Writing SOL Review

In a Nutshell: The Writing SOL has two parts. The first part is a 44 question multiple choice test. These questions are based on compositions drafted by fictional students in response to particular writing tasks. The second part of the test, called the “direct-writing component,” contains a prompt for a written essay.

What’s Tested: The test focuses on three specific areas:

1. Writing Process
2. Grammar and Usage
3. Spelling, Capitalization, and Punctuation

Test Taking Tips: Here are three basic test taking strategies to use on the multiple choice test.

1. Process of Elimination (POE): It is often easier to detect the wrong answer choices than the right ones. You should literally cross out those wrong choices first. Even if you can’t eliminate three of the four choices, you still improve the odds with each choice you eliminate.

2. Aggressive Guessing: After using POE, if an answer doesn’t jump out at you, you should make an educated guess. Leaving a question blank is the same as getting it wrong, so don’t leave any questions blank!

3. Backsolving: Sometimes the choices themselves, not the question, should get the most of your attention. In fact, you can sometimes figure out the answer by working backward, starting with the choices, even if you don’t quite get the question.

Of course, you should take these tips into account too:

1. Get a good night’s sleep before the exam (but don’t overdo it so you wake up feeling sluggish).
2. Eat a good breakfast (but that doesn’t mean steak and eggs if you’re used to a breakfast bar).
3. Bring at least 3 sharpened #2 pencils.
4. Remind yourself that you’re in control!

So What? This packet will go through the information needed for the multiple choice test. Each part will be followed by sample SOL questions.
The Writing Process & Grammar and Usage

The Planning Stage
Pre-writing activities are sort of like warm-ups before sports: well worth the time and effort to avoid later pain. Here are some pre-writing activities:

**Brainstorming**
- Definition
- Example

**Clustering**
- Definition
- Example

**Venn Diagram**
- Definition
- Example

**T Chart**
- Definition
- Example
Others

1. Do some research.

2. Watch a video.

3. Administer a survey.

4. Conduct an interview.

5. Do some role-playing.

6. Hold a debate.

7. Sit and observe.

On the multiple choice test, you will probably be asked to figure out which of four pre-writing activities would best help a pretend student writer, so here are some practice questions:

Erin is feeling anxious about a take-home essay that is due tomorrow. Her friends try to help her relax so she can write her essay.

1. Which of these strategies would be the most likely to help Erin relax and get down to work?

   A. Suggest that she take a few slow, deep breaths
   B. Offer to take her on a ten-mile hike
   C. Yell at her to “Relax!”
   D. Suggest that she imagine herself in the dentist’s chair
Cereal A and Cereal B

Cedric has done a science fair project comparing and contrasting two brands of cereal. He needs to write a paragraph summarizing his findings. Before writing his paragraph, Cedric made a Venn diagram. Use it to answer question 2.

2. Which item in Cedric’s Venn diagram is least relevant to his paragraph?
   F. 2
   G. 4
   H. 5
   J. 6

Daniella is a tenth grader entering an online writing contest sponsored by a wildlife society; winning entries will be published in a collection of animal stories. Daniella decides that her story will be about a childhood memory of one of her pets, but she hasn’t selected

3. Which of these would most help Daniella get started on her story?
   A. Making up a title for her story
   B. Watching a public TV special about unusual pets
   C. Listing the pets she had as a child
   D. Beginning to write her first draft
Organization
When organizing, take a few minutes to think about the order of your ideas. There are two basic ways to organize:

Conventional Outline: Here, roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, etc) are used for the main ideas. Capital letters (A, B, C, etc) are used to indicate all of the parts of the main ideas. Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc) are used for the details to support each part. Here’s an example with an SOL question:

Topic: Getting a Driver’s License

I. What you need to provide when applying for a license
   A. Full name
   B. Address
   C. Proof of age and identity
      1. Birth certificate
      2. Social Security card
II. Special requirements if you’re under 18
   A. Driver’s education class
   B. Provisional driver’s license
III. People who are ineligible for a license
IV. Steps in obtaining a license

