

# CHAPTER 11: WRITING BASICS: WHAT MAKES A GOOD SENTENCE?

***Communication Essentials for College* by Jen Booth, Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell**

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interactive activities and ancillary resources.

# 11.1 - SENTENCE WRITING

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## Learning Objectives

- Identify the components of a basic sentence.
- Identify the four most serious writing errors.

Imagine you are reading a book for school. You need to find important details that you can use for an assignment. However, when you begin to read, you notice that the book has very little punctuation. Sentences fail to form complete paragraphs and instead form one block of text without clear organization. Most likely, this book would frustrate and confuse you. Without clear and concise sentences, it is difficult to find the information you need.

For both students and professionals, clear communication is important. Whether you are typing an e-mail or writing a report, it is your responsibility to present your thoughts and ideas clearly and precisely. Writing in complete sentences is one way to ensure that you communicate well. This section covers how to recognize and write basic sentence structures and how to avoid some common writing errors.

## Components of a Sentence

Clearly written, complete sentences require key information: a subject, a verb and a complete idea. A sentence needs to make sense on its own. Sometimes, complete sentences are also called independent clauses. A clause is a group of words that may make up a sentence. An independent clause is a group of words that may stand alone as a complete, grammatically correct thought. The following sentences show independent clauses.



This passage contains three independent clauses: 1- “We went to the store.” 2-“We bought the ingredients on our list” 3-“we went home.”

All complete sentences have at least one independent clause. You can identify an independent clause by reading it on its own and looking for the subject and the verb.

## Subjects

When you read a sentence, you may first look for the subject , or what the sentence is about. The subject usually appears at the beginning of a sentence as a noun or a pronoun . A noun is a word that identifies a person, place, thing, or idea. A pronoun is a word that replaces a noun. Common pronouns are *I, he, she, it, you, they, and we*. In the following sentences, the subject is **bold**.

**Malik** is the project manager for this project. **He** will give us our assignments.

In these sentences, the subject is a person: **Malik**. The pronoun **He** replaces and refers back to **Malik**.

The **computer lab** is where we will work. **It** will be open twenty-four hours a day.

In the first sentence, the subject is a place: **computer lab**. In the second sentence, the pronoun **It** substitutes for **computer lab** as the subject.

The **project** will run for three weeks. **It** will have a quick turnaround.

In the first sentence, the subject is a thing: **project**. In the second sentence, the pronoun **It** stands in for the **project**.

## Tip

In this chapter, please refer to the following grammar key:

**Subjects** are **in bold**

*Verbs* are in *italics*.

LV means linking verb, HV means helping verb, and V means action verb.

## Compound Subjects

A sentence may have more than one person, place, or thing as the subject. These subjects are called compound subjects. Compound subjects are useful when you want to discuss several subjects at once.

**Desmond** and **Maria** have been working on that design for almost a year. **Books, magazines,** and **online articles** are all good resources.

## Prepositional Phrases

You will often read a sentence that has more than one noun or pronoun in it. You may encounter a group of words that includes a preposition with a noun or a pronoun. Prepositions connect a noun, pronoun, or verb to another word that describes or modifies that noun, pronoun, or verb. Common prepositions include *in, on, under, near, by, with,* and *about*. A group of words that begin with a preposition is called a prepositional phrase. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and modifies or describes a word. It cannot act as the subject of a sentence. The following circled phrases are examples of prepositional phrases.

We went on a business trip That restaurant with the famous pizza was on the way. We stopped for lunch.

There are 3 prepositional phrases in this sentence 1- “on a business trip”, 2- “with the famous pizza” and 3- “for lunch”.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Part 1 – Read the following sentences and click on the subject in each

1. The gym is open until nine o'clock tonight.
2. We went to the store to get some ice.
3. The student with the most extra credit will win a homework pass.
4. Maya and Tia found an abandoned cat by the side of the road.
5. The driver of that pickup truck skidded on the ice.
6. Anita won the race with time to spare.
7. The people who work for that company were surprised about the merger.
8. Working in haste means that you are more likely to make mistakes.
9. The soundtrack has over sixty songs in languages from around the world.
10. His latest invention does not work, but it has inspired the rest of us.

Part 2- Read the following sentences and identify the prepositional phrases.

1. The gym is open until nine o'clock tonight
  - a. the gym
  - b. until nine o'clock tonight
  - c. is open until
2. We went to the store to get some ice.
  - a. to get some ice

- b. we went to
  - c. to the store
3. The student with the most extra credit will win a homework pass.
- a. with the most extra credit
  - b. will win
  - c. homework pass
4. Maya and Tia found an abandoned cat by the side of the road
- a. found an abandoned cat
  - b. by the side
  - c. by the side of the road
5. The driver of that pickup truck skidded on the ice.
- a. skidded on the ice
  - b. of that pickup truck
  - c. the driver
6. Anita won the race with time to spare.
- a. Won the race
  - b. with time to spare
  - c. Anita won
7. We went to the store to get some ice.
- a. we went to
  - b. to the store
  - c. to get some ice

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 was adapted from “2.1 Sentence Writing” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Verbs

Once you locate the subject of a sentence, you can move on to the next part of a

complete sentence: the verb . A verb is often an action word that shows what the subject is doing. A verb can also link the subject to a describing word. There are three types of verbs that you can use in a sentence: action verbs, linking verbs, or helping verbs.

## Action Verbs

A verb that connects the subject to an action is called an action verb . An action verb answers the question *what is the subject doing?* In the following sentences, the action verbs are in italics.

The dog *barked* at the jogger.  
He *gave* a short speech before we ate.

## Linking Verbs

A verb can often connect the subject of the sentence to a describing word. This type of verb is called a linking verb because it links the subject to a describing word. In the following sentences, the linking verbs are in italics.

The coat *was* old and dirty.  
The clock *seemed* broken.

If you have trouble telling the difference between action verbs and linking verbs, remember that an action verb shows that the subject is doing something, whereas a linking verb simply connects the subject to another word that describes or modifies the subject. A few verbs can be used as either action verbs or linking verbs.

**Action Verb:** The boy *looked* for his glove.  
**Linking Verb:** The boy *looked* tired.

Although both sentences use the same verb, the two sentences have completely different meanings. In the first sentence, the verb describes the boy's action. In the second sentence, the verb describes the boy's appearance.

## Helping Verbs

A third type of verb you may use as you write is a helping verb. Helping verbs are verbs that are used with the main verb to describe a mood or tense. Helping verbs are usually a form of *be*, *do*, or *have*. The word *can* is also used as a helping verb.

**The restaurant** *is known* for its variety of dishes.

**She** *does speak up* when prompted in class.

**We** *have seen* that movie three times.

**She** *can tell* when someone walks on her lawn.

(is, does, have, and can are helping verbs and known, speak up, seen, and tell are verbs)

### Tip

Whenever you write or edit sentences, keep the subject and verb in mind. As you write, ask yourself these questions to keep yourself on track:

**Subject:** Who or what is the sentence about?

**Verb:** Which word shows an action or links the subject to a description?

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Part 1 – Select the verbs in each sentence

1. The cat sounds ready to come back inside.
2. We have not eaten dinner yet.
3. It took four people to move the broken-down car.
4. The book was filled with notes from class.
5. We walked from room to room, inspecting for damages.



6. Harold was expecting a package in the mail.
7. The clothes still felt damp even though they had been through the dryer twice.
8. The teacher who runs the studio is often praised for his restoration work on old masterpieces.

Part 2- Name the type of verb(s) used in the sentence in the space provided (LV, HV, or V). Note: Use comma ( , ) to separate more than one answer.

1. The cat sounds ready to come back inside.
2. We have not eaten dinner yet.
3. It took four people to move the broken-down car.
4. The book was filled with notes from class.
5. We walked from room to room, inspecting for damages.
6. Harold was expecting a package in the mail.
7. The clothes still felt damp even though they had been through the dryer twice.
8. The teacher who runs the studio is often praised for his restoration work on old masterpieces.

### **Check Your Answers:**<sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 was adapted from “2.1 Sentence Writing” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Sentence Structure, Including Fragments and Run-ons

Now that you know what makes a complete sentence – a subject and a verb – you can use other parts of speech to build on this basic structure. Good writers use a variety of sentence structures to make their work more interesting. This section covers different sentence structures that you can use to make longer, more complex sentences.

### Sentence Patterns

Six basic subject-verb patterns can enhance your writing. A sample sentence is provided for each pattern. As you read each sentence, take note of where each part of the sentence falls. Notice that some sentence patterns use action verbs and others use linking verbs.

## Subject–Verb

**Computers** (subject) *hum* (verb)

## Subject–Linking Verb–Noun

**Computers** (subject) *are* (linking verb) a tool (noun)

## Subject–Linking Verb–Adjective

**Computers** (subject) *are* (linking verb) expensive (adjective)

## Subject–Verb–Adverb

**Computers** (subject) *calculate* (verb) quickly (adverb)

## Subject–Verb–Direct Object

When you write a sentence with a direct object (DO), make sure that the DO receives the action of the verb.

**Sally** (subject) *rides* (verb) a motorcycle (direct object)

## Subject–Verb–Indirect Object–Direct Object

In this sentence structure, an indirect object explains *to whom* or *to what* the action is being done. The indirect object is a noun or pronoun, and it comes before the direct object in a sentence.

**My coworker** (subject) *gave* (verb) me (indirect object) the reports (direct object)

## Exercise 3

Use what you have learned so far to bring variety in your writing. Use the following lines or your own sheet of paper to write six sentences that practice each basic sentence pattern. When you have finished, label each part of the sentence (S, V, LV, N, Adj, Adv, DO, IO).

### Collaboration

Find an article in a newspaper, a magazine, or online that interests you. Bring it to class or post it online. Then, looking at a classmate's article, identify one example of each part of a sentence (S, V, LV, N, Adj, Adv, DO, IO). Please share or post your results.

## Fragments

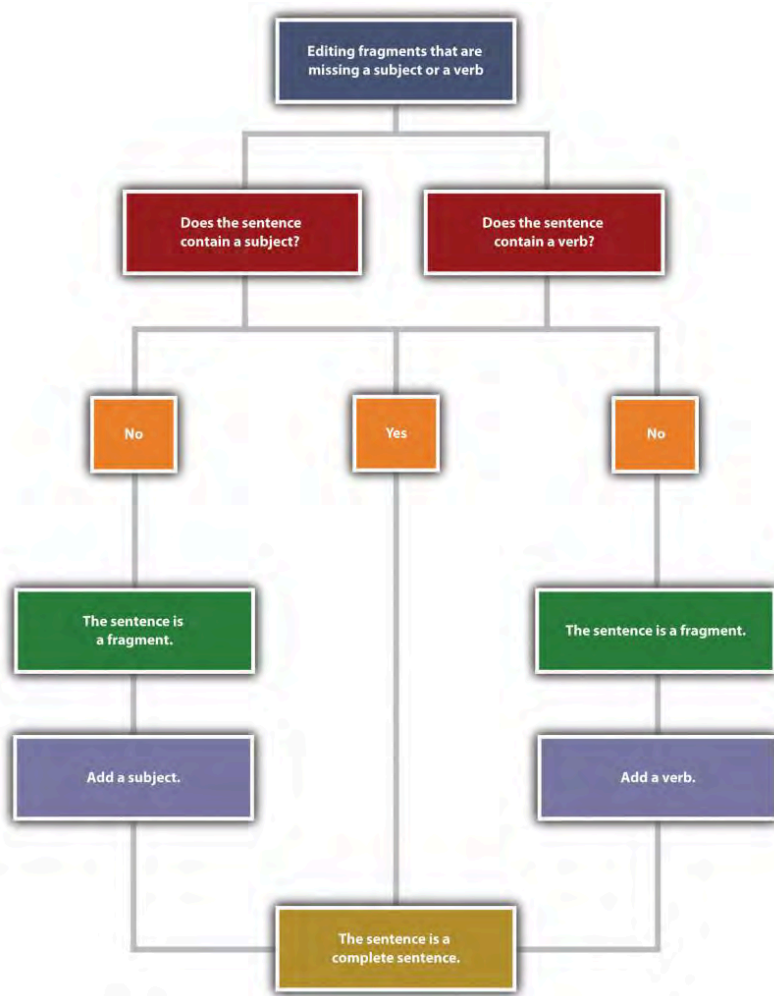
The sentences you have encountered so far have been independent clauses. As you look more closely at your past writing assignments, you may notice that some of your sentences are not complete. A sentence that is missing a subject or a verb is called a fragment. A fragment may include a description or may express part of an idea, but it does not express a complete thought.

**Fragment:** Children helping in the kitchen.

**Complete sentence:** Children helping in the kitchen **often make a mess.**

You can easily fix a fragment by adding the missing subject or verb. In the example, the sentence was missing a verb. Adding *often make a mess* creates an S-V-N sentence structure.

### Figure 1 – Editing Fragments That Are Missing a Subject or a Verb



Expand Figure 1 image

### Text version – Figure 1: Editing Fragments That Are Missing a Subject or a Verb

1. Does the sentence contain a subject AND a verb?
  1. If yes, the sentence is complete.
  2. If no, continue to #2.
2. Does the sentence contain a subject?
  3. If No: the sentence is a fragment & you should add a subject to create a complete sentence before continuing to #3.
  4. If Yes, go to #3
3. Does the sentence contain a verb?
  1. If Yes: the sentence is a complete sentence.

2. If No: The sentence is a fragment & you should add a verb to ensure the sentence is complete. [Return to Figure 1]
- 

See whether you can identify what is missing in the following fragments.

**Fragment:** Told her about the broken vase.

**Complete sentence:** I told her about the broken vase.

**Fragment:** The store down on Main Street.

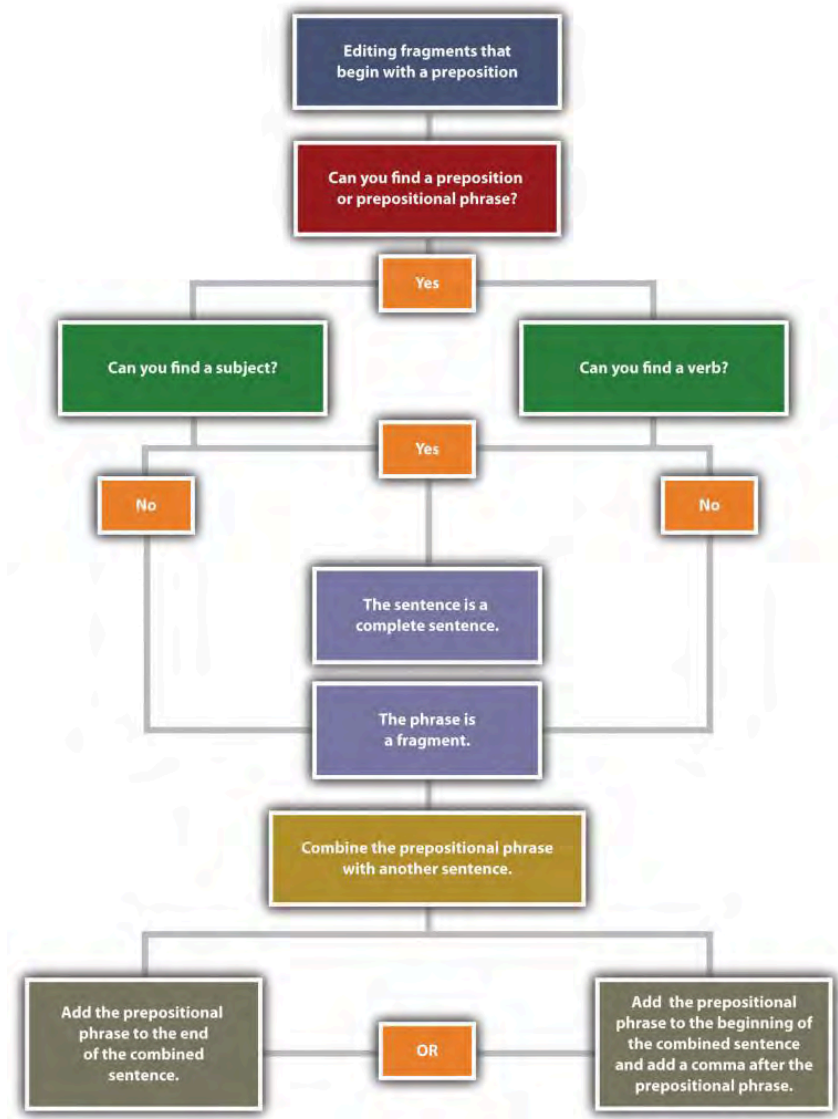
**Complete sentence:** The store down on Main Street *sells music*.

## Common Sentence Errors

Fragments often occur because of some common error, such as starting a sentence with a preposition, a dependent word, an infinitive, or a gerund. If you use the six basic sentence patterns when you write, you should be able to avoid these errors and thus avoid writing fragments.

When you see a preposition, check to see that it is part of a sentence containing a subject and a verb. If it is not connected to a complete sentence, it is a fragment, and you will need to fix this type of fragment by combining it with another sentence. You can add the prepositional phrase to the end of the sentence. If you add it to the beginning of the other sentence, insert a comma after the prepositional phrase.

### Figure 2 – Editing Fragments That Begin with a Preposition



Expand Figure 2 image

**Text version – Figure 2 Editing Fragments That Begin with a Preposition**

1. Can you find a preposition or prepositional phrase?
  - a. If yes, can you find a subject AND a verb?
    - i. If yes, the sentence is a complete sentence.
    - ii. If no, the phrase is a fragment. Continue to #2
  - b. If no, continue to #2.
2. Can you find a subject AND a verb?
  - a. If No: the sentence is a fragment. Combine the prepositional phrase with another sentence.
    - i. Add the prepositional phrase to the end of the combined sentence OR

- ii. Add the prepositional phrase to the beginning of the combined sentence and add a comma after the prepositional phrase.
- b. If yes: The sentence is a complete sentence. [Return to Figure 2

#### Example A

**Incorrect:** After walking over two miles. John remembered his wallet.

**Correct:** After walking over two miles, John remembered his wallet.

**Correct:** John remembered his wallet after walking over two miles.

#### Example B

**Incorrect:** The dog growled at the vacuum cleaner. When it was switched on.

**Correct:** When the vacuum cleaner was switched on, the dog growled.

**Correct:** The dog growled at the vacuum cleaner when it was switched on.

Clauses that start with a dependent word —such as *since*, *because*, *without*, or *unless*—are similar to prepositional phrases. Like prepositional phrases, these clauses can be fragments if they are not connected to an independent clause containing a subject and a verb. To fix the problem, you can add such a fragment to the beginning or end of a sentence. If the fragment is added at the beginning of a sentence, add a comma.

**Incorrect:** Because we lost power. The entire family overslept.

**Correct:** Because we lost power, the entire family overslept.

**Correct:** The entire family overslept because we lost power.

**Incorrect:** He has been seeing a physical therapist. Since his accident.

**Correct:** Since his accident, he has been seeing a physical therapist.

**Correct:** He has been seeing a physical therapist since his accident.

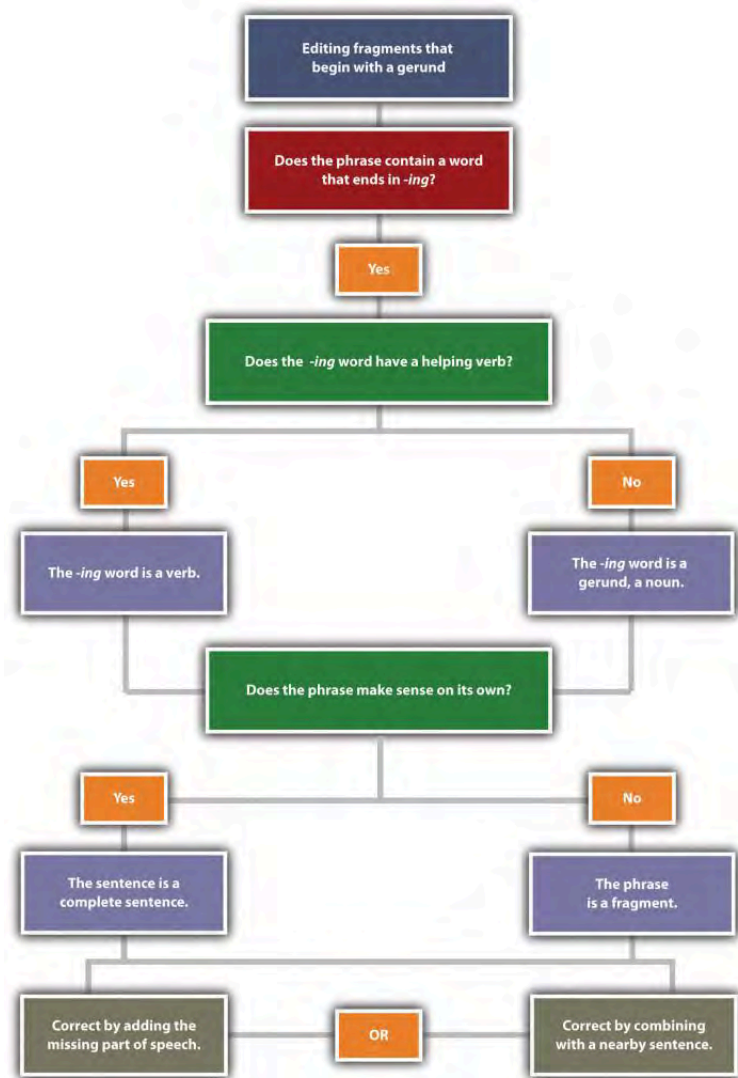
When you encounter a word ending in *-ing* in a sentence, identify whether or not this word is used as a verb in the sentence. You may also look for a helping verb. If the word is not used as a verb or if no helping verb is used with the *-ing* verb form, the verb is being used as a noun. An *-ing* verb form used as a noun is called a gerund.

