The Ultimate Digital SAT® Reading & Writing Expression of Ideas Cheat Sheet

Expression of Ideas: Overview

What It Tests

Expression of Ideas: revising writing to meet a goal; ~20% of R&W, about 8–12 of the 54 questions.

2 question types: **Rhetorical Synthesis** (use notes to meet a goal) & **Transitions** (link 2 ideas logically).

Type	You see	You choose
Rhetorical Synthesis	Bulleted notes + goal	Sentence that meets goal
Transitions	Short passage w/ blank	Word linking 2 ideas

Where It Appears

Position: Expression of Ideas questions come LAST in each module, after Standard English Conventions.

Format: 2 adaptive modules, 27 questions & 32 minutes each; every question has its own short passage.

Pace: about 71 seconds per question overall; these are often faster, so bank time for harder reading items.

Passages: each is short (about 25–150 words), so you can reread the key sentence quickly before choosing.

What Graders Reward

Goal first: the right answer accomplishes the stated purpose, not just the most detailed or most accurate claim.

Logic first: the right transition matches the relationship between ideas, not the most formal-sounding word.

Accuracy: every answer must also stay true to the notes or passage; no added or invented details.

Concision: when 2 answers both work, the SAT prefers the one that's clearer & more direct & avoids repetition.

⚠ True ≠ correct. Several choices may state true facts from the notes; only 1 meets the goal as stated.

✓ These are high-yield points: clear rules, short passages & no grammar memorization needed to master.

Rhetorical Synthesis: Method

What the Question Looks Like

Setup: "While researching a topic, a student has taken the following notes," then 4–6 bullet points of facts.

Question stem: "The student wants to [goal]. Which choice most effectively uses relevant information from the notes?"

4-Step Method

Step	Do this
1. Read the goal	Before the notes
2. Underline key words	e.g., contrast, audience
3. Check each choice	Does it do the goal?
4. Verify facts	Matches the notes?

Read the question first: the goal tells you which notes matter; most bullets are extra background.

Skim the notes: you rarely need every bullet; the answers will point you to the relevant ones that matter most.

Test each choice: ask "Does this sentence do exactly what the goal says?" Cross out any that don't.

Key Words in Goals

Emphasize: the main point must be that idea, not a side detail; **explain**: must give a reason or cause.

Compare / contrast: the choice must mention BOTH items & show how they're alike or different in a single sentence.

Audience cue: "unfamiliar w/ X" means the sentence must briefly explain X for a reader who's new to it.

Specific vs. general: "specific example" needs a concrete name or number; "overview" stays broad.

Order of info: if the goal stresses 1 idea, the best sentence often puts that idea in its main clause.

⚠ Don't read the notes first & form opinions. The goal decides the answer, not what seems most interesting.

✓ You can often answer w/o reading the notes at all; just match each choice to the goal's wording.

Rhetorical Synthesis: Goal Types

Common Goals & What They Need

Goal says	Right answer must
Emphasize a similarity	Name both + shared trait
Emphasize a difference	Name both + contrast
Introduce to new audience	Define/explain the topic
Present the study	Who/what studied + method
Present findings / results	State what was found
Explain significance	Say why it matters
Give an example	Specific name or case

Similarity vs. Difference

Similarity signals: both, also, like, similarly, share, the same. Look for these words in the right answer.

Difference signals: while, whereas, but, unlike, however, rather than; both items must still appear.

Audience Goals

Unfamiliar audience: the correct choice adds a short description: "X, a type of deep-sea fish, ..."

Familiar audience: the right answer can use the term directly, since readers already know what it means.

Research Goals

Present the study: who did it, what they studied & how; results are optional unless the goal mentions them.

Present a conclusion: must state the researchers' finding, not just describe the experiment's setup.

Make a generalization: a broad statement that covers several examples in the notes, not 1 detail or a single study.

Goal verbs: emphasize, explain, introduce, compare, present.

⚠ "Emphasize the difference" answers that describe only 1 item are wrong, even if accurate or even well written.

✓ Predict the shape: for a contrast goal, expect "While A does X, B does Y" before reading the choices.

Rhetorical Synthesis: Traps & Example

Worked Example

Notes: Mae Jemison was a physician. She joined NASA in 1987. In 1992 she flew on the space shuttle *Endeavour*. She was the 1st African American woman in space.

Goal: "emphasize Jemison's historic achievement." Focus on what made her flight historic, not her career or training.

Best answer: "In 1992, Mae Jemison became the 1st African American woman to travel into space."

Wrong answers: "Jemison, a physician, joined NASA in 1987" is true but doesn't emphasize the achievement.

Common Traps

Trap	Why it's wrong
True but off-goal	Facts fine, goal missed
Half the goal	1 item, goal needs 2
Too much detail	Buries the main point
Distorted fact	Changes the notes
Outside info	Not in the notes

Most detailed ≠ best: a long answer packed w/ facts often hides the goal; shorter can win when it has a clear focus.

Distortions: watch for changed numbers, dates or who-did-what; reread the matching bullet to confirm.

Outside info: any claim not stated in the notes (even if true in real life) makes a choice wrong on the test.

Wrong emphasis: an answer that mentions the key fact only in a side clause may not "emphasize" it enough.

Quick Checklist

Before you pick: Does it do the goal? Does it match the notes? Does it include ALL parts the goal names?

⚠ The most common miss: picking an accurate sentence that answers a different goal than the one asked.

✓ If 2 choices seem right, reread the goal's exact verb: emphasize, explain, introduce or compare.

