likely to see on the GMAT, this verb also idiomatically takes an infinitive. Following the verb "want" with a "that"-clause is always wrong on the GMAT. One alternate acceptable construction is what is called an "object complement": the structure of this form is "want" + [direct object] + [adjective]. For example:

*The sheriff wanted the bandit dead.

*The CFO wants the overseas division solvent before the end of the year.

This is a common form in casual speech, and there's an off chance it could appear on a GMAT Sentence Correct in the future. In other words, don't automatically discount the verb "want" if it is not followed by an infinitive: it could be an "object complement."

other words + infinitives

There are a few other constructions that require the infinitive

- The words **able** & **ability:** The word "able" is an adjective, and the corresponding noun form is "ability." Both of these must be followed by an infinitive or infinitive phrase. This is an idiom the GMAT Sentence Correct loves to test. Common mistake patterns involve the word "ability" followed by some other preposition and then a gerund: "the ability for doing X", "the ability of doing X" — all incorrect!
- The adjective **reluctant**: This adjective idiomatically takes the infinitive: e.g. "I was reluctant to do X." As with "ability", any other preposition + a gerund is wrong!
- The idiom "**in order to do X**": this is an idiomatically correct way to describe the purpose or intention or goal of one's action. For example: "The independent investor published a series of scathing articles about their management procedures in order to short-sell that company." The structure describes a first action undertaken (here, publishing the articles) in order to bring out a second less obvious result or consequence (short-selling the company). You are expect to understand this idiom on the GMAT, and you are expect to recognize this as correct and other variants (e.g. "in order that he could …") incorrect.

VERBS THAT REQUIRE INFINITIVES

practice

Having read this, take another look at the idioms in those practice sentences before looking at the explanations below. Here's another practice Sentence Correction sentence on idioms.

http://gmat.magoosh.com/questions/3264

VERBS AND "THAT" CLAUSES

basics of "that" clauses

First of all, a "that" clause must have a full [noun]+[verb] structure, a structure that could stand on its own as a sentence. Sometimes "that" is pronoun (as in the previous sentence) and serves as the subject of the clause, but as the object of "thinking" or "arguing" verbs, the word "that" introduces a substantive clause, which has its own subject after the word that. Again, in substantive clause, what follows the "that" could be a stand-on-it-own sentence in its own right:

1a) He believes that the Mets will have a winning record in 2013.

1b) The Mets will have a winning record in 2013.

Regardless of whether you agree with the content, what follows the word "that" functions as a full grammatically correct sentence on its own.

colloquialisms

A. **omitting the word "that"**

In colloquial speech, the word "that" is dropped all the time. "I think it's going to rain." "I doubt he's coming." "She claims he is not the best for the job." Of course, those topics are also informal, but even at the level of grammar, these sentences would be incorrect on the GMAT Sentence Correction, because they omit the word "that" between the verb and the clause.

B. **use of the infinitive instead of the "that" clause**

This is less common, but heard sometimes. "I know her to be honest." "I think Moby Dick to be the greatest American novel." This is used enough in speech (especially by folks trying to sound fancy) to sound plausible. Don't be fooled. This is also 100% wrong as a substitute for "that" clause following one of these verbs.

VERBS AND "THAT" CLAUSES

verbs

Each of the following verbs idiomatically takes a "that" clause, a substantive clause, as its direct object. For all of these, dropping the "that" would be considered incorrect on the GMAT. For all of these except "believe", the infinitive is also incorrect.

argue that
believe that
claim that
conclude that
contend that
doubt that
hold that
predict that
suggest that
think that

Some examples:

2) The lawyer claimed that his client was out of the country for that entire week.

3) The Theory of Relativity predicted that nothing with mass could travel as fast as the speed of light.

4) The historian argued that Afghanistan was more a quagmire for the Soviet Union than Vietnam was for the United States.

The verb "believe" can also take an object with the idiomatic preposition "in"

5) Pure Land Buddhists believe in salvation through repetition of the name of the Amida Buddha.

Unlike the others on the list, the verb "believe" can legally and legitimately take the infinitive.

6) Conspiracy theories believe Pope John Paul I to have been murdered, possibly in connection with the affairs of Banco Ambrosiano.

VERBS AND "THAT" CLAUSES

verbs

The word "predict" also can take an ordinary noun as a direct object.

7) SU5 Grand Unified Theory predicted proton decay.

8) The analyst predicted a stock market crash by the end of the year.

two more verbs

These two verbs require special mention:

assure that
reveal that

Both of these take that clauses, like the ones above, and for both of these, both colloquialism would be incorrect on the GMAT. But, both of these can also include a person, a recipient of the news, as an object.

The word "assure" takes an ordinary direct object as the recipient, along with the "that" clause.

9) The CFO assured the Board of Trustees that the company would remain solvent through the end of the calendar year.

The verb "reveal" can have only what is revealed as an object, or it can also include a recipient, following the preposition "to", the person or group to whom something is reveals. This is complicated by the fact that what is reveals could be a full that clause or a simple noun as a direct object, and either of these can be accompanied by a "to" preposition phrase for the recipient. Here are examples of the variations.

10) Leeuwenhoek's improvements to the microscope revealed the existence of individual biological cells.

VERBS AND "THAT" CLAUSES

two more verbs

11) Senator McCarthy refused to reveal to Congress the actual names of the "known communists" whom he alleged were working in the State Department.

12) In 2003, journalist Robert Novak publically revealed in his column that Valerie Plame was a covert CIA operative, thereby ruining her career as a spy.

13) The final witness revealed to the jury that all of the previous witnesses were heavily intoxicated at the time of the crime.

asking

The final verb, "to ask", requires special treatment. Ironically, unlike the others, here the ordinary infinitive construction is legal. The phrase to ask to do X implies that the subject of the sentence is requesting permission to do X, while the phrase to ask P to do X implies that the subject has some privilege or authority over P, and the subject wants P to do X.

14) The student asked to leave school early.

15) The teacher asked the student to write the answer on the board.

We can also use a "that" clause with the verb "to ask", but here, the "that" clause, the object of the request, is phrased in the subjunctive.

16) The teacher asked that the shelves on the side of the room be kept clear.

17) Sir Ector asked that King Arthur choose his half-brother Kay, Ector's son, as his seneschal.

18) The Yongle Emperor, in launching an international tribute mission across land and water, essentially was asking that the whole world acknowledge China as the supreme nation.

"SO"

clauses of purpose

When we want a subordinate clause to indicate the purpose or intention of some action, that clause can begin with the words "so that" or "so as to". Here are a couple examples:

1) I went into town so that I could see Marcia before she left.
2) I went into town so as to see Marcia before she left.

