

Step 1

Step 1: Identify the Topic

For each underlined portion, finish the sentence and then look at the answers. The answers are your clues to identifying what the question is testing. Let's start off with this first question.

For the first episode of its new radio

series, CBS decided to adapt H.G. Wells' The

War of the Worlds', the story of a Martian

invasion of Earth.

1. A. NO CHANGE
B. Wells' *The War of the World's*,
C. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*,
D. Wells *The War of the Worlds*,

Do any of the words change? No. What is the only thing that does change? Apostrophes. So what must be the topic of the question? Apostrophes.

Always identify the topic of the question first. Pay attention to what changes versus what stays the same in the answers.

Step 2

Step 2: Use POE

You may have chosen an answer for question 1 already. If you haven't, don't worry: we'll review all the rules of apostrophes later in the lesson. But let's use question 1 to learn the next step, POE. To go from good to great on the English test, you can't just fix a question in your head and then find an answer that matches. Instead, after you've identified what's wrong, eliminate all the choices that do not fix the error.

For question 1, no apostrophe is needed for *Worlds*. Cross off choices (A) and (B).

1. A. NO CHANGE
B. Wells' *The War of the World's*,
C. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*,
D. Wells *The War of the Worlds*,

Now compare the two that remain, choices (C) and (D). Do you need the apostrophe for *Wells*? Yes, you do, so choice (C) is the correct answer. Here's where you could have messed up if you didn't use POE: if you fixed it in your head and looked for your answer, you could have missed the absence of the apostrophe in choice (D) and chosen incorrectly. POE on English isn't optional or a backup when you're stuck. You have to first eliminate wrong answers and then compare what's left.

Step 3: Use the context

Even though you may struggle with time on the English test, you can't skip the non-underlined text in between questions in order to save yourself a few minutes. Take a look at this next question.

In order to tell the story in traditional
radio play format, however, the young
director Orson Welles decided to present it
as an unfolding news story and hired actors
to portray radio reporters "stunned" by the
horrific events unfolding before their eyes.

- 2. F. NO CHANGE
- G. Rather than
- H. Therefore, to
- J. Thus, to

Don't forget to apply the first two steps. The transition word is changing in the answers. Transitions test the correct direction to match the flow of the sentence. How do you know which direction to use? Read the entire sentence for the full context. The information that follows indicates Welles' direction would be a departure; the word *however* also helps. Eliminate all answers that are not *consistent* with the clues in the non-underlined portion and only choice (G) remains.

Always finish the sentence before attacking the question, and don't skip from question to question. The non-underlined text provides context you need.

Let's move on to the next step.

Step 4: Trust Your Ear, But Verify

Your ear can be pretty reliable at raising the alarm for outright errors and clunky, awkward phrasing.

You should, however, always verify what your ear signals by confirming the actual error. Steps 1 and 2 will help with that: use the answers to identify the topic, and use POE heavily.

But remember to be careful for errors your ear *won't* catch. Using the answers to identify the topic will save you there as well.

Step
3

Step
4

Let's try another question.

Any listener who tuned in after the broadcast had started believing that the United States faced an alien invasion in their skies.

3. A. NO CHANGE
B. there skies.
C. it's skies.
D. its skies.

That sounded pretty good to us, how about you? But before we circle NO CHANGE and go on our merry way, look at the answers to identify the topic and confirm there is no error. Only the pronoun changes, so the question is testing pronouns. *Their* is a plural pronoun, but all countries take the singular verb and pronoun, including the *United States*. Cross off choices (A) and (B)—(B) isn't even the right type of pronoun, plural or not. Since we need a possessive pronoun, cross off choice (C) as well. Choice (D) is the correct answer.

Let's move on to our last step.

Step 5

Step 5: Don't Fix What Isn't Broken

Read the next question.

In retrospect, it seems strange that so many could have been fooled by what surely could not have been all that convincing a radio play.

4. F. NO CHANGE
G. all that believable or credible a radio play.
H. all convincing.
J. considered convincing by most who listened to it.

Go to Step 1, and identify the topic. *Everything* seems to be changing in the answers for question 4: What the question is testing isn't obvious at all. You can't confirm what you can't identify, so leave "NO CHANGE," and apply the 4 C's.

Does one of the answers fix something you missed?

Does one of the answers make the sentence better by making it more concise?

If the answer to both questions is *No* for all three other answers, the correct answer choice is (F), or (A), NO CHANGE.

NO CHANGE *is* a legitimate answer choice. Don't make the mistake of assuming that all questions have an error that you just can't spot. If you use the five steps of our Basic Approach, you'll catch errors your ear would miss, and you'll confidently choose NO CHANGE when it's the correct answer.