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REA: THE TEST PREP TEACHERS RECOMMEND

DOUG FRENCH'S **VERBAL PREP**
for the
ACCUPLACER*



By
Doug French



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**DOUG FRENCH's
Verbal Prep for the Accuplacer***

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DEDICATION

To my sons, for whom I hope the SAT will be abolished by the time they're 16.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doug French has worked in test-preparation since he first signed on with The Princeton Review in 1992. He has worked as an author, instructor, and course developer for the SAT, SAT Subject Tests, LSAT, GMAT, GRE, and way too many other standardized oppressions, until he became a full-time teacher, with summers off and everything, in 2004. He now works as a freelance writer in New York City.

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ABOUT RESEARCH & EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1959, Research & Education Association (REA) is dedicated to publishing the finest and most effective educational materials—including software, study guides, and test preps—for students in middle school, high school, college, graduate school, and beyond.

REA's test preparation series includes books and software for all academic levels in almost all disciplines. REA publishes test preps for students who have not yet entered high school, as well as high school students preparing to enter college. Students from countries around the world seeking to attend college in the United States will find the assistance they need in REA's publications. For college students seeking advanced degrees, REA publishes test preps for many major graduate school admission examinations in a wide variety of disciplines, including engineering, law, and medicine. Students at every level, in every field, with every ambition can find what they are looking for among REA's publications.

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We invite you to visit us at www.rea.com to find out how "REA is making the world smarter."

INTRODUCTION



“If you’re used to stressing about standardized tests, you can stop now. The Accuplacer is a totally different type of test, because it’s untimed and unscored!”

Welcome to *Doug French’s Verbal Prep for the Accuplacer*, the definitive prep book for All Things Verbal on the Accuplacer. This book is set up to guide you through the test’s format, increase your appreciation of English grammar, help you improve your reading comprehension skills, and review the best techniques for writing a good essay. It will also teach you a few tried-and-true techniques that are always helpful on any test that includes answer choices, as this one does.

First, let’s start with the basics. Like what the Accuplacer actually is.

WHAT IS THE ACCUPLACER?

The Accuplacer is a test developed by the College Board that is designed to help you assess your ability to work math problems, understand English grammar, and comprehend short reading passages. It’s meant to help your academic advisors analyze your academic strengths and weaknesses and “place” you “accurately” in the courses that will be the best fit for you.

Unlike most of the other standardized tests you might encounter, there are two very important aspects of the Accuplacer that you’ll probably really like.

- You don’t have to worry about getting a certain score, because the Accuplacer doesn’t give you one. It’s only meant as an assessment, which means you cannot “pass” or “fail” it. You merely want to represent your academic skills as accurately as possible.
- You don’t have to worry about time pressure, because the Accuplacer doesn’t have a time limit. This test is more concerned with determining what you know, not how fast you can tell people about it. But, doing well on the

Accuplacer will help you financially. You will move more quickly through the regular college courses instead of taking non-credit review classes.

Basically, this test is a lot less stressful than most other standardized tests. And that's a good thing, because when you take it you can concentrate on the one question sitting on your computer screen without having to worry about how much time you have left to finish all of them.

And yes, we did say "computer screen," because the Accuplacer is a "computer-adaptive test," sometimes referred to as a CAT.

What is a "computer-adaptive" test?

The Accuplacer is a computer-based exam, so you won't have to bother with paper test booklets and bubble sheets. Instead, the test "adapts" to the level of ability it perceives, based on the questions you've already answered.

When a section begins, the first question you'll see will be of "medium" difficulty. If you get it right, the next question you'll see will be a little "harder"; if you get it wrong, the next question will be a little "easier." And please note that those words are in quotes for a reason: The Accuplacer might have an idea of what makes a question easy or difficult, but that doesn't mean that its perception of difficulty is the same as yours. Everyone is different, and what you think is easy might strike someone else as really hard. Or vice versa.

The bottom line? It's doesn't make a whole lot of sense to worry about whether a question is easy, or difficult, or anywhere in between. Just concentrate on the question you see on the screen, do your best with it, and move on.

Adjusting to the CAT

A good thing about paper-and-pencil exams is that you can work on whatever problem you want to within a given section. If you're not sure how to answer the first question, for example, you can skip it and go to the next one.

On the CAT, however, this isn't an option. The computer gives you a question, and you have to answer it before moving on. You can't scroll ahead to look at the next answer, and you can't go back to check anything you've already answered. You also can't cross off answers in your test booklet (we'll talk more about that later), and you have to use separate scratch paper (which is more of an issue on math problems than for verbal ones).

The test format

The verbal portion of the Accuplacer consists of 40 questions divided into four categories, 10 questions each. The first two sections are all about sentence skills; the third and fourth are about reading comprehension.