Both of those are perfectly correct. In this instance, the second is slightly shorter, so it would be marginally preferable, although the GMAT SC will never ask you to compare two constructions as similar as this. Notice, the second form, "so as to", is slightly more efficient when the actor in the independent clause is the same as the actor in the subordinate clause. What if those two actors are different?

3) I lent Robert my car, so that he could drive to town and see Marcia before she leaves.
4) I lent Robert my car, so as to allow him to drive to town and see Marcia before she leaves.

Again, both are correct, although now the second construction sounds a bit too wordy and indirect. Again, the GMAT SC will not have you compare two sentences this close. The GMAT definitely does not like this variation at all:

I went into town so I could see Marcia before she left.

The word "that", or the words "as to", are needed in this construction. Sentence #5 could be an incorrect answer choice, compared to either #1 or #2 above.

comparisons

The word "so" can be used as an adverb intensifying the degree of a noun.

6) Located on one of the most scenic stretches of the Onondaga River, the suburb of Aureum is so expensive.

Admittedly, this is a borderline colloquial usage not likely to appear on the GMAT. The words "as ... as" are used for comparisons.

comparisons

7) Located on one of the most scenic stretches of the Onondaga River, the suburb of Aureum is as expensive as the most exclusive neighborhoods of Westchester County, north of New York City.

That comparison is 100% grammatically correct. The problem comes when these two forms are conflated.

8) Located on one of the most scenic stretches of the Onondaga River, the suburb of Aureum is so expensive as the most exclusive neighborhoods of Westchester Country, north of New York City.

That is a classic mistake pattern for a comparison on the GMAT SC. It's all the more tempting because, as I will discuss below, the combination "so ... as" is correct in an entirely different structure. In a simple comparison of two nouns, the structure "as ... as" is correct, and the structure "so ... as" is always wrong.

clause of consequence

Sometimes we specify the degree of an adjective ("so large", "so far north") simply for emphasis. Sometimes, we construct a comparison ("as large as", "as far north as"). Sometimes, though, we underscore the degree of an adjective in order to discuss something that results from this. One perfectly correct construction for this is the form: "so [adjective] that". For example,

9) Jupiter is so large that, if it were hollow, a thousand Earths could fit inside.

10) The city of Murmansk is so far north that it undergoes more than two full months of sunless darkness in the middle of winter.

Both of these are 100% grammatically correct, and either could be the correct answer on a GMAT SC question. Another perfectly correct construction is the form: "so [adjective] as to" — this is the legitimate use of the "so ... as" combination! For example,

"SO"

clause of consequence

11) The hurricane was so powerful as to topple every telephone pole on Main St.

12) Mariano Rivera is so dominant a closer as to top the career rankings in Adjusted ERA+.

Again, perfectly correct, and either could be could be the correct answer on a GMAT SC question. Be careful, though, not to confuse this completely correct use of "so … as" with the faulty comparison given in #8 above.

further practice

The following questions in the OG13 feature some of these uses of "so": SC #16, #35, #39, and #111. Furthermore, here's a Magoosh practice question.

http://gmat.magoosh.com/questions/3290

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

idioms of cause

The three primary idioms dealing with causes are as follows:

because
because of
due to

The first two were already discussed on p. 46. The big idea is that **because** is a subordinate conjunction, which means must be followed by a full blown [noun] + [verb] clause, a clause that with the word "because" could stand on its own as a bonafide independent sentence.

1) Because oxygen receives electrons in almost all its chemical reactions, oxygen itself is never "oxidized"; instead, oxygen is reduced as it oxidizes the other reactant.

2) Because Roosevelt violated Washington's precedent of serving only two terms, the American people enshrined this precedent as law in the Twenty-Second Amendment.

Notice that in both sentences, everything after the word "because" and before the first comma could be an independent stand-on-its-own sentence.

By contrast, both **because of** is a compound preposition. It also identifies a cause, but that cause must be the object of a preposition: a noun. Occasionally, the object may be a gerund or a substantive clause, but these constructions are rare on the GMAT Sentence Correction.

3) Because of the lingering effects of the recession, the Federal Reserve introduced multiple rounds of Quantitative Easing.

4) Physicists have abandoned most theories that call for proton decay, because of a complete lack of experimental evidence for this process.

The phrase **due to** is similar to **because of**, and in colloquial use they are used interchangeably, but there is a subtle difference. The words "because of" are a compound preposition, and the preposition phrase formed can modify the verb and thus be placed in any part of the sentence. The word "due" is an adjective and must modify a noun. Most often, this occurs when "due to" follows "is"/"are" in the predicate, modifying the subject. Again the "to" that idiomatically follows the word "due" is a preposition and can only be followed by a noun, or on rare occasions, by a gerund or substantive clause.

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

idioms of cause

5) The delay, due to the senator's change in plans, cost the convention sponsors thousands of dollars.

6) The sharp rise in this stock is due to the crisis in the corporation of their closest competitor.

In sentence #5, "due" modifies the noun "delay", and sentence #6 shows the most typical use of the "due to" structure, following the word "is" and modifying the subject. The GMAT is quite unlikely to test on the subtle difference between "**because of**" and "**due to**".

The GMAT definitively does not like the structure [preposition]+[noun]+[participial phrase]. Prepositions aren't designed to handle that much action. If you want full [noun] + [verb] type action, use a subordinate conjunction.

7a) Because of his troops dying from the cold, Napoleon had to retreat from Russia.

That sentence structure will be wrong 100% of the time on the GMAT Sentence Correction. Here is a corrected version of the same sentence, using the subordinate conjunction "because" instead.

7b) Because his troops were dying from the cold, Napoléon had to retreat from Russia.

clauses of consequence

There are six clauses of consequence that appear regularly on the GMAT:

so that
so as to
such that
so *[adjective]* that
so *[adjective]* as to
such *[noun]* that

clauses of consequence

In all six of these, what precedes these words it the causing situation or condition, and what follows them is what results as a consequence. This is a standard construction for demonstrating the purpose of an action. The four with "that" require a full [noun] + [verb] clause, and the two with "to" demand an infinitive phrase.

8) The Berlin Airlift provided the city with food and valuable resources, so that the vitally important city would not fall into Soviet control.

9) Upon his election, Pope John Paul II decided to learn Spanish, so as to communicate directly with the single largest group of Catholics in the world.

10) The local rulers of early medieval Europe were almost constantly at war, such that the infrastructure had little chance to develop beyond the most rudimentary level.

In the two structures that involve an adjective, it must be an adjective that admits of degree — i.e. one could be more or less of this adjective. One can be more happy or less happy, more tired or less tired, more rich, more healthy, more educated, etc. Some adjectives have an all-or-nothing quality — left-handed, electric, financial, individual, etc. — one cannot be "more" or "less" or any of these. Technically, the word "unique" is in this latter category — something is either unique or it isn't, and it is logically incorrect to say something is "more unique" or "less unique." Only adjectives that admit of degree, adjectives about which we can legitimately say "more" or "less", can be used in these two structures. Notice, we could use a participle in the place of an ordinary adjective.

11) The highest peaks of the Himalayas are so tall that there is insufficient oxygen to support life at the peaks.

12) The appeal of the 1942 film *Casablanca* is so enduring that, ever since its release, it has been named as one of the greatest films of all times.

13) Glenn Gould was so devoted to recreating flawlessly the intentions of the composers that he foreswore live performance entirely and chose to perform only in the pristine conditions of the recording studio for the last 18 years of his life.

clauses of consequence

14) The planets Venus and Jupiter are so bright as to outshine easily the stars of the night-time sky.

15) Critics suggest that Johnson became so concerned with the American involvement in Vietnam as to neglect entirely the social programs for which he had been elected.

Notice, in both #13 and #15, the adjective's place is taken by long participial phrases: expect to see similar constructions on the GMAT Sentence Correction.

In the final construction, **such *[noun]* that**, the noun may be modified by an adjective that is the object of the intensifier "such". The noun also may be a singular noun with the article "a" — "*such a tragedy*", "*such a triumph*", "*such a problem*", "*such a help*" — but this construction would be rare in the formal language of the GMAT.

16) Modern mathematics is such a diverse and fragmented discipline that few professors understand much outside of their own narrow region of expertise.

17) The Don Juan legends presented such a provocative character that numerous works of art and subsequent philosophical works explored the themes.

18) The ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* presented such radical breakthroughs in tonality that it produced riots among the audience at the premiere.

IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

comparisons to subjects

The following forms can be used when one term of the comparison is the subject of the sentence, a very common form on GMAT Sentence Correction.

more than
more (adjective) than
different from
in contrast to A, B
unlike A, B
compared to A, B

The first involves a few variations. If the verb is intransitive (i.e. it takes no direct object), then we can use the construction A [verb] "more than" B.

1) Alison sings more than Bertrand.

Here, the phrase "more than" can be replaced with any comparative adverb phrase.

2) Charles sleeps more deeply than David.

3) Elizabeth laughs more heartily than Francine.

In any of those three, it would also be correct to stick a verb after the word "than"

1a) Alison sings more than does Bertrand.

2a) Charles sleeps more deeply than David does.

These sentence are fine either with or without the verb after the word "than."

If the verb is transitive (i.e. it takes a direct object), then we use the construction **A [verb] "more" [direct object] "than" B or A [verb] [direct object] [comparative adverb] "than" B.**

4) Gerald has published more articles than Henry.

5) Iphigenia follows baseball more avidly than does James.

IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

comparisons to subjects

6) Ken gives more money to charity than does Lawrence.

In #4, we could have added a verb after "than" — that also would have been correct. In #5 and #6, the verb after "than" is absolutely necessary to resolve ambiguity. Consider them without this second verb:

5a) Iphigenia follows baseball more avidly than James.
6a) Ken gives more money to charity than Lawrence.

Does Iphigenia follow James as well as baseball? Does Ken give money to Lawrence as well as to charity? The absence of a verb creates ambiguity: is the object of "than" in parallel with the subject or the direct object? This ambiguity did not arise in #4, because Gerald could not possibly "publish" Henry — because of the context, Henry can only be parallel to the subject. Without the verb, though, the other two are ambiguous, and the GMAT Sentence Correction ***hates*** ambiguity.

The adjective "different" idiomatically take the preposition "from." The construction **"A is different from B"** contrasts A with B, but it's not very interesting in and of itself. If we add an **"in that"** clause, then the sentence becomes much more sophisticat ed:

7) The final movement of Brahms' *Fourth Symphony* is different from the final movement of virtually every other symphony in the classical repertoire in that is a passacaglia.

The next three idioms all act as modifiers to the subject.

8) Compared to the *Mona Lisa*, Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine* has a smile that is far less famous but just as enigmatic.

9) In contrast to his depraved predecessor Caligula, Claudius (10 BCE – AD 54) was a particularly just and efficient ruler who enriched the empire with extensive public works.

10) Unlike a maze, a labyrinth has only one path from entrance to goal and thus involves no choices at all: its object is inner reflection and mystical contemplation, rather than the rational puzzle-solving that a maze demands.

IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

comparisons to subjects

Because all three of these are modifiers, all three are vulnerable to problems involving the modifier touch rule. For example, consider

8a) Compared to the *Mona Lisa*, Leonardo painted *The Lady with an Ermine* in order to...

This is a classic GMAT Sentence Correction mistake pattern — here, the grammar suggests we are comparing the painting The Mona Lisa to the artist Leonardo da Vinci. The GMAT loves to construct incorrect SC answer choices of this form: misplaced modifiers and violations of the Modifier Touch Rule for comparative modifiers! This is one of the most common mistake patterns on the entire Sentence Correction section.

"rather" vs. "instead"

Sentence #10 was a "two-fer" — in addition to the "unlike" idiom, we also had an example of the **"rather than"** than idiom. Both rather and instead can be used as adverbs, meaning "on the contrary," but these constructions don't appear on the GMAT. The GMAT focuses on rather than vs. instead of. The latter is a compound preposition, and as such, could only take a noun as its object. By contrast, **rather than** can act as either a preposition (taking a noun) or a subordinate conjunction (followed by a full clause). Instead of could only put nouns in parallel, but rather than can put nouns or verbs or entire actions in parallel. In general, the GMAT seems to avoid the situations in which a correct use of "instead of" would be allowed, and seems to use "instead of" only as an incorrect choice for "rather than."

11) She simply bought a condo in Boston, rather than pay for a hotel room for several months.

In that sentence, the verbs "bought" and "pay" are in parallel. Notice, since the latter action is hypothetical, it is in the subjunctive. If this were the correct choice in a Sentence Correction question, a typical incorrect choice would be:

11a) She simply bought condo in Boston, instead of paying for a hotel room for several months.

IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

distinction

The proper idioms here are **distinguish between A and B** and **distinction between A and B**, **distinguish A from B** and **the distinction of A from B.** The subtle differences between these are not worth exploring — the GMAT Sentence Correction will not split hairs like this. In all of these constructions, both A and B have to be either nouns or something that acts as a noun — a gerund or a substantive clause. Here's an example with gerunds:

12) Many ethicists do not distinguish between telling an outright lie and intentionally concealing some part of the true.

