



How to “Cut the Fluff”

Make Long, Complex SC Questions Seem Easy



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Goals:

- 1) Minimize time spent reading SC questions
- 2) Reduce complex SC questions to super simple ones
- 3) Spot subject-verb issues & structure more easily

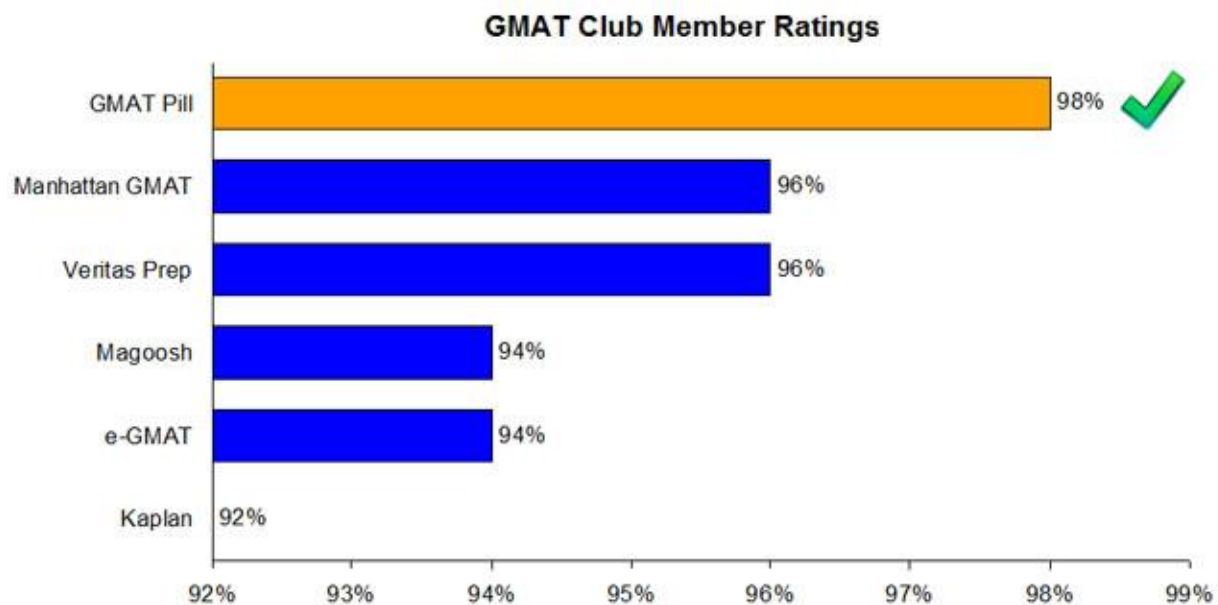
First, a quick introduction to GMAT Pill...

About GMAT Pill

Founded in 2009 by Zeke Lee, Stanford Graduate

Mission: To offer high-quality GMAT prep at a fraction of the cost in order to level the playing field in MBA admissions.

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GMAT Pill has more official score reports from students posted on our homepage than any other prep company.

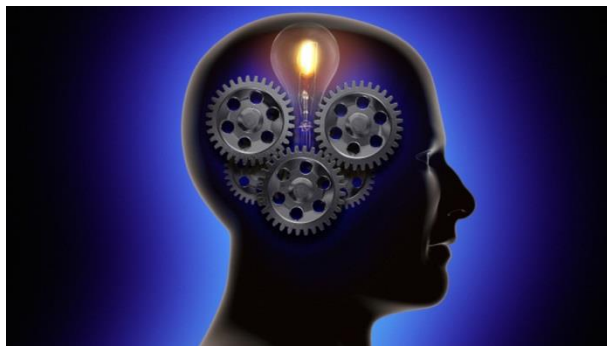
About GMAT Pill

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Focus on how to think – thought process efficiency.



About GMAT Pill

Cross-Platform Video Course Accessible on:

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Students don't improve until they take the GMAT Pill...