4. Which of these belongs under heading III in this outline?
   F. Application, in person, at the DMV
   G. Adult cosigner of minor’s application for a license
   H. U.S. government issued passport with two photographs
   J. Individuals with revoked or suspended license

Cluster Map: Instead of a standard outline, you might see a cluster map. Here’s an example with a question:

5. Which of these could properly go in bubble IV?
   A. Take a vision test
   B. Habitual narcotics user
   C. Suspension of minor’s license on request of co-signer
   D. Restriction of alcohol use
Composing and Revising
The parts of a sentence relate to each other; each sentence relates to other sentences; related sentences form paragraphs; paragraphs relate to each other to form a whole essay. The SOL will test you on writing good sentences AND on topics having to do with the essay as a whole.

Good Sentences

**Complete Sentences:** Every sentence has to have a subject and a verb. Label the following two sentences’ subjects and verbs:

1. The wrestler won the match.
2. Her tattoo is unforgettable.

**Sentence Fragments:** If the subject or the verb or both are missing, you do not have a complete idea.

Incorrect: Raising both arms in victory.
Correct:

Incorrect: Raising both arms in victory. The wrestler grinned at the crowd.
Correct:

Incorrect: The wrestler raising both arms on victory.
Correct:

**Run-ons:** You must separate ideas that can stand on their own. You cannot simply string them together with no punctuation – or even with a comma.

Incorrect: Many people have come down with the flu, the flu shot was no guarantee.
Correct:

Incorrect: The capitol dome is being restored workers are removing lead-based paint.
Correct:

Incorrect: Quick fixes have been made, longer term remedies will be needed.
Correct:

**Sentence Variety & Smoothness:** On the test, you will be given sentences that have no obvious errors but still sound awkward. They could have these problems:

Repetitious: Grapes rolling around on supermarket floors are hazards. Hazards can result in lawsuits.
Better:
Awkward: Tyler does not know how to spell that word. That’s why he can’t look it up in the dictionary.
Better:

Choppy: Chip finally cleared the dishes from his floor. He could no longer get to his bed.
Better:

**Parallelism:** In grammar, parallelism refers to keeping like ideas in like form.
Incorrect: Teens discuss how to do tomorrow’s homework, who’s dating whom, and they talk about Saturday night’s choice of movies.
Correct:

Incorrect: Phoebe learned to play lacrosse, swimming, and the art of knitting.
Correct:

Incorrect: Ross is a good athlete but is very poor at keeping up with his studies.
Correct:

**Misplaced Modifiers:** A modifier is a word or a group of words that change or shape another word. The modifier must be located directly next to what it is changing.
Incorrect: Harrison’s new opera opened last night, which is based on *Harry Potter*.
Correct:

Incorrect: Johnny Depp is wonderful as the dark professor Snipe, known for his bold performances.
Correct:

Incorrect: The show seems as if it will never get to the final curtain, dragging along.
Correct:

**Word Choice:** Diction conveys tone. It is always better to use specific words rather than general one to convey tone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Word</th>
<th>Specific Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>walking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Try these questions:

**My Position on Curfews**

Mike and Andrea have both decided to write to their state senator about a proposal to impose a curfew on teens. Mike is against the idea, but Andrea is for it.

**Draft A below is Mike’s rough draft of the first part of his letter.**

**DRAFT A: Mike’s Draft**

(1) Some people wanting a curfew for minors in our state. (2) They feel that a curfew would reduce crime. (3) While restricting when teenagers can be out might reduce misbehavior in urban areas, I am against imposing a curfew on all teens everywhere in the state. (4) Minors in our state are already not allowed to do certain things. (5) They are already not allowed to drive between certain hours. (6) Adding on more to this law and still further limiting our freedom would achieve nothing. (7) It would not only create resentment but also being hard to enforce. (8) We have certain freedoms during the day, why shouldn’t we have the same ones at night? (9) Installing a curfew, teens and police would be facing unnecessary tension created by lawmakers and that would be unwise.