**Verb:** I *was* (helping verb) *working* (verb) on homework until midnight.

**Noun:** *Working* until midnight makes me tired the next morning.

Once you know whether the *-ing* word is acting as a noun or a verb, look at the rest of the sentence. Does the entire sentence make sense on its own? If not, what you are looking at is a fragment. You will need to either add the parts of speech that are missing or combine the fragment with a nearby sentence.

### Figure 3 – Editing Fragments That Begin with Gerunds



[Expand Figure 3 image](#)



### Text version – Figure 3: Editing Fragments That Begin with Gerunds

1. Does the phrase contain a word that ends in *-ing*?
  1. If yes: Does the *-ing* word have a helping verb?
    2. If Yes, the *-ing* word is a verb. Continue to #2.
    3. If no, the *-ing* word is a gerund, a noun. Continue to #2.
  2. Does the phrase make sense on it's own?
    1. If yes: the sentence is a complete sentence.
    2. If no: the phrase is a fragment. Correct it by:
      1. Adding the missing part of speech *OR*
      2. Combining with a nearby sentence.

**Incorrect:** Taking deep breaths. Saul prepared for his presentation.

**Correct:** Taking deep breaths, Saul prepared for his presentation.

**Correct:** Saul prepared for his presentation. He **was taking** deep breaths.

**Incorrect:** Congratulating the entire team. Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

**Correct:** **She was** congratulating the entire team. Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

**Correct:** Congratulating the entire team, Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Another error in sentence construction is a fragment that begins with an infinitive. An infinitive is a verb paired with the word *to*; for example, *to run*, *to write*, or *to reach*. Although infinitives are verbs, they can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. You can correct a fragment that begins with an infinitive by either combining it with another sentence or adding the parts of speech that are missing.

**Incorrect:** We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes. To reach the one thousand mark.

**Correct:** We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes **to** reach the one thousand mark.

**Correct:** We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes. **We wanted to** reach the one thousand mark.

## Exercise 4

Copy the following sentences onto your own sheet of paper and circle the fragments. Then combine the fragment with the independent clause to create a complete sentence.

1. Working without taking a break. We try to get as much work done as we can in an hour.
2. I needed to bring work home. In order to meet the deadline.
3. Unless the ground thaws before spring break. We won't be planting any tulips this year.
4. Turning the lights off after he was done in the kitchen. Robert tries to conserve energy whenever possible.
5. You'll find what you need if you look. On the shelf next to the potted plant.
6. To find the perfect apartment. Deidre scoured the classifieds each day.

## Run-on Sentences

Just as short, incomplete sentences can be problematic, lengthy sentences can be problematic too. Sentences with two or more independent clauses that have been incorrectly combined are known as run-on sentences . A run-on sentence may be either a fused sentence or a comma splice.

**Fused sentence:** A family of foxes lived under our shed young foxes played all over the yard.

**Comma splice:** We looked outside, the kids were hopping on the trampoline.

When two complete sentences are combined into one without any punctuation, the result is a fused sentence . When two complete sentences are joined by a comma, the result is a comma splice . Both errors can easily be fixed.

## Punctuation

One way to correct run-on sentences is to correct the punctuation. For example, adding a period will correct the run-on by creating two separate sentences.

**Run-on:** There were no seats left, we had to stand in the back.

**Correct:** There were no seats left. we We had to stand in the back.

Using a semicolon between the two complete sentences will also correct the error. A semicolon allows you to keep the two closely related ideas together in one sentence. When you punctuate with a semicolon, make sure that both parts of the sentence are independent clauses. For more information on semicolons, see Section 11.4 “Capitalize Proper Nouns”.

**Run-on:** The accident closed both lanes of traffic we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

**Complete sentence:** The accident closed both lanes of traffic; we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

When you use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses, you may wish to add a transition word to show the connection between the two thoughts. After the semicolon, add the transition word and follow it with a comma. For more information on transition words, see Chapter 3 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”.

**Run-on:** The project was put on hold we didn't have time to slow down, so we kept working.

**Complete sentence:** The project was put on hold; **however,** we didn't have time to slow down, so we kept working.

## Coordinating Conjunctions

You can also fix run-on sentences by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction . A coordinating conjunction acts as a link between two independent clauses.

## Tip

These are the seven coordinating conjunctions that you can use: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*. Use these words appropriately when you want to link the two independent clauses. The acronym *FANBOYS* will help you remember this group of coordinating conjunctions.

**Run-on:** The new printer was installed, no one knew how to use it.

**Complete sentence:** The new printer was installed, **but** no one knew how to use it.

## Dependent Words

Adding dependent words is another way to link independent clauses. Like the coordinating conjunctions, dependent words show a relationship between two independent clauses.

**Run-on:** We took the elevator, the others still got there before us.

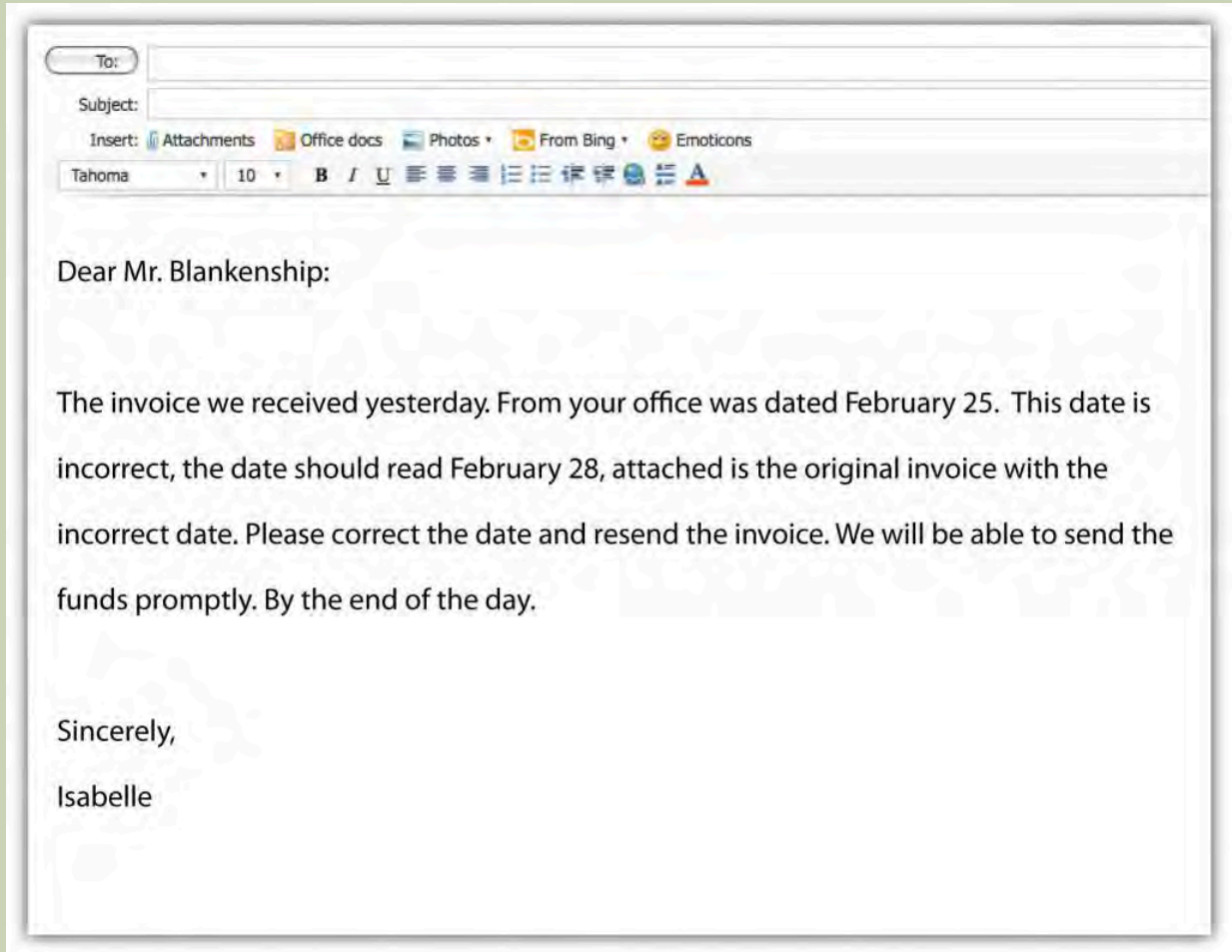
**Complete sentence:** **Although** we took the elevator, the others got there before us.

**Run-on:** Cobwebs covered the furniture, the room hadn't been used in years.

**Complete sentence:** Cobwebs covered the furniture **because** the room hadn't been used in years.

## Writing at Work

Figure 4 – Sample e-mail



A sample e-mail with errors.

Isabelle's e-mail opens with two fragments and two run-on sentences containing comma splices. The e-mail ends with another fragment. What effect would this e-mail have on Mr. Blankenship or other readers? Mr. Blankenship or other readers may not think highly of Isabelle's communication skills or—worse—may not understand the message at all! Communications written in precise, complete sentences are not only more professional but also easier to understand. Before you hit the "send" button, read your e-mail carefully to make sure that the sentences are complete, are not run together, and are correctly punctuated.

## Exercise 5

A reader can get lost or lose interest in material that is too dense and rambling. Use what you have learned about run-on sentences to correct the following passages:

1. The report is due on Wednesday but we're flying back from Miami that morning. I told the project manager that we would be able to get the report to her later that day she suggested that we come back a day early to get the report done and I told her we had meetings until our flight took off. We e-mailed our contact who said that they would check with his boss, she said that the project could afford a delay as long as they wouldn't have to make any edits or changes to the file our new deadline is next Friday.
2. Anna tried getting a reservation at the restaurant, but when she called they said that there was a waiting list so she put our names down on the list when the day of our reservation arrived we only had to wait thirty minutes because a table opened up unexpectedly which was good because we were able to catch a movie after dinner in the time we'd expected to wait to be seated.
3. Without a doubt, my favourite artist is Leonardo da Vinci, not because of his paintings but because of his fascinating designs, models, and sketches, including plans for scuba gear, a flying machine, and a life-size mechanical lion that actually walked and moved its head. His paintings are beautiful too, especially when you see the computer enhanced versions researchers use a variety of methods to discover and enhance the paintings' original colors, the result of which are stunningly vibrant and yet delicate displays of the man's genius.

## Key Takeaways

- A sentence is complete when it contains both a subject and verb. A complete sentence

makes sense on its own.

- Every sentence must have a subject, which usually appears at the beginning of the sentence. A subject may be a noun (a person, place, or thing) or a pronoun.
- A compound subject contains more than one noun.
- A prepositional phrase describes, or modifies, another word in the sentence but cannot be the subject of a sentence.
- A verb is often an action word that indicates what the subject is doing. Verbs may be action verbs, linking verbs, or helping verbs.
- Variety in sentence structure and length improves writing by making it more interesting and more complex.
- Focusing on the six basic sentence patterns will enhance your writing.
- Fragments and run-on sentences are two common errors in sentence construction.
- Fragments can be corrected by adding a missing subject or verb. Fragments that begin with a preposition or a dependent word can be corrected by combining the fragment with another sentence.
- Run-on sentences can be corrected by adding appropriate punctuation or adding a coordinating conjunction.

## Writing Application

Using the six basic sentence structures, write one of the following:

1. A work e-mail to a coworker about a presentation.
  2. A business letter to a potential employer.
  3. A status report about your current project.
  4. A job description for your résumé.
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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from " 2.1 Sentence Writing (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/2-1-sentence-writing/>)" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Adaptations include updates to improve accessibility (alt-tags, long descriptions for flow charts, etc.). Materials created for accessibility updates in this text are licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

### 1. Part 1 -

- |              |           |               |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1. Gym       | 5. Driver | 9. Soundtrack |
| 2. We        | 6. Anita  | 10. His       |
| 3. Student   | 7. People |               |
| 4. Maya, Tia | 8. You    |               |

### Part 2 - 1b, 2a, 3b, 4a, 5a, 6a, 7a

### 2. Part 1 -

- |          |                       |                  |
|----------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Sound | 4. Filled             | 7. Felt, been    |
| 2. Eaten | 5. Walked, Inspecting | 8. Runs, praised |
| 3. Move  | 6. Expecting          |                  |

### Part 2 -

- |          |                |                |
|----------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. LV, V | 4. LV          | 7. LV, HV OR V |
| 2. LV    | 5. LV, HV      | 8. LV, HV OR V |
| 3. V     | 6. LV, HV OR V |                |



## 11.2 - SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

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### Learning Objectives

- Define subject-verb agreement.
- Identify common errors in subject-verb agreement.

In the workplace, you want to present a professional image. Your outfit or suit says something about you when meeting face-to-face, and your writing represents you in your absence. Grammatical mistakes in your writing or even in speaking make a negative impression on coworkers, clients, and potential employers. Subject-verb agreement is one of the most common errors that people make. Having a solid understanding of this concept is critical when making a good impression, and it will help ensure that your ideas are communicated clearly.

### Agreement

Agreement in speech and in writing refers to the proper grammatical match between words and phrases. Parts of sentences must agree, or correspond with other parts, in number, person, case, and gender.

- **Number.** All parts must match in singular or plural forms.
- **Person.** All parts must match in first person (*I*), second person (*you*), or third person (*he, she, it, they*) forms.
- **Case.** All parts must match in subjective (*I, you, he, she, it, they, we*), objective (*me, her, him, them, us*), or possessive (*my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, their, theirs, our, ours*) forms. For

more information on pronoun case agreement, see Section 12.5 “Pronoun Agreement”.

- **Gender.** All parts must match in male or female forms.

Subject-verb agreement describes the proper match between subjects and verbs.

Because subjects and verbs are either singular or plural, the subject of a sentence and the verb of a sentence must agree with each other in number. That is, a singular subject belongs with a singular verb form, and a plural subject belongs with a plural verb form. For more information on subjects and verbs, see Section 11.1 “Sentence Writing”.

**Singular:** The **cat** *jumps* over the fence.

**Plural:** The **cats** *jump* over the fence.

## Regular Verbs

Regular verbs follow a predictable pattern. For example, in the third person singular, regular verbs always end in *-s*. Other forms of regular verbs do not end in *-s*. Study the following regular verb forms in the present tense.

Person	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I live.	We live.
Second Person	You live.	You live.
Third Person	He/She/It lives.	They live.

### Tip

Add an *-es* to the third person singular form of regular verbs that end in *-sh*, *-x*, *-ch*, and *-s*. (I wish/He wishes, I fix/She fixes, I watch/It watches, I kiss/He kisses.)

**Singular:** I *read* every day.

**Plural:** We *read* every day.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the first person singular and the first person plural.

**Singular:** **You** *stretch* before you go to bed.

**Plural:** **You** *stretch* before every game.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the second person singular and the second person plural. In the singular form, the pronoun *you* refers to one person. In the plural form, the pronoun *you* refers to a group of people, such as a team.

**Singular:** My **mother** *walks* to work every morning.

In this sentence, the subject is *mother*. Because the sentence only refers to one mother, the subject is singular. The verb in this sentence must be in the third person singular form.

**Plural:** My **friends** *like* the same music as I do.

In this sentence, the subject is *friends*. Because this subject refers to more than one person, the subject is plural. The verb in this sentence must be in the third person plural form.

## Tip

Many singular subjects can be made plural by adding an -s. Most regular verbs in the present tense end with an -s in the third person singular. This does not make the verbs plural.

**Singular subject, singular verb:** The **cat** *races* across the yard.

**Plural subject, plural verb:** The **cats** *race* across the yard.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

On your own sheet of paper, write the correct verb form for each of the following sentences.

1. I (brush/brushes) my teeth twice a day.
2. You (wear/wears) the same shoes every time we go out.
3. He (kick/kicks) the soccer ball into the goal.
4. She (watch/watches) foreign films.
5. Catherine (hide/hides) behind the door.
6. We (want/wants) to have dinner with you.
7. You (work/works) together to finish the project.
8. They (need/needs) to score another point to win the game.
9. It (eat/eats) four times a day.
10. David (fix/fixes) his own motorcycle.

### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “2.2 Subject-Verb Agreement” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Irregular Verbs

Not all verbs follow a predictable pattern. These verbs are called irregular verbs . Some of the most common irregular verbs are *be*, *have*, and *do*. Learn the forms of these verbs in the present tense to avoid errors in subject-verb agreement.

### Be

Study the different forms of the verb *to be* in the present tense.

Person	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I am.	We are.
Second Person	You are.	You are.
Third Person	He/She/It is.	They are.

## Have

Study the different forms of the verb *to have* in the present tense.

Person	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I have.	We have.
Second Person	You have.	You have.
Third Person	He/She/It has.	They have.

## Do

Study the different forms of the verb *to do* in the present tense.

Person	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I do.	We do.
Second Person	You do.	You do.
Third person	He/She/It does.	They do.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by writing the correct present tense form of be, have, or do. Use your own sheet of paper to complete this exercise.

1. I \_\_\_\_ sure that you will succeed.

2. They \_\_\_\_ front-row tickets to the show.
3. He \_\_\_\_ a great Elvis impersonation.
4. We \_\_\_\_ so excited to meet you in person!
5. She \_\_\_\_ a fever and a sore throat.
6. You \_\_\_\_ not know what you are talking about.
7. You \_\_\_\_ all going to pass this class.
8. She \_\_\_\_ not going to like that.
9. It \_\_\_\_ appear to be the right size.
10. They \_\_\_\_ ready to take this job seriously.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “2.2 Subject-Verb Agreement” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

Errors in subject-verb agreement may occur when

- a sentence contains a compound subject;
- the subject of the sentence is separate from the verb;
- the subject of the sentence is an indefinite pronoun, such as *anyone* or *everyone*;
- the subject of the sentence is a collective noun, such as *team* or *organization*;
- the subject appears after the verb.

Recognizing the sources of common errors in subject-verb agreement will help you avoid these errors in your writing. This section covers the subject-verb agreement errors in more detail.

## Compound Subjects

A compound subject is formed by two or more nouns and the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *or*, or *nor*. A compound subject can be made of singular subjects, plural subjects, or a combination of singular and plural subjects.

Compound subjects combined with *and* take a plural verb form.

**Two singular subjects:** **Alicia** and **Miguel** *ride* their bikes to the beach.

**Two plural subjects:** The **girls** and the **boys** *ride* their bikes to the beach.

**Singular and plural subjects:** **Alicia** and the **boys** *ride* their bikes to the beach.

Compound subjects combined with *or* and *nor* are treated separately. The verb must agree with the subject that is nearest to the verb.

**Two singular subjects:** Neither **Elizabeth** nor **Rianna** *wants* to eat at that restaurant.

**Two plural subjects:** Neither the **kids** nor the **adults** *want* to eat at that restaurant.

**Singular and plural subjects:** Neither **Elizabeth** nor the **kids** *want* to eat at that restaurant.

**Plural and singular subjects:** Neither the **kids** nor **Elizabeth** *wants* to eat at that restaurant.

**Two singular subjects:** Either **you** or **Jason** *takes* the furniture out of the garage.

**Two plural subjects:** Either **you** or **the twins** *take* the furniture out of the garage.

**Singular and plural subjects:** Either **Jason** or the **twins** *take* the furniture out of the garage.

**Plural and singular subjects:** Either the **twins** or **Jason** *takes* the furniture out of the garage.

## Tip

If you can substitute the word *they* for the compound subject, then the sentence takes the third person plural verb form.

## Separation of Subjects and Verbs

As you read or write, you may come across a sentence that contains a phrase or clause that separates the subject from the verb. Often, prepositional phrases or dependent clauses add more information to the sentence and appear between the subject and the verb. However, the subject and the verb must still agree.

If you have trouble finding the subject and verb, cross out or ignore the phrases and clauses that begin with prepositions or dependent words. The subject of a sentence will never be in a prepositional phrase or dependent clause.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a prepositional phrase:

The **students** with the best grades *win* the academic awards.

The **puppy** under the table *is* my favourite.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a dependent clause:

The **car** that I bought *has* power steering and a sunroof.

The **representatives** who are courteous *sell* the most tickets.

## Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to an unspecified person, thing, or number. When an indefinite pronoun serves as the subject of a sentence, you will often use a singular verb form.

However, keep in mind that exceptions arise. Some indefinite pronouns may require a plural verb form. To determine whether to use a singular or plural verb with an indefinite pronoun, consider the noun that the pronoun would refer to. If the noun is plural, then use a plural verb with the indefinite pronoun. View the chart to see a list of common indefinite pronouns and the verb forms they agree with.

Indefinite Pronouns That Always Take a Singular Verb	Indefinite Pronouns That Can Take a Singular or Plural Verb
anybody, anyone, anything	All
each	Any
everybody, everyone, everything	None
much	Some
many	
nobody, no one, nothing	
somebody, someone, something	

**Singular: Everybody** in the kitchen *sings* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *everybody* takes a singular verb form because *everybody* refers to a group performing the same action as a single unit.



**Plural: All** the people in the kitchen *sing* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *all* takes a plural verb form because *all* refers to the plural noun *people*. Because *people* is plural, *all* is plural.

**Singular: All** the cake *is* on the floor.

In this sentence, the indefinite pronoun *all* takes a singular verb form because *all* refers to the singular noun *cake*. Because *cake* is singular, *all* is singular.

## Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and considers those people, places, or things one singular unit. Because collective nouns are counted as one, they are singular and require a singular verb. Some commonly used collective nouns are *group*, *team*, *army*, *flock*, *family*, and *class*.

**Singular:** The **class** *is* going on a field trip.

In this sentence, *class* is a collective noun. Although the class consists of many students, the class is treated as a singular unit and requires a singular verb form.

## The Subject Follows the Verb

You may encounter sentences in which the subject comes after the verb instead of before the verb. In other words, the subject of the sentence may not appear where you expect it to appear. To ensure proper subject-verb agreement, you must correctly identify the subject and the verb.