Test Taker Information

Telephone Number: [REDACTED]
 E-mail Address: raghu [REDACTED]
 Date of Birth: [REDACTED]
 Gender: Male
 Country of Citizenship: India
 GMAT ID: [REDACTED]
 Appointment Number: [REDACTED]

Verbal: 11 pt improvement!
 V25 to V36

Optional Test Taker Information (Self-Reported)

Graduation Date: June 2009
 Undergraduate GPA:
 Highest Education Level:
 Undergraduate Institution:
 Undergraduate Major: Engineering
 Intended Graduate Study: Full-time student

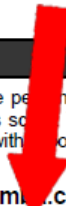
From 570 to 620 to 710!!

Test Information (Score / % Below)

For the Quantitative, Verbal, Total and Analytical Writing sections, the percentages shown below represent the proportion of tests taken in the previous three years with reported scores lower than this score. The percentage shown below for the new Integrated Reasoning section represents the proportion of IR tests taken so far with reported scores lower than this score. This percentage is updated monthly for the first six months and annually thereafter.

To view the most recent percentile table, please visit magoosh.com. See below for alphabetic score key.

Test Date	Verbal	Quantitative	Total	Analytical Writing	Integrated Reasoning
25 October 2012	36 / 79%	49 / 83%	710 / 92%	5.5 / 77%	7 / 81%
08 August 2012	25 / 36%	49 / 83%	620 / 69%	5.5 / 77%	6 / 67%
04 July 2012	30 / 56%	46 / 71%	620 / 69%	5.5 / 77%	3 / 24%
30 March 2012	23 / 30%	45 / 68%	570 / 53%	6.0 / 90%	~/~



Prepositional and descriptive phrases are NOT core to the main sentence.

They can be eliminated when reading to simplify and better understand the sentence.

How do we know spot phrases that we can “cut out” when we read them?

- **Look for descriptive phrases in between 2 commas.**
- **Look for prepositional phrases.**

Examples of Fluff:

“on the ferry”

“one of the largest libraries in the world”

“,known by many to be quite popular,”

“, and particularly of red wine,”

Example 1: [Official Guide 13 SC#44](#)

44. “The plot of The Bostonians centers on the rivalry between Olive Chancellor, an active feminist, with her charming and cynical cousin, Basil Ransom, when they find themselves drawn to the same radiant young woman whose talent for public speaking has won her an ardent following.”

(A) rivalry between Olive Chancellor, an active feminist, with her charming and cynical cousin, Basil Ransom,

It’s easiest to spot the fluff in split sentences – Framework #4. Split sentences occur when you see two commas and the phrase in between is the descriptive phrase – the fluff. The main part of the sentence is the text on the left and right – not the middle.

How to read the sentence above:

“The plot ~~of The Bostonians~~ centers on the rivalry between Olive Chancellor, an active feminist, with her charming and cynical cousin, Basil Ransom, when they...”

becomes:

“The plot centers on the rivalry between Olive Chancellor with her cousin when they...”

Notice we have multiple FLUFFs:

- 1) “of The Bostonians” – describing plot
- 2) “an activist feminist” – describing Olive Chancellor
- 3) “charming and cynical” –describing cousin
- 4) “Basil Ransom” – describing cynical cousin.

Let’s read the sentence **without** fluff:

“The plot of The Bostonians centers on the rivalry between Olive Chancellor with her charming and cynical cousin when they...”

Spot the error: “rivalry between A **with** B”

The idiomatic expression should be “rivalry between A **AND** B” – not **WITH**

So by cutting the fluff – we made it a lot easier for us to spot this error and we were able to do it faster than we would otherwise.

Simplified phrase we are looking for:

“The plot centers on the rivalry between A and B”

So now we try to look through the available answer choices to find ones that use the word “between” followed by “and” –it turns out only answer choice (C) uses this construction.