- Part I: Decide whether the sentence structure (grammar, word order, and punctuation) is correct and, if not, select the best way to fix it.
- Part II: Rewrite a given sentence using a different word structure while keeping the same meaning as the original sentence.
- Part III: Read a short passage (5-6 sentences) and answer a question about it.
- Part IV: Determine the relationship between two sentences.

If the description of these questions seems a little vague right now, don't worry. You'll see plenty of examples of each in this book.

The verbal portion of the Accuplacer also contains a WritePlacer test that measures your ability to write effectively. The assignment will be to write a multi-paragraph essay of 300-500 words on the topic provided.

You can also find out more information about the test on the College Board's Accuplacer website: www.collegeboard.org/student/testing/accuplacer.

How to use this book

This book devotes a chapter to each of the four categories described above. Each chapter lists some basic concepts of the Accuplacer tests and offers several drills to help you improve your skill set. In [chapter 1](#), for example, there is a section on each of the grammar issues that the Accuplacer routinely tests, as well as references to the grammar and idiom glossaries, which appear at the end of the book. In [chapter 3](#), on reading comprehension, we'll offer you some techniques for processing written information more quickly and efficiently.

At the end of the book are two 40-question practice tests, each with an annotated answer key. As you work on these questions, as well as the others interspersed throughout the chapters, look for patterns in the questions you answer correctly and those that you keep getting wrong. This will help you pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses and guide you to the areas in which you need the most practice.

And throughout the book, we will endeavor to take advantage of the Accuplacer's most glaring vulnerability: the answer choices.

POE shall set you free

Since every question you'll see on the Accuplacer will have four answer choices, one of the most useful skills you'll develop as you study is the ability to determine why an

answer choice is *wrong*. And that’s where the Process of Elimination (POE) comes in. The Accuplacer’s writers have a very specific task: to write a question and supply an answer to that question. That’s the easy part. The hard part is writing the wrong answers—the “decoys”—that can seem attractive enough to choose.

For example, let’s look at a sentence that appears on the first page of this introduction:

“Unlike most of the other standardized tests you might encounter, there are two very important aspects of the Accuplacer that you’ll probably really like.”

Now let’s re-envision it as the given sentence in a question in Part I of the Accuplacer and throw in some answer choices:

Unlike most of the other standardized tests you might encounter, there are two very important aspects of the Accuplacer that you’ll probably really like.

- A. there are two very important aspects of the Accuplacer that you’ll probably really like.
- B. there are two of the Accuplacer’s aspects that are very important and you’ll probably really like them.
- C. the Accuplacer has two very important aspects that you’ll probably really like.
- D. the Accuplacer’s two very important aspects will very probably be liked by you.

You may not have picked up on this when you first read it, but the sentence is written incorrectly. It begins with the phrase *Unlike most of the other standardized tests you might encounter*, which is a descriptive phrase, or a modifier. When a sentence begins in this way, the noun that follows right after the comma must be the subject that the opening phrase modifies.

- Answer choice (A), which is always a repeat of the sentence as written, violates this rule. So you can cross it out.
- Answer choice (B) has a similar problem, and it creates a run-on sentence at the end. So cross that one out, too.
- Answer choice (D) seems to address the modifying problem, but it also contains the passive voice “liked by you” at the end. Out it goes.

You’re left with answer choice (C), which is the credited answer. The opening phrase describes “the Accuplacer,” which is *unlike most of the other standardized tests you might encounter*. So the first words that appear in the underlined portion of the sentence must be *the Accuplacer*.

The point of all this is that even if you didn’t know about the Misplaced Modifier Rule (which we’ll discuss at great length in the next chapter), you can select the credited response either by recognizing what’s right about the best one or by recognizing

what's wrong about the wrong ones.

If you're down to two

In many cases, you'll be able to get rid of two answer choices rather easily, but you'll find yourself having a tough time deciding between the final two choices. In this circumstance, most of our minds are wired to think in terms of positivity, and to find the answer choice that is defensibly better than the other. That's all fine and wonderful in real life, but in the hardscrabble world of standardized testing, the opposite is true. When you're sizing up two answer choices and playing them off each other, it's actually much easier to point out why the wrong answer is wrong than it is to defend why the best answer is the credited response. So you'll actually make things easier for yourself if you learn to spot flaws.

Don't look for perfection

Did you also notice that the previous paragraph referred to the "best" answer rather than the "right" answer? This is an important point. When you're trying to choose among the four answer choices, you might not agree with what the test deems the "credited response." In fact, many times the credited response is defended not by saying what is correct about it, but by showing the errors in the other answer choices.

The credited response might not be perfect, but it will always be better than the other three. So when you work on questions, remember that, in some circumstances, you may end up choosing the answer choice that stinks the least.

