RESOURCE

The Red Pen Method: How to Prepare English for CLAT 2027

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CLAT UG · English Language SectionThe Red Pen Method

Grammar isn’t memorised it’s noticed.

A complete strategy for the CLAT English section — how the paper actually tests you, the reading method that beats 450-word passages, and ten grammar tricks that sharpen every vocabulary and inference question you’ll face.

CLAT PREP DESK · UPDATED FOR THE CURRENT PATTERN

22–26Questions in English

~20%Weightage of the paper

450Words per passage (avg.)
120Total questions · 2 hours
First, correct the myth

CLAT doesn't ask "fill in the blank" grammar anymore

Since the 2020 reform, the CLAT English section has no standalone grammar MCQs — no isolated "choose the correct tense" or "identify the error" questions sitting on their own. Every question is built on a 450-word passage drawn from fiction, non-fiction, historical writing, or contemporary journalism, pitched at roughly a Class 12 reading level.

That doesn't make grammar irrelevant — it changes *where* it shows up. Grammar now hides inside vocabulary-in-context questions, inference questions, and "which sentence best fits the author's meaning" questions. If your grammar sense is weak, you'll misread tone, miss negation, and pick the option that sounds right but isn't.

This blog treats grammar as the toolkit that makes reading comprehension faster and more accurate — not as a separate subject to cram.

What's actually testedCLAT 2026 Syllabus & Exam Pattern – Complete Guide

The five question types inside every passage

Type	What it's really testing	Typical stem
Main idea / theme	Can you compress the whole passage into one accurate sentence?	"Which of the following best captures the central argument?"
Inference	Can you conclude something the author implies but never states directly?	"It can be inferred from the passage that…"
Vocabulary-in-context	Do you know how a word's meaning shifts with the sentence around it?	"The word 'X' as used in the passage most nearly means…"
Author's tone / viewpoint	Can you separate the author's opinion from the facts they report?	"The author's attitude toward the subject can best be described as…"

Summary / paraphrase	Can you spot the option that restates a sentence without changing its meaning?	“Which sentence best paraphrases the underlined portion?”

Notice that four of the five types depend on precise reading, not passage-hunting. This is why speed-reading tricks (skim for keywords, jump to questions first) tend to backfire on CLAT — the questions are built to punish skimming.



Reading method

How to attack a 450-word passage in under 5 minutes

1. Read once, fully, without stopping No highlighting on the first pass. Just read for the shape of the argument: what claim is being made, and what evidence or story supports it. This takes 90–120 seconds for a 450-word passage.
2. Label the paragraphs in the margin In three or four words each — “sets up problem,” “author disagrees,” “gives example,” “concludes.” This becomes your map for every question that follows, so you never re-read the whole passage twice.
3. Separate fact from opinion as you go Underline (mentally or lightly) any sentence where the author judges, not just reports. Tone questions almost always trace back to two or three sentences like this.
4. Answer from your map, then verify Use your paragraph labels to jump to the right zone, re-read just that sentence or two, and only then select. Never answer from memory of the “gist” — CLAT options are written to trap gist-level reading.
5. For vocabulary questions, cover the word and guess from context first Predict a meaning before looking at the options. This stops you from being pulled toward the option that matches the word’s *common* meaning instead of its meaning *in this sentence*.

The red pen rulesNALSAR University of Law



Ten grammar tricks that actually move your score

These aren't exam-hall grammar drills. They're the instincts that make vocabulary-in-context, inference, and paraphrase questions faster — the same instincts a good editor uses on a manuscript.

Rule 01 · Subject–Verb Agreement

Cross out the middleman

The verb agrees with the real subject — not with whatever noun happens to sit closest to it. Prepositional phrases between subject and verb are the trap.

The list of items were ✗ The list of items was incomplete.

Trick Mentally delete everything between the subject and the verb. "The list … was" reads correctly on its own.