Here's an example with substantive clauses.

13) The distinction of what the eye sees from what the brain perceives is, for all practical purposes, meaningless.

contrast

Both of these idioms are correct: **in contrast with** and **in contrast to**. The construction "as contrasted with/to" is not acceptable. Both "with" and "to" are prepositions, so again, they can be followed by a noun, or by something that acts as a noun — a gerund or a substantive clause. Here's an example with a gerund.

14) In contrast to sending an email, writing a text message seems like such an evanescent form of communication.

The GMAT Sentence Correct does not like the structure [preposition][noun]participial phrase] — that's too much "action" for a preposition to contain.

15a) In contrast to Dante assigning his enemies to hell, Joyce, in *Finnegans Wake*, celebrates and has fun even with the words of his harshest critics.

We would have to change that first action entirely to a noun (e.g. "Dante's assignment of his enemies to hell" = *awkward!*), or have to use a subordinate conjunction contrast word, such as **"whereas"**

15b) Whereas Dante assigned his enemies to hell, Joyce, in Finnegans Wake, celebrates and has fun even with the words of his harshest critics.

IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

sophisticated idioms

Here, we reach the heights of Parnassus, some of the most sophisticated language you could see on the GMAT Sentence Correction.

same to A as to B
just as P, so Q
X is to Y what A is to B

The first is a remarkably succinct construction. In this, A and B are most often people, and the subject is some sort of experience.

16) Are the emotional inflections in the human voice the same to a dog as to a baby?

Notice, we could include repeat the subject & verb after "as" — *"as they are to a baby"* — this would also be correct, but less succinct.

In the second idiom, P and Q are full [noun]+[verb] clauses, describing actions we are comparing.

17) Just as Darwin's ideas "dethroned" humans from their supposed unique place among biological entities, so Freud's ideas subordinated the conscious subject to much more power forces of the Unconscious.

18) Just as the Sun is the center of eight planets and numerous smaller satellites, so Jupiter holds in orbit four large moons and dozens of smaller moons, forming a "solar system in miniature."

Perhaps the most sophisticated is the final idiom, which compares two relationships — it compares the relationship between X & Y to the relationship between A & B.

19) Franklin was to many of the younger members of the Continental Congress, such as Jefferson and Hancock, what Niels Bohr was to the founders of Quantum Mechanics.

20) The ancient Celtic stories of Arthur were to Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* what Muslim tales of the *Mi'raj* were to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

A QUIRKY IDIOM

the idiom

Suppose A and B are two items or qualities or quantities, and we want to express how one of them changes as a result of the other one changing; that is, we want to express the interrelated nature of their changes. This is the formal structure of the idiom:

"the" (comparative adjective or adverb) (independent clause about A), **"the"** (comparative adjective or adverb) (independent clause about B)

practice question

1) According to Kepler's Second Law of Planetary Motion, as a planet moves through its elliptical orbit, it changes its orbital speed as its distance from the Sun changes: in particular, the closer the planet is to the Sun, then it is moving its orbit that much faster.

A. the closer the planet is to the Sun, then it is moving in its orbit that much faster
B. the closer the planet is to the Sun, the faster it moves in its orbit
C. when the planet is closer to the Sun, the faster it moves in its orbit
D. when the planet is closer to the Sun, moving fasting in its orbit as well
E. by being closer to the Sun, also moving fasting in its orbit

2) Kepler's Third Law says expresses the relationship between the semi-major axis of a planet's orbit and its orbital period: the further a planet's orbit is from the Sun, the longer the planet's period of revolution around the Sun.

A. the further a planet's orbit is from the Sun, the longer the planet's period of revolution around the Sun
B. when a planet's orbit is further from the Sun, the longer the planet's period of revolution around the Sun
C. the further a planet's orbit is from the Sun, thereby the planet's period of revolution around the Sun is that much longer
D. when a planet's orbit is further from the Sun, the planet's period of revolution around the Sun being that much longer
E. by having an orbit further from the Sun, a planet also having a period of revolution around the Sun being that much longer

practice questions solutions

The words **"the"** beginning each part are crucial, as is the comma separating the two parts. This idiom stands alone as an independent clause, and therefore can be a complete sentence by itself, or can play a role in a larger sentence. Here are some examples.

3) The higher they fly, the harder they fall.

4) The straighter an arrow, the truer it flies.

5) The hotter the surface temperature of a star, the more light per square meter it radiates.

6) "The more you tighten your grip, Tarkin, the more star systems will slip through your fingers."

If you understand the layout of this idiom, see whether that changes your answers to the questions above. You may want to give them a second look before reading the solutions below. May the Force be with you.

Like a question in the OG13 (SC #2), this question is designed specifically to test this pattern. Only one of the answers in each follows this particular idiom perfectly, and the other four answer choices in each are both idiomatically and grammatically incorrect. The correct choices are **(B)** in the first and **(A)** in the second.

"MORE" VS. "GREATER"

countable vs. uncountable

Some things in life (cars, cats, houses, lawnmowers, etc.) come in countable units. The hallmark of items that are countable nouns is that we would ask, "how many?" (how many cars? how many cats? etc.)

Some things in life (air, water, pleasure, pain, science, art, money, etc.) can come in varying quantities, but there are no countable units; rather, these things come in what you might call uncountable bulk. The hallmark of uncountable nouns is that we would ask the question "how much?" (How much air is in that tire? How much pain was he in? How much science does she know?)

This distinction between countable vs. uncountable will be important below.

"more" vs. "greater"

When something countable increases, we use "more"

1) Holland has more tulips than does any other country in Western Europe.

Tulips are separate: you can count how many tulips you have.

When something uncountable increases, we also use also "more"

2) The US State of Georgia has more land than does the state of Pennsylvania.

3) It costs more to go to the ballgame than to go to the opera.

Land is an uncountable noun, and in #3, the implicit noun is "money", which is also uncountable.

The question arises: when do we use "greater" rather than "more"? We use "greater" when the noun in question ***is a number***. We can count the number of tulips, but a tulip itself is not a number. Some examples of nouns that are themselves numbers are: percent, interest rate, population, volume, distance, price, cost, and number.

"MORE" VS. "GREATER"

"more" vs. "greater"

4) The area of Georgia is greater than that of Pennsylvania.

5) The price of a trip to the ballgame is greater than the cost of a night at the opera.

6) Call option premia are greater when interest rates are higher.

(Notice, for certain economic quantities, we will use "higher" for an increase.) In general, things take "more" but numbers take "greater." The "increasing" case is the easier of the two cases.

