

Office grammar and proofreading: study guide

Administration, clerical, records, and office support · suite apt-313-office-grammar-and-proofreading · generated 2026-09-15T19:20:27.243Z

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Private practice result. Not an official exam certificate, employer decision, hiring signal, admissions decision, or guaranteed outcome. Scores stay on this device unless you export them.

Answer keys and scoring logic stay server-side and are never included in any download or export.

How to use this guide

This file contains the whole study outline for this suite: every skill it draws on, the full lesson for each of those skills, worked examples, practice tips, a glossary, and where each piece of material comes from. Nothing here is a summary of a page you still have to visit.

1. Read the skills section end to end once, without timing yourself.
2. Work the guided practice mode for the suite, using the practice tips as a checklist.
3. Move to the mini-test only when guided practice feels unhurried.
4. Sit the full simulation last, once, in the conditions you expect on the day.

Practice attempts are stored on the device you used, never on an account. Exporting a result is the only way anything leaves that device.

Practice modes and durations

Practice modes for Office grammar and proofreading

Mode	Duration	What it is for
Guided practice	15 minutes	Untimed, with feedback after every item.
Mini-test	18 minutes	A short timed set for checking pace.
Full simulation	45 minutes	Full length and full time, in one sitting.

- Start guided practice:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/practice/new?bank=apt-313-office-grammar-and-proofreading&mode=guided>
- Start mini-test:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/practice/new?bank=apt-313-office-grammar-and-proofreading&mode=mini>
- Start full simulation:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/practice/new?bank=apt-313-office-grammar-and-proofreading&mode=full>

Skills covered, in full

This suite draws on 5 skill constructs. Each one below carries its complete lesson.

Written communication

Grammar, vocabulary, sentence correction, clarity, tone, proofreading, and workplace writing.

Written communication is assessed in two quite different ways: multiple-choice sentence-correction and proofreading items that test whether you can name and fix a specific grammatical fault, and free-text exercises - an email, an incident note, a briefing - marked on structure, accuracy and tone. It appears in clerical and administrative entry tests, legal support and paralegal batteries, teacher selection, public relations sifts, and any role where a badly worded sentence becomes somebody else's problem. The two formats reward the same underlying skill: knowing what a sentence claims and making it claim exactly that. Practice is device-local, with no account and nothing uploaded unless you export it.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Resolve subject-verb agreement across an intervening phrase, and apply the proximity rule for neither/nor and the singular-plural split between 'the number of' and 'a number of'.
2. Identify and repair dangling and misplaced modifiers, including the placement of limiting words such as 'only'.
3. Enforce parallel grammatical form across items in a list or a set of bullets.
4. Recognise a comma splice and choose among the four legitimate repairs, including the case where 'however' is involved.
5. Rewrite nominalised, hedged official prose into plain language while preserving the recommendation and its condition.
6. Draft the same facts for three different readers, and keep observation separate from inference in a record that may be read back later.

Worked examples and pitfalls

Agreement: find the head noun, then decide: 'The set of quarterly returns filed by the three regional offices (was / were) incomplete.' The subject is 'the set', which is singular, so 'was' is correct; 'offices' is merely the nearest noun, sitting inside a prepositional phrase that cannot supply the subject. Strike out everything between the head noun and the verb and the choice becomes obvious - 'the set was incomplete'. Next: 'Neither the manager nor the two supervisors (was / were) informed.' With neither/nor the verb agrees with the nearer of the two subjects, and the nearer one here is 'the two supervisors', so 'were' is correct. Reverse the order - 'Neither the two supervisors nor the manager was informed' - and the correct verb flips to singular, which is a useful check that you are applying the rule rather than guessing. Finally, a pair that trips experienced writers: 'A number of applications are missing' is correct, because 'a number of' functions as a plural quantifier, while 'The number of applications is rising' is also correct, because there 'the number' is a single quantity. Same three words, opposite verbs.

Dangling modifiers and the wandering 'only': 'Having reviewed the tender documents, the deadline was extended by two weeks.' An opening participial phrase attaches to the subject of the main clause, and the subject here is 'the deadline', so the sentence says the deadline reviewed the documents. It reads acceptably aloud because a listener silently supplies the missing actor, which is precisely why this error survives proofreading. Two clean fixes: name the actor as the subject - 'Having reviewed the tender documents, the panel extended the deadline by two weeks' - or drop the participle entirely - 'The panel reviewed the tender documents and extended the deadline by two weeks.' Now the limiting word. 'We only sent the invoice to three suppliers' literally says that sending was the only thing we did to those three. 'We sent the invoice to only three suppliers' says we sent it to no more than three. 'We sent only the invoice to three suppliers' says

we sent nothing else. Three placements, three meanings, one word - put 'only', 'just', 'even' and 'almost' immediately before what they limit, and in a marked item the four options usually differ by nothing else.

Parallelism in a list: 'The role involves drafting reports, client liaison, and to maintain the case register.' Three items in three different grammatical forms: a gerund phrase, a noun phrase, and an infinitive. The repair is to pick one form and hold it: 'The role involves drafting reports, liaising with clients, and maintaining the case register.' Parallelism is worth its own item type because it is the most visible marker of careless list writing, and because real documents fail on it constantly - a bulleted list where two bullets start with a verb and the third starts with a noun, or a set of headings mixing questions and statements. The same rule governs correlative pairs: 'not only ... but also' must join two grammatically matching elements, so 'The report not only covers spending but also staffing' is faulty, and 'The report covers not only spending but also staffing' is correct, because the correlatives now bracket two nouns rather than a verb phrase and a noun.

Comma splice, and why 'however' is not a rescue: 'The system was offline for six hours, no backup was available.' Two independent clauses joined by a comma is a comma splice, and there are four legitimate repairs. Use a full stop: 'The system was offline for six hours. No backup was available.' Use a semicolon, which signals the two facts belong together. Add a coordinating conjunction after the comma: '... six hours, and no backup was available.' Or subordinate one clause: 'Because no backup was available, the six-hour outage could not be mitigated.' The trap is the fifth option that people reach for instinctively: 'The system was offline for six hours, however no backup was available.' However is a conjunctive adverb, not a coordinating conjunction, so it cannot join two independent clauses with a comma - the sentence is still spliced. It needs a semicolon or full stop before 'however' and a comma after it. The same applies to therefore, moreover, nevertheless, and consequently, which is why they appear so often in sentence-correction distractors.

Plain language: 37 words down to 14: Before: 'It is the recommendation of this department that consideration be given to the deferral of the implementation of the new filing procedure until such time as adequate training provision has been made available to all affected staff.' That is thirty-seven words. After: 'We recommend delaying the new filing procedure until all affected staff have been trained.' Fourteen. Look at what the rewrite actually did: it turned three nominalisations back into verbs (recommendation to recommend, deferral to delaying, provision to trained), it named the actor instead of hiding behind 'this department', and it cut 'consideration be given to' and 'until such time as', which carry no content at all. Look just as carefully at what it kept: the recommendation, the thing being delayed, and the condition that ends the delay. Plain-language items are marked on meaning preservation, not on brevity alone, and the standard wrong answer is the over-cut version - 'We recommend delaying the new procedure' - which reads beautifully and silently deletes the condition that is the substance of the recommendation. Trim the packaging, never the payload.

