

Sample SAT Writing Questions

Questions 1-11 are based on the following passage.

José Clemente Orozco: Political Muralist

In his *Self Portrait*, José Clemente Orozco scowls at the viewer. The tones of his face are tinged with the same steel grey that defines his hair. His collared shirt is colored with just a few slashes of a dark **1** reddish-brown. Behind him rises a background of thick strokes of grey and blue. **2** It is a forbidding portrait, and an appropriate one.

José Clemente Orozco is one of the three great Mexican artists called **3** “Los Tres Grandes”: Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaró Siqueiros. He is one of the **4** foundations of the movement called Mexican Muralism, a movement that began in the 1920’s and was meant to unify the country in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. **5** The new government commissioned muralists like Orozco to paint large pieces on walls where the public could see them. The paintings were of inspiring scenes that depicted the country’s past, present, and future.

6 He was drawn to art from a young age. On his way to school each day, he **7** had been inspired by seeing the great lithographer José Guadalupe Posada at work. Orozco went on to study art, architecture, and painting before becoming a political cartoonist who published work in pro-revolutionary papers like *The Vanguard*. Orozco was concerned with social justice and **8** freedom, he worried about the oppression of the poor **9** and the rights of workers. These artistic themes made his work appealing to the post-revolutionary government.

As the revolution faded into the past, though, the Mexican government began to withdraw support for artists like Orozco. Many great Mexican artists, Orozco included, made new homes in the United States, where they believed that they would find more support and opportunities. Orozco certainly found success: after great critical appreciation of his first American mural, *Prometheus* (1930), which he painted at Pomona College in California, he went on to paint several other large public murals in the U.S. **10** He was even commissioned to create the illustrations for a John Steinbeck book, *The Pearl*, in 1947.

Eventually, Orozco returned to Mexico as an internationally recognized artist. Upon his return, he was asked to paint a mural at the Palace of Fine Art in Mexico City. For the Palace of Fine Art, Orozco created *Catharsis* (1934). [1] *Catharsis* is a chaotic mass of figures painted in those same dark reds, browns, greys, and blues that make up Orozco’s *Self Portrait*. [2] It depicts a laughing woman lying on her back while all around her, humanity falls. [3] *Catharsis* is an excellent example of the pessimism that characterizes most of the artist’s later works, which grew darker as Orozco grew more and more cynical about the future of humankind. [4] The mural is a grim illustration of his fears about industrialization and war. **11**

- 1) Select an Answer.
- a) NO CHANGE
 - b) reddish, brown
 - c) reddish brown
 - d) red-brown

Explanation:

Choice C is the best answer because it follows the rule to hyphenate compound adjectives before a noun but not after.

Choice A is not the best answer because compound adjectives do not require hyphenation after a noun.

Choice B is not the best answer because it places an unnecessary comma between two adjectives that are working together as a single unit of meaning.

Choice D is not the best answer because it changes the wording without addressing the punctuation error.

- 2) Select an Answer.
- a) NO CHANGE
 - b) It is a forbidding portrait and an appropriate one.
 - c) It is a forbidding portrait: and an appropriate one.
 - d) It is a forbidding portrait; and an appropriate one.

Explanation:

Choice B is the best answer because “and” joins two predicate nominatives that apply equally to the subject “it.” Neither predicate nominative should be separated from the subject by a comma.

Choice A is not the best answer because neither predicate nominative should be separated from the subject by a comma.

Choice C is not the best answer because it places an unnecessary colon between two predicate nominatives.

Choice D is not the best answer because it places an unnecessary semicolon between two predicate nominatives.

- 3) Select an Answer.
- a) NO CHANGE
 - b) “Los Tres Grandes”
 - c) *Los Tres Grandes*
 - d) Los Tres Grandes

Explanation:

Choice A is the best answer because the text is talking about the nickname itself, and so it should be in quotation marks. This particular nickname is in Spanish, and so it also needs to be italicized to indicate non-English language words.

Choice B is not the best answer because it omits the italicization that indicates Spanish wording.

Choice C is not the best answer because it omits the quotation marks that indicate the discussion of a word or name rather than its real-world referent.

Choice D is not the best answer because it omits both the italics and quotation marks necessary to make clear that this is a discussion of a Spanish nickname.

- 4) Select an Answer.
- a) NO CHANGE
 - b) foundational members
 - c) founding members
 - d) founders

Explanation:

Choice D is the best answer because “founders” is the most direct and accurate phrasing to indicate that Orozco was one of the people who began this movement.

Choice A is not the best answer because “foundations” is a word more appropriately used to indicate the basis of something. That is, Orozco’s work might be one of the “foundations of the movement,” but not Orozco himself.

Choice B is not the best answer because it is unnecessarily wordy.

Choice C is not the best answer because although it is less awkward than Choice B, it is still wordy.

- 5) Which choice most effectively combines the underlined sentences?
- a) The new government commissioned muralists like Orozco to paint large pieces on walls where the public could see them; the paintings were of inspiring scenes that depicted the country's past, present, and future.
 - b) The new government commissioned murals that would inspire citizens with scenes that depicted the country's past, present, and future.
 - c) The new government commissioned muralists like Orozco to create inspiring depictions of the country's past, present, and future on walls where the public could see them.
 - d) The new government commissioned muralists like Orozco to create public depictions of inspiring scenes from the country's past, present, and future.