6. Which of these should be revised because it is not a complete sentence?
   
   F. 1  
   G. 2  
   H. 3  
   J. 4

7. Which of these should be revised because it is not a correctly formed sentence?

   A. 5  
   B. 6  
   C. 7  
   D. 8
8. How can sentences 4 and 5 best be combined without changing their meaning?

F. Minors in our state are already allowed to do certain things, and they are not allowed to drive between certain hours.
G. Minors in our state are already allowed to do certain things because they are not allowed to drive between certain hours.
H. Already minors in our state are not allowed to drive between certain hours.
J. Minors in our state already not being allowed to drive between certain hours.

9. How is sentence 6 best rewritten?

A. Further limiting our freedom by adding to this law would achieve nothing.
B. Adding on still more to this law and further limiting our freedoms would achieve nothing.
C. Adding on more to this law would limit our freedom still further and would achieve nothing at all.
D. To add on more to this law and still further limiting our freedom would achieve nothing.

10. How is sentence 7 best rewritten?

F. It would not only be creating resentment but also being hard to enforce.
G. It would not only create resentment but also be hard to enforce.
H. It would not only create resentment, it was hard to enforce.
J. It not only will create resentment but also would be hard to enforce.

11. How is sentence 9 best rewritten?

A. Installing a curfew, teens and police would be unwisely facing unnecessary tension created by lawmakers.
B. Lawmakers would be unwise to install a curfew and create unnecessary tension between teens and police.
C. Installing a curfew, police and teens would be unwisely facing unnecessary tension created by lawmakers.
D. Creating unnecessary tension between teens and police, it would be unwise of lawmakers to install a new curfew.
DRAFT B: Andrea’s Draft

(1) I think installing a new curfew is a good idea to reduce crimes by and against teens. (2) Most important, it would benefit the community by keeping kids off the streets at night and out of trouble. (3) Forty percent of teens smoke marijuana on a regular basis. (4) Statistically, people between the ages of 14 and 20 are most likely to be involved in violent crimes and many of these happen at night. (5) The District of Columbia has instated a curfew and it has helped. (6) Much less important, but still worth mentioning, is that petty crimes like littering would decline if young people were not out at night tossing cans and wrappers on the streets and sidewalks. (7) Serious problems like vandalism decline when potential troublemakers are kept indoors at night.

(8) A second vital point to bear in mind is that not only are kids committers of crimes, but they are sometimes victims. (9) By keeping youth at home and off the streets at night, they would be kept out of harm’s way. (10) I would advocate enforcing a curfew in our community with the help of local police. (11) Doesn’t a curfew make sense? (12) In summary, I am for a curfew because it would cut down substantially on crimes committed both by and against teenagers.

12. How is sentence 5 best rewritten?

F. The District of Columbia has instated and curfew, and it have greatly helped.
G. The District of Columbia has instated and curfew, and it had a significant effect.
H. The District of Columbia has instated and curfew, and it had a highly significant effect of criminals.
J. The District of Columbia has instated and curfew, and it produced a moderate drop in the crime rate.
Tips on Sentence Formation:
1. Watch out with sentences that begin with *having* or *being*. These are often incomplete sentences.
2. Be suspicious of –*ing* words. These are often used incorrectly as misplaced modifiers.
3. Be suspicious of sentences that run on and on. See if these are really two complete ideas that have been mistakenly glued together.
4. KISS: Keep It Short and Simple. The best answer is often the most concise and economical. Of the choices look at the shortest first. If it is grammatically correct and doesn’t change the meaning of the sentence, it is probably the correct one.
5. Listen to tone of voice. Be aware of the attitude behind the words. Use words that suit the purpose.

Essay as a Whole

Introduction: Introductions need to grab the reader’s attention and set up the writer’s argument.
Attention grabbers can be:
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Central Idea: In any piece of writing, the writer needs to choose a main idea and stick to it. Every detail needs to support the main argument with some sort of example or illustration. Any other detail must be eliminated. The SOL may ask you to weed out details that do not belong. To do this, follow these steps:
1. 
2. 
3. 