One incident, three readers, and the fact-inference line: Facts: the gate camera timestamps a van leaving at 11:42:00; the weighbridge camera, 300 m along the yard road, timestamps the same van at 11:42:15; the yard limit is 20 km/h. The arithmetic: 300 m in 15 s is 20 m/s, and $20 \times 3.6 = 72$ km/h. Now write it three ways. In the incident record: 'Vehicle VT-118 passed the gate camera at 11:42:00 and the weighbridge camera at 11:42:15. The cameras are 300 m apart, giving an average speed of 72 km/h over that section. The posted yard limit is 20 km/h.' Note what is absent: 'the driver was speeding', which is a conclusion, and 'was travelling at 72 km/h', which overstates the evidence - the figure is an average over the section, not an instantaneous speed. To the yard supervisor: lead with the decision needed and the deadline. 'Two camera timestamps put VT-118 at an average 72 km/h in a 20 km/h yard yesterday morning. I have attached the record. Can you confirm by Friday whether this goes to the safety review?' To the driver's employer: lead with the specific, verifiable reference - vehicle, date, time, the two camera points - and the single action requested. Same facts every time; what changes is which fact leads, and in a written-communication assessment the most apologetic option is rarely the best one, while any option that names blame in a record that has not been reviewed is usually the worst.

How to practise this skill

- Proofread in separate passes, one error class at a time - agreement, then modifiers, then punctuation, then numbers and names. A single pass looking for 'anything wrong' reliably finds fewer errors than three narrow passes taking the same total time.
- Read your draft aloud, or subvocalise it. Comma splices, dropped words and lost parallelism are audible even when they are invisible; dangling modifiers are the exception, which is why they need a deliberate check of what each opening phrase attaches to.
- On sentence-correction items, diagnose before you choose. Name the fault in the original in three words, then look for the option that fixes exactly that and introduces nothing new. Options that fix the fault while adding a second one are standard.
- Read every option to the end. Sentence-correction distractors commonly differ from the correct answer only in the last two or three words, and candidates who stop once the opening looks right lose marks they never see.
- For free-text tasks, spend the first minute on a three-line plan: purpose, the single action you want from the reader, and the deadline. Untimed free-text answers are usually well written and structurally shapeless, and structure is what the mark scheme can see.
- Keep a personal error list of the mistakes you actually make rather than a generic grammar checklist. Most writers repeat three or four faults, and proofreading against your own four is far faster than proofreading against forty.

Glossary

Subject-verb agreement: The requirement that the verb match the grammatical number of the subject's head noun, not of the nearest noun. Long prepositional phrases between the two are the standard way this is tested.

Dangling modifier: An introductory phrase whose implied actor is not the subject of the main clause, so the sentence attributes the action to the wrong thing. Fixed by naming the actor as the subject or by rewriting the phrase as a full clause.

Parallelism: Matching grammatical form across items in a list or across correlative pairs such as not only / but also. The commonest breach mixes gerunds, nouns and infinitives in a single series.

Comma splice: Two independent clauses joined only by a comma. Repaired with a full stop, a semicolon, a coordinating conjunction, or subordination - never by inserting however, therefore or moreover after the comma.

Nominalisation: A verb converted into a noun - implement becomes implementation, decide becomes decision. Nominalised prose hides who does what and typically doubles the word count for the same content.

Register: The level of formality and the vocabulary appropriate to a particular reader and purpose. A message can be grammatically perfect and still wrong in register, which is what free-text tasks are largely marking.

Active and passive voice: Active names the actor before the verb; passive can omit the actor entirely.

Passive is legitimate when the actor is unknown or genuinely irrelevant, and evasive when it is used to avoid naming a responsible party.

Observation versus inference: An observation is what a camera, meter or witness recorded; an inference is the conclusion drawn from it. Records that mix the two are hard to defend later, because the conclusion cannot be separated from its basis.

Study this next

- Written communication skill hub:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/written-communication>

- Practise the written communication bank:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/cognitive-skills/written-communication>
- Reading comprehension lesson:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/reading-comprehension/lesson>
- Police report writing suite: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/police-report-writing>
- Administrative and clerical entry suite:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/administrative-and-clerical-entry>
- Written communication lesson on Novus Learn:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/written-communication/lesson>

Where this material comes from

- Worked items written for Novus Learn. Every faulty sentence, rewrite, word count and incident figure above is original and invented for this lesson; no published or copyrighted test item is reproduced.
- Grammatical terminology follows standard, widely published usage - subject-verb agreement, dangling modifier, parallelism, comma splice, nominalisation.
- Novus Learn aptitude construct registry (catalog seed) for the construct scope and the suite mapping shown in the related links.
- Public educational framing only - not affiliated with any official exam board, publisher or employer.

Educational preparation only. Novus Learn does not administer official exams and does not guarantee scores or hiring outcomes.

Error detection

Comparing strings, records, transactions, forms, and data for mistakes.

Error detection is the skill of holding a source and a copy side by side and finding the one character, digit or field that moved, and of knowing which errors a given check will and will not catch. It is assessed directly in clerical checking, banking operations, records, proofreading and dispatch selection, and it underpins quality control anywhere a record is rekeyed or transcribed. The useful part of the skill is not staring harder; it is a repeatable scan procedure plus a set of arithmetic checks that catch what the eye misses. Everything you practise is stored on this device only, with no account and no upload unless you export it.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Name the four transcription error families (substitution, transposition, omission, duplication), and state which of them a plain digit-sum check will fail to detect.
2. Run a fixed field-order comparison between a source record and a copy, reporting the specific field and character position that differs rather than a general impression.
3. Compute a modulus 11 check digit (ISBN-10 style) by hand and use it to decide whether a single record is internally consistent.
4. Apply the Luhn algorithm to a candidate account number, and state the one transposition case Luhn provably cannot catch.
5. Work out, from a stated scoring rule, whether guessing on an uncertain item has positive, zero or negative expected value.
6. Reconcile a document at batch level (line totals, subtotal, tax, grand total) and explain why an internally consistent document can still be wrong.