## Here or There

In sentences that begin with *here* or *there*, the subject follows the verb.

Here *is* my **wallet**!  
 There *are* thirty **dolphins** in the water.

If you have trouble identifying the subject and the verb in sentences that start with *here* or *there*; it may help to reverse the order of the sentence so the subject comes first.

My **wallet** *is* here!  
 Thirty **dolphins** *are* in the water.

## Questions

When you ask questions, a question word (*who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, or *how*) appears first. The verb and then the subject follow.

Who *are* the **people** you are related to?  
 When *am* **I** going to go to the grocery store?

### Tip

If you have trouble finding the subject and the verb in questions, try answering the question being asked.

When *am* I going to the grocery store? **I** *am* going to the grocery store tonight!

## Exercise 3

### Exercise 3 (Text Version)

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following sentences. If there are no errors in

subject-verb agreement, write OK. Copy the corrected sentence or the word OK on your own sheet of notebook paper.

1. My dog and cats chases each other all the time.
2. The books that are in my library is the best I have ever read.
3. Everyone are going to the concert except me.
4. My family are moving to California.
5. Here is the lake I told you about.
6. There is the newspapers I was supposed to deliver.
7. Which room is bigger?
8. When are the movie going to start?
9. My sister and brother cleans up after themselves.
10. Some of the clothes is packed away in the attic.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>3</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 3 adapted from “2.2 Subject-Verb Agreement” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Exercise 4

### Exercise 4 (Text Version)

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following paragraph. Copy the paragraph on a piece of notebook paper and make corrections.

Dear Hiring Manager,

I feels that I am the ideal candidate for the receptionist position at your company. I has three years of experience as a receptionist in a company that is similar to yours. My phone skills and written communication is excellent. These skills, and others that I have learned on the job, helps me understand that every person in a company helps make the business a success. At my current job, the team always say that I am very helpful. Everyone appreciate when I go the extra mile to get the job done right. My current employer and coworkers feels that I am an asset to the team. I is

efficient and organized. Is there any other details about me that you would like to know? If so, please contact me. Here are my résumé. You can reach me by e-mail or phone. I looks forward to speaking with you in person.

Thanks,

Felicia Fellini

**Check Your Answers:** <sup>4</sup>

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## Writing at Work

Figure 1 -Advertisement



Terra Services are dedicated to serving our clients' needs. We settles for nothing less than high quality work, delivered on time. The next time you needs assistance getting your project off the ground, contact Terra Services, where everybody know how important it is that you get the job done right.

**Ad text:** Terra Services are dedicated to serving our clients' needs. We settles for nothing less than high quality work, delivered on time. The next time you needs assistance getting your project off the ground, contact Terra Services, where everybody know how important it is that you get the job done right.

Imagine that you are a prospective client and that you saw this ad online. Would you call Terra Services to handle your next project? Probably not! Mistakes in subject-verb agreement can cost a company business. Paying careful attention to grammatical details ensures professionalism that clients will recognize and respect.

## Key Takeaways

- Parts of sentences must agree in number, person, case, and gender.

- A verb must always agree with its subject in number. A singular subject requires a singular verb; a plural subject requires a plural verb.
- Irregular verbs do not follow a predictable pattern in their singular and plural forms. Common irregular verbs are to be, to have, and to do.
- A compound subject is formed when two or more nouns are joined by the words and, or, or nor.
- In some sentences, the subject and verb may be separated by a phrase or clause, but the verb must still agree with the subject.
- Indefinite pronouns, such as anyone, each, everyone, many, no one, and something, refer to unspecified people or objects. Most indefinite pronouns are singular.
- A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and treats those people, places, or things one singular unit. Collective nouns require singular verbs.
- In sentences that begin with here and there, the subject follows the verb.
- In questions, the subject follows the verb.

## Writing Application

Use your knowledge of subject-verb agreement to write one of the following:

1. An advertisement for a potential company
2. A memo to all employees of a particular company
3. A cover letter describing your qualifications to a potential employer

Be sure to include at least the following:

- One collective noun
  - One irregular verb
  - One question
-

## Attribution & References

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## Notes

1.
  1. brush
  2. wear
  3. kicks
  4. watches
  5. hides
  6. want
  7. work
  8. need
  9. eats
  10. fixes
2.
  1. am
  2. have
  3. does
  4. are
  5. has
  6. do
  7. are
  8. is
  9. does
  10. are
3.
  1. My dog and cats chase each other all the time
  2. The books that are in my library are the best I have ever read
  3. Everyone is going to the concert except me
  4. My family is moving to California
  5. OK
  6. There is the newspapers I suppose to deliver
  7. OK
  8. When is the movie going to start?
  9. My sister and brother clean up after themselves.
  10. Some of the clothes are packed away in the attic
4. Dear Hiring Manager, I ~~feels~~ **feel** that I am the ideal candidate for the receptionist position at your company. I ~~has~~ **have** three years of experience as a receptionist in a company that is similar to yours. My phone skills and written communication ~~is~~ **are** excellent. These skills, and others that I have ~~learned~~ **learnt** on the job, ~~helps~~ **help** me understand that every person in a company helps make the business a success. At my current job, the team always ~~say~~ **says** that I am very helpful. Everyone ~~apprecciate~~ **appreciates** when I go the extra mile to get the job done right. My current employer and coworkers ~~feels~~ **feel** that I am an asset to the team. I ~~is~~ **am** efficient and organized. ~~Is~~ **are** there any other details about me that you would like to know? If so, please contact me. Here ~~are~~ **is** my résumé. You can reach me by e-mail or phone. I ~~looks~~ **look** forward to speaking with you in person. Thanks, Felicia Fellini

## 11.3 - VERB TENSE

---

### Learning Objectives

- Use the correct regular verb tense in basic sentences.
- Use the correct irregular verb tense in basic sentences.

Suppose you must give an oral presentation about what you did last summer. How do you make it clear that you are talking about the past and not about the present or the future? Using the correct verb tense can help you do this.

It is important to use the proper verb tense. Otherwise, your listener might judge you harshly. Mistakes in tense often leave a listener or reader with a negative impression.

### Regular Verbs

Verbs indicate actions or states of being in the past, present, or future using tenses. Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from the present to past tense. For example, to form a past-tense or past-participle verb form, add *-ed* or *-d* to the end of a verb. You can avoid mistakes by understanding this basic pattern.

Verb tense identifies the time of action described in a sentence. Verbs take different forms to indicate different tenses. Verb tenses indicate

- an action or state of being in the present,
- an action or state of being in the past,
- an action or state of being in the future.

Helping verbs, such as *be* and *have*, also work to create verb tenses, such as the future tense.



**Present Tense: Tim** *walks* to the store. (Singular subject)

**Present Tense: Sue** and **Kimmy** *walk* to the store. (Plural subject)

**Past Tense:** Yesterday, **they** *walked* to the store to buy some bread. (Singular subject)

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tenses. Write the corrected sentence on your own sheet of paper.

1. The Dust Bowl (is, was, will be) a name given to a period of very destructive dust storms that occurred in the United States during the 1930s.
2. Historians today (consider, considered, will consider) The Dust Bowl to be one of the worst weather of events in American history.
3. The Dust Bowl mostly (affects, affected, will affect) the states of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico.
4. Dust storms (continue, continued, will continue) to occur in these dry regions, but not to the devastating degree of the 1930s.
5. The dust storms during The Dust Bowl (cause, caused, will cause) irreparable damage to farms and the environment for a period of several years.
6. When early settlers (move, moved, will move) into this area, they (remove, removed, will remove) the natural prairie grasses in order to plant crops and graze their cattle.
7. They did not (realize, realized, will realize) that the grasses kept the soil in place.
8. There (is, was, will be) also a severe drought that (affects, affected, will affect) the region.
9. The worst dust storm (happens, happened, will happen) on April 14, 1935, a day called Black Sunday.
10. The Dust Bowl era finally came to end in 1939 when the rains (arrive, arrived, will arrive).
11. Dust storms (continue, continued, will continue) to affect the region, but hopefully they will not be as destructive as the storms of the 1930s.

### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

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## Irregular Verbs

The past tense of irregular verbs is not formed using the patterns that regular verbs follow. Study Table 1 “Irregular Verbs”, which lists the most common irregular verbs.

### Tip

The best way to learn irregular verbs is to memorize them. With the help of a classmate, create flashcards of irregular verbs and test yourselves until you master them.

Table 1 – Irregular Verbs

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
be	was, were	lose	lost
become	became	make	made
begin	began	mean	meant
blow	blew	meet	met
break	broke	pay	paid
bring	brought	put	put
build	built	quit	quit
burst	burst	read	read
buy	bought	ride	rode
catch	caught	ring	rang
choose	chose	rise	rose
come	came	run	ran
cut	cut	say	said
dive	dove (dived)	see	saw
do	did	seek	sought
draw	drew	sell	sold
drink	drank	send	sent
drive	drove	set	set
eat	ate	shake	shook
fall	fell	shine	shone (shined)
feed	fed	shrink	shrank (shrank)
feel	felt	sing	sang
fight	fought	sit	sat
find	found	sleep	slept
fly	flew	speak	spoke
forget	forgot	spend	spent
forgive	forgave	spring	sprang
freeze	froze	stand	stood
get	got	steal	stole

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
give	gave	strike	struck
go	went	swim	swam
grow	grew	swing	swung
have	had	take	took
hear	heard	teach	taught
hide	hid	tear	tore
hold	held	tell	told
hurt	hurt	think	thought
keep	kept	throw	threw
know	knew	understand	understood
lay	laid	wake	woke
lead	led	wear	wore
leave	left	win	won
let	let	wind	wound

Here we consider using irregular verbs.

**Present Tense:** Lauren *keeps* all her letters.

**Past Tense:** Lauren *kept* all her letters.

**Future Tense:** Lauren *will keep* all her letters.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the irregular verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tense. Copy the corrected sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Marina finally (forgived, forgave, will forgive) her sister for snooping around her room.
2. The house (shook, shook, shakes) as the airplane rumbled overhead.
3. I (bought, bought, buy) several items of clothing at the thrift store on Wednesday.
4. She (put, putted, puts) the lotion in her shopping basket and proceeded to the checkout line.
5. The prized goose (laid, laid, lay) several golden eggs last night.
6. Mr. Batista (taught, taught, taught) the class how to use correct punctuation.
7. I (drink, drank, will drink) several glasses of sparkling cider instead of champagne on New Year's Eve next year.
8. Although Hector (grewed, grew, grows) three inches in one year, we still called him "Little Hector."
9. Yesterday our tour guide (lead, led, will lead) us through the maze of people in Times Square.
10. The rock band (burst, bursted, bursts) onto the music scene with their catchy songs.

**Check Your Answers:** <sup>2</sup>

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## Exercise 3

### Exercise 3 (Text Version)

On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence using the correct form of the verb tense shown below.

1. Throw (past)
2. Paint (simple present)
3. Smile (future)
4. Tell (past)
5. Share (simple present)

**Check Your Answers:** <sup>3</sup>

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## Maintaining Consistent Verb Tense

Consistent verb tense means the same verb tense is used throughout a sentence or a paragraph. As you write and revise, it is important to use the same verb tense consistently and to avoid shifting from one tense to another unless there is a good reason for the tense shift. In the following box, see whether you notice the difference between a sentence with consistent tense and one with inconsistent tense.

**Inconsistent tense:**

The crowd *starts* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line.

**Consistent tense:**

The crowd *started* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line.

**Consistent tense:**

The crowd *starts* cheering as Melina *approaches* the finish line.

### Tip

In some cases, clear communication will call for different tenses. Look at the following example:

When I was a teenager, I *wanted* to be a fire fighter, but not I *am studying* computer science.

If the time frame for each action or state is different, a tense shift is appropriate.

## Exercise 4

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the inconsistent verb tense. Copy the corrected paragraph onto your own sheet of paper.

In the Middle Ages, most people lived in villages and work as agricultural laborers, or peasants. Every village has a “lord,” and the peasants worked on his land. Much of what they produce go to the lord and his family. What little food was leftover goes to support the peasants’ families. In return for their labor, the lord offers them protection. A peasant’s day usually began before sunrise and involves long hours of backbreaking work, which includes plowing the land, planting seeds, and cutting crops for harvesting. The working life of a peasant in the Middle Ages is usually demanding and exhausting.

## Writing at Work

Read the following excerpt from a work e-mail:

I would like to highlight an important concern that comes up after our meeting last week. During the meeting, we agree to conduct a series of interviews over the next several months in which we hired new customer service representatives. Before we do that, however, I would like to review your experiences with the Customer Relationship Management Program. Please suggest a convenient time next week for us to meet so that we can discuss this important matter.

The inconsistent tense in the e-mail will very likely distract the reader from its overall point. Most likely, your coworkers will not correct your verb tenses or call attention to grammatical errors, but it is important to keep in mind that errors such as these do have a subtle negative impact in the workplace.

## Key Takeaways

- Verb tense helps you express when an event takes place.
- Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from present to past tense.
- Irregular verbs do not follow regular, predictable patterns when shifting from present to past tense.
- Using consistent verb tense is a key element to effective writing.

## Writing Application

Tell a family story. You likely have several family stories to choose from, but pick the one that you find most interesting to write about. Use as many details as you can in the telling. As you write and proofread, make sure your all your verbs are correct and the tenses are consistent.

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## Attribution & References

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## Notes

1.
  1. is
  2. consider
  3. affects
  4. will continue
2.
  1. forgave,
  2. shook,
  3. bought,
  4. put,
3. Present: I am throwing the baseball to Sara Past: I threw the baseball to Sara Future: I will throw the baseball to Sara

5. caused

6. removed

7. realize

8. was

9. affected

10. happened

11. arrived

12. continue

5. laid,

6. taught,

7. will drink,

8. grew,

9. led,

10. bursts

## 11.4 - CAPITALIZATION

---

### Learning Objectives

- Learn the basic rules of capitalization.
- Identify common capitalization errors.

Text messages, casual e-mails, and instant messages often ignore the rules of capitalization. In fact, it can seem unnecessary to capitalize in these contexts. In other, more formal forms of communication, however, knowing the basic rules of capitalization and using capitalization correctly gives the reader the impression that you choose your words carefully and care about the ideas you are conveying.

### Capitalize the First Word of a Sentence

**Incorrect:** the museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

**Correct:** The museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

**Incorrect:** cooking can be therapeutic.

**Correct:** Cooking can be therapeutic.

### Capitalize Proper Nouns

Proper nouns—the names of specific people, places, objects, streets, buildings, events, or titles of individuals—are always capitalized.

**Incorrect:** He grew up in edmonton, alberta.

**Correct:** He grew up in **E**dmonton, **A**lberta.

**Incorrect:** The skydome in toronto has a new name.

**Correct:** The **S**kydome in **T**oronto has a new name.

### Tip

Always capitalize nationalities, races, languages, and religions. For example, Canadian, African American, Hispanic, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on.

Do not capitalize nouns for people, places, things, streets, buildings, events, and titles when the noun is used in general or common way. See the following chart for the difference between proper nouns and common nouns.

Common Noun	Proper Noun
museum	The Art Gallery of Ontario
theater	Royal Alexandra Theater
country	Malaysia
uncle	Uncle Javier
doctor	Dr. Jackson
book	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
college	Georgian College
war	World War I
historical event	The Renaissance

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Classify the following words as Common noun or Proper Noun: Man, Soccer, Australia, Peter, Atlantic Ocean, Fish, Country

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “2.4 Capitalization” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Capitalize Days of the Week, Months of the Year, and Holidays

**Incorrect:** On **w**ednesday, I will be traveling to Halifax for a music festival.

**Correct:** On **W**ednesday, I will be traveling to Halifax for a music festival.

**Incorrect:** **c**anada **d**ay is my favourite holiday.

**Correct:** **C**anada **D**ay is my favourite holiday.

## Capitalize Titles

**Incorrect:** The play, **c**reeps, by David Freeman is one of my favourites.

**Correct:** The play, **C**reeps, by David Freeman is one of my favourites.

**Incorrect:** The **p**rime minister of **c**anada will be speaking at my university.

**Correct:** The **P**rime Minister of the **C**anada will be speaking at my university.

### Tip

Computer-related words such as “Internet” and “World Wide Web” are usually capitalized; however, “e-mail” and “online” are never capitalized.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Edit the following sentences by correcting the capitalization of the titles or names.

The prince of england enjoys playing polo.

“Ode to a nightingale” is a sad poem.

My sister loves to read magazines such as maclean’s.

The edible woman is an excellent novel written by Margaret Atwood.

My physician, dr. patel, always makes me feel comfortable in her office.

### Check Your Answers:<sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** is adapted from “2.4 Capitalization” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Exercise 3

### Exercise 3 (Text Version)

Edit the following paragraphs by correcting the capitalization.

david grann’s the lost City of Z mimics the snake-like winding of the amazon River. The three distinct Stories that are introduced are like twists in the River. First, the Author describes his own journey to the amazon in the present day, which is contrasted by an account of percy fawcett’s voyage in 1925 and a depiction of James Lynch’s expedition in 1996. Where does the river lead these explorers? the answer is one that both the Author and the reader are hungry to discover.

The first lines of the preface pull the reader in immediately because we know the author, david grann, is lost in the amazon. It is a compelling beginning not only because it’s thrilling but also

because this is a true account of grann’s experience. grann has dropped the reader smack in the middle of his conflict by admitting the recklessness of his decision to come to this place. the suspense is further perpetuated by his unnerving observation that he always considered himself A Neutral Witness, never getting personally involved in his stories, a notion that is swiftly contradicted in the opening pages, as the reader can clearly perceive that he is in a dire predicament—and frighteningly involved.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>3</sup>

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## Writing at Work

Did you know that, if you use all capital letters to convey a message, the capital letters come across like shouting? In addition, all capital letters are actually more difficult to read and may annoy the reader. To avoid “shouting” at or annoying your reader, follow the rules of capitalization and find other ways to emphasize your point.

## Key Takeaways

- Learning and applying the basic rules of capitalization is a fundamental aspect of good writing.
- Identifying and correcting errors in capitalization is an important writing skill.

## Writing Application

Write a one-page biography. Make sure to identify people, places, and dates and use capitalization correctly.

---

## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “2.4 Capitalization (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/2-4-capitalization/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

1. Common Noun - Man, Fish, Country Proper Noun - Peter, Atlantic Ocean, Australia, Soccer
2. The Prince of England enjoys playing polo.
3. David Grann's *The lost city of Z* mimics the snake-like winding of the Amazon river. The three distinct stories that are introduced are like twists in the river. First, the author describes his own journey to the Amazon in the present day, which is contrasted by an account of Percy Fawcett's voyage in 1925 and a depiction of James Lynch's expedition in 1996. Where does the river lead these explorers? the answer is one that both the author and the reader are hungry to discover. The first lines of the preface pull the reader in immediately because we know the author, David Grann, is lost in the Amazon. It is a compelling beginning not only because it's thrilling but also because this is a true account of Grann's experience. Grann has dropped the reader smack in the middle of his conflict by admitting the recklessness of his decision to come to this place. the suspense is further perpetuated by his unnerving observation that he always considered himself a neutral witness, never getting personally involved in his stories, a notion that is swiftly contradicted in the opening pages, as the reader can clearly perceive that he is in a dire predicament—and frighteningly involved.

# 11.5 - PRONOUNS

---

## Learning Objectives

- Identify pronouns and their antecedents.
- Use pronouns and their antecedents correctly.

If there were no pronouns, all types of writing would be quite tedious to read. We would soon be frustrated by reading sentences like *Bob said that Bob was tired* or *Christina told the class that Christina received an A*. Pronouns help a writer avoid constant repetition. Knowing just how pronouns work is an important aspect of clear and concise writing.

## Pronoun Agreement

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of (or refers back to) a noun or another pronoun. The word or words a pronoun refers to is called the **antecedent** of the pronoun.

1. *Lani* complained that *she* was exhausted.

- *She* refers to *Lani*.
- *Lani* is the antecedent of *she*.

2. The potted plant drooped because *it* was overwatered.

- *It* refers to the potted plant
- *The potted plant* is the antecedent of *it*.

3. *Crina and Rosalie* have been best friends ever since *they* were freshman in high school.



- *They* refers to *Crina and Rosalie*.
- *Crina and Rosalie* is the antecedent of *they*.

Pronoun agreement errors occur when the pronoun and the antecedent do not match or agree with each other. There are several types of pronoun agreement.

## Agreement in Number

If the pronoun takes the place of or refers to a singular noun, the pronoun must also be singular.

**Incorrect:** When a *dog* (sing.) feels threatened, *they* (plur.) might bite.

**Correct:** When a *dog* (sing.) feels threatened, *it* (sing.) might bite.

**Correct:** When *dogs* (plur.) feels threatened, *they* (sing.) might bite.

## Agreement in Person

Person	Singular Pronouns			Plural Pronouns		
First Person	I	me	my (mine)	we	us	our (ours)
Second Person	you	you	your (yours)	you	you	your (your)
Third Person	he, she, it, they	him, her, it, them	his, her, its, theirs	they	them	their (theirs)

If you use a consistent person, your reader is less likely to be confused.

**Incorrect:** When a *satellite* (3rd person singular) stops working, *they* (3rd person plural) become space junk.

**Correct:** When a *satellite* (3rd person singular) stops working, *it* (3rd person singular) becomes space junk.

**Correct:** When *satellites* (3rd person plural) stop working, *they* (3rd person plural) become space junk.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Edit the following paragraph by correcting pronoun agreement errors in number and person.

Over spring break I visited my older cousin, Diana, and they took me to a butterfly exhibit at a museum. Diana and I have been close ever since she was young. Our mothers are twin sisters, and she is inseparable! Diana knows how much I love butterflies, so it was their special present to me. I have a soft spot for caterpillars too. I love them because something about the way it transforms is so interesting to me. One summer my grandmother gave me a butterfly growing kit, and you got to see the entire life cycle of five Painted Lady butterflies. I even got to set it free. So when my cousin said they wanted to take me to the butterfly exhibit, I was really excited!

### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “2.5 Pronouns” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Inclusive Language & The Singular “They”

A **pronoun** is a word that stands in for a **noun**—it needs to match that noun in some important ways. This rule leads to the following sorts of examples:

CORRECT: The **box** is heavy, so **it** will break the table.

- “It” agrees with “box” in that it is singular in number—there is ONE box—and it stands in for things, like boxes but not people.

CORRECT: **Students** must bring **their** books to class.

- “Their” agrees with “students” in that there is more than one student and they/their/them stands in for people.

CORRECT: **Thomas** doesn’t like to read; **he** prefers to play cricket.

- “He” agrees with “Thomas” in that it is singular in number and gender. Thomas is traditionally a male name, and he is a pronoun for male people.

In traditional grammar lessons, the rule is that pronouns must match their antecedents; however, the singular “they” is a generic third-person singular pronoun in English, which is now widely accepted and endorsed. Using “they” is inclusive and prevents writers from making assumptions about genders.

You might see or hear the following:

CORRECT: **Each writer** must bring to the act of writing poetry their wit and imagination.

CORRECT: When **a student** writes a successful essay, the instructor will ask **them** to submit this piece of work for the annual writing award.

CORRECT: **A scientist** can get into trouble by being too sure of what **they** can do alone.

CORRECT: My friend **Blake** takes **their** schoolwork very seriously.

Learn more about the Singular “They” from the APA Style Guide: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/grammar/singular-they>

In all of these cases, the pronoun “they” (or variations on it like “their” and “them”) refers back to a person (singular) whose gender is unknown and/or to a person who identifies as non-binary.

## Tip

An easy way to make most English sentences both clear and gender-inclusive is **to revise singular nouns to be plural**—that way, one can use “they/their”: a pronoun that is not only plural but also doesn’t indicate gender.

CORRECT: **All writers** must bring to the act of writing poetry **their** wit and imagination.

CORRECT: When **students** write successful essays, the instructor will ask **them** to submit **their** work for the annual writing award.

CORRECT: **Scientists** can get into trouble by being too sure of what **they** can do alone.

## Collective Nouns

Collective nouns suggest more than one person but are usually considered singular. Look over the following examples of collective nouns.

---

### Common Collective Nouns

audience	faculty	public
band	family	school
class	government	society
committee	group	team
company	jury	tribe

---

### Collective noun agreement

**Incorrect:** Lara's *company* (sing.) will have *their* (plur.) annual picnic next week.

**Correct:** Lara's *company* (sing.) will have *its* (sing.) annual picnic next week.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct pronoun. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper. Then circle the noun the pronoun replaces.

1. In the current economy, nobody wants to waste \_\_\_\_\_ money on frivolous things.
2. If anybody chooses to go to medical school, \_\_\_\_\_ must be prepared to work long hours.
3. The plumbing crew did \_\_\_\_\_ best to repair the broken pipes before the next ice storm.
4. If someone is rude to you, try giving \_\_\_\_\_ a smile in return.
5. My family has \_\_\_\_\_ faults, but I still love them no matter what.
6. The school of education plans to train \_\_\_\_\_ students to be literacy tutors.
7. The commencement speaker said that each student has a responsibility toward \_\_\_\_\_.
8. My mother's singing group has \_\_\_\_\_ rehearsals on Thursday evenings.

9. No one should suffer \_\_\_\_\_ pains alone.  
 10. I thought the flock of birds lost \_\_\_\_\_ way in the storm.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>2</sup>

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## Subject and Object Pronouns

Subject pronouns function as subjects in a sentence. Object pronouns function as the object of a verb or of a preposition.

Singular Pronouns		Plural Pronouns	
Subject	Object	Subject	Object
I	me	we	us
you	you	you	you
he, she, they, it	him, her, them, it	they	them

The following sentences show pronouns as subjects:

1. *She* loves the Blue Ridge Mountains in the fall.
2. Every summer, *they* picked up litter from national parks.

The following sentences show pronouns as objects:

1. Marie leaned over and kissed *him*.
2. Jane moved *it* to the corner.

### Tip

Note that a pronoun can also be the object of a preposition.

Near them, the children played.

My mother stood between us.

The pronouns *us* and *them* are objects of the prepositions *near* and *between*. They answer the questions *near whom?* And *between whom?*

Compound subject pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the subject of the sentence.

The following sentences show pronouns with compound subjects:

**Incorrect:** *Me and Harriet* visited the Rocky Mountains last summer.

**Correct:** *Harriet and I* visited the Rocky Mountains last summer.

**Correct:** Jenna accompanied *Harriet and me* on our trip.

## Tip

Note that object pronouns are never used in the subject position. One way to remember this rule is to remove the other subject in a compound subject, leave only the pronoun, and see whether the sentence makes sense. For example, *Me visited the Rocky Mountains last summer* sounds immediately incorrect.

Compound object pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the object of the sentence.

**Incorrect:** I have a good feeling about *Janice and I*.

**Correct:** I have a good feeling about *Janice and me*.

## Tip

It is correct to write Janice and me, as opposed to me and Janice. Just remember it is more polite to refer to yourself last.

## Writing at Work

In casual conversation, people sometimes mix up subject and object pronouns. For instance, you might say, “Me and Donnie went to a movie last night.” However, when you are writing or speaking at work or in any other formal situation, you need to remember the distinctions between subject and object pronouns and be able to correct yourself. These subtle grammar corrections will enhance your professional image and reputation.

## Exercise 3

### Exercise 3 (Text Version)

Revise the following sentences in which the subject and object pronouns are used incorrectly. Copy the revised sentence onto your own sheet of paper. Write a C for each sentence that is correct.

1. Meera and me enjoy doing yoga together on Sundays.
2. She and him have decided to sell their house.
3. Between you and I, I do not think Jeffrey will win the election.
4. Us and our friends have game night the first Thursday of every month.
5. They and I met while on vacation in Mexico.
6. Napping on the beach never gets boring for Alice and I.
7. New Year’s Eve is not a good time for she and I to have a serious talk.

8. You exercise much more often than me.
9. I am going to the comedy club with Yolanda and she.
10. The cooking instructor taught her and me a lot.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>3</sup>

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## Who versus Whom

*Who* or *whoever* is always the subject of a verb. Use *who* or *whoever* when the pronoun performs the action indicated by the verb.

*Who* won the marathon last Tuesday?

I wonder *who* came up with that terrible idea!

On the other hand, *whom* and *whomever* serve as objects. They are used when the pronoun does *not* perform an action. Use *whom* or *whomever* when the pronoun is the direct object of a verb or the object of a preposition.

*Whom* did Frank marry the third time? (direct object of verb)

From *whom* did you buy that old record player? (object of preposition)

### Tip

If you are having trouble deciding when to use *who* and *whom*, try this trick. Take the following sentence:

*Who/Whom* do I consider my best friend?



Reorder the sentence in your head, using either *he* or *him* in place of *who* or *whom*.

I consider *him* my best friend.

I consider *he* my best friend.

Which sentence sounds better? The first one, of course. So the trick is, if you can use *him*, you should use *whom*.

## Exercise 4

### Exercise 4 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by adding *who* or *whom*. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ hit the home run?
2. I remember \_\_\_\_\_ won the Academy Award for Best Actor last year.
3. To \_\_\_\_\_ is the letter addressed?
4. I have no idea \_\_\_\_\_ left the iron on, but I am going to find out.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ are you going to recommend for the internship?
6. With \_\_\_\_\_ are you going to Hawaii?
7. No one knew \_\_\_\_\_ the famous actor was.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ in the office knows how to fix the copy machine?
9. From \_\_\_\_\_ did you get the concert tickets?
10. No one knew \_\_\_\_\_ ate the cake mom was saving.

### Check Your Answers: <sup>4</sup>

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## Key Takeaways

- Pronouns and their antecedents need to agree in number and person.
- The Singular “They” is widely accepted.
- Collective nouns are usually singular.
- Pronouns can function as subjects or objects.
- Subject pronouns are never used as objects, and object pronouns are never used as subjects.
- Who serves as a subject of a verb.
- Whom serves as an object of a sentence or the object of a preposition.

## Writing Application

Write about what makes an ideal marriage or long-term relationship. Provide specific details to back up your assertions. After you have written a few paragraphs, go back and proofread your paper for correct pronoun usage.

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## Attribution & References

- Inclusive Language & The Singular “They” is from “5.6 Inclusive Grammar “Rules”” (<https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/whywriteguide/chapter/5-6-inclusive-grammar-rules/>) In *Why Write? A Guide for Students in Canada* by Academic Writing Program, University of Victoria is licensed under CC BY 4.0.
- Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “2.5 Pronouns” (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/2-5-pronouns/>) In *Writing for*

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## Notes

1. Over spring break I visited my older cousin, Diana, and *she* took me to a butterfly exhibit at a museum. Diana and I have been close ever since she was young. Our mothers are twin sisters, and *they are* inseparable! Diana knows how much I love butterflies, so it was *her* special present to me. I have a soft spot for caterpillars too. I love them because something about the way it transforms is so interesting to me. One summer my grandmother gave me a butterfly growing kit, and you got to see the entire life cycle of five Painted Lady butterflies. I even got to set it free. So when my cousin said *she* wanted to take me to the butterfly exhibit, I was really excited!
2.
 

1. their	5. its	9. their
2. they	6. their	10. its
3. their	7. themselves	
4. them	8. their	
3.
 

1. Incorrect	5. Correct	9. Incorrect
2. Correct	6. Incorrect	10. Incorrect
3. Correct	7. Incorrect	
4. Correct	8. Correct	
4.
 

1. Who	5. Who	9. whom
2. who	6. whom	10. who
3. whom	7. who	
4. who	8. Whom	

# 11.6 - ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

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## Learning Objectives

- Identify adjectives and adverbs.
- Use adjectives and adverbs correctly.

Adjectives and adverbs are descriptive words that bring your writing to life.

## Adjectives and Adverbs

An adjective is a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. It often answers questions such as *which one*, *what kind*, or *how many*?

1. The *green* sweater belongs to Iris.
2. She looks *beautiful*.

- In sentence 1, the adjective *green* describes the noun *sweater*.
- In sentence 2, the adjective *beautiful* describes the pronoun *she*.

An adverb is a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs frequently end in *-ly*. They answer questions such as *how*, *to what extent*, *why*, *when*, and *where*.

3. Bertrand sings *horribly*.
4. My sociology instructor is *extremely* wise.
5. He threw the ball *very* accurately.

- In sentence 3, *horribly* describes the verb *sings*. How does Bertrand sing? He sings *horribly*.

- In sentence 4, *extremely* describes the adjective *wise*. How *wise* is the instructor? *Extremely wise*.
- In sentence 5, *very* describes the adverb *accurately*. How *accurately* did he throw the ball? *Very accurately*.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Identify if the bolded term is an adjective or adverb (Adj, Adv).

1. Frederick \*\* choked on the piece of chicken when he saw Margaret walk through the door.
2. His **curious** eyes looked at everyone and everything as if they were specimens in a biology lab.
3. Despite her pessimistic views on life, Lauren believes that most people have **kind** hearts.
4. Although Stefan took the criticism **poorly**, he remained calm.
5. The child developed a **vibrant** imagination because he read a lot of books.
6. Madeleine spoke **softly** while she was visiting her grandmother in the hospital.
7. Akash's most **prized** possession was his father's bass guitar from the 1970s.
8. My definition of a \*\* afternoon is walking to the park on a beautiful day, spreading out my blanket, and losing myself in a good book.
9. She **secretly** eyed her new coworker and wondered if he was single.
10. At the party, Denise **quickly** devoured two pieces of pepperoni pizza and a several slices of ripe watermelon.

### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from "2.6 Adjectives and Adverbs" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Comparative versus Superlative

Comparative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare two people or things.

1. Jorge is *thin*.
2. Steven is *thinner* than Jorge.

- Sentence 1 describes Jorge with the adjective *thin*.
- Sentence 2 compares Jorge to Steven, stating that Steven is *thinner*. So *thinner* is the comparative form of *thin*.

Form comparatives in one of the following two ways:

1. If the adjective or adverb is a one syllable word, add *-er* to it to form the comparative. For example, *big*, *fast*, and *short* would become *bigger*, *faster*, and *shorter* in the comparative form.
2. If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word *more* in front of it to form the comparative. For example, *happily*, *comfortable*, and *jealous* would become *more happily*, *more comfortable*, and *more jealous* in the comparative.

Superlative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare more than two people or two things.

1. Jackie is the *loudest* cheerleader on the squad.
  2. Kenyatta was voted the *most confident* student by her graduating class.
- Sentence 1 shows that Jackie is not just *louder* than one other person, but she is the *loudest* of all the cheerleaders on the squad.
  - Sentence 2 shows that Kenyatta was voted the *most confident* student of all the students in her class.

Form superlatives in one of the following two ways:

1. If the adjective or adverb is a one-syllable word, add *-est* to form the superlative. For example, *big*, *fast*, and *short* would become *biggest*, *fastest*, and *shortest* in the superlative form.
2. If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word *most* in front of it. For example, *happily*, *comfortable*, and *jealous* would become *most happily*, *most comfortable*, and *most jealous* in the superlative form.

### Tip

Remember the following exception: If the word has two syllables and ends in *-y*, change the *-y* to an *-i*

and add -est. For example, happy would change to happiest in the superlative form; healthy would change to healthiest.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the errors in comparative and superlative adjectives.

Our argument started on the most sunny afternoon that I have ever experienced. Max and I were sitting on my front stoop when I started it. I told him that my dog, Jacko, was more smart than his dog, Merlin. I could not help myself. Merlin never came when he was called, and he chased his tail and barked at rocks. I told Max that Merlin was the most dumbest dog on the block. I guess I was angrier about a bad grade that I received, so I decided to pick on poor little Merlin. Even though Max insulted Jacko too, I felt I had been more mean. The next day I apologized to Max and brought Merlin some of Jacko's treats. When Merlin placed his paw on my knee and licked my hand, I was the most sorry person on the block.

### Check Your Answers:<sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “2.6 Adjectives and Adverbs” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Irregular Words: *Good, Well, Bad, and Badly*

*Good, well, bad, and badly* are often used incorrectly. Study the following chart to learn the correct usage of these words and their comparative and superlative forms.

		Comparative	Superlative
Adjective	good	better	best
Adverb	well	better	best
Adjective	bad	worse	worst
Adverb	badly	worse	worst

## Good versus Well

*Good* is always an adjective—that is, a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. The second sentence is correct because *well* is an adverb that tells how something is done.

**Incorrect:** Cecilia felt that she had never done so *good* on a test.

**Correct:** Cecilia felt that she had never done so *well* on a test.

*Well* is always an adverb that describes a verb, adverb, or adjective. The second sentence is correct because *good* is an adjective that describes the noun *score*.

**Incorrect:** Cecilia's team received a *well* score.

**Correct:** Cecilia's team received a *good* score.

## Bad versus Badly

*Bad* is always an adjective. The second sentence is correct because *badly* is an adverb that tells how the speaker did on the test.

**Incorrect:** I did *bad* on my accounting test because I didn't study.

**Correct:** I did *badly* on my accounting test because I didn't study.

*Badly* is always an adverb. The second sentence is correct because *bad* is an adjective that describes the noun *thunderstorm*.

**Incorrect:** The coming thunderstorm looked *badly*.

**Correct:** The coming thunderstorm looked *bad*.



## Better and Worse

The following are examples of the use of *better* and *worse*:

Tyra likes sprinting *better* than long distance running.

The traffic is *worse* in Chicago than in Atlanta.

## Best and Worst

The following are examples of the use of *best* and *worst*:

Tyra sprints *best* of all the other competitors.

Peter finished *worst* of all the runners in the race.

### Tip

Remember better and worse compare two persons or things. Best and worst compare three or more persons or things.

## Exercise 3

### Exercise 3 (Text Version)

Write good, well, bad, or badly to complete each sentence. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Donna always felt \_\_\_\_\_ if she did not see the sun in the morning.

2. The school board president gave a \_\_\_\_\_ speech for once.
3. Although my dog, Comet, is mischievous, he always behaves \_\_\_\_\_ at the dog park.
4. I thought my back injury was \_\_\_\_\_ at first, but it turned out to be minor.
5. Steve was shaking \_\_\_\_\_ from the extreme cold.
6. Apple crisp is a very \_\_\_\_\_ dessert that can be made using whole grains instead of white flour.
7. The meeting with my son's math teacher went very \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Juan has a \_\_\_\_\_ appetite, especially when it comes to dessert.
9. Magritte thought the guests had a \_\_\_\_\_ time at the party because most people left early.
10. She \_\_\_\_\_ wanted to win the writing contest prize, which included a trip to New York.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>3</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 3 is adapted from “2.6 Adjectives and Adverbs” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Exercise 4

### Exercise 4 (Text Version)

Write the correct comparative or superlative form of the word in parentheses. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. This research paper is \_\_\_\_\_ (good) than my last one.
2. Tanaya likes country music \_\_\_\_\_ (well) of all.
3. My motorcycle rides \_\_\_\_\_ (bad) than it did last summer.
4. That is the \_\_\_\_\_ (bad) joke my father ever told.
5. The hockey team played \_\_\_\_\_ (badly) than it did last season.
6. Tracey plays guitar \_\_\_\_\_ (well) than she plays the piano.
7. It will go down as one of the \_\_\_\_\_ (bad) movies I have ever seen.
8. The deforestation in the Amazon is \_\_\_\_\_ (bad) than it was last year.
9. Movie ticket sales are \_\_\_\_\_ (good) this year than last.

10. My husband says mystery novels are the \_\_\_\_\_ (good) types of books.

**Check Your Answers:** <sup>4</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 4 is adapted from “2.6 Adjectives and Adverbs” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Writing at Work

The irregular words *good*, *well*, *bad*, and *badly* are often misused along with their comparative and superlative forms *better*, *best*, *worse*, and *worst*. You may not hear the difference between *worse* and *worst*, and therefore type it incorrectly. In a formal or business-like tone, use each of these words to write eight separate sentences. Assume these sentences will be seen and judged by your current or future employer.

## Key Takeaways

- Adjectives describe a noun or a pronoun.
  - Adverbs describe a verb, adjective, or another adverb.
  - Most adverbs are formed by adding -ly to an adjective.
  - Comparative adjectives and adverbs compare two persons or things.
  - Superlative adjectives or adverbs compare more than two persons or things.
  - The adjectives *good* and *bad* and the adverbs *well* and *badly* are unique in their comparative and superlative forms and require special attention.
-

## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “2.6 Adjectives and Adverbs (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/2-6-adjectives-and-adverbs/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

### Notes

1.
  1. adverb
  2. adjective
  3. adjective
  4. adverb
  5. adjective
  6. adverb
  7. adjective
  8. adjective
  9. adverb
  10. adverb
  
2. Our argument started on the ~~most sunny~~ **sunniest** afternoon that I have ever experienced. Max and I were sitting on my front stoop when I started it. I told him that my dog, Jacko, was ~~more smart~~ **smarter** than his dog, Merlin. I could not help myself. Merlin never came when he was called, and he chased his tail and barked at rocks. I told Max that Merlin was the ~~most dumbest~~ **dumbest** dog on the block. I guess I was ~~angrier~~ **more angry** about a bad grade that I received, so I decided to pick on poor little Merlin. Even though Max insulted Jacko too, I felt I had been more mean. The next day I apologized to Max and brought Merlin some of Jacko’s treats. When Merlin placed his paw on my knee and licked my hand, I was the ~~most sorry~~ **sorriest** person on the block.
  
3.
  1. bad
  2. good
  3. well
  4. bad
  5. badly
  6. good
  7. well
  8. good
  9. bad
  10. badly
  
4.
  1. better
  2. best
  3. worst
  4. worst
  5. worse
  6. better
  7. worst
  8. worse
  9. better
  10. best

# 11.7 - MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIERS

---

## Learning Objectives

- Identify modifiers.
- Learn how to correct misplaced and dangling modifiers.

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that clarifies or describes another word, phrase, or clause. Sometimes writers use modifiers incorrectly, leading to strange and unintentionally humorous sentences. The two common types of modifier errors are called misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers. If either of these errors occurs, readers can no longer read smoothly. Instead, they become stumped trying to figure out *what* the writer meant to say. A writer's goal must always be to communicate clearly and to avoid distracting the reader with strange sentences or awkward sentence constructions. The good news is that these errors can be easily overcome.

## Misplaced Modifiers

A misplaced modifier is a modifier that is placed too far from the word or words it modifies. Misplaced modifiers make the sentence awkward and sometimes unintentionally humorous.

**Incorrect:** She wore a bicycle helmet on her head *that was too large*.

**Correct:** She wore a bicycle helmet *that was too large* on her head.

- Notice in the incorrect sentence it sounds as if her head was too large! Of course, the writer is referring to the helmet, not to the person's head. The corrected version of the sentence clarifies the writer's meaning.

Look at the following two examples:

**Incorrect:** They bought a kitten for my brother *they call Shadow*.

**Correct:** They bought a kitten *they call Shadow* for my brother.

- In the incorrect sentence, it seems that the brother's name is *Shadow*. That's because the modifier is too far from the word it modifies, which is *kitten*.

**Incorrect:** The patient was referred to the physician *with stomach pains*.

**Correct:** The patient *with stomach pains* was referred to the physician.

- The incorrect sentence reads as if it is the physician who has stomach pains! What the writer means is that the patient has stomach pains.

## Tip

Simple modifiers like only, almost, just, nearly, and barely often get used incorrectly because writers often stick them in the wrong place.

Confusing: Tyler almost found fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

Repaired: Tyler found almost fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

- How do you almost find something? Either you find it or you do not. The repaired sentence is much clearer.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences to correct the misplaced modifiers.