Unity and Coherence: Good writers try for one effect. Details must be presented in a logical order and must be connected (usually with transitional words or phrases). Here are some orders:
1. Time Order
2. Order of Importance
3. Cause and Effect
4. Comparison and Contrast
5. Spatial Order
Conclusions: A good conclusion brings the writer’s ideas together. It does not introduce any new information!

Remember Andrea and Mike and their letters about the proposed curfew? Try these questions based on those two drafts:

13. What is the main difference between paragraph 1 of Draft A and paragraph 1 of Draft B?
   A. Draft A begins in an angry tone  
   B. Draft B clearly states the writer’s position in the opening sentence  
   C. Draft B opens with a question to grab the reader’s attention  
   D. Draft A begins with an interesting anecdote

14. In Draft B, which sentence contains information that is least relevant to Andrea’s argument?
   F. 3  
   G. 4  
   H. 5  
   J. 9

15. In Draft B, sentence 6 is not in the correct sequence. Sentence 6 is best placed directly after sentence −
   A. 2  
   B. 4  
   C. 9  
   D. 11

16. Which of these is a problem with sentence 12 of Draft B?
   F. It restates the first sentence  
   G. It introduces a completely new idea  
   H. It brings the writer’s ideas together without restating  
   J. It leaves the reader with an interesting question to ponder
Editing: Nouns and Pronouns
As we deal with grammar issues on the SOL test, it helps if you understand the key terms.

**Nouns**: A noun is a person, place, thing, or idea.
- Person:
- Place:
- Thing:
- Idea:

**Proper Nouns**: These name specific people, places, or things and are capitalized.
- Examples:

**Gerunds**: These are nouns that end in *-ing*.
- Example: giggling – write a sentence using this as a noun

**Pronouns**: A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun.
- Examples:

  **Antecedent**: The word a pronoun stands in for is called the antecedent. The pronoun must agree with its antecedent in gender and number.
  - Incorrect: Cathy gave away his dessert.
  - Correct:

  - Incorrect: When people offer you something for free, ask yourself what he may want in return.
  - Correct:

  - Incorrect: When one eats ice cream, they should be polite.
  - Correct:

  **Pronouns must clearly point to what they are replacing.**
  - Unclear: Don’t take the lid off the ice cream if you’re going to put it there.
  - Clear:

  - Unclear: Cal asked his father if he could play the banjo.
  - Clear:
Case: Subjective: I, you, he/she, it, we, they, who, one, anybody
Objective: me, you, him/her, it, us, them, whom, one, anybody
Possessive: my, your, his/her, its, our, their, whose, one’s, anybody’s

Incorrect: Them are my batting gloves.
Correct:

Incorrect: Us are going to the practice field.
Correct:

Compound Subjects: Things get trickier with plural subjects. To figure out which pronouns to use, split the subjects up into separate sentences.
Incorrect: Ali and me want to go to the game.
Split up: Ali want to go to the game.
_____ want to go to the game. (I or Me?)
Correct:

Try them and us by splitting it up the same way:

_______ are rivals. (They or Them?)
_______ are rivals. (We or Us?)
Correct: _______ and _______ are rivals.

Me as a Direct or Indirect Object: The object of a sentence is the person or thing affected by the verb.

He gave me all the red jellybeans.

The direct object is jellybeans and the indirect object is me. Why is this? Who or what does he give? jellybeans. To whom or to what are they given? Me.

To figure out whether a word is a direct or indirect object, ask yourself: Is this the person or thing that is (verb)ed? If yes, it is the direct object. Is this the person to or for whom the (verb)ing gets done? If yes, it is the indirect object.

Example: Tanya owes me five dollars.
Direct:     Indirect:

Me or I?
Please pass the mashed potatoes to Malcolm and ________.

Angie and ________ are both trying out for the play.

It’s hard for Susie and ________ to get there without a car.

Point of View: This refers to who is telling the story. Point of view should be consistent.
Incorrect: Taking care of your gums prevents tooth loss, and it may help one’s heart too.
Correct:
Try these questions:

**Standardized Testing**

Terry has decided to write a humorous letter to the editor of the school newspaper about standardized tests. Here is part of her rough draft.