Worked examples and pitfalls

The four transcription error families: Source reference: INV-2024-08871. Four corrupted copies, one of each family. INV-2024-08571 is a substitution: a single character changed, 8 to 5. INV-2024-0871 is an omission:

one character dropped, and the string is now a character short. INV-2024-088711 is a duplication: a character repeated, one character long. INV-2024-08817 is a transposition: the final 7 and 1 have swapped places, and crucially the string is the same length and contains exactly the same characters. That last property is why transposition is the hardest of the four to see and the most dangerous in practice. Anything that checks length catches omission and duplication. Anything that compares character sets or sums the digits catches substitution but not transposition, because $0+8+8+7+1$ and $0+8+8+1+7$ both come to 24. Reading the reference aloud catches substitution reliably and transposition poorly, because the ear is comparing sounds and both versions sound similar at speed. The only defences against transposition are a positional comparison and a weighted check digit.

A fixed scan order finds the one field that moved: Source record: Name Priyanka Ramaswamy / Account 4471-9026-3358 / Date of birth 14/03/1991 / Postcode SW1A 2AA / Phone 0161 496 0872. Copy: Name Priyanka Ramaswamy / Account 4471-9026-3358 / Date of birth 14/03/1991 / Postcode SW1A 2AA / Phone 0161 469 0872. The difference is in the phone field, where 496 has become 469: a transposition inside the middle block. Most candidates find it eventually; the ones who find it in eight seconds are the ones running a procedure. Always compare in the same field order, top to bottom, never skipping a field because it 'looks fine'. Compare long strings in the printed blocks rather than as a single run (4471, then 9026, then 3358) because short-term memory holds about four items and a twelve-digit run does not fit. Say the block silently, look, compare, move on. On a same-or-different item you may stop at the first mismatch; on a 'how many fields differ' item you must complete every field, and the instruction wording is what tells you which regime you are in. Getting this wrong in either direction costs marks: stopping early on a count item, or exhaustively checking a same-or-different item you had already resolved.

Modulus 11: why a weighted check digit catches a transposition: The ISBN-10 scheme multiplies the ten digits by descending weights 10, 9, 8 down to 1 and requires the total to be divisible by 11. Take 0-306-40615-2. Working left to right: $10 \times 0 = 0$, $9 \times 3 = 27$, $8 \times 0 = 0$, $7 \times 6 = 42$, $6 \times 4 = 24$, $5 \times 0 = 0$, $4 \times 6 = 24$, $3 \times 1 = 3$, $2 \times 5 = 10$, and the check digit $1 \times 2 = 2$. The sum is $0 + 27 + 0 + 42 + 24 + 0 + 24 + 3 + 10 + 2 = 132$, and $132 = 12 \times 11$ exactly, so the number is valid. Now transpose the 1 and the 5 to give 0-306-40651-2. The digits are identical, so a plain digit sum is unchanged at 27 either way and would report no problem. The weighted sum, however, becomes $0 + 27 + 0 + 42 + 24 + 0 + 24 + 15 + 2 + 2 = 136$, and $136 - 132 = 4$, so it is not a multiple of 11 and the record is rejected. That is the entire reason check digits are weighted rather than plain: position has to matter, or the commonest human error passes straight through.

Luhn: the number that fails, and the one case it misses: The Luhn check, used on payment and many membership numbers, doubles every second digit counting from the right, subtracts 9 from any doubled result above 9, sums everything, and requires a total ending in zero. Take 4539 1488 0343 6467. The doubled positions contribute 3, 3, 8, 0, 7, 2, 6 and 8, totalling 37; the undoubled positions contribute 7, 4, 3, 3, 8, 4, 9 and 5, totalling 43. The grand total is 80, which ends in zero, so the number passes. Now transpose the last two digits to 4539 1488 0343 6476. The doubled contributions become 5, 3, 8, 0, 7, 2, 6, $8 = 39$ and the undoubled become 6, 4, 3, 3, 8, 4, 9, $5 = 42$, giving 81. Not a multiple of ten, so the mistyped number is rejected at the point of entry. Luhn catches every single-digit substitution and almost every adjacent transposition: with exactly one blind spot. Swapping an adjacent 0 and 9 leaves the total unchanged, because doubling 0 gives 0 and doubling 9 gives 18 which reduces to 9, so both digits contribute the same amount whether doubled or not. A form that validates with Luhn will happily accept 90 where you typed 09. Knowing the blind spot is the point: a check digit narrows the space of undetected errors, it never closes it.

Negative marking: 44 right can beat 46 right: Many clerical checking sections score correct minus incorrect, with omissions neutral. Under that rule, guessing between two remaining options has an expected value of $0.5 \times (+1) + 0.5 \times (-1) = 0$, exactly neutral, and guessing blindly among four options has an expected value of $0.25 - 0.75 = -0.5$, clearly negative. Concretely: on a 60-item section you attempt 48, get 44 right and 4 wrong, and score 40. A colleague attempts all 60, gets 46 right and 14 wrong, and scores 32. More correct answers, a lower score. Reverse the scoring rule to plain raw-correct with no penalty and the ordering flips:

46 beats 44 and leaving a blank becomes strictly irrational. Neither strategy is universally right, which is why the instruction screen is not optional reading. Find the sentence that says whether wrong answers are penalised, and if it is absent, assume raw scoring and answer everything.

Reconcile the batch: consistent is not the same as correct. An invoice lists three lines: 12 at 14.25 = 171.00; 7 at 33.60 = 235.20; 3 at 128.00 = 384.00. The stated subtotal is 709.20, VAT at 20 percent is stated as 141.84, and the total is stated as 851.04. Every downstream figure checks out against the one above it: $709.20 \times 0.20 = 141.84$ and $709.20 + 141.84 = 851.04$. Nothing in the tax or total column is inconsistent. But recompute the lines: $171.00 + 235.20 + 384.00 = 790.20$, not 709.20. The subtotal is a transposition of the correct figure, and because every later number was calculated from the wrong subtotal, the document is perfectly self-consistent and perfectly wrong. The true VAT should be 158.04 and the true total 948.24, a shortfall of 97.20. This is the single most valuable habit in the construct: never verify a total against the number printed above it, always recompute it from the underlying items. Internal consistency proves that one person did the arithmetic carefully; it proves nothing about whether they started from the right number.

How to practise this skill

- Drill transposition specifically. Generate pairs where the only difference is two adjacent characters swapped, because that is the family your eye is worst at and the family a naive check will not catch.
- Fix a scan order and never vary it: field by field, top to bottom, and within a long value block by block. Free-roaming comparison feels faster and reliably misses one field per record.
- Learn one check-digit scheme by hand, modulus 11 is the easiest, until you can run it in about twenty seconds. It converts a whole class of 'does this record look right' items from judgement into arithmetic.
- Read the scoring rule before the first item and decide your guessing policy then, not at minute seven when you are behind. Under penalty scoring, an omission is a legitimate answer; under raw scoring it is a wasted mark.
- When you are checking financial or tabular documents, recompute the lowest-level figures first and work upward. Errors introduced at a subtotal propagate perfectly and are invisible from below.
- Log the errors you miss, not the ones you find. A miss log after four sessions usually shows a personal signature (always the middle of long numeric strings, or always the second occurrence of a repeated field), and that signature is what to drill.