I will warn you: we are coming up on one of the most frequently made mistakes in spoken English. Even otherwise highly literate and intelligent people routinely make this mistake. Yet, the GMAT will penalize you for making this mistake. It's the confusion of "less" and "fewer."

When something uncountable decreases, we use "less":

7) Pennsylvania has less land than does Georgia.

8) I have gotten less water in my basement since sealing the windows.

OK, now get ready for the mistake-zone. When something countable decreases, we use "fewer":

9) Female drivers tend to get fewer speeding tickets.

10) My dorm had fewer international students.

11) When fewer people are unemployed, the interest rates tend to rise.

12) If you were rich, would you have fewer problems?

It's quite possible that some of those, or even all of those, "sound" wrong. Many many people would make the mistake of using the word "less" in those sentences even though the word "fewer" is 100% correct. If you can count it, you need to use "fewer" instead of "less." In other words, whenever you would use "how many?" instead of "how much?", you need to use "fewer" instead of "less."

"LESS" VS. "FEWER"

"less" vs. "fewer"

By the way, the winner for the all-time most widespread grammatically incorrect sign: "ten items or less". How many times have you seen that grammatical error at the grocery store?

Mercifully, when we compare numbers, and numbers decrease, we can simply go back to using "less."

13) The population of Mongolia is less than that of Los Angeles.

14) The cost of a night at the opera is less than total cost of a day at the ballgame.

15) The melting point of zinc is less than that of copper.

BTW, "melting point" is a temperature, so it is indeed a number.

"ACT LIKE" VS. "ACT AS"

"like" vs. "as"

First of all, try this Sentence Correction question. A full explanation will follow later in the post.

1) Whereas both Europe and China use standard railroad gauge (1435 mm), Russia deliberately chose the wider "Russian gauge" (1520 mm) that gives greater side-to-side stability in railways cars and, more importantly, acts as a national defense, so that it would block foreign army's supply line and preventing these bordering powers from invading by train.

A. acts as a national defense, so that it would block
B. acts like a national defense, so as to block
C. acts as a national defense, blocking
D. acting as a national defense, blocking
E. acting like a national defense, would block

In general "like" is followed only by a single noun, and is used to compare nouns; but "as" is followed by a full noun + verb clause, and is used to compare actions.

2) This rookie swings like Ted Williams.

3) Ted Williams leads the majors in career on-base percentage, as Babe Ruth leads in career slugging percentage. Each is in second place behind the other on the respective lists.

"act like"

You will get a lot of mileage out of the general rule for "like" vs. "as", but it is no longer a reliable guide when you get to this idiom.

In English, the idiom "to act like" means to behavior or comport one's self in imitation of something else. If I "act like a king", that implies that I am not a king, but something about my behavior (presumably, my entitlement and presumption) resembles that of a king.

"ACT LIKE" VS. "ACT AS"

"act like"

A person is capable of intending to imitate something, so a person can "act like" something. Conceivably, an intelligent animal (one of the higher primates, for example) could be induced to imitate something, in which case we could say: the chimpanzee "acts like" such-and-such. Any inanimate object is utterly devoid of intentionality, so we cannot in any way attribute imitative behavior to it: therefore, we can never use the idiom "act like" with an inanimate object. With an object, we always have to use "act as."

explanation of the question

First of all, from the foregoing discussion, we know that the inanimate object "Russian gauge" cannot "act like" anything, because it doesn't have the conscious ability to imitate. If the subject is an inanimate object, we need to use "act as". Thus, (B) and (E) are out immediately.

We also have two parallel constructions we need to maintain here. We need the two verbs following "Russian gauge" to be in parallel — the first is "gives", so the second has to be the parallel "acts" — thus, (D) is out.

The second parallelism is between "would block"/"blocking" and the participle "preventing"; clearly, we need the participle "blocking" for the first verb. Therefore, (A) is out, and the only correct answer remaining is (C).

IDIOMS OF WHOLE AND PARTS

"consists of"

The verb consist is an intransitive verb — that is, a verb that does not take a direct object; in other words, there's no passive form of this verb, so we only have to worry about the active form. In the construction "P consists of Q", P is the whole, and Q is the part.

1. In poker, a full house consists of a pair of one value and three of a kind of another value.

2. Most soft drinks, consisting of little more than sugar water, have no nutritional value.

"compose"

In the active form, "P composes Q", P is the part, and Q is the whole: the active form of this verb is rare in formal language. The word "compose" is used more commonly in the passive. The passive form of this verb does not follow the standard pattern with the preposition "by" — instead, the passive of "P composes Q" is "Q is composed of P."

3. The Legislative Branch of the United States government is composed of two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate.

4. The US Virgin Islands, composed of three large islands and number of smaller islands, have been a US territory since 1916.

"comprise"

This is a very tricky word, and few people use it correctly; many confuse it with "compose", which means something quite different. Technically, in the construction "P comprises Q", P is the whole, Q is the parts, and it is understood from this construction that Q is an exhaustive list of the parts.

5. The state of California comprises 58 counties.

6. A baseball team, comprising a full roster of 25 men, never has more than nine players on the field at any one time.

IDIOMS OF WHOLE AND PARTS

"comprise"

This verb could also be used in the passive. Many folks confuse this word with the word "compose", and we seem to be reaching the point at which the mistakes are starting to bleed over into standard English — traditionally, "is comprised of" would have been considered absolutely wrong, but now, some authorities on usage allow it. Given the confusion over this word, I believe the GMAT is likely to avoid it.

"include"

This may be the easiest word on the list. In the active form "P includes Q", P is the whole and Q is the part; this active form is completely straightforward. The passive form is unusual only in that it takes the preposition "in", instead of the standard preposition "by."

7a. The European Union includes both Slovakia and Slovenia.

7b. Both Slovakia and Slovenia are included in the European Union.

"exemplify"

Now, perhaps the trickiest word on the list. In the active construction "P exemplifies Q", P is the specific example, and Q is the general case.

8. Magoosh exemplifies the small high-tech Bay Area start-ups that have been successful doing business around the globe.

9. *The Eroica Symphony*, exemplifying a symphony of the Classical period, arguably contains all the defining features of the Romantic movement.

10. The quaternions, exemplifying a noncommutative division algebra, form one of only two finite-dimensional division rings containing the real numbers as a proper subring.

"exemplify"

(Aren't you glad you don't have to answer Reading Comprehension questions about quaternions?!)

When we change "P exemplifies Q" to the passive "Q is exemplified by P", the subject of the passive, Q, is the general case, and the object of "by" is the example.