1. The young lady was walking the dog on the telephone.
2. I heard that there was a robbery on the evening news.
3. Uncle Louie bought a running stroller for the baby that he called "Speed Racer."
4. Rolling down the mountain, the explorer stopped the boulder with his powerful foot.
5. We are looking for a babysitter for our precious six-year-old who doesn't drink or smoke and owns a car.
6. The teacher served cookies to the children wrapped in aluminum foil.
7. The mysterious woman walked toward the car holding an umbrella.
8. We returned the wine to the waiter that was sour.
9. Charlie spotted a stray puppy driving home from work.
10. I ate nothing but a cold bowl of noodles for dinner.

### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from "2.7 Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that describes something that has been left out of the sentence. When there is nothing that the word, phrase, or clause can modify, the modifier is said to dangle.

**Incorrect:** *Riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

**Correct:** As Jane was *riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

- In the incorrect sentence, *riding in the sports car* is dangling. The reader is left wondering who is riding in the sports car. The writer must tell the reader!

**Incorrect:** *Walking home at night*, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

**Correct:** As Jonas was *walking home at night*, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

**Correct:** The trees looked like spooky aliens as Jonas was *walking home at night*.

- In the incorrect sentence *walking home at night* is dangling. Who is walking home at night? Jonas. Note that there are two different ways the dangling modifier can be corrected.

**Incorrect:** To win the spelling bee, Gita and Gerard should join our team.

**Correct:** If we want to win the spelling bee this year, Gita and Gerard should join our team.

- In the incorrect sentence, *to win the spelling bee* is dangling. Who wants to win the spelling bee? We do!

## Tip

The following three steps will help you quickly spot a dangling modifier:

1. Look for an -ing modifier at the beginning of your sentence or another modifying phrase:

Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie. (Painting is the -ing modifier.)

2. Underline the first noun that follows it:

Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie.

3. Make sure the modifier and noun go together logically. If they do not, it is very likely you have a dangling modifier.

After identifying the dangling modifier, rewrite the sentence.

Painting for three hours at night, Maggie finally finished the kitchen.



## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Rewrite the following the sentences onto your own sheet of paper to correct the dangling modifiers.

1. Mike bent over backward, the posture was very challenging.
2. Making discoveries about new creatures, this is an interesting time to be a biologist.
3. Walking in the dark, the picture fell off the wall.
4. Playing a guitar in the bedroom, the cat was seen under the bed.
5. Packing for a trip, a cockroach scurried down the hallway.
6. While looking in the mirror, the towel swayed in the breeze.
7. While driving to the veterinarian's office, the dog nervously whined.
8. The priceless painting drew large crowds when walking into the museum.
9. Piled up next to the bookshelf, I chose a romance novel.
10. Chewing furiously, the gum fell out of my mouth.

### Check Your Answers:<sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “2.7 Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Exercise 3

Rewrite the following paragraph correcting all the misplaced and dangling modifiers.

I bought a fresh loaf of bread for my sandwich shopping in the grocery store. Wanting to make a delicious sandwich, the mayonnaise was thickly spread. Placing the cold cuts on the bread, the lettuce was placed on top. I cut the sandwich in half with a knife turning on the radio. Biting into the sandwich, my favorite song blared loudly in my ears. Humming and

chewing, my sandwich went down smoothly. Smiling, my sandwich will be made again, but next time I will add cheese.

## Key Takeaways

- Misplaced and dangling modifiers make sentences difficult to understand.
- Misplaced and dangling modifiers distract the reader.
- There are several effective ways to identify and correct misplaced and dangling modifiers.

## Writing Application

See how creative and humorous you can get by writing ten sentences with misplaced and dangling modifiers. This is a deceptively simple task, but rise to the challenge. Your writing will be stronger for it.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “2.7 Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/2-7-misplaced-and-dangling-modifiers/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of

Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. / Minor updates for accessibility.

## Notes

1.
  1. The young lady on the telephone was walking the dog.
  2. I heard on the evening news that there was a robbery.
  3. Uncle Louie bought a running stroller that he called “Speed Racer” for the baby.
  4. The explorer stopped the boulder rolling down the mountain with his powerful foot.
  5. We are looking for a babysitter who doesn’t drink or smoke and owns a car for our precious six-year-old.
  6. The teacher served cookies wrapped in aluminum foil to the children.
  7. The mysterious woman holding an umbrella walked toward the car.
  8. We returned the wine that was sour to the waiter.
  9. Driving home from work Charlie spotted a stray puppy.
  10. I ate nothing but a cold bowl of noodles for dinner.
2.
  1. Bent over backward, the posture was very challenging for Mike.
  2. This is an interesting time to be a biologist, when you are making discoveries about new creatures.
  3. As I was walking in the dark, the picture fell off the wall.
  4. When he was playing guitar in the bedroom, he could see the cat under the bed.
  5. As I was packing for a trip, a cockroach scurried down the hallway.
  6. While she was looking in the mirror, she saw the towel sway in the breeze. / While he was looking in the mirror, she saw the towel sway in the breeze.
  7. While I was driving to the veterinarian’s office, the dog nervously whined. / While he was driving to the veterinarian’s office, the dog nervously whined./ While she was driving to the veterinarian’s office, the dog nervously whined. /While they were driving to the veterinarian’s office, the dog nervously whined.
  8. When walking into the museum, the priceless painting drew large crowds.
  9. I chose a romance novel piled up next to the bookshelf.
  10. The gum fell out of my mouth while I chewed furiously. / While chewing furiously the gum fell out of my mouth.

# 11.8 - WRITING BASICS: EXERCISES

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## Learning Objectives

- Use the skills you have learned in the chapter.
- Work collaboratively with other students.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

On your own sheet of paper, identify each sentence as a fragment, a run-on, or correct (no error).

1. My favorite book is Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, he was born in 1894 and died in 1963 \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Written in 1931 \_\_\_\_\_.
3. A futuristic society where humans are born out of test tubes and kept in rigid social classes \_\_\_\_\_.
4. This may not seem like a humorous premise for a novel, but Huxley uses satire, which is a type of humor that is used to make a serious point \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The humans in Brave New World learn through sleep teaching, Huxley calls this “hypnopedia” \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Everyone is kept “happy” in the brave new world by taking a pill called soma, there is one character named John the Savage who does not take soma \_\_\_\_\_.
7. because he comes from a different part of the world where there is no technology, and he

- believes in natural ways of living \_\_\_\_\_.
8. It turns out that John has a big problem with the brave new world and how people live there \_\_\_\_\_.
  9. Will he be able to survive living there, well you will have to read the novel to find out \_\_\_\_\_.
  10. Brave New World is considered a classic in English literature, it is one of the best novels I have ever read \_\_\_\_\_.

**Check Your Answers:** <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “2.8 Writing Basics: End-of-Chapter Exercises” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Each sentence contains an error in subject-verb agreement, irregular verb form, or consistent verb tense. Identify the type of error.

1. Maria and Ty meets me at the community center for cooking classes on Tuesdays.
2. John’s ability to laugh at almost anything amaze me.
3. Samantha and I were walking near the lake when the large, colorful bird appears.
4. I builded my own telescope using materials I bought at the hardware store.
5. My mother freezed the remaining tomatoes from her garden so that she could use them during the winter.
6. Bernard asked the stranger sitting next to him for the time, and she says it was past midnight.
7. My mother and brother wears glasses, but my father and sister do not.
8. We held our noses as the skunk runs away.
9. Neither Soren nor Andrew are excited about the early morning swim meet.
10. My hands hurted at the thought of transcribing all those notes.
11. The police questioned the suspect for hours but she gives them no useful information.

12. Terry takes short weekend trips because her job as a therapist was very emotionally draining.
13. She criticize delicately, making sure not to hurt anyone's feelings.
14. Davis winded the old clock and set it atop his nightstand.
15. Cherie losed four poker hands in a row before realizing that she was playing against professionals.
16. Janis and Joan describes their trip to the Amazon in vivid detail.
17. You should decides for yourself whether or not to reduce the amount of processed foods in your diet.
18. The oil rig exploded and spills millions of gallons of oil into the ocean.
19. The handsome vampire appeared out of nowhere and smiles at the smitten woman.
20. The batter swunged at the ball several times but never hit it.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “2.8 Writing Basics: End-of-Chapter Exercises” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Exercise 3

Correct the capitalization errors in the following fictional story. Copy the corrected paragraph onto your own sheet of paper.

lance worthington signed a Recording Contract with Capitol records on june 15, 2007. Despite selling two million copies of his Debut Album, nothing to lose, lance lost quite a bit as his tax returns from the irs revealed. lance did not think it was fair that the Record Company kept so much of his earnings, so he decided to hire robert bergman, a prominent music Attorney with a Shark-like reputation. bergman represented lance all the way to the supreme court, where lance won the case against capitol records. Lance worthington was instrumental in changing intellectual property rights and long standing Record Company practices. All artists and musicians can thank him for his brave stance against record companies. Lance subsequently formed his own independent record

label called worthy records. worthy is now a successful Label based out of chicago, illinois, and its Artists have appeared on well known shows such as The tonight show and Saturday night live. Lance worthington is a model for success in the do-it-yourself World that has become the Music Industry.

## Exercise 4

### Exercise 4 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct comparative or superlative adjective or adverb.

1. Denise has a (cheerful) \_\_\_\_\_ outlook on life than her husband.
2. I don't mean to brag, but I think I am the (good) \_\_\_\_\_ cook in my family.
3. Lydia is the (thoughtful) \_\_\_\_\_ person I know.
4. Italy experienced the (bad) \_\_\_\_\_ heat wave in its history last year.
5. My teacher, Ms. Beckett, is the (strange) \_\_\_\_\_ person I know, and I like that.
6. Dorian's drawing skills are (good) \_\_\_\_\_ this semester than last.
7. My handwriting is the (sloppy) \_\_\_\_\_ of all my classmates.
8. Melvin's soccer team played (badly) \_\_\_\_\_ than it did last season.
9. Josie's pen writes (smooth) \_\_\_\_\_ than mine.
10. I felt (lucky) \_\_\_\_\_ than my sister because I got in to the college of my choice.

### Check Your Answers:<sup>3</sup>

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## Notes

- 1.
2.
  1. Subject-verb agreement error
  2. Subject-verb agreement error
  3. Consistent verb tense error
  4. Irregular verb form error
  5. Irregular verb form error
  6. Consistent verb tense error
  7. Subject-verb agreement error
  8. Consistent verb tense error
  9. Irregular verb form error
  10. Irregular verb form error
  11. Consistent verb tense error
  12. Consistent verb tense error
  13. Subject-verb agreement error
  14. Irregular verb form error
  15. Irregular verb form error
  16. Subject-verb agreement error
  17. Subject-verb agreement error
  18. Consistent verb tense error
  19. Consistent verb tense error
  20. Irregular verb form error
3.
  1. more cheerful/less cheerful
  2. best
  3. most thoughtful/least thoughtful
  4. worst
  5. strangest
  6. better
  7. sloppiest
  8. worse
  9. smoother
  10. luckier



# CHAPTER 12: PUNCTUATION

## ***Communication Essentials for College* by Jen Booth, Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell**

- 12.1 – Commas
- 12.2 – Semicolons
- 12.3 – Quotes
- 12.4 – Apostrophes
- 12.5 – Punctuation: Exercises

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(<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/>) to access the complete book,  
interactive activities and ancillary resources.

## 12.1 - COMMAS

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### Learning Objectives

- Identify the uses of commas.
- Correctly use commas in sentences.

One of the punctuation clues to reading you may encounter is the comma . The comma is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause in a sentence or a separation of things in a list. Commas can be used in a variety of ways. Look at some of the following sentences to see how you might use a comma when writing a sentence.

- **Introductory word:** Personally, I think the practice is helpful.
- **Lists:** The barn, the tool shed, and the back porch were destroyed by the wind.
- **Coordinating adjectives:** He was tired, hungry, and late.
- **Conjunctions in compound sentences:** The bedroom door was closed, so the children knew their mother was asleep.
- **Interrupting words:** I knew where it was hidden, of course, but I wanted them to find it themselves.
- **Dates, addresses, greetings, and letters:** The letter was postmarked December 8, 1945.

### Commas after an Introductory Word or Phrase

You may notice a comma that appears near the beginning of the sentence, usually after a word or phrase. This comma lets the reader know where the introductory word or phrase ends and the main sentence begins.

Without spoiling the surprise, we need to tell her to save the date.

In this sentence, *without spoiling the surprise* is an introductory phrase, while *we need to tell her to save the date* is the main sentence. Notice how they are separated by a comma. When only an introductory word appears in the sentence, a comma also follows the introductory word.

Ironically, she already had plans for that day.

## Exercise 1

Look for the introductory word or phrase. On your own sheet of paper, copy the sentence and add a comma to correct the sentence.

1. Suddenly the dog ran into the house.
2. In the blink of an eye the kids were ready to go to the movies.
3. Confused he tried opening the box from the other end.
4. Every year we go camping in the woods.
5. Without a doubt green is my favorite color.
6. Hesitating she looked back at the directions before proceeding.
7. Fortunately the sleeping baby did not stir when the doorbell rang.
8. Believe it or not the criminal was able to rob the same bank three times.

## Commas in a List of Items

When you want to list several nouns in a sentence, you separate each word with a comma. This allows the reader to pause after each item and identify which words are included in the grouping. When you list items in a sentence, put a comma after each

noun, then add the word *and* before the last item. However, you do not need to include a comma after the last item.

We'll need to get flour, tomatoes, and cheese at the store.

The pizza will be topped with olives, peppers, and pineapple chunks.

## Commas and Coordinating Adjectives

You can use commas to list both adjectives and nouns. A string of adjectives that describe a noun are called coordinating adjectives. These adjectives come before the noun they modify and are separated by commas. One important thing to note, however, is that unlike listing nouns, the word *and* does not always need to be before the last adjective.

It was a bright, windy, clear day.

Our kite glowed red, yellow, and blue in the morning sunlight.

### Exercise 2

#### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Identify whether the given statement has correct comma placement or not

1. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are all booked with meetings.
2. It was a quiet, uneventful, unproductive, day.
3. We'll need to prepare statements for the Franks, Todds and Smiths before their portfolio reviews, next week.
4. Michael, Nita and Desmond finished their report last Tuesday.
5. With cold, wet, aching fingers he was able to secure the sails before the storm.

6. He wrote his name, on the board, in clear, precise, delicate letters.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “3.1 Commas” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Commas before Conjunctions in Compound Sentences

Commas are sometimes used to separate two independent clauses. The comma comes after the first independent clause and is followed by a conjunction, such as *for*, *and*, or *but*. For a full list of conjunctions, see Chapter 11 “Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?”.

He missed class today, and he thinks he will be out tomorrow, too.

He says his fever is gone, but he is still very tired.

### Exercise 3

**Exercise 3 (Text Version)**

On your own sheet of paper, create a compound sentence by combining the two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

1. The presentation was scheduled for Monday. The weather delayed the presentation for four days.
2. He wanted a snack before bedtime. He ate some fruit.
3. The patient is in the next room. I can hardly hear anything.
4. We could go camping for vacation. We could go to the beach for vacation.
5. I want to get a better job. I am taking courses at night.

6. I cannot move forward on this project. I cannot afford to stop on this project.
7. Patrice wants to stop for lunch. We will take the next exit to look for a restaurant.
8. I've got to get this paper done. I have class in ten minutes.
9. The weather was clear yesterday. We decided to go on a picnic.
10. I have never dealt with this client before. I know Leonardo has worked with them. Let's ask Leonardo for his help.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 3 is adapted from "3.1 Commas" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Commas before and after Interrupting Words

In conversations, you might interrupt your train of thought by giving more details about what you are talking about. In a sentence, you might interrupt your train of thought with a word or phrase called interrupting words . Interrupting words can come at the beginning or middle of a sentence. When the interrupting words appear at the beginning of the sentence, a comma appears after the word or phrase.

If you can believe it, people once thought the sun and planets orbited around Earth.  
Luckily, some people questioned that theory.

When interrupting words come in the middle of a sentence, they are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas. You can determine where the commas should go by looking for the part of the sentence that is not essential for the sentence to make sense.

An Italian astronomer, Galileo, proved that Earth orbited the sun.  
We have known, for hundreds of years now, that the Earth and other planets exist in a solar system.

## Exercise 4

### Exercise 4 (Text Version)

On your own sheet of paper, copy the sentence and insert commas to separate the interrupting words from the rest of the sentence.

1. I asked my neighbors the retired couple from Florida to bring in my mail.
2. Without a doubt his work has improved over the last few weeks.
3. Our professor Mr. Alamut drilled the lessons into our heads.
4. The meeting is at noon unfortunately which means I will be late for lunch.
5. We came in time for the last part of dinner but most importantly we came in time for dessert.
6. All of a sudden our network crashed and we lost our files.
7. Alex hand the wrench to me before the pipe comes loose again.

### Check Your Answers:<sup>3</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 4 is adapted from “3.1 Commas” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Commas in Dates, Addresses, and the Greetings and Closings of Letters

You also use commas when you write the date, such as in cover letters and e-mails. Commas are used when you write the date, when you include an address, and when you greet someone.

If you are writing out the full date, add a comma after the day and before the year. You do not need to add a comma when you write the month and day or when you write the month and the year. If you need to continue the sentence after you add a date that includes the day and year, add a comma after the end of the date.

The letter is postmarked May 4, 2001.

Her birthday is May 5.

He visited the country in July 2009.

I registered for the conference on March 7, 2010, so we should get our tickets soon.

You also use commas when you include addresses and locations. When you include an address in a sentence, be sure to place a comma after the street and after the city. Do not place a comma between the province and the postal code. Like a date, if you need to continue the sentence after adding the address, simply add a comma after the address.

We moved to 4542 Boxcutter Lane, Hamilton, Ontario L0P 1B0.

After moving to Victoria, British Columbia, Eric used public transportation to get to work.

Greetings are also separated by commas. When you write an e-mail or a letter, you add a comma after the greeting word or the person's name. You also need to include a comma after the closing, which is the word or phrase you put before your signature.

Hello,  
I would like more information about your job posting.  
Thank you,  
Anita Al-Sayf

Dear Mrs. Al-Sayf,  
Thank you for your letter. Please read the attached document for details.  
Sincerely,  
Jack Fromont



## Exercise 5

On your own sheet of paper, use what you have learned about using commas to edit the following letter.

March 27 2010

Alexa Marché

14 Taylor Drive Apt. 6

Beauceville Quebec G0M 1K0

Dear Mr. Timmons

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am available on Monday the fifth. I can stop by your office at any time. Is your address still 7309 Marcourt Circle #501? Please get back to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you

Alexa

## Exercise 6

On your own sheet of paper, use what you have learned about comma usage to edit the following paragraphs.

1. My brother Nathaniel is a collector of many rare unusual things. He has collected lunch boxes limited edition books and hatpins at various points of his life. His current collection of unusual bottles has over fifty pieces. Usually he sells one collection before starting another.
2. Our meeting is scheduled for Thursday March 20. In that time we need to gather all our documents together. Alice is in charge of the timetables and schedules. Tom is in charge of updating the guidelines. I am in charge of the presentation. To prepare for this meeting please print out any e-mails faxes or documents you have referred to when writing your sample.

3. It was a cool crisp autumn day when the group set out. They needed to cover several miles before they made camp so they walked at a brisk pace. The leader of the group Garth kept checking his watch and their GPS location. Isabelle Wei and Maggie took turns carrying the equipment while Mohammed took notes about the wildlife they saw. As a result no one noticed the darkening sky until the first drops of rain splattered on their faces.
4. Please have your report complete and filed by April 15 2010. In your submission letter please include your contact information the position you are applying for and two people we can contact as references. We will not be available for consultation after April 10 but you may contact the office if you have any questions. Thank you HR Department.

### **Collaboration**

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## **Key Takeaways**

- Punctuation marks provide visual cues to readers to tell them how to read a sentence. Punctuation marks convey meaning.
- Commas indicate a pause or a list in a sentence.
- A comma should be used after an introductory word to separate this word from the main sentence.
- A comma comes after each noun in a list. The word and is added before the last noun, which is not followed by a comma.
- A comma comes after every coordinating adjective except for the last adjective.
- Commas can be used to separate the two independent clauses in compound sentences as long as a conjunction follows the comma.
- Commas are used to separate interrupting words from the rest of the sentence.
- When you write the date, you add a comma between the day and the year. You also add a comma after the year if the sentence continues after the date.
- When they are used in a sentence, addresses have commas after the street address, and the

city. If a sentence continues after the address, a comma comes after the postal code.

- When you write a letter, you use commas in your greeting at the beginning and in your closing at the end of your letter.

## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “3.1 Commas (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/3-1-commas/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

1. Correct
  2. Incorrect
  3. Incorrect
  4. Correct
  5. Correct
  6. Incorrect
1. The presentation was scheduled for Monday, but the weather delayed the presentation for four days.
  2. He wanted a snack before bedtime, so he ate some fruit.
  3. The patient is in the next room, so I can hardly hear anything./ The patient is in the next room, but I can hardly hear anything.The patient is in the next room, so I can hardly hear anything./ The patient is in the next room, but I can hardly hear anything
  4. We could go camping for vacation, or we could go to the beach for vacation.
  5. I want to get a better job, so I am taking courses at night.
  6. I cannot move forward on this project, but I cannot afford to stop on this project.
  7. Patrice wants to stop for lunch, so we will take the next exit to look for a restaurant.
  8. I’ve got to get this paper done, but I have class in ten minutes.
  9. The weather was clear yesterday, so we decided to go on a picnic.
  10. I have never dealt with this client before, but I know Leonardo has worked with them, so let’s ask Leonardo for his help.
1. I asked my neighbors, the retired couple from Florida, to bring in my mail.
  2. Without a doubt his work has improved, over the last few weeks.
  3. Our professor, Mr. Alamut, drilled the lessons into our heads.
  4. The meeting is at noon unfortunately, which means I will be late for lunch.
  5. We came in time for the last part of dinner, but most importantly we came in time for dessert.
  6. All of a sudden, our network crashed and we lost our files.