Glossary

Transposition error: Two adjacent characters exchanged, as in 496 typed for 469. Length and character content are unchanged, so length checks and plain digit sums both pass it; only positional comparison or a weighted check digit detects it.

Substitution error: One character replaced by another, as in 08571 for 08871. It is the family most reliably caught by reading a value aloud against the source, and by any check digit scheme.

Check digit: An extra digit computed from the others so that a corrupted record fails an arithmetic test. It detects errors; it never corrects them and never proves the record refers to the right person or item.

Modulus 11: A weighted check scheme in which digits are multiplied by descending position weights and the total must divide by 11. Used in ISBN-10 and several banking and national identifier formats.

Luhn algorithm: A modulus 10 check that doubles alternate digits from the right and requires the sum to end in zero. It catches all single-digit errors and most adjacent transpositions except an adjacent 0 and 9.

Miss and false alarm: A miss is a genuine discrepancy passed as correct; a false alarm is a difference flagged where none exists, usually a formatting variant such as a trailing space or a differently written date. Misses are the costlier of the two in records work, which is why procedures normalise formatting first and then bias toward escalating doubt.

Correction for guessing: A scoring rule that subtracts a fraction or multiple of the wrong answers from the

correct ones, making blind guessing negative in expectation and turning omission into a rational choice.

Reconciliation: Recomputing an aggregate from its components rather than accepting the printed figure. It is the only check that catches an error introduced at summary level, where everything below and above it still agrees.

Study this next

- Error detection skill hub: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/error-detection>
- Error detection practice in the Cognitive Skills Lab:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/cognitive-skills/error-detection>
- Data checking and clerical accuracy lesson:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/clerical-accuracy/lesson>
- Clerical checking suite: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/clerical-checking>
- Copyediting and proofreading suite:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/copyediting-and-proofreading>
- Error detection lesson on Novus Learn:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/error-detection/lesson>

Where this material comes from

- The ISBN-10 modulus 11 worked example (0-306-40615-2, weighted sum 132) and the Luhn worked example (4539 1488 0343 6467, sum 80) were computed by hand for this lesson and each was re-verified digit by digit, including the corrupted variants.
- Algorithm definitions cross-checked against the public specifications described in the Wikipedia articles 'International Standard Book Number' and 'Luhn algorithm', including the documented 09/90 transposition blind spot. Records, invoices and reference numbers above are invented.
- Novus Learn aptitude construct registry (catalog seed) for construct scope and suite mapping.
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Data checking and clerical accuracy

Matching, filing, coding, record checking, and identifying discrepancies.

Clerical accuracy is the ability to handle a large volume of records correctly and consistently: filing them in the right order, coding them against a key, spotting duplicates that do not look like duplicates, and holding that standard on the two-hundredth record as well as the second. Where error detection asks whether two things match, clerical accuracy asks whether you can apply a rule reliably at volume. It is assessed in administrative, records, clinical admin, school office, evidence-handling and insurance operations selection, and it is exactly the skill an employer is buying when they hire for a data-heavy back-office role. Practice stays on this device; there is no account and nothing is uploaded unless you export it.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Apply an alphabetical filing rule consistently, and state whether a given system files letter-by-letter or word-by-word. The two produce different, equally correct orders.
2. Sort alphanumeric references correctly under both string ordering and natural numeric ordering, and explain why record systems zero-pad.
3. Code records against a written key, handling every boundary condition (under, up to, and over, inclusive ranges) exactly as written rather than as intuited.

4. Identify duplicate records that differ only in formatting (case, whitespace, date order, punctuation inside a reference), and route genuinely ambiguous ones to exceptions instead of resolving them by guess.
5. Measure your own accuracy decay across a long batch and use the measurement to set a realistic attempt rate.
6. Convert a stated scoring rule into a target items-per-minute figure, and show why the optimum rate moves when the penalty multiplier changes.

Worked examples and pitfalls

Word-by-word or letter-by-letter: two correct answers, one rule: File these four names: Van Dyke, Vandenberg, Van Horn, Vance. Under word-by-word filing, each space-separated unit is compared in turn and 'nothing files before something', so the first unit 'Van' sorts ahead of both 'Vance' and 'Vandenberg'. The order is Van Dyke, Van Horn, Vance, Vandenberg. Under letter-by-letter filing, spaces are ignored entirely, so the keys are VANCE, VANDENBERG, VANDYKE, VANHORN, and the order is Vance, Vandenberg, Van Dyke, Van Horn. Both orders are correct filing; only one is correct for the system you are working in. Test items state the convention in the instructions, and the candidates who lose marks are almost always the ones applying whichever convention their previous employer used. The same fork appears with prefixes and punctuation: whether Mc and Mac interfile, whether St is treated as Saint, whether a hyphen counts as a space. Read the rule, restate it to yourself in one sentence, then apply it mechanically and do not let a name that 'obviously' belongs somewhere override it.

Alphanumeric codes: A-102 at the front or the back of the drawer: Sort the references A-7, A-12, A-70, A-102, B-3. Under natural numeric ordering, the way a person reads them, the answer is A-7, A-12, A-70, A-102, B-3. Under plain string ordering, the way most software sorts by default, each character is compared in turn, so '1' comes before '7' and the answer is A-102, A-12, A-7, A-70, B-3, with A-102 first rather than last. Both are defensible; a filing item is testing which one the stated system uses. This is also why serious record systems zero-pad their references: rewrite the set as A-007, A-012, A-070, A-102 and the string sort and the numeric sort agree, permanently. If you are ever asked to design or clean a reference scheme, pad to a fixed width and the whole class of problem disappears. In a test, the giveaway is a set that deliberately mixes one-, two- and three-digit suffixes; that mixture exists only to separate candidates who apply the stated rule from candidates who apply the intuitive one.

Coding to a key: every mark is at a boundary: A claims routing key: under 500 pounds with no injury reported goes to CS1; under 500 with injury goes to CI2; 500 to 4,999 with no injury goes to CS3; 500 to 4,999 with injury goes to CI4; 5,000 and over goes to CE5 regardless of injury. Now code five records. R-118 at 499.99, no injury: CS1, since 499.99 is under 500. R-119 at exactly 500.00, no injury: CS3, because 'under 500' excludes 500 itself and the second band starts there. R-120 at 4,999.00 with injury: CI4, since the band is inclusive at its top. R-121 at exactly 5,000.00 with no injury: CE5, because the top band is 'and over' and its 'regardless of injury' clause overrides the injury split that governs the lower bands. R-122 at 86.40 with injury: CI2. Four of those five decisions turn on a boundary, and that is not an accident, coding items are written so that the interior cases are trivial and every discriminating mark sits on an edge. Before coding anything, underline the boundary words: under, up to, and over, between, inclusive. Then decide, once, what each one does to the endpoint, and apply that decision to every record in the batch.

