

PSAT English Formula and Strategy Guide

The Digital PSAT/NMSQT Reading and Writing domains: reading comprehension, standard English conventions, expression of ideas, vocabulary in context, and rhetorical synthesis — with the decision rules each question type rewards.

SECTIONS	4	WORKED EXAMPLES	0	FORMAT	Print friendly
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How to use this guide

A formula you cannot place is not knowledge yet. Work the recall drill below before the questions.

- Read the question before the passage on grammar and vocabulary items — it tells you exactly what to look for.
- For conventions questions, read the full sentence with each answer choice inserted, not just the blank.
- Eliminate choices that are plausible but do not answer the specific question asked, not just choices that sound wrong.

1. Standard English conventions

NAME	FORMULA	WHEN TO USE
Subject-verb agreement	the verb must match the TRUE subject, not the nearest noun	A phrase separates the subject from the verb.
Comma with an introductory phrase	place a comma after an introductory word/phrase	A sentence opens with a dependent clause or transition.
Semicolon use	joins two independent clauses without a conjunction	Two complete sentences are closely related.
Apostrophe for possession	singular: add 's; plural ending in s: add only '	Showing ownership, not a simple plural.
Sentence boundaries	a complete sentence needs a subject and a verb, and expresses a complete thought	Identifying a run-on or a fragment.

2. Expression of ideas

NAME	FORMULA	WHEN TO USE
Transition words	choose based on the LOGICAL relationship between ideas	Connecting two sentences or clauses.

NAME	FORMULA	WHEN TO USE
Conciseness	the shortest choice that preserves meaning is usually correct	Two answer choices say the same thing at different lengths.
Combining sentences	choose the option that shows the correct logical relationship	Two short sentences must become one, showing their connection.

3. Vocabulary in context

NAME	FORMULA	WHEN TO USE
Context clues	the surrounding sentence defines the intended meaning	A word has multiple possible meanings.
Tone-appropriate word choice	match the register (formal/informal) of the passage	Two synonyms differ in formality or connotation.

4. Reading comprehension and rhetorical synthesis

NAME	FORMULA	WHEN TO USE
Central idea	the main point the entire passage supports	Asked for the passage's overall point, not a detail.
Command of evidence	identify the specific line/detail that best supports a claim	A claim is given and the best textual support is needed.
Rhetorical synthesis	select notes that best accomplish a STATED goal	Combining bullet-point notes to meet a specific purpose.

Notes and tutor hand-off

Bring this page to your next session so the tutor can start from what actually blocked you.

Which convention rule (agreement, punctuation, sentence boundaries) needs more practice?

One transition word you keep choosing incorrectly:

Worksheet question numbers to review with a tutor:
