

find the real subject, fix the real time, and the option set collapses

What a verb question looks like

- a passage of roughly 25 to 150 words, its own blank, and a stem that never changes: which choice conforms to the conventions of Standard English
- the four options are the same verb in four forms. Nothing else in the sentence moves, so the passage's subject matter is close to irrelevant
- the two things being tested are almost always number (does the verb match its subject) and time (does the tense match the events around it)
- these are among the fastest questions on the whole section, which is exactly why they are worth drilling: seconds banked here buy time for the slow questions
- no mark is deducted for a wrong answer, so a verb question is never left blank, even when it comes down to a coin toss between two forms

What an option set varies



one root with four siblings at a single level: the four properties of a verb an option set here can change between, with the sentence around it held fixed

Step one, every time: find the real subject

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- the verb agrees with the subject, never with the noun standing nearest to it. Distance is the whole trick
- cross out every phrase that opens with a preposition (of, in, among, beneath, between). None of them can hold a subject
- cross out anything fenced by a pair of commas. An appositive renames a noun; it never becomes the noun the verb answers to
- along with, as well as, together with, in addition to add nothing to the count. The team along with its coach is still singular
- watch for inverted order: when a sentence opens with a place or a there, the subject sits AFTER the verb, so read on past the blank before deciding

The number rules that keep coming back

- each, every, either, neither, everyone, nobody are singular however many nouns trail behind them
- two subjects joined by and take a plural verb, unless the two together name one thing
- with either A or B and neither A nor B, the verb agrees with the part sitting nearer to it
- a collective noun (team, committee, jury, government) takes a singular verb when it acts as one body
- the number of X takes a singular verb, a number of X takes a plural one. That pair is offered often and read fast

The four shapes this domain comes in

Agreement

four forms of one verb, all the same tense, differing only in number

Tense

four different times, one subject; a clue word in the sentence decides it

Finite or not

a mix of real verbs and -ing or to forms; the sentence needs a main verb

Parallel

the blank is one item in a list, so its form has to copy the others

name the shape from the option set before you read the passage again. It tells you which single check to run