A word about vocabulary

The Accuplacer does not specifically test your vocabulary by making you define ten-dollar words like *perambulate* (which is a fancier version of walk). However, having a good vocabulary couldn't hurt your chances. When you're reviewing a reading comprehension passage, for example, it will definitely help your comprehension if you know what every word means.

More importantly, a good vocabulary will come in very handy when you're writing your essay, because any writing benefits from 1) word variety and 2) a good command of using the right word at the right time.

If you don't think you have the strongest vocabulary in the world, there's no need to stay up nights reading a thesaurus. Instead, you can make a daily exercise of improving your vocabulary by reading as much as you can, either for school or for pleasure, and taking note of any word whose meaning you don't know. If you're not sure whether you know the word's meaning, ask yourself if you'd feel comfortable using it in a school essay.

If not, use a 3 × 5 note card and make a flash card with the word on the front and the meaning on the back. If you really want to get word nerdy, you can annotate it in any

way that helps you remember the word's meaning:

- list some synonyms, like *loquacious* and *garrulous*
- include the etymology, or the word roots, and see if they relate to any other language you've studied (especially Latin)
- take note of prefixes or suffixes (like *circum-* means "around" in *circumnavigate*)
- think up a mnemonic device, and the wackier it is, the more likely you'll remember it

Once you start amassing a large stack of these flash cards, start studying and separate them into KNOW and DON'T KNOW piles. And don't try to study a huge batch of words all at once. Take 5-10 of them at a time and work with them over and over until you know them.

Now that we've covered some basic elements, let's get to it. Keep practicing, stay focused, and good luck!

CHAPTER 1: *Correcting Sentences*



“Mastering grammar on the Accuplacer is less challenging than you think, because it tests the same rules over and over again.”

The first ten questions you’ll see on Part I of the verbal portion of the Accuplacer will be sentences that may, or may not, need correcting. If you read the introduction (and if you haven’t, you should), you saw that each of these questions consists of one sentence—part of which has been underlined—and four answer choices:

Padma chose the bigger of the seven cupcakes.

- A. the bigger of the
- B. the biggest than
- C. the biggest of the
- D. bigger than the

If you think the sentence is written correctly, choose answer choice (A), which always repeats the underlined portion word for word. If you see a flaw in the sentence, however, you can cross off answer choice (A) and look for something better among the remaining three choices, which suggest alternative ways to write the sentence.

What not to do

When you see a question like this, your first instinct might be to re-read the sentence four times, with each of the four answer choices included in the underlined portion. If you do this, be aware that the sentences might start to sound unnervingly alike, and your job might actually become more difficult.

A second instinct might be to re-write the sentence in your head and then look for a match among the answer choices. This might seem like the best way to go, but it can cause more problems than you might think. If a sentence is written incorrectly, there is always more than one way to fix it. If you decide on one specific remedy, and it’s not

there among the last three choices, you might be inclined to pick the one closest to what you want it to be, and that might not necessarily be the credited response. As always, the key lies in a deeper appreciation of grammar and strategy.

The big three for POE

When attempting to correct a sentence, here are the three best strategies to consider:

1. Spot a problem with the sentence as written.
2. Eliminate all the other answer choices that repeat the same problem.
3. See where the answer choices are different from each other and decide which of them is/are flawed.

Let's use these techniques on that sample question we saw earlier in the chapter:

Padma chose the bigger of the seven cupcakes.

- A. the bigger of the
- B. the biggest than
- C. the biggest of the
- D. bigger than the

The most efficient way to go after this question is to recognize that, since it specifically mentions *seven cupcakes*, it's incorrect to use *bigger*. Words that end in *-er* are comparatives that are used when only two things are being compared. When a sentence refers to three or more items, the proper term to use is a superlative, which ends in *-est*. We can therefore eliminate answer choice (A), which we know is incorrect, and answer choice (D), which repeats the error.

There's an example of Steps 1 and 2 in use right there. Since you know *biggest* is the right word, the next step is to compare the other parts of answer choices (B) and (C). How are they different?

Answer choice (C) keeps *of the* after *biggest*, but since answer choice (B) unnecessarily changes *of the* to *than*, you can cross it off. The only answer left is the best answer, choice (C).

Look for a two-and-two split

While looking at the answer choices, you'll often see that the four options often split off into two camps. In this case, it was *bigger* or *biggest*. This can be a helpful trend to recognize. If you didn't know or recognize this rule (and you should, because the

Accuplacer frequently brings it up), you have to try something else because you can't just skip ahead to the next question. In this circumstance, you might consider bypassing Steps 1 and 2 and looking at how all four answer choices differ from each other. Since two of them include *bigger*, and the other two include *biggest*, you could conclude that using *bigger* or *biggest* is an important issue. And now it's time to make an educated guess as to which two answer choices to eliminate.

