ACT English
H. Argument and Logic

Rule: Sentences and paragraphs must be placed in a logical and coherent order.

For example: [1] President Lincoln may or may not have personally detested slavery. [2] There is evidence to suggest that he disliked the practice, but politically he simply argued that slavery must not expand into the territories. [3] His primary goal seems to have been to keep the Union intact. [4] As a result, South Carolina and other southern states seceded from the Union upon Lincoln’s election. [5] His political rivals, on the other hand, accused him of trying to abolish slavery in the South and worried that a Lincoln victory meant the end of slavery. [6] Only after the war began did Lincoln issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which was more military strategy than moral dictate. [7] In the end, Lincoln was not a moral crusader as many remember him, but a savvy politician who deeply believed in the preservation of the Union.

For the most part, this paragraph follows a logical order, though Sentence 4, “as a result, South Carolina and other southern states seceded from the Union upon Lincoln’s election” is out of place. “As a result” demonstrates cause and effect, though there is no such relationship between Lincoln’s desire to keep the Union intact and the southern states’ decision to secede. Sentence 4 should instead be placed after Sentence 5. As a result of the anxiety expressed in Sentence 5, the southern states ceded from the Union. Each sentence must follow logically in a paragraph.

Rule: All sentences and parts of sentences must be relevant to the paragraph as a whole.

For example: Choosing a career is often less of a choice that people think. Oftentimes, people gravitate towards jobs and internships that fit with their skills, and those jobs lead to connections and opportunities that lead to more jobs within that line of work. Some people aren’t great at networking. For example, a person who is great with children, patient and outgoing might start our as a camp counselor as an adolescent, only to become a teacher later in life. Certainly some people “choose” their careers: they go to law school or medical school or pursue public relations. Most of us, especially if we are lucky, simply fall into careers that work well for us.

This paragraph includes an irrelevant sentence: “Some people aren’t great at networking.” This sentence fails to contribute to the larger point of the paragraph, which is to discuss how people choose, or do not choose, their careers. Therefore, this sentence should be eliminated.

Rule: Introductory, transition and concluding sentences must be effective.

For example: It was pretty nerve-wracking, but I figured it out. When we arrived in China, my brother and I were overwhelmed by how new everything was and by how vulnerable we were because of our limited Mandarin. The hotel was really cool. Sometimes, the food was a tad exotic for me, but my brother enjoyed it. We also visited the Great Wall of China, which was magical.

This paragraph fails to introduce, transition, and conclude effectively. An introduction sentence, or topic sentence, should introduce the topic at hand broadly and succinctly. A better topic sentence would be: “My trip to China with my brother was both exciting and scary.” The transitions in the paragraph also need improvement. As it stands now, the paragraph jumps from one experience to another without transition words. Finally, the conclusion should sum up the paragraph as whole. This paragraph ends with yet another detail from the trip. A better conclusion might be: “Despite some of the initial scariness, visiting China was an incredible experience!”
Rule: Each passage has a particular argument and scope. You must be able to assess it.

For example: If a passage discusses the relationship between media coverage and political success, the passage is not about “life on a political campaign” or “how difficult it is to maintain objectivity as a reporter.” While answering questions about scope and argument, you must choose the most specific answer choice.

ACT ENGLISH TAKE AWAY
- Watch for numbered paragraphs and sentences because the numbers signal forthcoming questions about logical placement.
- If a sentence can be removed from a paragraph without the paragraph losing meaning, that sentence should be removed.
- Make sure introductory sentences are general enough and offer clear transitions from the preceding paragraph.
- Make sure concluding sentences focus on the main point of the paragraph and are consistent with the author’s tone.