Rule 02 · Parallelism

Match the grammatical shape

Items in a list, or the two sides of a comparison, must use the same grammatical form — all gerunds, all infinitives, all nouns.

She enjoys reading, to write, and painting. ✗ She enjoys reading, writing, and painting.

Trick Read only the connecting words aloud: "enjoys reading… enjoys to write" exposes the mismatch instantly.

Rule 03 · Pronoun Reference

Trace the pronoun back

Every pronoun should point to one clear, matching noun. If you can't name the exact noun a pronoun replaces, the sentence is ambiguous or wrong.

Each of the girls submitted their essay. ✗ Each of the girls submitted her essay.

Trick "Each," "either," "neither," and "one" are singular — the pronoun that follows must be singular too.

Rule 04 · Misplaced / Dangling Modifiers

The modifier must sit next to what it describes

A descriptive phrase at the start of a sentence should describe the very next noun. If it doesn't, the sentence accidentally describes the wrong thing.

Walking to school, the rain soaked her. ✗Walking to school, she was soaked by the rain.

Trick Ask "who is doing the action in the opening phrase?" — then check that noun appears immediately after the comma.

Rule 05 · Tense Consistency

Find the anchor tense

A passage or sentence has one dominant tense unless a time-signal word justifies a shift (“yesterday,” “since,” “by 2030”).

He finished the report and submits it. → He finished the report and submitted it.

Trick In CLAT passages, tense shifts usually signal a shift in time period being discussed — treat every shift as a clue, not noise.

Rule 06 · Articles (a / an / the)

Go by sound, not spelling

“An” precedes a vowel *sound*, not a vowel letter — which is why “an hour” and “a university” both feel correct.

A honest answer → An honest answer | An university → A university

Trick Say the word aloud. If it starts with a vowel sound when spoken (“onest,” “yuniversity”), that decides the article.

Rule 07 · Confusing Word Pairs

Know the five pairs that trap everyone

Affect (verb, to influence) vs **Effect** (noun, a result). **Fewer** (countable) vs **Less** (uncountable). **Than** (comparison) vs **Then** (time). **Its** (possessive) vs **It’s** (it is). **Who** (subject) vs **Whom** (object).

The policy will effect change. → The policy will affect change, and its effect will be lasting.

Trick For who/whom — if you can answer the implied question with “he,” use “who”; if the answer is “him,” use “whom.”

Rule 08 · Redundancy

Cut what the sentence already implies

Vocabulary-in-context and paraphrase questions often reward the option that says the same thing in fewer, tighter words — so train yourself to spot padding.

They returned back the free gift. → They returned the gift.

Trick If removing a word changes nothing about the meaning, it was redundant — and CLAT’s “best paraphrase” option is usually the leanest one.

Rule 09 · Comma Splices & Run-ons

Two independent clauses need more than a comma

If both halves of a sentence could stand alone, a comma by itself can’t join them — you need a conjunction, a semicolon, or a full stop.

The court reserved judgment, it will rule next week. → The court reserved judgment; it will rule next week.

Trick Split the sentence at the comma. If both halves are complete sentences on their own, the comma alone is wrong.

Rule 10 · Connotation Over Denotation

Read the charge of the word, not just the dictionary meaning

Two synonyms can carry opposite emotional weight — "frugal" (positive) versus "stingy" (negative) both mean "spends little." CLAT's vocabulary and tone questions are built on exactly this gap.

The minister was called assertive by supporters and stubborn by critics — same trait, opposite charge.

Trick Before choosing a vocabulary answer, ask whether the author's tone toward the subject is approving or critical — that tone decides which synonym fits.

Vocabulary building

Build words the way CLAT tests them — in context, not in lists

Read editorials, not word-lists

Opinion pages of The Hindu, Indian Express, or Livemint use exactly the register CLAT passages draw from. Twenty minutes a day builds contextual vocabulary faster than memorising 3,000 GRE words you'll never see.

Keep a "shade of meaning" notebook

Instead of one word per entry, group three near-synonyms and note how their tone differs — e.g. "notorious / famous / renowned" all mean well-known, but only one is neutral.