7. Alex, hand the wrench to me before the pipe comes loose again.

## 12.2 - SEMICOLONS

---

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the uses of semicolons.
- Properly use semicolons in sentences.

Another punctuation mark that you will encounter is the semicolon (;) . Like most punctuation marks, the semicolon can be used in a variety of ways. The semicolon indicates a break in the flow of a sentence, but functions differently than a period or a comma. When you encounter a semicolon while reading aloud, this represents a good place to pause and take a breath.

### Semicolons to Join Two Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon to combine two closely related independent clauses. Relying on a period to separate the related clauses into two shorter sentences could lead to choppy writing. Using a comma would create an awkward run-on sentence.

**Correct:** Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview; appearances are important.

**Choppy:** Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview. Appearances are important.

**Incorrect:** Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview, appearances are important.

In this case, writing the independent clauses as two sentences separated by a period is correct. However, using a semicolon to combine the clauses can make your writing

more interesting by creating a variety of sentence lengths and structures while preserving the flow of ideas.

## Semicolons to Join Items in a List

You can also use a semicolon to join items in a list when the items in the list already require commas. Semicolons help the reader distinguish between items in the list.

**Correct:** The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey; green, brown, and black; or red, green, and brown.

**Incorrect:** The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey, green, brown, and black, or red, green, and brown.

By using semicolons in this sentence, the reader can easily distinguish between the three sets of colors.

### Tip

Use semicolons to join two main clauses. Do not use semicolons with coordinating conjunctions such as and, or, and but.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Identify whether the given statement has correct semicolon placement or not

1. I did not notice that you were in the office; I was behind the front desk all day.
2. Do you want turkey, spinach; and cheese roast beef, lettuce, and cheese; or ham, tomato, and cheese?

3. Please close the blinds; there is a glare on the screen.
4. Unbelievably, no one was hurt in the accident.
5. I cannot decide; if I want my room to be green, brown, and purple green, black, and brown or green, brown, and dark red.
6. Let's go for a walk the air is so refreshing.

### Check Your Answers:<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “3.2 Semicolons” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Key Takeaways

- Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses.
- Use a semicolon to separate items in a list when those items already require a comma.

## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “3.2 Semicolons (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/3-2-semicolons/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

- |    |          |         |          |
|----|----------|---------|----------|
| 1. | 1. True  | 3. True | 5. False |
|    | 2. False | 4. True | 6. False |

## 12.3 - QUOTES

---

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the uses of quotes.
- Correctly use quotes in sentences.

Quotation marks (“ ”) set off a group of words from the rest of the text. Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotations of another person’s words or to indicate a title. Quotation marks always appear in pairs.

### Direct Quotations

A direct quotation is an exact account of what someone said or wrote. To include a direct quotation in your writing, enclose the words in quotation marks. An indirect quotation is a restatement of what someone said or wrote. An indirect quotation does not use the person’s exact words. You do not need to use quotation marks for indirect quotations.

**Direct quotation:** Carly said, “I’m not ever going back there again.”

**Indirect quotation:** Carly said that she would never go back there.



## Writing at Work

Most word processing software is designed to catch errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. While this can be a useful tool, it is better to be well acquainted with the rules of punctuation than to leave the thinking to the computer. Properly punctuated writing will convey your meaning clearly. Consider the subtle shifts in meaning in the following sentences:

- The client said he thought our manuscript was garbage.
- The client said, “He thought our manuscript was garbage.”

The first sentence reads as an indirect quote in which the client does not like the manuscript. But did he actually use the word “garbage”? (This would be alarming!) Or has the speaker paraphrased (and exaggerated) the client’s words?

The second sentence reads as a direct quote from the client. But who is “he” in this sentence? Is it a third party?

Word processing software would not catch this because the sentences are not grammatically incorrect. However, the meanings of the sentences are not the same. Understanding punctuation will help you write what you mean, and in this case, could save a lot of confusion around the office!

## Punctuating Direct Quotations

Quotation marks show readers another person’s exact words. Often, you will want to identify who is speaking. You can do this at the beginning, middle, or end of the quote. Notice the use of commas and capitalized words.

**Beginning:** Madison said, “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

**Middle:** “Let’s stop at the farmers market,” Madison said, “to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

**End:** “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner,” Madison said.

**Speaker not identified:** “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Always capitalize the first letter of a quote even if it is not the beginning of the sentence. When using identifying words in the middle of the quote, the beginning of the second part of the quote does not need to be capitalized.

Use commas between identifying words and quotes. Quotation marks must be placed *after* commas and periods. Place quotation marks after question marks and exclamation points only if the question or exclamation is part of the quoted text.

**Question is part of quoted text:** The new employee asked, “When is lunch?”

**Question is not part of quoted text:** Did you hear her say you were “the next Picasso”?

**Exclamation is part of quoted text:** My supervisor beamed, “Thanks for all of your hard work!”

**Exclamation is not part of quoted text:** He said I “single-handedly saved the company thousands of dollars”!

## Quotations within Quotations

Use single quotation marks ( ‘ ’ ) to show a quotation within in a quotation.

Theresa said, “I wanted to take my dog to the festival, but the man at the gate said, ‘No dogs allowed.’”

“When you say, ‘I can’t help it,’ what exactly does that mean?”

“The instructions say, ‘Tighten the screws one at a time.’”

## Titles

Use quotation marks around titles of short works of writing, such as essays, songs, poems, short stories, and chapters in books. Usually, titles of longer works, such as books, magazines, albums, newspapers, and journals, are italicized.

“Annabelle Lee” is one of my favorite romantic poems.

The *Halifax Gazette* has been in publication since 1752.

## Writing at Work

In many businesses, the difference between exact wording and a paraphrase is extremely important. For legal purposes, or for the purposes of doing a job correctly, it can be important to know exactly what the client, customer, or supervisor said. Sometimes, important details can be lost when instructions are paraphrased. Use quotes to indicate exact words where needed, and let your coworkers know the source of the quotation (client, customer, peer, etc.).

### Exercise 1

#### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Identify whether the given statement has correct quotation marks placement

1. Yasmin said, "I don't feel like cooking. Let's go out to eat."
2. "Where should we go"? said Russell.
3. Yasmin said "it didn't matter to her."
4. "I know," said Russell, "let's go to the Two Roads Juice Bar."
5. "Did you know that the name of the Juice Bar is a reference to a poem?" asked Russell.
6. "I didn't!" exclaimed Yasmin. Which poem?
7. The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost Russell explained.
8. Oh! said Yasmin, Is that the one that starts with the line, Two roads diverged in a yellow wood?
9. That's the one said Russell.

#### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from "3.4 Quotes" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Key Takeaways

- Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotes and titles of short works.
- Use single quotation marks to enclose a quote within a quote.
- Do not use any quotation marks for indirect quotations.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “3.4 Quotes (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/3-4-quotes/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

- |    |          |          |          |
|----|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. | 1. True  | 4. True  | 7. False |
|    | 2. False | 5. False | 8. False |
|    | 3. True  | 6. False | 9. False |

## 12.4 - APOSTROPHES

---

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the uses of apostrophes.
- Correctly use apostrophes in sentences.

An apostrophe (') is a punctuation mark that is used with a noun to show possession or to indicate where a letter has been left out to form a contraction.

### Possession

An apostrophe and the letter *s* indicate who or what owns something. To show possession with a singular noun, add 's.

Jen's dance routine mesmerized everyone in the room.

The dog's leash is hanging on the hook beside the door.

Jess's sister is also coming to the party.

Notice that singular nouns that end in *s* still take the apostrophe *s* ('s) ending to show possession.

To show possession with a plural noun that ends in *s*, just add an apostrophe ('). If the plural noun does not end in *s*, add an apostrophe and an *s* ('s).

**Plural noun that ends in s:** The drummers' sticks all moved in the same rhythm, like a machine.

**Plural noun that does not end in s:** The people's votes clearly showed that no one supported the management decision.

## Contractions

A contraction is a word that is formed by combining two words. In a contraction, an apostrophe shows where one or more letters have been left out. Contractions are commonly used in informal writing but not in formal writing.

I do not like ice cream.

I **don't** like ice cream.

Notice how the words *do* and *not* have been combined to form the contraction *don't*. The apostrophe shows where the *o* in *not* has been left out.

We will see you later.

**We'll** see you later.

Look at the chart for some examples of commonly used contractions.

**This chart outlines common  
contractions and the words they  
combine**

contraction	words combined
aren't	are not
can't	cannot
doesn't	does not
don't	do not
isn't	is not
he'll	he will
I'll	I will
she'll	she will
they'll	they will
you'll	you will
it's	it is, it has
let's	let us
she's	she is, she has
there's	there is, there has
who's	who is, who has

## Tip

Be careful not to confuse it's with its. It's is a contraction of the words it and is. Its is a possessive pronoun.

It's cold and rainy outside. (It is cold and rainy outside.)

The cat was chasing its tail. (Shows that the tail belongs to the cat.)

When in doubt, substitute the words it is in a sentence. If sentence still makes sense, use the contraction it's.

## Exercise 1

On your own sheet of paper, correct the following sentences by adding apostrophes. If the sentence is correct as it is, write *OK*.

1. “What a beautiful child! She has her mothers eyes.”
2. My brothers wife is one of my best friends.
3. I couldnt believe it when I found out that I got the job!
4. My supervisors informed me that I wouldnt be able to take the days off.
5. Each of the students responses were unique.
6. Wont you please join me for dinner tonight?

## Key Takeaways

- Use apostrophes to show possession. Add 's to singular nouns and plural nouns that do not end in s. Add ' to plural nouns that end in s.
- Use apostrophes in contractions to show where a letter or letters have been left out.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “3.5 Apostrophes



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## 12.5 - PUNCTUATION: EXERCISES

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### Learning Objectives

- Use the skills you have learned in this chapter.
- Work collaboratively with other students.

### Exercises

Each sentence contains a punctuation error. On your own sheet of paper, correct each sentence by adding the correct punctuation. The headings will let you know which type of punctuation mistakes to look for. If the sentence does not need corrections, write *OK*.

#### Commas

- a. The wedding will be July 13 2012.
- b. The date by the way is the anniversary of the day that they met.
- c. The groom the bride and their parents are all planning the event.
- d. Actually all of their friends and relatives are involved in the planning.
- e. The bride is a baker so she will be making the wedding cake herself.
- f. The photography the catering and the music will all be friends.

#### Semicolons

- a. Some people spend a lot of money hiring people for wedding services they are lucky to have such talented friends.
- b. The flowers will be either roses, daisies, and snapdragons orchids, tulips, and irises or peonies and lilies.

### Colons

- a. There will be three colors for the wedding: white, black, and gold.
- b. They've finally narrowed down the dinner choices salmon, steak, and a vegan stew.
- c. Their wedding invitations contained the following quote from the Roman poet Ovid If you want to be loved, be lovable.

### Quotes

- a. The invitations said that the wedding would be "outdoor casual."
- b. "What exactly does 'outdoor casual' mean?" I asked the bride.
- c. She told me to dress comfortably and wear shoes that do not sink into the ground.

### Apostrophes

- a. On the day of the wedding, were going to rent a limo.
- b. My brothers wife will make the arrangements.
- c. Shes a great party organizer.

Each sentence contains a punctuation error. On your own sheet of paper, correct each sentence by adding commas, semicolons, colons, and apostrophes as needed.

1. My mothers garden is full of beautiful flowers.
2. She has carefully planted several species of roses peonies and irises.
3. She is especially proud of her thirty year old Japanese maple tree.
4. I am especially proud of the sunflowers I planted them!
5. You should see the birds that are attracted to the garden hummingbirds, finches, robins, and sparrows.
6. I like to watch the hummingbirds they are my favorite.
7. We spend a lot of time in the garden planting weeding and just enjoying the view.
8. Each flower has its own personality some seem shy and others seem bold.
9. Arent gardens wonderful?
10. You should come visit sometime Do you like to garden?

The following paragraph contains errors in punctuation. On your own sheet of paper, correct the

paragraph by adding commas, semicolons, colons, and apostrophes as needed. There may be more than one way to correct the paragraph.

May 18 2011

Dear Hiring Manager

Allow me to introduce myself in my previous position I was known as the King of Sales. I hope to earn the same title within your company. My name is Frances Fortune. I have thirteen years experience in corporate sales and account management. I have been the top rated seller for two years in a row in my previous position. Clients recognize me as dependable honest and resourceful. I have a strong work ethic and great interpersonal skills. I excel at goal setting and time management. However you don't have to take my word for it I will be happy to provide personal and professional references upon request. You're welcome to contact my previous employer to inquire about my work performance. I look forward to speaking with you in person in the near future.

Sincerely

Frances Fortune

Read the following paragraph. Edit by adding apostrophes and semi-colons where needed. There may be more than one correct way to edit some sentences. Consider how the punctuation you choose affects the meaning of the sentence.

I was a little nervous about the interview it was my first in years. I had to borrow my roommates suit, but it fit me well. A few days ago, I started to research the companys history and mission. I felt like I was well qualified for the job. When I arrived, I shook hands with the interviewer she had a strong grip! It nearly caught me off guard, but I did my best to smile and relax. I was a little distracted by all the books in the womans office she must have had a hundred books in that tiny room. However, I think my responses to her questions were good. Ill send her an e-mail to thank her for her time. Hopefully shell call me soon about the position.

## Writing Application

Review some of the recent or current assignments you have completed for school or work. Look through recent business and personal e-mails. Does your work contain any errors in punctuation? Correct the errors and compile a list of the types of errors you are correcting (commas, semicolons, colons, apostrophes, etc.). Use this list as a reference for the types of punctuation marks that you should review and practice.

If you do not find many errors—great! You can still look for ways to add interest to your writing by using semicolons and colons to create a variety of sentence lengths and structures.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “3.9 Punctuation: End-of-Chapter Exercises (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/3-9-punctuation-end-of-chapter-exercises/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

# CHAPTER 13: WORKING WITH WORDS: WHICH WORD IS RIGHT?

## ***Communication Essentials for College* by Jen Booth, Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell**

- 13.1 – Commonly Confused Words
- 13.2 – Spelling
- 13.3 – Word Choice
- 13.4 – Using Context Clues
- 13.5 – Plain language
- 13.6 – Working with Words: End-of-Chapter Exercises

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Please visit the web version of *Communication Essentials for College*  
(<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/>) to access the complete book,  
interactive activities and ancillary resources.

# 13.1 - COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

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## Learning Objectives

- Identify commonly confused words.
- Use strategies to avoid commonly confused words.

Just as a mason uses bricks to build sturdy homes, writers use words to build successful documents. Consider the construction of a building. Builders need to use tough, reliable materials to build a solid and structurally sound skyscraper. From the foundation to the roof and every floor in between, every part is necessary. Writers need to use strong, meaningful words from the first sentence to the last and in every sentence in between.

You already know many words that you use everyday as part of your writing and speaking vocabulary . You probably also know that certain words fit better in certain situations. Letters, e-mails, and even quickly jotted grocery lists require the proper selection of vocabulary. Imagine you are writing a grocery list to purchase the ingredients for a recipe but accidentally write down cilantro when the recipe calls for parsley. Even though cilantro and parsley look remarkably alike, each produces a very different effect in food. This seemingly small error could radically alter the flavor of your dish!

Having a solid everyday vocabulary will help you while writing, but learning new words and avoiding common word errors will make a real impression on your readers. Experienced writers know that deliberate, careful word selection and usage can lead to more polished, more meaningful work. This chapter covers word choice and vocabulary-building strategies that will improve your writing.

## Commonly Confused Words

Some words in English cause trouble for speakers and writers because these words share a similar pronunciation, meaning, or spelling with another word. These words are called commonly confused words. For example, read aloud the following sentences containing the commonly confused words *new* and *knew*:

I liked her *new* sweater.

I *knew* she would wear that sweater today.

These words may sound alike when spoken, but they carry entirely different usages and meanings. *New* is an adjective that describes the sweater, and *knew* is the past tense of the verb *to know*. To read more about adjectives, verbs, and other parts of speech see Chapter 11 “Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?”.

## Recognizing Commonly Confused Words

*New* and *knew* are just two of the words that can be confusing because of their similarities. Familiarize yourself with the following list of commonly confused words. Recognizing these words in your own writing and in other pieces of writing can help you choose the correct word.

### Commonly Confused Words

A, An, And

- A (article). Used before a word that begins with a consonant.  
**a** key, **a** mouse, **a** screen



- *An* (article). Used before a word that begins with a vowel.  
**an** airplane, **an** ocean, **an** igloo
- *And* (conjunction). Connects two or more words together.  
peanut butter **and** jelly, pen **and** pencil, jump **and** shout

#### Accept, Except

- *Accept* (verb). Means to take or agree to something offered.  
They **accepted** our proposal for the conference.
- *Except* (conjunction). Means only or but.  
We could fly there **except** the tickets cost too much.

#### Affect, Effect

- *Affect* (verb). Means to create a change.  
Hurricane winds **affect** the amount of rainfall.
- *Effect* (noun). Means an outcome or result.  
The heavy rains will have an **effect** on the crop growth.

#### Are, Our

- *Are* (verb). A conjugated form of the verb *to be*.  
My cousins **are** all tall and blonde.
- *Our* (pronoun). Indicates possession, usually follows the pronoun *we*.  
We will bring **our** cameras to take pictures.

#### By, Buy

- *By* (preposition). Means next to.  
My glasses are **by** the bed.
- *Buy* (verb). Means to purchase.  
I will **buy** new glasses after the doctor's appointment.

#### Its, It's

- *Its* (pronoun). A form of *it* that shows possession.  
The butterfly flapped **its** wings.
- *It's* (contraction). Joins the words *it* and *is*.  
**It's** the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

#### Know, No

- *Know* (verb). Means to understand or possess knowledge.  
I **know** the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.
- *No*. Used to make a negative.  
I have **no** time to visit the zoo this weekend.

#### Loose, Lose

- *Loose* (adjective). Describes something that is not tight or is detached.  
Without a belt, her pants are **loose** on her waist.
- *Lose* (verb). Means to forget, to give up, or to fail to earn something.  
She will **lose** even more weight after finishing the marathon training.

#### Of, Have

- *Of* (preposition). Means *from* or *about*.  
I studied maps **of** the city to know where to rent a new apartment.
- *Have* (verb). Means to possess something.  
I **have** many friends to help me move.
- *Have* (linking verb). Used to connect verbs.  
I should **have** helped her with that heavy box.

#### Quite, Quiet, Quit

- *Quite* (adverb). Means *really* or *truly*.  
My work will require **quite** a lot of concentration.
- *Quiet* (adjective). Means not loud.  
I need a **quiet** room to complete the assignments.
- *Quit* (verb). Means to stop or to end.  
I will **quit** when I am hungry for dinner.

#### Right, Write

- *Right* (adjective). Means proper or correct.  
When bowling, she practices the **right** form.
- *Right* (adjective). Also means the opposite of left.  
The ball curved to the **right** and hit the last pin.
- *Write* (verb). Means to communicate on paper.

After the team members bowl, I will **write** down their scores.

#### Set, Sit

- *Set* (verb). Means to put an item down. She **set** the mug on the saucer.
- *Set* (noun). Means a group of similar objects.  
All the mugs and saucers belonged in a **set**.
- *Sit* (verb). Means to lower oneself down on a chair or another place  
I'll **sit** on the sofa while she brews the tea.

#### Suppose, Supposed

- *Suppose* (verb). Means to think or to consider  
I **suppose** I will bake the bread, because no one else has the recipe.
- *Suppose* (verb). Means to suggest.  
**Suppose** we all split the cost of the dinner.
- *Supposed* (verb). The past tense form of the verb suppose, meaning required or allowed.  
She was **supposed** to create the menu.

#### Than, Then

- *Than* (conjunction). Used to connect two or more items when comparing  
Registered nurses require less schooling **than** doctors.
- *Then* (adverb). Means next or at a specific time.  
Doctors first complete medical school and **then** obtain a residency.

#### Their, They're, There

- *Their* (pronoun). A form of *they* that shows possession.  
The dog walker feeds **their** dogs everyday at two o'clock.
- *They're* (contraction). Joins the words *they* and *are*.  
**They're** the sweetest dogs in the neighborhood.
- *There* (adverb). Indicates a particular place.  
The dogs' bowls are over **there**, next to the pantry.
- *There* (pronoun). Indicates the presence of something  
**There** are more treats if the dogs behave.

#### To, Two, Too

- *To* (preposition). Indicates movement.  
Let's go **to** the circus.
- *To*. A word that completes an infinitive verb.  
**to** play, **to** ride, **to** watch.
- *Two*. The number after one. It describes how many.  
**Two** clowns squirted the elephants with water.
- *Too* (adverb). Means *also* or *very*.  
The tents were **too** loud, and we left.

#### Use, Used

- *Use* (verb). Means to apply for some purpose.  
We **use** a weed whacker to trim the hedges.
- *Used*. The past tense form of the verb *to use*  
He **used** the lawnmower last night before it rained.
- *Used to*. Indicates something done in the past but not in the present  
He **used to** hire a team to landscape, but now he landscapes alone.

#### Who's, Whose

- *Who's* (contraction). Joins the words *who* and either *is* or *has*.  
**Who's** the new student? **Who's** met him?
- *Whose* (pronoun). A form of *who* that shows possession.  
**Whose** schedule allows them to take the new student on a campus tour?

#### Your, You're

- *Your* (pronoun). A form of *you* that shows possession.  
**Your** book bag is unzipped.
- *You're* (contraction). Joins the words *you* and *are*.  
**You're** the girl with the unzipped book bag.

