Achievable

ACT DUMP SHEET

Punctuation

Is it a complete sentence?

- It needs a **subject**, a **verb** and a **complete thought**; a dependent clause lacks the last
- An *-ing* word without its own subject is not the verb: *Walking slowly, the* **policeman kept** *a sharp eye*
- *While*, *because*, *since* or *which* makes a clause **dependent**: *While I can't stand politics* is not a sentence
- **Independent clause:** stands alone as a sentence. **Dependent clause:** has a subject and verb but can't stand alone

What joins two clauses

Clauses	Join them with
Independent + independent	Period, semicolon, comma + FANBOYS, or a colon when the right side specifies the left
Dependent, then independent	Comma: *Because I forgot my wallet, I came back*
Independent, then dependent	Usually **nothing**: *I came back because I forgot my wallet*

- **FANBOYS:** *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*, with a comma before, and a complete sentence on **both** sides
- **A comma alone** between two sentences is a comma splice; **nothing** at all is a run-on
- **Hard question?** Check the outlier choice first, label the clauses, then cut the choices that join them wrongly

Period and semicolon

- **A semicolon is a "weak period":** between clauses, it goes only between two independent ones
- Check both sides: *With pepper spray in his eyes; he could not see* is wrong
- **Choices alike but for a period and a semicolon? Both wrong**
- **Rare:** semicolons split list items that hold commas: *Sarah, my boss; Jimmy, the HR rep; and Mateo*

Colon

Right only if all three answers are yes. **Check the left side first:** it is where the ACT sets the trap.

- **1.** Is the left side an **independent clause**? *At the store, I bought:* fails
- **2.** Is it a **statement**, not a question?
- **3.** Does the right side **specify** the left? *three things: bananas, apples, and sauce*
- Not only lists: a word (*a favorite color: blue*) or a clause (*a favorite color: it is blue*) works too

Interruptions

- Nonessential words take a **matching pair** of marks: lift them out and a sentence must remain
- **Commas** for extra information (*grounded me, deservedly, for a month*); **parentheses** break harder, and are rarely tested
- **Dashes** break hardest: a dash that opens closes with a dash, unless the interruption **ends the sentence**
- Never open with a dash and close with a comma

Commas with which, that and so

Word	Comma?
which	Yes: *the truth, which was that he knew*
that, who	No, if it identifies the noun: *the man who sat by me*
so	Yes, joining sentences: *I learned Japanese, so now I skip subtitles*
so that	No: *I stopped by the store so that I could grab milk*

Appositives

- An **appositive** renames the noun beside it: **essential**, no commas; **extra**, commas
- **General phrase → name:** no commas: *The author William Shakespeare wrote tragedies*
- **Name → description:** commas: *William Shakespeare, a prolific writer of plays, remains a mystery*
- **Specific phrase → name:** commas: *The greatest of all English tragedies, Hamlet, was written around 1600*

Introductory and interrupting adverbs

- A comma after an opening *However, Therefore, Meanwhile*
- Mid-sentence, modifying the whole sentence: commas on **both** sides: *I cannot,* **however,** *remember the color*
- Between two sentences, a semicolon before it: *It rained;* **however,** *we played*

Apostrophes, its and it's

- **One owner:** add 's: *the teacher's desk, the actress's script*
- **Plural owners:** form the plural, then add ' if it ends in s (*the teachers' desk*), 's if not (*the children's*)
- **Contractions:** the apostrophe marks the cut: *haven't, we're*; **he's** is *he is* or *he has*, never *his*
- **Checklist:** contraction? What owns what? One owner or more? *the* **ocean's** *blue surface*
- **it's** = *it is*: swap that in to test. **its** = belonging to it, like *his*: *spin on* **its** *axis*
- **its' never exists:** choose it only on a **NOT** acceptable question