Dear Editor:

(1) Do you want to know what makes life worth living for a High School junior like me? (2) The answer is standardized tests. (3) Taking test preparation classes is more fun than buying scratch-off lottery tickets. (4) What could be more exciting than practicing math and reading questions on Saturday mornings with an SAT “coach”?

(5) My history and biology teacher may not win any Academy Awards, but his review sessions for the SOL Exam make it entertaining.

(6) In fact, my classmates and me are thinking of designing a special trophy. (7) One wishes to show appreciation to all those teachers who make testing so much fun. (8) Seriously, though, we should be grateful to teachers for their efforts to see that we pass these exams. (9) They have always been put a lot of pressure to see that their students do well, and in the future they will be held even more “accountable” for how their students do.

17. In sentence 1, how would a High School junior be correctly written?
   A. a High School Junior
   B. a high school Junior
   C. a high school junior
   D. As it is

18. In sentence 3, how would test preparation classes be correctly written?
   F. test preparation classes
   G. Test Preparation Classes
   H. Test Preparation Classes
   J. As it is

19. In sentence 4, how would math and reading questions on Saturday be correctly written?
   A. math and reading questions on saturday
   B. Math and Reading questions on Saturday
   C. math and reading questiones on Saturday
   D. As it is
20. In sentence 5, how would Academy Awards, but his review sessions be correctly written?

F. Academy Awards, but their review sessions
G. academy awards, but his review sessions
H. Academy Awards, but his review sessiones
J. As it is

21. In sentence 5, how would make it entertaining be correctly written?

A. make them entertaining
B. make the review entertaining
C. make it wonderful entertainment
D. As it is

22. In sentence 6, how would my classmates and me are be correctly written?

F. Me and my classmates
G. my classmates and me is
H. my classmates and I are
J. As it is

23. In sentence 7, how would One wishes to show be correctly written?

A. We wish to show
B. They wish to show
C. You wish to show
D. As it is

Editing: Verbs, Adjectives, and Adverbs

Verbs: Some verbs express actions while other verbs express states of being.

Actions:

State of Being:

Tense: Verb tense should remain consistent. Pay attention to words that clue you in to the necessary tense.

Future words:

Past words:
Voice: Like tense, voice must be consistent.
    Active Voice = He did his math homework. He is taking a break.
    Passive Voice = His math homework was done by him. A break was being taken by him.

Subject-Verb Agreement: The verb must agree with the subject in number. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular:
    The bullfrog croaks.
If the subject is plural, the verb must be plural:
    The bullfrogs croak.

Adjectives: Adjectives describe nouns. They often describe a person or thing’s appearance, sound, taste, smell, or feel.
    Examples:

    Adjective      Adverb                                                                             -
    You are a bad dog.     You are drooling badly. (not You are drooling bad.)
    There is slow traffic ahead.    Traffic is moving slowly.
    She is a good player.    She plays well.

SOL Pet Peeves

Lay and Lie: The reason for the common mix-up is that the present tense of one is just like the past tense of the other.
    Correct: Today, I lie on the beach. (Humans lie in the present)
             Today, I lay my blanket on the beach. (Objects lay in the present)
             Yesterday, I lay on the beach. (Humans lay in the past)
             Yesterday, I laid my blanket on the beach.

Double Negatives: These waste words and reverse what the writer really intends.
    Example: I’m not paying nothing for that piece of junk!
    Means: I’m paying something for that piece of junk!

Incorrect: I didn’t see no way out.
Correct: I didn’t see any way out.

Incorrect: She couldn’t find nothing.
Correct: She couldn’t find anything.
Less or Fewer: The rule is: If you can count it, use fewer.

Example: I have less money than you. (Money is not countable.)
I have fewer dollars than you. (Dollars are countable.)

Try these questions:

Carter’s health teacher has asked her class to write essays on how students handle stress. Carter has decided to write about students in all four grades at his high school.

Read this section of Carter’s rough draft. This section has groups of underlined words. The questions ask about these groups of words.