The English language contains so many words; no one can say for certain how many words exist. In fact, many words in English are borrowed from other languages. Many words have multiple meanings and forms, further expanding the immeasurable number of English words. Although the list of commonly confused words serves as a helpful

guide, even these words may have more meanings than shown here. When in doubt, consult an expert: the dictionary!

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct word.

1. My little cousin turns (to, too, two) years old tomorrow.
2. The next-door neighbor's dog is (quite, quiet, quit) loud. He barks constantly throughout the night.
3. (Your, You're) mother called this morning to talk about the party.
4. I would rather eat a slice of chocolate cake (than, then) eat a chocolate muffin.
5. Before the meeting, he drank a cup of coffee and (than, then) brushed his teeth.
6. Do you have any (loose, lose) change to pay the parking meter?
7. Father must (have, of) left his briefcase at the office.
8. Before playing ice hockey, I was (suppose, supposed) to read the contract, but I only skimmed it and signed my name quickly, which may
9. (affect, effect) my understanding of the rules.
10. Tonight she will (set, sit) down and (right, write) a cover letter to accompany her résumé and job application.
11. It must be fall, because the leaves (are, our) changing, and (it's, its) getting darker earlier.

### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “4.1 Commonly Confused Words” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Strategies to Avoid Commonly Confused Words

When writing, you need to choose the correct word according to its spelling and meaning in the context. Not only does selecting the correct word improve your vocabulary and your writing, but it also makes a good impression on your readers. It

also helps reduce confusion and improve clarity. The following strategies can help you avoid misusing confusing words.

1. **Use a dictionary.** Keep a dictionary at your desk while you write. Look up words when you are uncertain of their meanings or spellings. Many dictionaries are also available online, and the Internet's easy access will not slow you down. Check out your cell phone or smartphone to see if a dictionary app is available.
2. **Keep a list of words you commonly confuse.** Be aware of the words that often confuse you. When you notice a pattern of confusing words, keep a list nearby, and consult the list as you write. Check the list again before you submit an assignment to your instructor.
3. **Study the list of commonly confused words.** You may not yet know which words confuse you, but before you sit down to write, study the words on the list. Prepare your mind for working with words by reviewing the commonly confused words identified in this chapter.

## Tip

Figure 1 – Commonly Misused Word on a Public Sign



Commonly confused words appear in many locations, not just at work or at school. Be on the lookout for misused words wherever you find yourself throughout the day. Make a mental note of the error and remember its correction for your own pieces of writing.

## Writing at Work

All employers value effective communication. From an application to an interview to the first month on the job, employers pay attention to your vocabulary. You do not need a large vocabulary to succeed, but you do need to be able to express yourself clearly and avoid commonly misused words.

When giving an important presentation on the effect of inflation on profit margins, you must know the difference between *effect* and *affect* and choose the correct word. When writing an e-mail to confirm deliveries, you must know if the shipment will arrive in *to* days, *too* days, or *two* days. Confusion may arise if you choose the wrong word.

Consistently using the proper words will improve your communication and make a positive impression on your boss and colleagues.

## Exercise 2

The following paragraph contains eleven errors. Find each misused word and correct it by adding the proper word.

The original United States Declaration of Independence sets in a case at the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom as part of the National Archives in Washington, DC. Since 1952, over one million visitors each year of passed through the Rotunda too snap a photograph to capture they're experience. Although signs state, "No Flash Photography," forgetful tourists leave the flash on, an a bright light flickers for just a millisecond. This millisecond of light may not seem like enough to effect the precious document, but supposed how much light could be generated when all those milliseconds are added up. According to the National Archives administrators, its enough to significantly damage the historic document. So, now, the signs display quit a different message: "No Photography." Visitors continue to travel to see the Declaration that began are country, but know longer can personal pictures serve as

mementos. The administrators' compromise, they say, is a visit to the gift shop for a preprinted photograph.

**Collaboration**

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Key Takeaways

- In order to write accurately, it is important for writers to be aware of commonly confused words.
- Although commonly confused words may look alike or sound alike, their meanings are very different.
- Consulting the dictionary is one way to make sure you are using the correct word in your writing. You may also keep a list of commonly confused words nearby when you write or study the chart in this book.
- Choosing the proper words leaves a positive impression on your readers.

## Writing Application

Review the latest assignment you completed for school or for work. Does it contain any commonly confused words? Circle each example and use the circled words to begin your own checklist of commonly confused words. Continue to add to your checklist each time you complete an assignment and find a misused word.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter (text & images) is adapted from “4.1 Commonly Confused Words (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/4-1-commonly-confused-words/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

- |    |          |                     |               |
|----|----------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1. | 1. two   | 5. then             | 9. sit, write |
|    | 2. quite | 6. loose            | 10. are, it's |
|    | 3. Your  | 7. have             |               |
|    | 4. than  | 8. supposed, affect |               |

## 13.2 - SPELLING

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### Learning Objectives

- Identify common spelling rules.
- Identify commonly misused homonyms.
- Identify commonly misspelled words.

One essential aspect of good writing is accurate spelling. With computer spell checkers, spelling may seem simple, but these programs fail to catch every error. Spell checkers identify some errors, but writers still have to consider the flagged words and suggested replacements. Writers are still responsible for the errors that remain.

For example, if the spell checker highlights a word that is misspelled and gives you a list of alternative words, you may choose a word that you never intended even though it is spelled correctly. This can change the meaning of your sentence. It can also confuse readers, making them lose interest. Computer spell checkers are useful editing tools, but they can never replace human knowledge of spelling rules, homonyms, and commonly misspelled words.

### Common Spelling Rules

The best way to master new words is to understand the key spelling rules. Keep in mind, however, that some spelling rules carry exceptions. A spell checker may catch these exceptions, but knowing them yourself will prepare you to spell accurately on the first try. You may want to try memorizing each rule and its exception like you would memorize a rhyme or lyrics to a song.

Write *i* before *e* except after *c*, or when pronounced *ay* like “neighbour” or “weigh.”

- achieve, niece, alien
- receive, deceive

When words end in a consonant plus *y*, drop the *y* and add an *i* before adding another ending.

- happy + er = happier
- cry + ed = cried

When words end in a vowel plus *y*, keep the *y* and add the ending.

- delay + ed = delayed

Memorize the following exceptions to this rule: *day, lay, say, pay* = *daily, laid, said, paid*

When adding an ending that begins with a vowel, such as *-able, -ence, -ing, or -ity*, drop the last *e* in a word.

- write + ing = writing
- pure + ity = purity

When adding an ending that begins with a consonant, such as *-less, -ment, or -ly*, keep the last *e* in a word.

- hope + less = hopeless
- advertise + ment = advertisement

For many words ending in a consonant and an *o*, add *-s* when using the plural form.

- photo + s = photos
- soprano + s = sopranos

Add *-es* to words that end in *s*, *ch*, *sh*, and *x*.

- church + es = churches
- fax + es = faxes

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Identify the nine misspelled words in the following paragraph.

Sherman J. Alexie Jr. was born in October 1966. He is a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian and an American writer, poet, and filmmaker. Alexie was born with hydrocephalus, or water on the brain. This condition led doctors to predict that he would likly suffer long-term brain damage and possibly mental retardation. Although Alexie survived with no mental disabilitys, he did suffer other serious side effects from his condition that plagud him throughout his childhood. Amazingly, Alexie learned to read by the age of three, and by age five he had read novels such as John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath. Raised on an Indian reservation, Alexie often felt aleinated from his peers due to his avid love for reading and also from the long-term effects of his illness, which often kept him from socializeing with his peers on the reservation. The reading skills he displaid at such a young age foreshadowed what he would later become. Today Alexie is a prolific and successful writer with several story anthologeis to his credit, notably The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven and The Toughest Indian in the World. Most of his fiction is about contemporary Native Americans who are influenced by pop culture and pow wows and everything in between. His work is sometimes funny but always thoughtful and full of richness and depth. Alexie also writes poetry, novels, and screenplays. His latest collection of storys is called War Dances, which came out in 2009.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “4.2 Spelling” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

**Tip****Eight Tips to Improve Spelling Skills**

1. Read the words in your assignment carefully, and avoid skimming over the page. Focusing on your written assignment word by word will help you pay close attention to each word’s spelling. Skimming quickly, you may overlook misspelled words.
2. Use mnemonic devices to remember the correct spelling of words. Mnemonic devices, or memory techniques and learning aids, include inventive sayings or practices that help you remember. For example, the saying “It is important to be a beautiful person inside and out” may help you remember that beautiful begins with “be a.” The practice of pronouncing the word Wednesday Wed-nes-day may help you remember how to spell the word correctly.
3. Use a dictionary. Many professional writers rely on the dictionary—either in print or online. If you find it difficult to use a regular dictionary, ask your instructor to help you find a “poor speller’s dictionary.”
4. Use your computer’s spell checker. The spell checker will not solve all your spelling problems, but it is a useful tool. See the introduction to this section for cautions about spell checkers.
5. Keep a list of frequently misspelled words. You will often misspell the same words again and again, but do not let this discourage you. All writers struggle with the spellings of certain words; they become aware of their spelling weaknesses and work to improve. Be aware of which words you commonly misspell, and you can add them to a list to learn to spell them correctly.
6. Look over corrected papers for misspelled words. Add these words to your list and practice writing each word four to five times each. Writing teachers will especially notice which words you frequently misspell, and it will help you excel in your classes if they see your spelling improve.
7. Test yourself with flashcards. Sometimes the old-fashioned methods are best, and for spelling, this tried and true technique has worked for many students. You can work with a peer or alone.
8. Review the common spelling rules explained in this chapter. Take the necessary time to master the material; you may return to the rules in this chapter again and again, as needed.

## Tip

Remember to focus on spelling during the editing and revising step of the writing process. Start with the big ideas such as organizing your piece of writing and developing effective paragraphs, and then work your way down toward the smaller—but equally important—details like spelling and punctuation. To read more about the writing process and editing and revising, see Chapter 3 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”.

## Homonyms

Homonyms are words that sound like one another but have different meanings.

### Commonly Misused Homonyms

Principle, Principal

- **Principle (noun).** A fundamental concept that is accepted as true.  
The **principle** of human equality is an important foundation for all nations.
- **Principal (noun).** The original amount of debt on which interest is calculated.  
The payment plan allows me to pay back only the **principal** amount, not any compounded interest.
- **Principal (noun).** A person who is the main authority of a school.  
The **principal** held a conference for both parents and teachers.

Where, Wear, Ware

- **Where (adverb).** The place in which something happens.  
**Where** is the restaurant?

- **Wear (verb).** To carry or have on the body.  
I will **wear** my hiking shoes when go on a climb tomorrow morning.
- **Ware (noun).** Articles of merchandise or manufacture (usually, *wares*).  
When I return from shopping, I will show you my **wares**.

## Lead, Led

- **Lead (noun).** A type of metal used in pipes and batteries.  
The **lead** pipes in my homes are old and need to be replaced.
- **Led (verb).** The past tense of the verb *lead*.  
After the garden, she **led** the patrons through the museum.

## Which, Witch

- **Which (pronoun).** Replaces one out of a group.  
**Which** apartment is yours?
- **Witch (noun).** A person who practices sorcery or who has supernatural powers.  
She thinks she is a **witch**, but she does not seem to have any powers.

## Peace, Piece

- **Peace (noun).** A state of tranquility or quiet.  
For once, there was **peace** between the argumentative brothers.
- **Piece (noun).** A part of a whole.  
I would like a large **piece** of cake, thank you.

## Passed, Past

- **Passed (verb).** To go away or move.  
He **passed** the slower cars on the road using the left lane.
- **Past (noun).** Having existed or taken place in a period before the present.  
The argument happened in the **past**, so there is no use in dwelling on it.

## Lessen, Lesson

- **Lessen (verb).** To reduce in number, size, or degree.  
My dentist gave me medicine to **lessen** the pain of my aching tooth.
- **Lesson (noun).** A reading or exercise to be studied by a student.  
Today's **lesson** was about mortgage interest rates.

## Patience, Patients

- **Patience (noun).** The capacity of being patient (waiting for a period of time or enduring pains and trials calmly).  
The novice teacher's **patience** with the unruly class was astounding.
- **Patients (plural noun).** Individuals under medical care.  
The **patients** were tired of eating the hospital food, and they could not wait for a home-cooked meal.

## Sees, Seas, Seize

- **Sees (verb).** To perceive with the eye.  
He **sees** a whale through his binoculars.
- **Seas (plural noun).** The plural of sea, a great body of salt water.  
The tidal fluctuation of the oceans and **seas** are influenced by the moon.
- **Seize (verb).** To possess or take by force.  
The king plans to **seize** all the peasants' land.

## Threw, Through

- **Threw (verb).** The past tense of *throw*.  
She **threw** the football with perfect form.
- **Through (preposition).** A word that indicates movement.  
She walked **through** the door and out of his life.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct homonym.

1. Do you agree with the underlying \_\_\_\_\_ (principle, principal) that ensures copyrights are



protected in the digital age?

2. I like to \_\_\_\_\_ (where, wear, ware) unique clothing from thrift stores that do not have company logos on them.
3. Marjorie felt like she was being \_\_\_\_\_ (led, lead) on a wild goose chase, and she did not like it one bit.
4. Serina described \_\_\_\_\_ (witch, which) house was hers, but now that I am here, they all look the same.
5. Seeing his friend without a lunch, Miguel gave her a \_\_\_\_\_ (peace, piece) of his apple.
6. Do you think that it is healthy for mother to talk about the \_\_\_\_\_ (passed, past) all the time?
7. Eating healthier foods will \_\_\_\_\_ (lessen, lesson) the risk of heart disease.
8. I know it sounds cliché, but my father had the \_\_\_\_\_ (patients, patience) of a saint.
9. Daniela \_\_\_\_\_ (sees, seas, seize) possibilities in the bleakest situations, and that it is why she is successful.
10. Everyone goes \_\_\_\_\_ (through, threw) hardships in life regardless of who they are.

### Check Your Answers:<sup>2</sup>

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## Commonly Misspelled Words

Below is a list of commonly misspelled words. You probably use these words every day in either speaking or writing. Each word has a segment in bold type, which indicates the problem area of the word that is often spelled incorrectly. If you can, use this list as a guide before, during, and after you write.

### Tip

Use the following two tricks to help you master these troublesome words:

1. Copy each word a few times and underline the problem area.
2. Copy the words onto flash cards and have a friend test you.

**Table 1 – Commonly Misspelled Words**

- across
- dis**appoint**
- **integration**
- particular
- se**parate**
- **address**
- dis**approve**
- **intelligent**
- **perform**
- **similar**
- an**swer**
- doe**s**n't
- **interest**
- **perhaps**
- **since**
- arg**ument**
- eigh**th**
- **interfere**
- person**nel**
- spe**ech**
- **athlete**
- embarr**ass**
- jewel**ry**
- **possess**
- streng**th**
- begin**ning**
- enviro**nment**
- judg**ment**
- **possible**
- suc**cess**
- behavio**r**
- exag**gerate**
- knowledg**e**
- **prefer**
- **surprise**
- calen**dar**
- fam**iliar**
- maint**ain**
- prej**udice**
- **taught**
- care**er**
- **finally**
- mathem**atics**
- privileg**e**
- temper**ature**
- consc**ience**
- govern**ment**
- me**ant**
- prob**ably**
- **thorough**
- crow**ded**
- gram**mar**
- **necessary**
- **psychology**
- thought
- def**inite**
- heig**ht**
- **nervous**
- **pursue**
- **tired**
- **describe**
- **illegal**
- **occasion**
- **reference**
- **until**
- **desperate**
- **immediately**
- **opinion**
- **rhythm**
- **weight**
- **different**
- **important**
- **optimist**
- **ridiculous**
- **written**

## Exercise 3

### Exercise 3 (Text Version)

Find the ten commonly misspelled words in the following paragraph.

Brooklyn is one of the five boroughs that make up New York City. It is located on the eastern shore of Long Island directly across the East River from the island of Manhattan. Its beginings stretch

back to the sixteenth century when it was founded by the Dutch who originally called it “Breuckelen.” Immediately after the Dutch settled Brooklyn, it came under British rule. However, neither the Dutch nor the British were Brooklyn’s first inhabitants. When European settlers first arrived, Brooklyn was largely inhabited by the Lenapi, a collective name for several organized bands of Native American people who settled a large area of land that extended from upstate New York through the entire state of New Jersey. They are sometimes referred to as the Delaware Indians. Over time, the Lenapi succumbed to European diseases or conflicts between European settlers or other Native American enemies. Finally they were pushed out of Brooklyn completely by the British.

In 1776, Brooklyn was the site of the first important battle of the American Revolution known as the Battle of Brooklyn. The colonists lost this battle, which was led by George Washington, but over the next two years they would win the war, kicking the British out of the colonies once and for all.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Brooklyn grew to be a city in its own right. The completion of the Brooklyn Bridge was an occasion for celebration; transportation and commerce between Brooklyn and Manhattan now became much easier. Eventually, in 1898, Brooklyn lost its separate identity as an independent city and became one of five boroughs of New York City. However, in some people’s opinion, the integration into New York City should have never happened; they thought Brooklyn should have remained an independent city.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>3</sup>

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## Writing at Work

In today’s job market, writing e-mails has become a means by which many people find employment. E-mails to prospective employers require thoughtful word choice, accurate spelling, and perfect punctuation. Employers’ inboxes are inundated with countless e-mails daily. If even the

subject line of an e-mail contains a spelling error, it will likely be overlooked and someone else's e-mail will take priority.

The best thing to do after you proofread an e-mail to an employer and run the spell checker is to have an additional set of eyes go over it with you; one of your teachers may be able to read the e-mail and give you suggestions for improvement. Most colleges and universities have writing centers, which may also be able to assist you.

## Key Takeaways

- Accurate, error-free spelling enhances your credibility with the reader.
- Mastering the rules of spelling may help you become a better speller.
- Knowing the commonly misused homonyms may prevent spelling errors.
- Studying the list of commonly misspelled words in this chapter, or studying a list of your own, is one way to improve your spelling skills.

## Writing Application

What is your definition of a successful person? Is it based on a person's profession or is it based on his or her character? Perhaps success means a combination of both. In one paragraph, describe in detail what you think makes a person successful. When you are finished, proofread your work for spelling errors. Exchange papers with a partner and read each other's work. See if you catch any spelling errors that your partner missed.

## Attribution & References

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## Notes

1. Sherman J. Alexie Jr. was born in October 1966. He is a Spokane/Coeur d’Alene Indian and an American writer, poet, and filmmaker. Alexie was born with hydrocephalus, or water on the brain. This condition led doctors to predict that he would *likly* suffer long-term brain damage and possibly mental retardation. Although Alexie survived with no mental *disabilitys*, he did suffer other serious side effects from his condition that *plagud* him throughout his childhood. Amazingly, Alexie learned to read by the age of three, and by age five he had read novels such as John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. Raised on an Indian reservation, Alexie often felt *aleinated* from his peers due to his avid love for reading and also from the long-term effects of his illness, which often kept him from *socializeing* with his peers on the reservation. The reading skills he *displaid* at such a young age foreshadowed what he would later become. Today Alexie is a prolific and successful writer with several story *anthologeis* to his credit, *notably* *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *The Toughest Indian in the World*. Most of his fiction is about contemporary Native Americans who are influenced by pop culture and pow wows and everything in between. His work is sometimes funny but always thoughtful and full of richness and depth. Alexie also writes poetry, novels, and screenplays. His latest collection of *storys* is called *War Dances*, which came out in 2009.
2.
 

1. principle	5. piece	9. seizes
2. wear	6. past	10. through
3. led	7. lessen	
4. which	8. patience	
3. Brooklyn is one of the five boroughs that make up New York City. It is located on the eastern shore of Long Island directly *accross* the East River from the island of Manhattan. Its *beginings* stretch back to the sixteenth century when it was founded by the Dutch who originally called it “Breuckelen.” *Immedietely* after the Dutch settled Brooklyn, it came under British rule. However, neither the Dutch nor the British were Brooklyn’s first inhabitants. When European settlers first arrived, Brooklyn was largely inhabited by the Lenapi, a collective name for several organized bands of Native American people who settled a large area of land that extended from upstate New York through the entire state of New Jersey. They are sometimes referred to as the Delaware Indians. Over time, the Lenapi succumbed to European diseases or conflicts between European settlers or other Native American enemies. *Finalley* they were pushed out of Brooklyn completely by the British. In 1776, Brooklyn was the site of the first *important* battle of the American Revolution known as the Battle of Brooklyn. The colonists lost this battle, which was led by George Washington, but over the next two years they would win the war, kicking the British out of the colonies once and for all. By the end of the nineteenth century, Brooklyn grew to be a city in its own right. The completion of the Brooklyn Bridge was an *ocasion* for celebration; transportation and commerce between Brooklyn and Manhattan now became

much easier. Eventually, in 1898, Brooklyn lost its *seperate* identity as an independent city and became one of five boroughs of New York City. However, in some people's *opiniem*, the *intagratiion* into New York City should have never happened; they *though* Brooklyn should have remained an independent city.

## 13.3 - WORD CHOICE

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### Learning Objectives

- Identify the reasons why using a dictionary and thesaurus is important when writing.
- Identify how to use proper connotations.
- Identify how to avoid using slang, clichés, and overly general words in your writing.

Effective writing involves making conscious choices with words. When you prepare to sit down to write your first draft, you likely have already completed some freewriting exercises, chosen your topic, developed your thesis statement, written an outline, and even selected your sources. When it is time to write your first draft, start to consider which words to use to best convey your ideas to the reader.

Some writers are picky about word choice as they start drafting. They may practice some specific strategies, such as using a dictionary and thesaurus, using words and phrases with proper connotations, and avoiding slang, clichés, and overly general words.

Once you understand these tricks of the trade, you can move ahead confidently in writing your assignment. Remember, the skill and accuracy of your word choice is a major factor in developing your writing style. Precise selection of your words will help you be more clearly understood—in both writing and speaking.