Duplicates that are not textually identical: Three rows arrive in a merge. Row 1: SMITH, JANE | 07/04/1988 | AB123456C. Row 2: Smith, Jane | 1988-04-07 | AB 123456 C. Row 3: SMITH, JANE | 04/07/1988 | AB123456C. Rows 1 and 2 are the same person: normalise case, strip the spaces from the reference, and convert the ISO date and they match exactly. Row 3 is the genuinely hard one. If the file is in day/month order it is a different date of birth and possibly a different person; if that row came from a system using month/day order it is the same record again. You cannot tell from the row itself, so the correct action is to send it to the exception queue with the ambiguity noted, not to merge it and not to discard it. This is the judgement that separates competent records work from the appearance of it: the goal is not to make every

row disappear, it is to make every decision defensible. In test form the item usually asks 'how many distinct individuals are represented', and the answer is often given as a range or accompanied by a 'cannot determine' option for exactly this reason.

Where accuracy actually decays on a long batch: Run a self-measurement rather than trusting a number from anyone: take 200 record pairs, split them into four blocks of 50, and log errors per block. Most people find block 1 slightly worse than block 2, a warm-up cost, and then a rise across blocks 3 and 4 as vigilance falls. The reason to measure it is that the arithmetic of small percentages is brutal at volume. Checking 200 pairs at 98 percent accuracy passes 4 bad records; at 99.5 percent it passes 1. Scale that to a realistic month of 20,000 records and the same two accuracy rates mean 400 defects against 100: a four-fold difference in downstream rework from a 1.5 point difference that would look like noise on a single test. Once you know where your own curve turns, the intervention is cheap: a deliberate twenty-second break at that point, or splitting the batch so the hardest records fall in your strongest block. Practice sessions on this site are recorded on your own device, so building a block-by-block picture across several sessions costs nothing but the logging.

Setting an attempt rate from the scoring rule: A 120-item checking test with a 10-minute limit, scored as correct minus incorrect. Suppose practice has told you that you hold 92 percent at ten items a minute and 96 percent at seven and a half. Fast: $10 \times 10 = 100$ attempted, 92 correct and 8 wrong, score 84. Careful: $10 \times 7.5 = 75$ attempted, 72 correct and 3 wrong, score 69. Fast wins by 15. Now change the rule to correct minus three times incorrect: fast scores $92 - 24 = 68$, careful scores $72 - 9 = 63$, and the 15-point gap has shrunk to 5. Now suppose your real accuracy at ten a minute is 80 percent rather than 92. A gap most people do not discover until they measure it. Fast now gets 80 right and 20 wrong: under simple correct-minus-incorrect that is 60, already behind the careful strategy's 69, and under the triple penalty it is $80 - 60 = 20$ against 63. Same test, same person, opposite advice, and the two deciding variables are the penalty multiplier, which the instructions hand you, and your own accuracy-at-speed, which only measurement gives you. Do not pick a pace from temperament. Measure two rates in practice, write both accuracy figures down, and do this arithmetic before the test rather than during it.

How to practise this skill

- Before the first record of any batch, write the filing or coding rule at the top of the page in your own words. The single largest source of clerical error is applying a remembered rule from a previous system.
- Underline the boundary words in a coding key (under, up to, and over, inclusive), and resolve each endpoint once. Interior cases carry almost no marks; the edges carry nearly all of them.
- Normalise before you compare: mentally strip case, spaces and punctuation from references, and restate dates in one fixed order. Half of apparent duplicates are formatting, and half of apparent non-duplicates are too.
- When a record is genuinely ambiguous, mark it and move on. Time spent resolving one unresolvable row is taken from thirty rows you could have done correctly, and a guessed merge is worse than a flagged one.
- Measure your accuracy at two different speeds in practice and write both numbers down. You cannot choose an attempt rate rationally without them, and the fast rate is almost never as accurate as it feels.
- Practise on batches long enough to hit your own fatigue point, not on ten-item samples. The construct is specifically about sustained accuracy, and a ten-item drill measures the part of the curve that was never in doubt.

Glossary

Word-by-word filing: An alphabetical convention that compares space-separated units in turn, with a shorter first unit filing before a longer one. Under it, Van Horn files before Vance.

Letter-by-letter filing: An alphabetical convention that ignores spaces and punctuation entirely, comparing the

run of letters. Under it, Vance files before Van Dyke.

Natural sort: Ordering that reads embedded digit runs as numbers, so A-7 precedes A-12. Contrasted with string ordering, which compares characters one at a time and puts A-102 first.

Zero padding: Writing references to a fixed width by adding leading zeros (A-007 rather than A-7) so that string ordering and numeric ordering produce the same result. The standard structural fix for alphanumeric filing errors.

Primary and secondary sort key: The field sorted on first and the field used to break ties within it. A batch sorted by site then by surname will look wrong if the two keys are applied in the opposite order.

Canonicalisation: Converting records to a single standard form (one case, no stray whitespace, one date order, punctuation stripped from references) before any comparison, so that formatting differences stop masquerading as data differences.

Exception queue: The destination for records that cannot be resolved from the information available. Routing an ambiguous record here is a correct outcome; guessing it into a merge is not.

Boundary condition: The endpoint of a coded band, where wording such as under, up to or and over decides which side a value falls. Coding tests concentrate their discriminating items here.

Study this next

- Data checking and clerical accuracy skill hub:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/clerical-accuracy>
- Clerical accuracy practice in the Cognitive Skills Lab:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/cognitive-skills/clerical-accuracy>
- Error detection lesson: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/error-detection/lesson>
- Administrative and clerical entry suite:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/administrative-and-clerical-entry>
- Clerical checking suite: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/clerical-checking>
- Data checking and clerical accuracy lesson on Novus Learn:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/clerical-accuracy/lesson>

Where this material comes from

- All filing sets, reference codes, routing keys and records above were invented for this lesson. The two filing orders, the two sort orders and every score calculation in the attempt-rate example were worked through and checked by recomputation.
- Filing and sorting conventions cross-checked against standard public descriptions such as the Wikipedia articles 'Alphabetical order', 'Natural sort order' and 'Collation'. Terminology only; the examples are original.
- Novus Learn aptitude construct registry (catalog seed) for construct scope and suite mapping.
- Public educational framing only: not affiliated with any official exam board, publisher or employer, and no copyrighted test item is reproduced.

Educational preparation only. Novus Learn does not administer official exams and does not guarantee scores or hiring outcomes.

Attention and concentration

Sustained focus, selective attention, and accuracy under time pressure.