(C) rivalry that develops **between** Olive Chancellor, an active feminist, and Basil Ransom, her charming **and** cynical cousin,

Once we cut the fluff and keep only the most important parts of the sentence, we get:

**“The plot centers on the rivalry that develops between A and B when they...”
--Looks good!**

Now compare this simplified phrase with the new, complete sentence with the additional fluff:

Correct Full Sentence:

“The plot of The Bostonians centers on the rivalry that develops between Olive Chancellor, an active feminist, and her charming and cynical cousin, Basil Ransom, when they find themselves drawn to the same radiant young woman whose talent for public speaking has won her an ardent following.”

Correct Full Sentence – cutting the fluff

“The plot of ~~The Bostonians~~ centers on the rivalry that develops between Olive Chancellor, ~~an active feminist~~, and her ~~charming and cynical~~ cousin, ~~Basil Ransom~~, when they find themselves drawn to the same radiant young woman whose talent for public speaking has won her an ardent following.”

Correct Sentence – without the fluff

“The plot centers on the rivalry that develops between Olive Chancellor and her cousin when they find themselves drawn to the same woman...”

Notice we’ve reduced a very long, complicated sentence with lots of commas down to a much more manageable sentence that makes it a lot easier to spot mistakes. In this case, cutting the fluff made it easier to spot the incorrect structure “between X with Y” and from there we found answer choice (C) with the correct structure “between X and Y.”

Review of Example 1

- 1) We started with a long sentence with multiple commas.
- 2) We cut the fluff, spotted the idiomatic error: “between X with Y” should be “between X and Y”
- 3) We found answer choice (C) – which uses “between X and Y”

We re-read the full sentence – cutting the fluff – and quickly concluded that answer choice (C) does in fact make sense and is the correct answer.

Example 2: [Official Guide 13 SC#132](#)

Although appearing less appetizing than most of their round and red supermarket cousins, heirloom tomatoes, grown from seeds saved during the previous year— they are often green and striped, or have plenty of bumps and bruises—heirlooms are more flavorful and thus in increasing demand.

- (A) Although appearing less appetizing than most of their round and red supermarket cousins, heirloom tomatoes, grown from seeds saved during the previous year

Notice this question is quite long and a good portion of the sentence is underlined. How do you cut the fluff to make it easier to read and understand?

Read it as:

“Although appearing [x], heirloom tomatoes, grown from [Y] – they are...”

Does that make sense?

No. “Heirloom tomatoes—they are” does not make sense. So you know something is wrong with the structure of the sentence.

At this point you know answer choice (A) is no good.

- (B) Although appearing less appetizing than most of their round and red supermarket cousins, heirloom tomatoes, grown from seeds saved during the previous year
- (C) Although heirloom tomatoes, grown from seeds saved during the previous year, appear less appetizing than most of their round and red supermarket cousins
- (C) Although they appear less appetizing than most of their round and red supermarket cousins, heirloom tomatoes, grown from seeds saved during the previous year

So at this point, you should quickly read through (B) and (C). But they both have so many words – if you read every single word, it’s going to eat up a LOT of time. The goal here is to quickly read through each answer choice and have enough confidence early on to know when to keep reading and when to stop reading and move on.

So how do we look at answer choice (B)?

(B): “Although heirloom tomatoes, grown from ~~seedssaved during the previous year~~, appear less appetizing than ~~most of their round and red supermarket cousins~~”

becomes:

(B): “Although heirloom tomatoes, grown from [x], appear less appetizing than [y]—they are...”

From this, we can quickly see that the verb “appear” matches with the plural “heirloom tomatoes” and there is no grammar issue as there is in (A).

We also see the subject as “heirloom tomatoes” – which matches with the “they are” phrase after the underlined portion of the sentence. This was not the case in (A).

(B): “Although heirloom tomatoes..appear less appetizing, they are...”

--Looks good!

For kicks, we can check (C).