Transitions: Categories

Transition Families

Relationship	Transitions
Addition	Moreover, furthermore, also
Contrast	However, but, in contrast
Concession	Nevertheless, still, granted
Cause/effect	Therefore, thus, as a result
Example	For example, for instance
Similarity	Similarly, likewise
Sequence/time	Then, subsequently, finally
Emphasis	In fact, indeed
Clarification	That is, in other words

What Each Signals

Addition: the 2nd idea adds another point in the same direction as the 1st, with no change in direction.

Contrast: the 2nd idea goes against or differs from the 1st, often reversing what the reader expected.

Concession: admits a point, then says something still holds: "It was costly. Nevertheless, it was built."

Similarity: "Similarly" introduces a 2nd case that works like the 1st; both must be distinct examples.

Cause/effect: the 2nd sentence results from the 1st; test it by inserting "because of this" or "as a result."

Example: the 2nd sentence gives a specific case of a general idea or claim made in the 1st sentence.

Emphasis: "In fact" strengthens or intensifies the previous point; it doesn't reverse it, which "however" would do.

Clarification: "That is" restates the same idea more plainly or precisely for the reader, often w/ more precise wording.

⚠ Same-family answers can't both be right. If 2 choices mean the same thing, eliminate both.

✓ Learn the families, not single words; the SAT rotates many synonyms in each group every test.

Transitions: Method

3-Step Method

Step	Do this
1. Cover choices	Don't look yet
2. Read around blank	Sentence before + after
3. Predict relationship	Same, opposite, result?

Read the sentence before the blank carefully; it's often 1 or 2 sentences back that sets up the relationship.

Name the relationship in your own words first: "this is a result," "this goes against it," "this adds more."

Then match: pick the choice from the family you predicted & eliminate the other 3 families that point the wrong way.

Worked Example

Passage: "Many expected the drought to ruin the harvest. _____, farmers reported record yields."

Relationship: the result went against expectations → contrast. **Answer**: "However" (not "Therefore").

Look back: sometimes the transition must connect to a sentence 2 back; read the full short passage.

Quick Tests

Swap test: replace the blank w/ "because of this" (cause), "but" (contrast) or "also" (addition); see which fits.

Direction test: does the 2nd sentence continue the same direction (+, +) or switch direction (+, −)?

Time test: if the passage moves through steps or dates, a sequence word (then, later, finally) fits best.

Example check: if the 2nd sentence names a specific case of the 1st, use "for example," not "moreover."

Contrast vs. concession: concession words (granted, admittedly) usually come before a "still" idea.

⚠ Don't choose by sound. "Thus" & "Moreover" sound formal but mean very different things.

✓ Predicting before looking stops the answer choices from steering you toward a trap that only sounds right.

Transitions: Tricky Distinctions

Commonly Confused Pairs

Word	Use when	Not when
However	Contrast	Cause
Therefore	Result	Mere addition
Instead	Replacement	Simple contrast
Similarly	Parallel case	Restating
Meanwhile	Same time	Contrast only
Granted	Admitting point	Adding point

Instead: the 2nd idea REPLACES what was expected: "They didn't flee. Instead, they hid." It's stronger than "however."

In contrast: compares 2 different things side by side; **however** can also counter an expectation.

Similarly / likewise: a 2nd, separate example that works the same way, not a repeat of the 1st w/ new wording.

For example vs. in fact: example gives a specific case; in fact adds a stronger, surprising point.

Consequently vs. accordingly: both signal results; accordingly also means "in a matching way."

Subtle Logic

Concession vs. contrast: "Granted, X. Still, Y" admits X is true, while contrast simply opposes it.

Result vs. sequence: "Then" is just time order; "Therefore" claims one thing caused the other, a much stronger claim.

Finally / ultimately: the last step or the final outcome of a process; check for a sequence first in the passage.

No transition needed? The SAT always gives a word; pick the one that fits, not the one that sounds smooth.

⚠ "Therefore" is the most overused wrong answer; make sure the 2nd idea truly follows from the 1st.

✓ Read the sentence aloud in your head w/ each choice; illogical ones usually sound wrong immediately.

Strategy & Practice

Time Management

Fast points: aim for under 60 seconds on transitions & about 60–75 seconds on rhetorical synthesis.

Flag & return: if 2 choices still seem right after 90 seconds, guess, flag & come back if time allows.

No penalty: wrong answers don't subtract points, so never leave a question blank on either module.

Elimination Rules

If a choice...	Then
Misses part of the goal	Eliminate
Adds outside info	Eliminate
Means the same as another	Eliminate both
Reverses the logic	Eliminate

Twin answers: if 2 transitions are synonyms (thus/therefore), neither can be the single correct answer.

Process of elimination: it's often easier to prove 3 choices wrong than to prove 1 choice right, so cross out fast.

Answer order: when 2 choices remain, pick the one that is more direct & matches every part of the goal.

Practice Plan

Build a transitions list: group words by family & add new ones you meet in practice tests each week.

Review misses: label each wrong answer as off-goal, half-goal, distortion or wrong logic, then target that pattern.

Use official practice: Bluebook full-length tests match real question styles & adaptive timing under real conditions.

Connection to writing: these skills match revising your own essays: clear goals & logical links for any class.

⚠ Don't rush the goal sentence. Misreading 1 word (similarity vs. difference) flips the answer.

✓ Expression of Ideas is very learnable; most students gain quickly w/ focused practice in a few weeks.