Reminder: Don't look for perfection

As we mentioned in the introduction, it's important to remember that the credited response might not match what you think the answer should be. This is especially true when you're correcting sentences. When you're trying to choose among the four answer choices, you might recognize that the sentence is incorrectly written and cross off answer choice (A). You might also think you have a good idea about how to correct the sentence and look among the remaining answer choices for a match. Unfortunately, if that match isn't there, you might feel frustrated and choose an answer just because it's closest to what you want the credited response to be.

If none of the four answer choices seems "correct," remind yourself that one of them has to be the credited response, which means it has to be defensibly better than the other three choices. Alter your expectations, consider the merit of each answer choice individually.

Keep these techniques in mind as you work through the drills and practice questions in this and other chapters, and you may find yourself spotting trends and wrong answers much more quickly and easily. And now, on to the grammar!

Reviewing the basics

As we prepare to review some of the standard rules of English grammar, it's important to note that this book will not cover every rule known to man. There are plenty of textbooks (some of which you might still have somewhere in the back of your closet) that will teach you all about diagramming sentences. Our goal is to give you a basic overview and prepare you for the errors that the College Board usually wants you to find. We'll also define a lot of grammar terms, so you can tell the difference between a "past participle" and the "present perfect." And if you forget anything, all the definitions appear in the Appendix on page 189.

The simple sentence

The only things a correctly formed sentence really needs are a **subject** and a **verb**. The subject commits the action that the verb describes:

Joe ran.

After that, everything else is just adding detail by adding more description. For example, we can add an **adverb** to describe how he ran:

Joe ran quickly.

From there, we can add a **prepositional phrase** to tell where he ran:

Joe ran quickly down the field.

Why was Joe running?

Attempting to score the winning touchdown, Joe ran quickly down the field.

Before you know it, you've got a more complex sentence that tells you a lot more about what Joe is doing, and where he's doing it. Regardless of all that, however, you can still boil the sentence down to the subject and verb, the most basic elements.

THE MOST COMMON MISCUES

So far, the idea of having to memorize all these grammar rules might be making you dizzy. And that's to be expected. The good news is that even though it's a good idea to review all these rules, there are several that the College Board likes to test over and over again. Therefore, here's a list of the six most common error areas that the Accuplacer wants you to recognize. Each section comes with tips on how to spot them and fix them, as well as several sample questions on which to practice your newfound expertise.

1. Misplaced modifiers

There is one basic rule about words or phrases that describe or modify other words: In a properly constructed sentence, modifiers should appear next to the word or words they describe. If not, then the modifier is *misplaced*. Your job is to determine if the modifier is properly placed in a sentence and, if not, choose the answer that fixes the error.

How to spot modifier errors: The most common structure is a descriptive phrase set off by a comma at the beginning of a sentence, like this: "Like Arizona, it gets really hot in Texas during the summer." This sentence is written incorrectly, because the opening phrase "Like Arizona" is supposed to describe Texas.

How to fix them: The most common way is to make sure the first word after the comma is the word that the opening phrase describes: "Like Arizona, Texas gets really hot in the summer" Another way, however, is to turn the opening phrase into a clause, which means rewrite it with a subject and verb. For example:

INCORRECT: While crossing the street, a car ran a red light.

CORRECT: While *I was* crossing the street, a car ran a red light.

Now that the opening is a clause, the sentence is fine.

DRILL #1 *Indicate whether the following sentences are written correctly. If not, re-write them to correct the misplaced modifier.*

1. While baiting his hook, a fish jumped into Bob's rowboat.
2. Steeped in a tradition of success, the New York Yankees have won more World Series championships than any other team.
3. First published in 1859 in 32 weekly installments, many literary experts believe *A Tale of Two Cities* to be Charles Dickens's best work.
4. Though usually a calm person, Albert's patience could not withstand the heavy traffic.
5. Unlike dogs, which are much more social, cats tend to keep to themselves.

The answers are on page 35.

2. Restrictive and Non-restrictive modifiers

This section refers to one of the Accuplacer's most niggling details, and it involves how nouns are modified. If a modifying phrase or clause is essential to the sentence because it gives important information that identifies the subject, it is called a **restrictive modifier**. Unlike the modifiers discussed above, restrictive modifiers are not preceded by a comma. Here's an example of the difference:

My son who went to law school just ran a marathon.

The absence of commas in this sentence tells the reader that the speaker has more than one son, and the phrase "who went to law school" is the essential to distinguish the son in the sentence from the other sons. When commas are added, however, the sentence takes on a new meaning:

My son, who went to law school, just ran a marathon.

In this sentence, the commas indicate that the speaker has just one son, so it's no longer necessary to set him apart from the others. Therefore, the modifying phrase now provides extra information that isn't as important as before. This sort of phrase is also called an **appositive**.