Attention and concentration is the skill of still noticing on minute forty of a checking block as reliably as you did on minute two, and of pointing the noticing at the right thing when two things compete. It has three distinguishable parts - selective attention, sustained attention or vigilance, and divided attention - and

assessments load them differently: cancellation and checking tasks load vigilance, conflict tasks load selection, and dispatch-style monitoring loads division. It is the construct that decides whether a records clerk, a dispatcher, an air-side controller or a quality inspector catches the one wrong digit in a shift. Practice here is device-local, with no account and nothing uploaded.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Count occurrences of a target in a dense string without double-counting or losing your place, using a fixed scan path rather than free looking.
2. Separate hits, misses and false alarms in your own results and work out whether you are set too eager or too cautious for the scoring rule in force.
3. Predict where in a long block your error rate will rise, and schedule micro-resets against that curve instead of pushing through it.
4. Recognise a transposition error, the class that survives a same-characters gist check and is therefore missed most often.
5. Explain why an automatic process such as reading interferes with a controlled one, and use that to anticipate which distractors will actually cost you time.
6. Run a two-stream monitoring task by alternating on a fixed cadence rather than attempting genuine simultaneity.

Worked examples and pitfalls

A cancellation count you can actually check: Count every 7 in this row: 4 7 1 7 7 3 9 7 2 8 7 5 7 6 0 7. Working left to right and tapping once per hit: hits at the second, fourth, fifth, eighth, eleventh, thirteenth and sixteenth positions. That is seven sevens. Two error modes produce nearly all the wrong answers. The first is the adjacent pair - the 7 7 at positions four and five gets counted once, because the eye takes a repeated character as one perceptual object. The second is losing the place after the 9, where the visually similar 9 and 7 force a moment of re-checking and the scan restarts a character early, producing an over-count of eight. The defence for both is a fixed scan path with a physical anchor: a fingertip or cursor moving one character at a time, never jumping back. Re-scanning to check is the thing that creates the double-count, so if you must verify, verify by counting a second time from the RIGHT-hand end and comparing totals, never by re-reading part of the row.

Hits, misses and false alarms: the eager candidate loses: A checking batch contains 300 records, 40 of which are genuinely faulty. Candidate A flags 46 records and 36 of them are truly faulty. Hits 36, misses 40 minus 36 equals 4, false alarms 46 minus 36 equals 10. Candidate B flags 38 and 34 are truly faulty: hits 34, misses 6, false alarms 4. On hit rate alone A wins, 36 out of 40 which is 90 percent against B's 34 out of 40 which is 85 percent. Now apply the scoring rule that most checking tasks actually use, where a false alarm cancels a hit: A scores 36 minus 10 equals 26, B scores 34 minus 4 equals 30. B wins by four despite catching two fewer faults. This is why 'flag anything that looks odd' is bad advice on a scored checking task, and why the first thing to read on a checking item is whether wrong flags are penalised. Your response criterion - how much evidence you demand before flagging - is adjustable, and it should be set from the scoring rule, not from your temperament.

The transposition that passes every gist check: Compare these two lines and decide whether they match. Invoice 4820-7391-06. Invoice 4820-7931-06. They do not: the middle group reads 7391 in the first and 7931 in the second, with the 3 and the 9 swapped. Transpositions are the most-missed error class in record checking for a structural reason - the character SET is identical, the length is identical, the first and last characters of the group are identical, so every fast check the visual system runs comes back clean. Substitutions and omissions change the character inventory and get caught; transpositions do not. Two habits raise the catch rate. Read digits in fixed groups of two rather than as a whole number, so 73-91 against 79-31 becomes a mismatch at the first group instead of a subtle difference somewhere in a four-digit blur. And check groups in a deliberately non-natural order - last group, first group, middle group - because

reading left to right lets the confirmation you built at the start carry you through the middle, which is exactly where the swap is usually planted.

Conflict: why reading fights you: The classic demonstration is Stroop's, published in 1935: the word RED printed in blue ink, with the instruction to name the ink colour. Naming takes measurably longer, and errors go up, because reading a familiar word is automatic and cannot be switched off, so the automatic response has to be suppressed before the controlled one can be produced. The same conflict has a numeric version you can test on yourself in a second: how many characters are in the string 4 4 4? The answer is three, and the digit 4 pulls at you the entire way. In an assessment this appears wherever the salient feature and the asked-for feature come apart - a chart where the tallest bar is not the answer to the question, a form where the highlighted field is not the one being verified, a row where the bold total is not what the stem requested. The practical move is to name the target feature out loud before you look - 'ink colour', 'character count', 'the value for March' - because pre-loading the target biases selection before the automatic reading response gets a chance to win.

Where the errors actually appear in a 45-minute block: Errors in a long checking block are not spread evenly. Mackworth's 1948 clock-watching study established the pattern that gives the effect its name: detection declines over a prolonged watch, with the sharpest deterioration early rather than at the very end. Practically, on a 45-minute self-timed checking block, expect your per-minute error rate in minutes 20 to 45 to run visibly above minutes 1 to 20 even though nothing about the material changed, and expect the subjective sense of effort to lag the actual decline, so it will not feel like you are getting worse. Two things work against it. Break the block into three fifteen-minute segments with a ten-second reset between them - look away, unfocus, breathe out - which costs thirty seconds of a 45-minute block, about one percent of the time, and buys back more than that in caught errors. And score your practice by segment rather than as one number, because a single overall accuracy figure hides exactly the information you need: whether your problem is skill, which shows as flat error rate, or endurance, which shows as a rising one.

Two streams: alternate on a cadence, do not try to merge: A dispatch-style monitoring task: keep a running total of the numbers announced on channel one while watching channel two for the code word AMBER. Genuine simultaneity is not available - the two tasks compete for the same control resource - so the choice is not whether to alternate but whether to alternate deliberately or accidentally. Deliberate looks like this: fix the arithmetic to a rhythm, updating the total only at each announcement and holding a single number between updates, which frees the gaps for channel two. If the total is 34 and the next announcement is 7, you spend under a second reaching 41 and then you are free again. Accidental looks like re-deriving the running total from the beginning because you did not trust it, which locks up the whole window and is when AMBER goes past unheard. The measurable failure of divided attention is almost never a failure to hear the target; it is a failure to have any spare capacity at the moment it arrived. The related phenomenon worth knowing is inattention blindness, illustrated by Simons and Chabris in 1999: an unexpected and perfectly visible event is missed entirely when attention is committed to a counting task.

How to practise this skill

- Fix your scan path before you start, and never re-scan backwards to double-check. Backward re-scanning is what produces both double-counts and lost places; if you need to verify a count, run it again from the other end and compare.
- Read the scoring rule before the first item. Whether false alarms are penalised changes the correct strategy completely, and a criterion set for the wrong rule costs more marks than slow reading does.
- Check numeric strings in fixed groups of two or three and in a deliberately shuffled group order. Transpositions are the errors that survive whole-string comparison, and they are the ones planted on purpose.
- Time your practice in segments and log accuracy per segment, not per session. A flat error rate means you need speed; a rising one means you need endurance and breaks, and the two problems have

opposite fixes.