11. Beta decay is exemplified by the decay of C-14 to stable Nitrogen.

12. Pirates of the so-called "Golden Age of Piracy", exemplified by Captain Kidd and Blackbeard, played a large role in the settlement and control of European colonies in the New World.

13. James Joyce's literary alter egos, exemplified by Stephen Dedalus in both *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and the Ulysses and by Shem the Penman in *Finnegans Wake*, offer his biographers tantalizing insights into his motivations and methods.

"MEANS OF" VS. "MEANS TO"

question

First, consider this question before you read the section.

1) In a recent policy shift, the management of the county's pubic senior-citizen facilities have cut staff hours as means to greater economic sustainability and have lowered the percentage of new residents it will accept whose only source of income is Social Security.

A. to greater economic sustainability and have lowered
B. to greater sustainability economically and have lowered
C. of greater economic sustainability and lowering
D. of greater sustainability economically and lowering
E. for greater economic sustainability and the lowering of

A complete explanation of this question will come at the end of this section.

difference a preposition makes

One of the splits in this SC question is the opening preposition, the preposition which accompanies "means" in the stem.

This is one of the subtlest of English idioms. First of all, "means for" is wrong 100% of the time: that's easy. What's difficult is the difference between "means of" and "means to."

When we say "X as a means of Y" suggests that X is a kind of Y. For example, I might say:

2) Dining out only seldom is a means of saving money.

3) Hand gestures alone do not always suffice as a means of communication.

In #2, there are many ways to save money, and one of those, one kind of way to save money, is to dine out infrequently. In #3, there are several forms of communication, and one of those, although not always the most efficient, are hand gestures.

Notice, in particular, the specific English idiom "by means of", which means "with the use or help of."

"MEANS OF" VS. "MEANS TO"

difference a preposition makes

4) Having lost my paddles downstream, I rowed the canoe by means of a plank.

By contrast, the idiom "X as a means to Y" clearly delineates a difference between X and Y: X is a step on the way to Y, but X and Y are clearly different things, and one's intent is to use X and thereby move past it toward Y. In this construct, Y is the true goal, the true object of one's intention, and X is merely a method employed to achieve this goal.

5) She adopted a no-carb diet as a means to losing weight quickly.

6) The historic town invested in a billboard along the nearby interstate as a means to increased tourism.

In #5, the no-carbs diet is not a goal in and of itself: rather, it is simply a tool, a method, but which the person in question intends to lose weight. In #6, the billboard is not a goal in and of itself; the town's goal is increased tourism, and the billboard is simply a method they hope will achieve this.

By no means should you assume these are the only idioms in English involving "means", but by all means you should study this particular distinction, a possible split on more challenging Sentence Correction questions. We want to support your understanding of GMAT SC by any means!

the question again

1) In a recent policy shift, the management of the county's pubic senior-citizen facilities have cut staff hours as means to greater economic sustainability and have lowered the percentage of new residents it will accept whose only source of income is Social Security.

A. to greater economic sustainability and have lowered
B. to greater sustainability economically and have lowered
C. of greater economic sustainability and lowering
D. of greater sustainability economically and lowering
E. for greater economic sustainability and the lowering of

"MEANS OF" VS. "MEANS TO"

the explanation

The foregoing discussion has probably helped you narrow down the choices. "Means for" is always wrong, so (E) is out. Here we are discussing cutting staff hours vs. greater economic sustainability. We don't want to suggest that cutting staff hours is a kind of greater economic sustainability. Rather, cutting staff hours is not desirable in and of itself, but it's a step the senior-citizen facilities are taking to reach their intended goal of greater economic sustainability. Therefore, in this context, "means to" is correct and "means of" is incorrect. That narrows choices down to (A) and (B).

Notice, also, the verbs "have cut" and "have lowered"/"lowering" must be in parallel, so "have lowered" is correct —- also (A) and (B) only. The difference between them is another tricky split I have discussed in this post: http://magoosh.com/gmat/2012/gmat-sentence-correction-the-power-of-al-the-adjectival-ending/. The phrase "greater economic sustainability" tells us specifically: what kind of sustainability? Very specifically, they want to stay financially afloat: that's economic sustainability. By contrast, "greater sustainability economically" means they want broader sustainability in general (financial, emotional, moral, spiritual, etc.) and they want to achieve this broad sustainability economically, that is to say, at low cost. In context, that's wacky. Clearly, the word "economic"/"economically" is supposed to tell us the specific kind of sustainability, not to qualify that this broad open-ended sustainability should be achieved with cost-cutting measure. Therefore, (A) is the best answer.

"IDEA" WORDS

"idea" words

This post concerns the idioms surrounding the use of "idea" words: **idea, belief, view, doctrine, dogma, principle, hypothesis, theory, teaching, ideology**, etc. What are the correct idioms to use with these words: belief in? principle of? doctrine that? Let's sort all this out.

Source of the idea/interaction with the idea

First of all, the idiom is very different depending on whether we talking about the source of the idea or the content of the idea. Here, let's focus first on the **source**. This includes not only the person who cooked up the idea, but also all the folks who in one way or another "**interact**" with the idea, by agreeing, disagreeing, supporting, disproving, etc.

For the source or other interaction, we can use either a "that"/"which" subordinate clause

3) The doctrine that the pope proclaimed ….
4) The idea about which Darwin first wrote …
5) The view that Spinoza repudiated ….
6) The theory that Einstein supplanted ….

Notice that, in #4, we used the idiom "to write about." We also can use the preposition "of" specifically for a source.

7) The doctrines of classical Buddhism ….
8) The teachings of Confucius ….
9) The thought of the Thomist school ….
10) The ideology of the Khmer Rouge ….

Certain "interact-with-the-idea" words have their own idiom. For example, the verbs "argue", "fight", and "struggle" are used with the preposition "against":

11) The view against which Athanasius fought ….
12) The position against which Bryan argued ….

content of the idea

In contrast to talking about the source of the idea or other people's relationship to the idea, the GMAT will also talk about what ideas **actually say**. For what idea is actually saying, the thought embodied in it — this is tricky. If we are going to name only a single noun, then we can use the prepositions "about" or "of", or the participle "concerning," but if we are going to describe a complete action, then the GMAT doesn't like cramming an entire action into a prepositional phrase — for this case, the GMAT would demand either a "that"/"which" clause with a full [noun] + [verb] structure.

Noun-only constructions:

13) The doctrine of the Prophet Muhammad's unique status among prophets ….
14) The doctrine about Christ's human and divine natures ….
15) The teaching concerning the afterlife ….
16) The teachings of depth psychology ….
17) The idea of hydrostatic equilibrium ….
18) The principle of least action ….