(1) Having too much to do and too little time became a problem for everyone at Ogden Ogilvie sooner or later.
(2) Ninth grade is a difficult time. (3) Many ninth graders are shell shocked by the change from middle school to high school. (4) Gone are those carefree middle school days.
(5) With more homework, there are less hours in the day for free time. (6) Stress can be even worse in tenth grade.
(7) Sudden increases in homework is accompanied by a decrease in sleep. (8) Many juniors long for the weekend, when they can lay in bed as long as they want. (9) My fellow juniors agree, though, that stress is felt by them the most in the 11th grade. (10) This is the big year, the one that counts.
(11) Many juniors who are bound for college feel lucky if they can still stand up by June after prepared for the SOL exams, PSAT’s, SAT’s, and in some cases, AP exams.
(12) The stress is felt by all grades at Ogden Ogilvie, but students at all levels have always finded ways to handle it.

(13) Freshmen take time to relax by lounging in the cafeteria. (14) Many go regular to the Regal to see a new release and play video games. (15) Since few have licenses, freshman also learn that one of the wonderfuller stress-busters is walking. (16) Some of the most popular escapes include hanging out at the mall, working out at the gym, and getting rid of upperclassmen. (17) To get away from the alphabet soup of tests, many juniors, on the other hand, head quick for the road. (18) My friends and I like to get in the car and just drive until we run out of gas, although I don’t see no way for that particular form of relaxation to continue if the price of gas keeps rising.
24. In sentence 1, how would became a problem for everyone be correctly written?
   F. had become a problem for everyone
   G. becomes a problem for everyone
   H. become a problem for everyone
   J. As it is

25. In sentence 3, how would Many ninth graders are be correctly written?
   A. Many ninth graders is
   B. Many ninth graders was
   C. Many ninth graders will be
   D. As it is

26. In sentence 7, how would Sudden increases in homework is be correctly written?
   F. Sudden increases in homework were
   G. Sudden increases in homework being
   H. Sudden increases in homework are
   J. As it is

27. In sentence 8, how would they can lay in bed be correctly written?
   A. they can lie in bed
   B. you can lay in bed
   C. one can lay in bed
   D. As it is

28. In sentence 9, how would stress is felt by them the most be correctly written?
   F. stress were felt by them the most
   G. they feel the most stress
   H. stress is felt by them the mostest
   J. As it is

29. In sentence 11, how would who are bound for college feel be correctly written?
   A. whom are bound for college feel
   B. who is bound for college feel
   C. who are bound for college feels
   D. As it is
30. In sentence 11, how would by June after prepared be correctly written?
   F. by june after preparing
   G. by June after having preparing
   H. by June after preparing
   J. As it is

31. In sentence 12, how would have always finded be correctly written?
   A. have always found
   B. always finds
   C. has always finded
   D. As it is

32. In sentence 13, how would Freshman take time to relax be correctly written?
   F. Freshmen takes time to relax
   G. Freshmen taken time to relax
   H. Time is taken by freshmen to relax
   J. As it is

33. In sentence 5, how would there are less hours be correctly written?
   A. there are fewer hours
   B. there is fewer hours
   C. there is less hours
   D. As it is

34. In sentence 6, how would can be even worser be correctly written?
   F. can be even badder
   F. can be even more worse
   H. can be even worse
   J. As it is

35. In sentence 14, how would Many go regular be correctly written?
   A. Many goes regular
   B. Many go regularly
   C. Many went regular
   D. As it is

36. In sentence 15, how would one of the wonderfulest stress-busters be correctly written?
   F. one of the most wonderful stress-busters is
   G. one of the wonderfulest stress-busters are
   H. one of the most wonderful stress-busters are
   J. As it is
37. In sentence 16, how would the most popular escapes include be correctly written?
   A. the more popular escapes includes
   B. the most popular escapes includes
   C. the popularist escapes include
   D. As it is

38. In sentence 17, how would head quick be correctly written?
   F. heads quick
   G. headed quick
   H. head quickly
   J. As it is

39. In sentence 18, how would I don’t see no way be correctly written?
   A. I don’t see any way
   B. I do not see no way
   C. I haven’t seen no way
   D. As it is