- Name the target feature out loud before each conflict item. Pre-loading the relevant dimension is the cheapest available defence against the salient-but-wrong answer.
- Practise with an actual distractor present rather than in silence. A test hall has movement, coughing and page-turning, and attention practice in perfect quiet trains a condition you will not meet.

Glossary

Selective attention: Prioritising one source or feature while suppressing competing ones. It is what fails when the visually salient element of a display captures the response instead of the requested one.

Sustained attention (vigilance): Maintaining detection performance over a long, low-event period. It is the capacity that checking, monitoring and inspection tasks are really sampling.

Vigilance decrement: The decline in detection performance over a prolonged watch, typically steepest early in the block. Mackworth's 1948 clock test is the standard public reference.

Divided attention: Handling two streams that compete for control. Performance is best modelled as fast alternation with a switch cost, not as genuine parallelism.

Hit, miss, false alarm, correct rejection: The four outcomes of any detection decision: flagging a real fault, missing one, flagging a clean record, and correctly leaving a clean record alone. Any honest accuracy claim needs at least the first three.

Response criterion: How much evidence you require before flagging. Shifting it trades misses against false alarms without changing your underlying sensitivity, which is why it must be set from the scoring rule.

Stroop interference: The slowing that occurs when an automatic response, such as reading a word, conflicts with the requested response, such as naming its ink colour. Named for Stroop's 1935 experiments.

Inattentional blindness: Failing to notice a fully visible, unexpected event because attention is committed elsewhere - the effect Simons and Chabris demonstrated in 1999 with a counting task.

Study this next

- Attention and concentration skill hub:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/attention-concentration>
- Cognitive Skills Lab: attention practice:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/cognitive-skills/attention-concentration>
- Emergency dispatch and 911 communications suite:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/emergency-dispatch-and-911-communications>
- Error detection lesson: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/error-detection/lesson>
- Perceptual speed lesson: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/perceptual-speed/lesson>
- Attention and concentration lesson on Novus Learn:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/attention-concentration/lesson>

Where this material comes from

- Character strings, invoice comparisons, batch counts and monitoring scenarios above are written for Novus Learn. All figures are original and no published test item is reproduced.
- Terminology and directions of effect follow widely published work: Mackworth (1948) on the vigilance decrement, Stroop (1935) on response conflict, Simons and Chabris (1999) on inattentional blindness, and the standard hit/miss/false-alarm framing from signal detection theory. Concepts only; no result figures are attributed to those studies.
- Novus Learn aptitude construct registry (catalog seed) for construct scope and suite mapping.
- Public educational framing only - not affiliated with any official exam board, publisher or employer, and not

a clinical, diagnostic or attention-disorder screening measure.

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Verbal reasoning

Drawing conclusions from written information without relying on outside assumptions.

Verbal reasoning is the discipline of answering strictly from a passage: deciding whether a statement is True, False, or Cannot Say on the evidence given, and refusing to import anything you happen to know about the topic. It is the workhorse construct in graduate and civil-service screening, banking and consulting sifts, and language-focused public-service batteries, where a passage about parcel volumes or grant conditions is followed by four statements to classify. The same discipline is what stops a contract review, a grant assessment or an incident summary from quietly acquiring facts nobody wrote down. Practice here is device-local: no account, and nothing leaves this device unless you export it.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Classify a statement as True, False, or Cannot Say, and state in one sentence which words in the passage force the classification.
2. Explain the difference that costs the most marks: 'Cannot Say' means undetermined by the passage, while 'False' means contradicted by it.
3. Spot quantifier drift between passage and statement (all, some, most, only, none) and show why 'all A are B' never licenses 'all B are A'.
4. Refuse a causal upgrade: recognise when a passage reports co-occurrence or sequence and a statement claims cause.
5. Separate what a passage asserts from what it reports somebody else asserting, and classify statements about each correctly.
6. Do the small arithmetic hidden inside verbal items - percentage changes, fractions of a stated total - without leaving the passage for outside data.

Worked examples and pitfalls

The three-way rule on one short passage: Passage: 'The Riverton depot handled 4,200 parcels in March, a 12 percent increase on February. A night shift was introduced in January; in March it processed 40 percent of the parcels the depot handled.' Now take four statements. (1) 'The depot handled 3,750 parcels in February.' February is March divided by 1.12: $4,200 / 1.12 = 3,750$ exactly, so this is True - the passage determines it even though the number is not printed. (2) 'The night shift caused the March increase.' Cannot Say. The passage puts the night shift and the increase in the same depot in the same period; it never claims one produced the other, and it never denies it either. Most candidates mark this False, reasoning correctly that correlation is not causation but then choosing the wrong label: False is reserved for statements the passage contradicts. (3) 'The night shift processed more than 1,700 parcels in March.' Forty percent of 4,200 is 1,680, which is not more than 1,700, so this is False - contradicted by arithmetic on the passage's own figures. (4) 'The depot handled more parcels in March than in January.' Cannot Say: January is mentioned only as the month the shift started, and no January volume is given.

Quantifier drift and illicit conversion: Passage: 'All accredited suppliers submit quarterly audits. Some suppliers in the northern region are accredited.' Statement A: 'Some suppliers in the northern region submit quarterly audits.' True, and it is worth seeing why the chain holds: at least one northern supplier is accredited, and every accredited supplier submits, so at least one northern supplier submits. Statement B: 'Every supplier that submits quarterly audits is accredited.' This reverses the first sentence. 'All accredited suppliers submit' leaves the door wide open for unaccredited suppliers to submit as well - perhaps voluntarily, perhaps

under another rule - so the answer is Cannot Say. Turning 'all A are B' into 'all B are A' is called illicit conversion and it is the single most productive trap in this format, because the reversed sentence sounds like a paraphrase. Statement C: 'No unaccredited supplier submits quarterly audits' is the same reversal wearing a negative coat, and it is Cannot Say for the same reason. Statement D: 'All northern suppliers submit quarterly audits' is also Cannot Say: 'some are accredited' says nothing about the rest.

Asserted versus reported: Passage: 'The committee's report claims that the scheme cut waiting times by a third. Two of the four regional boards have disputed that figure.' Statement A: 'The scheme cut waiting times by a third.' Cannot Say. What the passage asserts is that a report claims this; the claim's truth is never settled, and the dispute does not settle it either. Statement B: 'At least two regional boards disagree with the report's waiting-time figure.' True, and note 'at least' - the passage says two disputed it, and two of four disputing is consistent with 'at least two'. Statement C: 'All four regional boards accept the figure.' False, directly contradicted. Statement D: 'The report is wrong.' Cannot Say. This item type appears constantly in policy and diplomacy passages, where a paragraph stacks a claim, a source, and a reaction, and the reader has to keep three different truth-conditions apart. The reliable habit is to underline the reporting verb - claims, argues, estimates, alleges, projects - and remember that everything downstream of it belongs to the source, not to the passage.