Full clause constructions:

19) The doctrine that Christ pre-existed from all eternity
20) The teaching that the Buddha, in his first sermon, "turned" the wheel of Dharma
21) The axiom by which the geometric space becomes Euclidean
22) The idea that heavier-than-air machines can fly
23) The hypothesis that Francis Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays
24) The principle that one should counter violence with truth

"CONSIDER"

Idiom #1: "consider" + noun + noun

1) Many Magoosh users consider my friend Chris an authority on the GRE.

2) I consider Ted Williams the greatest baseball hitter of all times.

Both of those use this idiom correctly. The structure of this idiom is

[subject] "considers" A B

The noun A is the person or thing you are evaluating, and B is the rank or level or station or etc. to which you are assigning them. In sentence #1:

A = my friend Chris
B = an authority on the GRE

In sentence #2

A = Ted Williams
B = the greatest baseball hitter of all times

Idiom #2: "consider" + noun + adjective

3) I consider Margarette very intelligent.

4) Many unfairly consider New York City unfriendly.

5) The analysts considered tech industry stocks unlikely to rise before the new year.

This idiom is similar to the first, and all three of those use this idiom correctly. The structure of this idiom is

Idiom #2: consider + noun + adjective

[subject] "considers" A B

Again, the noun A is the person or thing you are evaluating, and B is the adjective, the quality, which the subject ascribes to A. In sentence #3:

A = Margarette
B = very intelligent

In sentence #4:

A = New York City
B = unfriendly

In sentence #5:

A = tech industry stocks
B = unlikely to rise before the new year

keep it simple

Notice, this is a very clean, simple idiom. On the Sentence Correct, the GMAT loves to give incorrect version of the form:

someone considers A to be B
someone considers A as B
someone considers that A is B
someone considers A should be B

All of those are wrong. All of those may sound more "dignified", more "formal", than the simplicity of "someone considers A B", but in this case, the simple answer is 100% correct, and all these variants with extra words always will be incorrect on the GMAT Sentence Correction. Keep it simple!

CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

conjunctions

Conjunctions are joining words: they help to link together two nouns, or two verbs, or two larger structures in a sentence. **Coordinating conjunctions** (e.g. "and", "but", "or") simply link two words or parts — they can even link two independent clauses. **Subordinate conjunctions** ("because", "that", "who", etc.) introduce a subordinate clause, a dependent clause. One unique feature of English is a third category, the **correlative conjunctions** — each is a pair of words or a pair of short phrases, and although separated in the sentence they act together as an organizing unit. How this work can be particularly confusing to folks learning English as a second language.

correlative conjunctions

either A or B
neither A nor B
both A and B
not A but B
not only A but also B
not just A but also B
not so much A as B
between A and B
just as A, so B
for every A, B

The first two are "all purpose" in the sense that they can join two individual words (two nouns, two verbs, two adjectives, etc.) or phrases or even independent clauses. These are the most flexible in their use. Remember that "neither ...nor" counts as a single negative, so another negative with these would be a double negative.

contrast and joining

The next five require some comments.

both A and B
not A but B
not only A but also B

CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

contrast and joining

not just A but also B
not so much A as B

These can contrast single nouns or single verbs, but it's much more likely for the GMAT to use them to set in parallel two of a more sophisticated structure (verb phrase, infinitives, participial phrase, gerund, etc.) None of these are used to link two independent clauses.

Both A and B simply affirms both elements equally, whereas **not A but B** negates the first and affirms the second. The next two, **not only A but also B** and **not just A but also B**, also affirms both elements, but with the connotations that A is more expected or more taken for granted and B is more of a surprise or something additional.

1) Beethoven was not only a great composer but also an electrifying pianist, according to contemporary accounts.

The first, "great composer", is expected — anyone who has heard of Beethoven knows he's a composer. The second may come as a surprise to folks who are not particularly familiar with his biography. This why the "not only … but also" idiom is more appropriate here than the "both … and" would be.

Be careful not to conflate these idioms —- typical GMAT mistake patterns include "not … but also" and "not only … but". Make sure you know exactly how to use these.

The final one is the most sophisticated of these five: **not so much A as B**. It demonstrates a difference in degree: whatever is being asserted, A is true or relevant, but it is ~~less~~ true or ~~less~~ relevant, and B is more so by comparison. This is used for nouns primarily for nouns, noun-like phrase (infinitives & gerunds), prepositional phrase or participial phrases.

2) The CEO wants to organize a new division around these six products, not so much to promote the sales of these six as to establish a foothold in a new market sector.

3) In composing the Bill of Rights, the Founding Fathers valued not so much defending the rights of criminals as protecting any innocent person from unjust punishment.

4) Ironically, Columbus is remembered not so much for his original goal, finding the sea route to Asia, as for his accidental discovery, North America.

CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

contrast and joining

5) After his dramatic home run in the 1988 World Series, Gibson rounded the bases not so much running as hobbling.

This form can also contrast two verbs, with a format: [subject] "do not so much" [verb #1] "as" [verb #2].

6) Flying squirrels do not so much fly as glide in a long leap from tree to tree.

The word "between" is a preposition in this construction, so A & B must be either nouns, or something that could take the place of noun, such as a gerund. The word "between" appears most frequently on the GMAT in the constructions **"difference between"** and **"distinction between."**

7) *"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."* — Mark Twain

between A and B

The word "between" is a preposition in this construction, so A & B must be either nouns, or something that could take the place of noun, such as a gerund. The word "between" appears most frequently on the GMAT in the constructions **"difference between"** and **"distinction between."**

7) *"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."* — Mark Twain

just as A, so B

This construction is used only to link two independent clauses. It sets up a comparison, and it is discussed further in the idioms of comparison.

for every A, B

Here, the word "for" is a preposition, so A and B have to be nouns. In fact, in this idiom, A & B have to be concrete nouns. This idiom discusses a correspondence, expressing the ratio between the elements of A and the elements of B. It is frequently used in economic and political contexts. In fact, this is a frequent idiom in GMAT math problems.

8) For every dollar Roscoe Corporation spends on R & D, Utica Central spends seven dollars.

9) For every vote McCormick wins in the Midwest with this new strategy, he stands to lose two or three in the Northeast and in California.

10) For every 10% increase in the value of x, y increases 25%.

"IF" VS. "WHETHER"

when to use "if"

The word "if" is used for clauses that specify conditions or speculate on something hypothetical.

1) Condition: "If you finish your peas, you can have dessert."

2) Hypothetical: "If I regularly ate my vegetables, I probably would be healthier."

In formal logic, the clause following the "if" clause would begin with the word "then": that's perfectly acceptable grammatically, but not at all necessary. For example, in both of those sentence, the word "then" could be inserted right after the comma, and would add a bit of emphasis to the logical relationship, if that were something that needed underscoring.