(C): “Although they appear ~~less appetizing than most of their round and red supermarket cousins~~, heirloom tomatoes, grown from seeds saved during the previous year—they are ... ”

becomes:

(C): “Although they appear [x], heirloom tomatoes—they are...”

You cannot have the phrase “heirloom tomatoes—they are..” – so that makes (C) no good.

Notice in (B) the structure was: “Although heirloom tomatoes appear [x]—they are..”

This is the way to make the structure work with the non-underlined portion “they are” at the end.

Review of Example 2

So by “cutting the fluff” you can more quickly read sentences by not reading the non-important phrases, and focusing on the core skeleton of the sentence. In this case, it allowed us to spot awkward phrases quicker and to arrive at answer (B) as the final answer.

- 1) We started with a long sentence
We “cut the fluff” and found that the core phrase did not make sense:
“Although appearing [x], heirloom tomatoes, grown from [Y] – they are...”
- 2) We eliminated (A) and quickly looked at (B) and (C).
- 3) (C) had the same problem as (A) but (B) looked good.
- 4) We didn’t go through (D) and (E) – but if you cut the fluff there, you could quickly see problems with those—leaving just (B) as the answer.

Example 3: [Official Guide 13 SC#123](#)

Here's an example of a long sentence in which most of it is underlined. It may look intimidating since when most of the sentence is underlined – it opens the doors for a lot more possibilities and longer answer choices, which eat up time. But if we “cut the fluff” – it can make these intimidating sentences seem more manageable.

“Sales of wines declined in the late 1980s, but they began to grow again after the 1991 report that linked moderate consumption of alcohol, ~~and particularly of red wine,~~ with a reduced risk of heart disease.”

Read as:

“Sales of wines declined in [X], but they (the wines) began to grow again after the report that linked [A] with [B].”

Looks a lot more manageable, right?

But cutting the fluff, it was slightly more easier to spot that “they” properly referenced the plural “sales”

We also cut out the descriptive phrase in between the 2 commas: “and particularly of red wine” as this is not part of the core skeleton of the sentence.

We spotted the keyword THAT indicating that what follows simply gives more details as to what kind of REPORT we are talking about.

The sentence works fine even up until that point:

“Sales declined, but they began to grow again after the report.” – looks fine.

What kind of report?

...the report that linked [moderate consumption of alcohol] with [a reduced risk of heart disease.]”

...the report that linked [A] with [B].

So we can easily see the structure after cutting the fluff and we know there is nothing wrong with the sentence.

At this point, there is no need to even look at the answer choices (B), (C), (D), and (E) because we are confident (A) is correct. This saves us a lot of valuable time on the GMAT – time that can be better spent on the more intensive Critical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension sections.

Review of Example 2

- 1) We saw a relatively long sentence in which most of it was underlined. Instead of being scared of reading all the long answer choices and considering the various possibilities, we resort to “cutting the fluff.”
- 2) We cut “in the late 1980s” and boiled the first few words to “Sales declined, but they began to grow..”
- 3) We saw that “they” matched with the plural “sales”
- 4) We cut the descriptive phrase in between the 2 commas “and particularly of red wine” and spotted the structure “linked [A] with [B]”
- 5) We re-read the sentence as:
“Sales declined, but they began to grow after the report that linked [A] with [B].”
--Everything seems fine so we didn’t even bother wasting time with the other answer choices. We simply marked (A) as our final answer and moved on.

Conclusion

- 1) So when you see long sentences with lots of commas – don't be intimidated!
- 2) Spot the commas. Spot the descriptive phrases and prepositional phrases.
- 3) Read the sentence without all the FLUFF and see if it still makes sense.
- 4) See if the structure and meaning workout – if not, then go through the answer choices and the cut the fluff again so you can see the core structure of each answer choice.

Cutting the fluff is a skill that takes a little practice. But once you have it down, it makes solving SC questions sooo much easier.

In SC Pill, we show you exactly how to “cut the fluff” in 100+ examples so if you're not sure of how to do it, go check it out!