Percentages are not symmetric: Passage: 'Membership fell from 8,000 to 6,000 over two years, then recovered by 25 percent in the third year.' Statement: 'Membership at the end of year three was higher than at the start.' The fall is 2,000 on a base of 8,000, which is 25 percent. The recovery is 25 percent of the new base: $6,000 \times 1.25 = 7,500$. That is below 8,000, so the statement is False. The trap is elegant, because a 25 percent fall followed by a 25 percent rise feels like it should cancel. It does not: to get back from 6,000 to 8,000 you need a 33.3 percent rise, since $2,000 / 6,000 = 0.333$. Whenever a verbal item states a change as a percentage, write down what the percentage is a percentage of before you touch it. A related version supplies the recovery as an absolute number instead - 'recovered by 2,000 members' - which does return the total to 8,000, and candidates who answered the first version from memory get the second one wrong.

Verbal analogies: name the relation as a sentence: Item: 'ANTISEPTIC is to INFECTION as ____ is to ____.' Options: (a) vaccine : immunity, (b) insulation : heat loss, (c) medicine : illness, (d) bandage : wound. Write the stem relation as a full sentence first: 'An antiseptic is applied in order to prevent an infection from occurring.' Now test each option against that exact sentence. Option (a) runs the other way - a vaccine is given to produce immunity, not to prevent it. Option (c) is the right family but the wrong specificity: medicine typically treats an illness that has already started. Option (d) is applied after the wound exists. Option (b) fits precisely: insulation is applied in order to prevent heat loss from occurring. The general method is the same on the simpler item types. 'BOOK is to LIBRARY as PAINTING is to ____' has canvas (the material), artist (the maker), and gallery (the place a collection is kept and shown) among its options; all three are genuine relations to 'painting', and only the third matches the stem sentence. Options in analogy items are chosen to be true statements about the words, just not the stated relation.

Two premises with 'some' prove nothing: Argument: 'Some depot managers are qualified engineers. Some qualified engineers hold a rigging certificate. Therefore some depot managers hold a rigging certificate.' This is invalid, and the way to prove it is a counter-model rather than an argument. Let the depot managers be Ana and Ben; let the qualified engineers be Ben and Cara; let the certificate holders be Cara alone. Premise one holds: Ben is a manager and an engineer. Premise two holds: Cara is an engineer with the certificate. The conclusion fails: neither Ana nor Ben holds the certificate. Since a single consistent world makes both premises true and the conclusion false, the argument cannot be valid, so in a True / False / Cannot Say framing the conclusion is Cannot Say. Two premises that both begin 'some' never combine into a conclusion, because 'some' gives you an overlap without telling you where the overlap sits. Contrast a valid pair: 'All accredited labs are inspected annually. No inspected facility is exempt from the fee.' Every accredited lab is inspected, and no inspected facility is exempt, so no accredited lab is exempt - True.

How to practise this skill

- Answer from the passage even when you know the subject. Candidates with a background in the topic score worse on verbal items than they expect, because their own knowledge quietly supplies the missing premise that turns a Cannot Say into a True.
- Run the two-worlds test on every candidate 'Cannot Say': can you imagine a world where all the passage's sentences hold and the statement is true, and another where they hold and it is false? If both, it is Cannot Say. If only the false world exists, it is False.
- Underline the quantifiers and hedges in the statement (all, some, only, most, may, must, likely) and find their counterparts in the passage. Roughly half of the wrong answers in this construct come from a single word swapped between the two.
- Budget about 25 to 30 seconds per statement rather than per passage, and read the passage once for structure before touching the statements. Re-reading the whole passage for each statement is what causes candidates to run out of time on the last set.
- Keep a wrong-answer log with one label per error: quantifier, causation, reported-versus-asserted, arithmetic, outside knowledge. A clear pattern almost always emerges within about forty items, and it is usually a single label.
- Work untimed until the three-way rule is automatic, then add the clock. Attempts are stored on this device only, so a slow first pass through a passage set costs you nothing but the time you spend on it.

Glossary

Entailment: A statement is entailed by a passage when it cannot be false while every sentence of the passage is true. Entailment is the only thing that earns a 'True' in this format; being plausible, likely, or well known does not.

Cannot Say: The verdict for a statement the passage neither entails nor contradicts. It is a claim about the passage, not about the world, which is why a statement you know to be true in real life can still be Cannot Say.

Quantifier: A word fixing how much of a group a claim covers: all, most, some, few, none, only. Swapping one quantifier for another changes the logical content completely while barely changing how the sentence reads.

Illicit conversion: The invalid move from 'all A are B' to 'all B are A', or from 'if P then Q' to 'if Q then P'. It preserves the words and destroys the logic, which is why converted sentences make such effective wrong answers.

Counter-model: A concrete, consistent scenario in which the premises hold and the conclusion fails. Producing one is the fastest possible proof that an argument is invalid, and it takes two or three named individuals.

Hedge: A qualifier such as may, could, is expected to, or is associated with. A hedged sentence in a passage cannot support an unhedged statement, and an unhedged passage sentence is not weakened by a hedged statement.

Reporting verb: A verb such as claims, argues, estimates, or alleges that attributes the following content to a source. Everything downstream of it is the source's assertion, and the passage takes no position on it.

Analogy relation: The specific link between the two stem words in an analogy item - tool and user, item and container, action and purpose. Naming it as a full sentence before reading the options removes almost all of the guesswork.

Study this next

- Verbal reasoning skill hub: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/verbal-reasoning>
- Practise the verbal reasoning bank:

<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/cognitive-skills/verbal-reasoning>

- Critical thinking lesson: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/critical-thinking/lesson>
- Reading comprehension lesson:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/reading-comprehension/lesson>
- General civil-service aptitude suite:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/general-civil-service-aptitude>
- Verbal reasoning lesson on Novus Learn:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/verbal-reasoning/lesson>

Where this material comes from

- Worked items written for Novus Learn. Every passage, statement set and figure above is original and invented for this lesson; no published or copyrighted test item is reproduced.
- Terminology follows standard, widely published usage in introductory logic and assessment writing - entailment, quantifier, illicit conversion, counter-model.
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Recommended preparation

- Practice written communication:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/written-communication/lesson>
- Strengthen error detection: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/error-detection/lesson>
- Strengthen clerical accuracy:
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/clerical-accuracy/lesson>

Answer keys, scoring and privacy

Answer keys and scoring logic stay server-side and are never included in any download or export.

Formal suite answer keys and scoring logic stay on the server and are not part of any download, in any format. Downloadable keys exist only for the open, untimed practice material (the practice packs on the puzzles, cognitive-skills and reasoning practice lab pages), where the answers are already public teaching content.

Novus Learn needs no account. Your practice history lives in this browser's storage on this device, and is sent to a server only if you create an account and switch on backup. This file contains no attempt, session or result link, so it is safe to share.

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Source: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/office-grammar-and-proofreading/study-outline>