The last clause of the previous paragraph highlights a particular category of conditional statements, those using the subjunctive. For more on the subjunctive mood, see this post. The GMAT loves "if"-clauses involving the subjunctive.

when to use "whether"

The word "whether" is a relative pronoun, which means it introduces a relative clause. A "whether" clause is always about the uncertainty in a choice or alternative, and the clause itself may stand apart from the sentence, the way an "if" clause does, or may act as a noun. When it stands apart, it is like an "if" clause in which the definite causal nature has been replaced with uncertainty or irrelevance. When it acts as a noun, the clause may act as the subject of the sentence, or as the object of an epistemological verb (to know, to wonder, etc.) or a volitional verb (to care, to prefer, etc.)

Stands apart:

3) Whether you study French or Spanish, you will encounter an unfamiliar language in Japan.

4) Whether or not I get the raise, I am going to buy that new car.

"IF" VS. "WHETHER"

when to use "whether"

Notice, in either of those: if we removed the uncertainty of the choice, we could replace the word whether with the word "if" to get a more definitive conditional statement. Without making those changes, the word "if" would be wrong.

Subject of sentence:

5) Whether you like jazz will influence your opinion of this new club.

6) Whether I walk on her left or right side matters a great deal to her.

Object of an epistemological or volitional verb:

7) I don't know whether there is intelligent life elsewhere in the Universe.

8) He doesn't care whether you serve broccoli or Brussels sprouts with dinner.

In sentence #5-8, the word "if" would be 100% incorrect. The GMAT Sentence Correction loves to test that particular mistake.

"whether ... or not"

The word "whether" implies a choice, at least a pair of alternatives. Sometimes that choice is made explicit (as in sentences #6 and #8), and sometimes it is implicit (as in sentences #5 & #7). When the choice is implicit, is it grammatically correct to add the words "or not" after whether?

When the "whether" clause acts as a noun, the words "or not" add absolutely nothing to the sentence. Consider:

5a) Whether you like jazz will influence your opinion of this new club.

5b) Whether or not you like jazz will influence your opinion of this new club.

"IF" VS. "WHETHER"

"whether ... or not"

The meaning of both sentences is exactly the same. The second sentence adds two more words that contribute zilch to the overall meaning of the sentence. What is GMAC's opinion of tossing in extra words that lengthen the sentence and contribute bupkis to the meaning? As you may well guess, they frown on these. Don't expect to see "whether or not" in any correct GMAT SC answer choice when the clause is used as a noun.

When the clause stands apart, as in sentences #3 & #4, that's another matter. In that construction, the alternative must be made explicit. In #3 there already was an explicit comparison of the two languages, but in #4 we absolutely must include the words "or not" after the word "whether": the grammatical construction demands it. This is the only case in which the words "whether or not" could be correct on GMAT sentence correction.

Whether or not you like it, knowing the correct use of "whether" and "if" is important for GMAT Sentence Correction. If you can master these distinctions, you will perform well on a question that that befuddles many.

Two relevant SC questions in the GMAT Official Guide, which appear as:

a.) #34 & #75 in OG12e, and

b.) #34 & #78 in OG13e

"WHETHER"

"I wonder if you know how to use the word 'whether' on the GMAT."

The astute reader will recognize the self-referential error in the above sentence. The first thing any prospective GMAT test taker needs to learn about this is the If vs. Whether split, so common on GMAT Sentence Correction. Beyond this, there are characteristic idioms involving the word "whether":

asks whether
question whether
wonder whether
depends on whether

All of these follow the same pattern. The word whether introduces a substantive clause which describes the uncertainty in question.

1) The lawyer asked whether the client knew the suspect before the incident.

2) The Congressional committee questioned whether the general had overstepped his authority in detaining the soldiers.

3) The baseball manager wondered whether his team would be able to rally from 5 runs down.

4a) The professor said he doubted whether most Americans could locate Afghanistan on a blank world map.

This one also could be expressed as a "that" clause:

4b) The professor said he doubted that most Americans could locate Afghanistan on a blank world map.

The last idiom can involve just one "whether clause" after the word "on", or two "whether" clauses, one as the subject and one as the object of the preposition "on".

5) The taxes a couple pays depends on whether they are married.

6) Whether a star becomes a black hole at the end of its life depends on whether its remaining mass, after successive red giant stages, is sufficiently large.

7) Whether the state will be able to avoid a full-blown recession depends on whether the agricultural sector is able to rebound this year.

easy

Choose the option that best answers the question.

Snow leopards live in the snow-capped mountain ranges of Central Asia, from eastern Iran all the way to Nepal and China, and in some of the higher alpine regions prey, like Himalayan Blue Sheep, is sometimes of such scarcity so that in a range of 1,000 square kilometers of territory support only five adult snow leopards.

- prey, like Himalayan Blue Sheep, is sometimes of such scarcity so that in a range of 1,000 square kilometers of territory support
- prey, such as Himalayan Blue Sheep, is sometimes so scarce that a range of 1,000 square kilometers of territory supports
- prey, like Himalayan Blue Sheep, is sometimes so scarce that a range of 1,000 square kilometers of territory support
- prey, for example, Himalayan Blue Sheep, is sometimes of such scarcity that in a range of 1,000 square kilometers of territory supporting
- prey, such as Himalayan Blue Sheep, is sometimes as scarce as to make a range of 1,000 square kilometers of territory supporting

The answer is B.

Try the question online and watch the video explanation: **http://gmat.magoosh.com/questions/3225**

medium

Choose the option that best answers the question.

The melting of world glaciers, measured consistently from the early 1990s until the present, seems <u>like it is corroborative that</u> average global temperatures are inexorably rising.

- like it is corroborative that
- as if to corroborate
- to corroborate that
- corroborative of
- like a corroboration of

The answer is C.

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very hard

Choose the option that best answers the question.

The income categories of Senator Crocker's proposed tax code are as broad as to fail to distinguish the sale of an old chair at a pawnshop from collecting profits in a sophisticated stock option move.

- as broad as to fail to distinguish the sale of an old chair at a pawnshop from collecting profits in
- as broad as to fail in distinguishing between the sale of an old chair at a pawnshop and collecting profits from
- so broad as to fail to distinguish selling an old chair at a pawnshop and collecting profits from
- so broad as to fail to distinguish selling an old chair at a pawnshop from collecting profits in
- so broad that he fails in distinguishing between selling chair at a pawnshop from the profits in

The answer is D.

Try the question online and watch the video explanation: **http://gmat.magoosh.com/questions/3289**

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