Learn roots, not whole words

Prefixes and roots like *bene-* (good), *mal-* (bad), *omni-* (all), and *-fy* (to make) let you guess an unfamiliar word's charge even under time pressure.

Re-read your wrong answers weekly

A vocabulary word you got wrong once will resurface. A five-minute weekly review of your mistake log beats adding new words you'll forget by the mock after next.

Practice

Try these — passage-style, the way CLAT actually asks them

Passage

“Reform, when it comes gradually, is rarely applauded in the moment it happens — its architects are more often remembered for the crisis they failed to prevent than the collapse they quietly avoided.”

Question 1 · Vocabulary-in-context

In this sentence, “architects” most nearly means:

1. Building designers
2. People who plan and carry out a policy or reform
3. Government engineers
4. Historians who record events

Why The sentence is about reform, not buildings — “architects” here is used figuratively for the people who design and implement a plan. Context, not dictionary definition, decides the answer.

Question 2 · Inference

Based on the passage above, the author most likely believes that:

1. Gradual reformers are usually rewarded for their foresight
2. Preventing a crisis is undervalued precisely because the crisis never visibly happens
3. Reform should always happen suddenly to be noticed
4. Crisis and collapse are the same thing

Why The passage contrasts being “remembered for the crisis failed to prevent” against “the collapse quietly avoided” — implying credit goes to the visible failure, not the invisible success. Option B is the only one that captures this irony.

Question 3 · Grammatical accuracy (paraphrase)

Which sentence is both grammatically correct and closest in meaning to: “Each of the committee members were asked to submit their reports before the deadline lapsed.”

1. Each of the committee members were asked to submit their report before the deadline lapses.
2. Each of the committee members was asked to submit their report before the deadline lapsed.

3. Each of the committee members was asked to submit their reports before the deadline will lapse.
4. All of the committee members was asked to submit their report before the deadline lapsed.

Why “Each” takes a singular verb (“was,” not “were” — Rule 03), and the original sentence’s past tense (“lapsed”) must stay consistent (Rule 05). Option D wrongly swaps “each” for “all,” which changes the meaning.
Weekly rhythm

A realistic four-week cycle for the English section

Week 1
Foundation. Read one editorial daily, build the shade-of-meaning notebook, work through Rules 01–05 with your own example sentences.
Week 2
Speed. Time yourself on 5 passages a day (5 minutes each including questions), add Rules 06–10, review every wrong answer the same day.
Week 3
Full mocks. Attempt full-length CLAT mocks under exam conditions; track accuracy separately for vocabulary, inference, and tone questions to find your weak type.
Week 4
Error audit. Revisit only your mistake log — no new passages. Re-attempt every question you got wrong across the month without looking at the old answer first.

Quick revision capsule

- **English = 22–26 Qs, ~20%** of CLAT UG’s 120-question paper.
- **No standalone grammar MCQs** since the 2020 reform — everything is passage-based.
- Passages run **~450 words**, drawn from fiction, non-fiction, and journalism at Class 12 level.
- Five question types: **main idea, inference, vocabulary-in-context, tone, paraphrase.**

- Read once fully, **label paragraphs**, then answer from your map — don't skim-and-hunt.
- Subject–verb agreement: **cross out the middle phrase** to find the true subject.
- Parallelism: **read only the connecting words** aloud to expose mismatches.
- Vocabulary-in-context beats dictionary meaning — always predict the meaning **before** reading options.
- **Connotation over denotation**: tone decides which synonym is correct.
- Comma splices: split the sentence — if **both halves stand alone**, a comma isn't enough.
- Build vocabulary from **editorials, not word-lists** — CLAT tests words the way newspapers use them.
- Accuracy beats attempts: with **0.25 negative marking**, skip what you're genuinely unsure of.

CLAT PREP DESK · ENGLISH LANGUAGE SECTION · FOR EDUCATIONAL USE