Explanation:

Choice D is the best answer because it eliminates unnecessary wording without sacrificing meaning and retains the rhythmic “past, present, and future” in the high-impact spot at the end of the sentence.

Choice A is not the best answer because it merely joins the two sentences with a semicolon, doing nothing to make the sentence more concise.

Choice B is not the best answer because in striving for concision it sacrifices mentioning Orozco, making its relationship to the prior sentence less clear.

Choice C is not the best answer because although it is more concise it ends the sentence with the less interesting phrase “the public could see them.”

- 6) Which choice most effectively establishes the main topic of the paragraph?
- a) Orozco's artistic and political background made him the perfect choice for the new government's project.
 - b) It is not surprising that the new Mexican government approved of Orozco's work.
 - c) Orozco was a profoundly political artist.
 - d) Orozco was greatly influenced by another great Mexican artist.

Explanation:

Choice A is the best answer because the paragraph is about how Orozco became interested in art and how he ended up using it to accomplish political goals.

Choice B is not the best answer because although it may seem similar to Choice A, its emphasis is on the government's motives rather than on Orozco's background.

Choice C is not the best answer because it is not broad enough to include the information about Orozco's early development as an artist.

Choice D is not the best answer because it simply rephrases one of the early ideas in the paragraph rather than encompassing all of the paragraph's ideas.

- 7) Select an Answer.
- a) NO CHANGE
 - b) is inspired
 - c) was inspired
 - d) would be inspired

Explanation:

Choice C is the best answer because it preserves the simple past tense with which the paragraph begins.

Choice A is not the best answer because it uses the past perfect tense, but the sentence is not meant to indicate a shift further back into the past.

Choice B is not the best answer because it shifts into the present tense, but the sentence is discussing events in the past.

Choice D is not the best answer because it creates an unnecessary passive construction.

- 8) Select an Answer.
- a) NO CHANGE
 - b) freedom: he
 - c) freedom, and he
 - d) freedom; he

Explanation:

Choice B is the best answer because the clause "he worried about the lives of the poor and the rights of workers" illustrates the previous clause.

Choice A is not the best answer because it contains a comma splice.

Choice C is not the best answer because the two clauses are not really equal ideas and so should not be joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Choice D is not the best answer because although a semicolon is an appropriate way to join two independent clauses, the relationship between these two particular clauses is better expressed with a colon.

- 9) The writer would like to add a third example of Orozco's political concerns to this sentence. Which choice best accomplishes this goal?
- a) the dangers of ideology
 - b) the trauma of war
 - c) political violence
 - d) the overuse of European artistic techniques

Explanation:

Choice B is the best answer because it is clearly another example of concerns related to "social justice and freedom" and it preserves the parallel form of the other two examples.

Choice A is not the best answer because although it preserves parallelism, it is not an example of concerns related to "social justice and freedom."

Choice C is not the best answer because although it is an example of concerns related to "social justice and freedom," it does not preserve the parallel structure of the other two examples.

Choice D is not the best answer because despite being parallel in construction and a clear example of a political concern, it is not closely related enough to the ideas of "social justice and freedom."

- 10) The writer would like to replace or revise this sentence to create a more effective ending to the paragraph. Which choice best accomplishes this goal?
- a) He was even commissioned to create the illustrations for a John Steinbeck book, *The Pearl*, in 1947--clearly, Americans valued his work even in a time when he felt undervalued in his home country.
 - b) He also continued to paint on canvas and create pencil sketches during this period.
 - c) Orozco felt betrayed by the sudden lack of interest in his art in Mexico, and decided to develop a more international following.
 - d) Although he moved to America in part because he felt underappreciated in Mexico, Orozco used his time in the United States to continue to advocate for his own people, creating work that challenged American stereotypes about Mexico.

Explanation:

Choice D is the best answer because it is closely related to the main idea of the paragraph, creates a feeling of closure, and eliminates the reference to something that happened in 1947, which is a detail that disrupts the chronological flow of the overall piece.

Choice A is not the best answer because despite its clear reference to the main idea of the paragraph, it contains a detail that is chronologically misplaced.

Choice B is not the best answer because it is not closely tied to the main idea of the paragraph and does not create a feeling of closure.

Choice C is not the best answer because it conveys an idea that belongs earlier in the paragraph.

11) To make this paragraph most logical, sentence 4 should be placed.

- a) where it is now.
- b) before sentence 1.
- c) before sentence 2.
- d) Before sentence 3.

Explanation:

Choice B is the best answer because placing sentence 4 before sentence 1 creates cohesion. Sentence 4 is a broad statement that sentences 1 and 2 illustrate with specific details, and sentence 3 is more properly a final, summative sentence for the essay itself.

Choice A is not the best answer because sentence 4 is a specific example of part of sentence 3 and would end the essay on too narrow a final note.

Choice C is not the best answer because placing sentence 4 between sentences 1 and 2 would interrupt the description of specific details about the painting that make it a “grim illustration of his fears about industrialization and war.”

Choice D is not the best answer because without sentence 4 preceding them, sentences 1 and 2 lack context.