### Using a Dictionary and Thesaurus

Even professional writers need help with the meanings, spellings, pronunciations, and uses of particular words. In fact, they rely on dictionaries to help them write better. No one knows every word in the English language and their multiple uses and meanings, so all writers, from novices to professionals, can benefit from the use of dictionaries.

Most dictionaries provide the following information:

- **Spelling.** How the word and its different forms are spelled.
- **Pronunciation.** How to say the word.
- **Part of speech.** The function of the word.
- **Definition.** The meaning of the word.
- **Synonyms.** Words that have similar meanings.
- **Etymology.** The history of the word.

Look at the following sample dictionary entry and see which of the preceding information you can identify:

**myth**, mith, *n.* [Gr. *mythos*, a word, a fable, a legend.] A fable or legend embodying the convictions of a people as to their gods or other divine beings, their own beginnings and early history and the heroes connected with it, or the origin of the world; any invented story; something or someone having no existence in fact.—**myth • ic**, **myth • i • cal**

Like a dictionary, a thesaurus is another indispensable writing tool. A thesaurus gives you a list of synonyms, words that have the same (or very close to the same) meaning as another word. It also lists antonyms, words with the opposite meaning of the word. A thesaurus will help you when you are looking for the perfect word with just the right meaning to convey your ideas. It will also help you learn more words and use the ones you already know more correctly.

**precocious** *adj.* *She's such a precocious little girl!*: uncommonly smart, mature, advanced, smart, bright, brilliant, gifted, quick, clever, apt.

*Ant.* slow, backward, stupid.

## Using Proper Connotations

A denotation is the dictionary definition of a word. A connotation, on the other hand, is the emotional or cultural meaning attached to a word. The connotation of a word can be positive, negative, or neutral. Keep in mind the connotative meaning when choosing a word.



### Scrawny

- **Denotation:** Exceptionally thin and slight or meager in body or size.
- **Word used in a sentence:** Although he was a premature baby and a **scrawny** child, Martin has developed into a strong man.
- **Connotation:** (Negative) In this sentence the word *scrawny* may have a negative connotation in the readers' minds. They might find it to mean a weakness or a personal flaw; however, the word fits into the sentence appropriately.

### Skinny

- **Denotation:** Lacking sufficient flesh, very thin.
- **Word used in a sentence:** **Skinny** jeans have become very fashionable in the past couple of years.
- **Connotation:** (Positive) Based on cultural and personal impressions of what it means to be skinny, the reader may have positive connotations of the word *skinny*.

### Lean

- **Denotation:** Lacking or deficient in flesh; containing little or no fat.
- **Word used in a sentence:** My brother has a **lean** figure, whereas I have a more muscular build.
- **Connotation:** (Neutral) In this sentence, *lean* has a neutral connotation. It does not call to mind an overly skinny person like the word *scrawny*, nor does it imply the positive cultural impressions of the word *skinny*. It is merely a neutral descriptive word.

Notice that all the words have a very similar denotation; however, the connotations of each word differ.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

In each of the following items, you will find words with similar denotations. Identify the words'

connotations as positive, negative, or neutral by writing the word in the appropriate box. Copy the chart onto your own piece of paper.

1. curious, nosy, interested
2. lazy, relaxed, slow
3. courageous, foolhardy, assured
4. new, newfangled, modern
5. mansion, shack, residence
6. spinster, unmarried woman, career woman
7. giggle, laugh, cackle
8. boring, routine, prosaic
9. noted, notorious, famous
10. assertive, confident, pushy

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “13.3 – Word Choice” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Avoiding Slang

Slang describes informal words that are considered nonstandard English. Slang often changes with passing fads and may be used by or familiar to only a specific group of people. Most people use slang when they speak and in personal correspondences, such as e-mails, text messages, and instant messages. Slang is appropriate between friends in an informal context but should be avoided in formal academic writing.

### Writing at Work

Frequent exposure to media and popular culture has desensitized many of us to slang. In certain situations, using slang at work may not be problematic, but keep in mind that words can have a powerful effect. Slang in professional e-mails or during meetings may convey the wrong message

or even mistakenly offend someone.

## Exercise 2

Edit the following paragraph by replacing the slang words and phrases with more formal language. Rewrite the paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

I felt like such an airhead when I got up to give my speech. As I walked toward the podium, I banged my knee on a chair. Man, I felt like such a klutz. On top of that, I kept saying “like” and “um,” and I could not stop fidgeting. I was so stressed out about being up there. I feel like I’ve been practicing this speech 24/7, and I still bombed. It was ten minutes of me going off about how we sometimes have to do things we don’t enjoy doing. Wow, did I ever prove my point. My speech was so bad I’m surprised that people didn’t boo. My teacher said not to sweat it, though. Everyone gets nervous his or her first time speaking in public, and she said, with time, I would become a whiz at this speech giving stuff. I wonder if I have the guts to do it again.

### Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Avoiding Clichés

Clichés are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused. Writing that uses clichés often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding clichés in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways.

- **Clichéd:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes my **blood boil**.
- **Plain:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me really angry.
- **Original:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that

makes me want to go to the gym and punch the bag for a few hours.

## Tip

Think about all the cliché phrases that you hear in popular music or in everyday conversation. What would happen if these clichés were transformed into something unique?

## Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, revise the following sentences by replacing the clichés with fresh, original descriptions.

1. She is writing a memoir in which she will air her family's dirty laundry.
2. Fran had an ax to grind with Benny, and she planned to confront him that night at the party.
3. Mr. Muller was at his wit's end with the rowdy class of seventh graders.
4. The bottom line is that Greg was fired because he missed too many days of work.
5. Sometimes it is hard to make ends meet with just one paycheck.
6. My brain is fried from pulling an all-nighter.
7. Maria left the dishes in the sink all week to give Jeff a taste of his own medicine.
8. While they were at the carnival Janice exclaimed, "Time sure does fly when you are having fun!"
9. Jeremy became tongue-tied after the interviewer asked him where he saw himself in five years.
10. Jordan was dressed to the nines that night.

## Avoiding Overly General Words

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting to read. Whenever

possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with particular nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring your words to life. Add words that provide color, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

- **General:** My new puppy is cute.
- **Specific:** My new puppy is a ball of white fuzz with the biggest black eyes I have ever seen.
- **General:** My teacher told us that plagiarism is bad.
- **Specific:** My teacher, Ms. Atwater, created a presentation detailing exactly how plagiarism is illegal and unethical.

## Exercise 4

Revise the following sentences by replacing the overly general words with more precise and attractive language. Write the new sentences on your own sheet of paper.

1. Reilly got into her car and drove off.
2. I would like to travel to outer space because it would be amazing.
3. Jane came home after a bad day at the office.
4. I thought Milo's essay was fascinating.
5. The dog walked up the street.
6. The coal miners were tired after a long day.
7. The tropical fish are pretty.
8. I sweat a lot after running.
9. The goalie blocked the shot.
10. I enjoyed my Mexican meal.

## Key Takeaways

- Using a dictionary and thesaurus as you write will improve your writing by improving your word choice.
- Connotations of words may be positive, neutral, or negative.
- Slang, clichés, and overly general words should be avoided in academic writing.

## Writing Application

Review a piece of writing that you have completed for school. Circle any sentences with slang, clichés, or overly general words and rewrite them using stronger language.

## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “4.3 Word Choice (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/4-3-word-choice/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

1. Positive: interested Negative: nosy Neutral: curious
2. Positive: relaxed Negative: lazy Neutral: slow
3. Positive: courageous Negative: foolhardy Neutral: assured
4. Positive: modern Negative: newfangled Neutral: new
5. Positive: mansion Negative: shack Neutral: residence
6. Positive: career woman Negative: spinster Neutral: unmarried woman

7. Positive: giggle Negative: cackle Neutral: laugh      9. Positive: famous Negative: notorious Neutral: noted  
8. Positive: routine Negative: prosaic Neutral: boring      10. Positive: confident Negative: pushy Neutral: assertive

# 13.4 - USING CONTEXT CLUES

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## Learning Objectives

- Identify the different types of context clues.
- Practice using context clues while reading.

Context clues are bits of information within a text that will assist you in deciphering the meaning of unknown words. Since most of your knowledge of vocabulary comes from reading, it is important that you recognize context clues. By becoming more aware of particular words and phrases surrounding a difficult word, you can make logical guesses about its meaning. The following are the different types of context clues:

- Brief definition or restatement
- Synonyms and antonyms
- Examples

## Brief Definition or Restatement

Sometimes a text directly states the definition or a restatement of the unknown word. The brief definition or restatement is signaled by a word or a punctuation mark. Consider the following example:

If you visit Baffin Island, you will likely see many glaciers, or slow moving masses of ice.



In this sentence, the word *glaciers* is defined by the phrase that follows the signal word *or*, which is *slow moving masses of ice*.

In other instances, the text may restate the meaning of the word in a different way, by using punctuation as a signal. Look at the following example:

Marina was indignant—fuming mad—when she discovered her brother had left for the party without her.

Although *fuming mad* is not a formal definition of the word *indignant*, it does serve to define it. These two examples use signals—the word *or* and the punctuation dashes—to indicate the meaning of the unfamiliar word. Other signals to look for are the words *is*, *as*, *means*, *known as*, and *refers to*.

## Synonyms and Antonyms

Sometimes a text gives a synonym of the unknown word to signal the meaning of the unfamiliar word:

When you interpret an image, you actively question and examine what the image connotes and suggests.

In this sentence the word *suggests* is a synonym of the word *connotes*. The word *and* sometimes signals synonyms.

Likewise, the word *but* may signal a contrast, which can help you define a word by its antonym.

I abhor clothes shopping, but I adore grocery shopping.

The word *abhor* is contrasted with its opposite: *adore*. From this context, the reader can guess that *abhor* means to dislike greatly.

## Examples

Sometimes a text will give you an example of the word that sheds light on its meaning:

I knew Mark's ailurophobia was in full force because he began trembling and stuttering when he saw my cat, Ludwig, slink out from under the bed.

Although *ailurophobia* is an unknown word, the sentence gives an example of its effects. Based on this example, a reader could confidently surmise that the word means a fear of cats.

### Tip

Look for signal words like such as, for instance, and for example. These words signal that a word's meaning may be revealed through an example.

### Exercise 1

Identify the context clue that helps define the underlined words in each of the following sentences. Write the context clue on your own sheet of paper.

1. Lucinda is very adroit on the balance beam, but Constance is rather clumsy.
2. I saw the entomologist, a scientist who studies insects, cradle the giant dung beetle in her palm.
3. Lance's comments about politics were irrelevant and meaningless to the botanist's lecture on plant reproduction.
4. Before I left for my trip to the Czech Republic, I listened to my mother's sage advice and made a copy of my passport.
5. His rancor, or hatred, for socializing resulted in a life of loneliness and boredom.

6. Martin was mortified, way beyond embarrassment, when his friends teamed up to shove him into the pool.
7. The petulant four-year-old had a baby sister who was, on the contrary, not grouchy at all.
8. The philosophy teacher presented the students with several conundrums, or riddles, to solve.
9. Most Canadians are omnivores, people that eat both plants and animals.
10. Elena is effervescent, as excited as a cheerleader, for example, when she meets someone for the first time.

## Exercise 2

On your own sheet of paper, write the name of the context clue that helps to define the following words:

- precocious
- flabbergasted
- dexterity
- gloated
- agape

Imani was a precocious child to say the least. She produced brilliant watercolor paintings by the age of three. At first, her parents were flabbergasted—utterly blown away—by their daughter’s ability, but soon they got used to their little painter. Her preschool teacher said that Imani’s dexterity, or ease with which she used her hands, was something she had never before seen in such a young child. Little Imani never gloated or took pride in her paintings; she just smiled contentedly when she finished one and requested her parents give it to someone as a gift. Whenever people met Imani for the first time they often watched her paint with their mouths agape, but her parents always kept their mouths closed and simply smiled over their “little Monet.”

### Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Tip

In addition to context clues to help you figure out the meaning of a word, examine the following word parts: prefixes, roots, and suffixes.

## Writing at Work

Jargon is a type of shorthand communication often used in the workplace. It is the technical language of a special field. Imagine it is your first time working as a server in a restaurant and your manager tells you he is going to “eighty-six” the roasted chicken. If you do not realize that “eighty-six” means to remove an item from the menu, you could be confused.

When you first start a job, no matter where it may be, you will encounter jargon that will likely be foreign to you. Perhaps after working the job for a short time, you too will feel comfortable enough to use it. When you are first hired, however, jargon can be baffling and make you feel like an outsider. If you cannot decipher the jargon based on the context, it is always a good policy to ask.

## Key Takeaways

- Context clues are words or phrases within a text that help clarify vocabulary that is unknown to you.
- There are several types of context clues including brief definition and restatement, synonyms and antonyms, and example.

## Writing Application

Write a paragraph describing your first job. In the paragraph, use five words previously unknown to you. These words could be jargon words or you may consult a dictionary or thesaurus to find a new word. Make sure to provide a specific context clue for understanding each word. Exchange papers with a classmate and try to decipher the meaning of the words in each other's paragraphs based on the context clues.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from "4.6 Using Context Clues (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/4-6-using-context-clues/>)" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

# 13.5 - PLAIN LANGUAGE

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## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- identify active and passive voice, jargon, positive and negative tone, and unnecessary words in written and oral communications;
- rewrite a given message while following five principles of plain language: active voice, common words, positive tone, reader focus, and short (concise) words and sentences;
- proofread another student's work, or your own, with a focus on the five principles of plain language: active voice, common words, positive tone, reader focus, and short (concise) words and sentences.

## Crafting Your Message with Plain Language

No matter who you are communicating with, they will appreciate your ability to write using plain language. This is a key skill in any professional setting. Plain language writing—and speaking—will help you to get your message across clearly and concisely. This chapter will introduce you to the principles of plain language and allow you to practise them.

### Principle 1: Use Active Voice

Knowing when and how to use either active or passive voice will help you to create clear messages. Most contexts prefer the active voice, which is more direct than passive voice, which can be awkward, vague and wordy. Passive voice can be the best choice, in some situations; knowing the difference is important!

## Recognizing Active and Passive Voice

To use active voice, make the *noun that performs the action* the subject of the sentence and pair it directly with an action verb.

Read these two sentences:

Matt Damon left Harvard in the late 1980s to start his acting career.

Matt Damon’s acting career was started in the late 1980s when he left Harvard.

In the first sentence, **left** is an action verb that is paired with the subject, Matt Damon. If you ask, “Who or what left?” the answer is Matt Damon. Neither of the other two nouns in the sentence—Harvard and career—“left” anything.

Now look at the second sentence. The action verb is **started**. If you ask, “Who or what started something?” the answer, again, is Matt Damon. But in this sentence, the writer placed **career**—not **Matt Damon**—in the subject position. When the doer of the action is not the subject, the sentence is in passive voice. In passive voice constructions, the doer of the action usually follows the word *by* as the indirect object of a prepositional phrase, and the action verb is typically partnered with a version of the verb *to be*.

The following sentences are in passive voice. For each sentence, identify

- the noun in the subject position,
- the form of the verb *to be*,
- the action verb, and
- the doer of the action.

Example 1: The original screenplay for *Good Will Hunting* was written by Matt Damon for an English class when he was student at Harvard University.

### Quick Check 1



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/?p=5249#h5p-290>

### Quick Check 1 (Text version)

Match the following words or phrases (a. Matt Damon, b. written, c. was, d. Good Will Hunting), to the following parts:

1. The noun in the subject position
2. The form of the verb 'to be'
3. The action verb
4. The doer of the action

**Check your Answer:** <sup>1</sup>

**Activity source:** "Quick Check 1" is adapted from *Professional Communications: Canadian Edition*, CC BY 4.0.

Example 2: As an actor, Matt Damon is loved by millions of fans worldwide.

## Quick Check 2



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/?p=5249#h5p-291>

### Quick Check 2 (Text version)

Match the following words or phrases (a. loved, b. Matt Damon, c. is, d. fans), to the following parts:

1. The noun in the subject position
2. The form of the verb 'to be'
3. The action verb
4. The doer of the action

**Check your Answer:** <sup>2</sup>



**Activity source:** “Quick Check 2” is adapted from *Professional Communications: Canadian Edition*, CC BY 4.0.

## Check Your Understanding: Active or Passive

Decide whether each of the following sentences is active or passive.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/?p=5249#h5p-292>

### Check Your Understanding: Active or Passive (Text version)

1. An Oscar was given to Matt Damon and Ben Affleck for the *Good Will Hunting* script.
2. Matt Damon and Ben Affleck grew up together and are still colleagues and friends today.
3. Jason Bourne, a character from the novels of Robert Ludlum, was played several times by Matt Damon.
4. Besides acting in the Bourne movies, Matt Damon also played the title character in *Good Will Hunting*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

### Check your Answer:<sup>3</sup>

**Activity source:** “Check Your Understanding: Active or Passive” is adapted from *Professional Communications: Canadian Edition*, CC BY 4.0.

## Using Action Verbs to Make Sentences More Interesting

Two sentences can say the same thing but leave a different impression based on the choice of verb. Which of the following sentences gives you the most vivid mental picture?

1. A bald eagle was overhead and now is low in the sky near me.

2. A bald eagle soared overhead and then dove low, seemingly coming right at me.

Most of us would agree that sentence B paints a better picture.

Try to express yourself with action verbs instead of forms of the verb *to be*. Sometimes it is fine to use forms of the verb *to be*, such as *is* or *are*, but it is easy to overuse them (as in this sentence—twice). Overuse of these verbs will make your writing dull.

## Revising sentences to make them more interesting

Read each of the following sentences and note the use of the verb *to be*. Think of a way to reword the sentence to make it more interesting by using an action verb before checking the suggested revision.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/?p=5249#h5p-293>

### Revising sentences to make them more interesting (Text version)

A photo was snapped, the tiger was upset, and Elizabeth was on the ground. Check revision<sup>4</sup>

A giraffe's neck is long and thin, but it is as much as 500 pounds in weight. Check revision<sup>5</sup>

An elephant is able to drink 80 gallons of water and is likely to eat 1,000 pounds of vegetation in a day. Check revision<sup>6</sup>

**Activity source:** “Revising sentences to make them more interesting” is adapted from *Professional Communications: Canadian Edition*, CC BY 4.0.

### Note

A point of confusion that sometimes comes up when people discuss the passive voice is the use of expletive pronouns. A sentence with expletive pronouns often starts with “There is ...” or “There are

....” Many people mistakenly think that expletive pronoun sentences are a form of passive voice, but they are not.

To understand the difference, please read the “Avoid Expletive Pronouns” section under Principle 5.

## Using Action Verbs Alone to Avoid Passive Voice

Even though the passive voice might include an action verb, the action verb is not as strong as it could be, because of the sentence structure. The passive voice also causes unnecessary wordiness.

### Rewording sentences in active voice

Read the following sentences and think of a way to reword each using an action verb in active voice. Then look at the suggested revision for each case.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/?p=5249#h5p-294>

#### Rewording sentences in active voice (Text version)

Original: The zebras were fed by the zoo workers. (eight words) Check revision<sup>7</sup>

Original: Water was spewed in the air by the elephant. (nine words) Check revision<sup>8</sup>

Original: The home of the hippopotamus was cleaned up and made tidy by Hank the Hippo Man. (16 words) Check revision<sup>9</sup>

**Activity source:** “Rewording sentences in active voice” is adapted from *Professional Communications: Canadian Edition*, CC BY 4.0.

## Writing in the Active Voice

Writing in active voice is easy once you understand the difference between active and passive voice. Make sure you always define who or what did what. If you use forms of the verb to be with your action verb, consider the reason for your choice. If you are writing in progressive tense (“Carrie is walking to my house”) or perfect progressive tense (“Melissa will have been married for four years by then”), you will need to use helping verbs, even in active voice.

## Using Passive Voice

Sometimes passive voice is the best option. Consider the following acceptable uses of passive voice.

When you do not know who or what is responsible for the action:

Example: Our front-door lock was picked.

Rationale: If you do not know who picked the lock on your front door, you cannot say who did it. You could say a thief broke in, but that would be an assumption; you could, theoretically, find out that the lock was picked by a family member who had forgotten to take a key.

When you want to hide the person or thing responsible for the action, such as in a story:

Example: The basement was filled with a mysterious scraping sound.

Rationale: If you are writing a dramatic story, you might introduce a phenomenon without revealing the person or thing that caused it.

When the person or thing that performed the action is not important:

Example: The park was flooded all week.

Rationale: Although you would obviously know that the rainwater flooded the park, saying so would not be important.

When you do not want to place credit, responsibility, or blame:

Example: A mistake was made in the investigation that resulted in the wrong person being on trial.

Rationale: Even if you think you know who is responsible for a problem, you might not want to expose the person.

When you want to maintain the impression of objectivity:

Example: It was noted that only first-graders chose to eat the fruit.

Rationale: Research reports in certain academic disciplines attempt to remove the

researcher from the results, to avoid saying, for example, “I noted that only first graders...”

When you want to avoid using a gendered construction, and pluralizing is not an option:

Example: If the password is forgotten by the user, a security question will be asked.

Rationale: This construction avoids the need for the cumbersome “his or her” (as in “the user forgets his or her password”).

## Principle 2: Use Common Words Instead of Complex Words

Inappropriate word choices will get in the way of your message. For this reason, use language that is accurate and appropriate for the writing situation. Omit jargon (technical words and phrases common to a specific profession or discipline) and slang (invented words and phrases specific to a certain group of people), unless your audience and purpose call for such language. Avoid outdated words and phrases, such as “Dial the number.” Be straightforward in your writing rather than using euphemism (a gentler, but sometimes inaccurate, way of saying something). Be clear about the level of formality each piece of writing needs, and adhere to that level.

### Writing without Jargon or Slang

Jargon and slang both have their places. Using jargon is fine as long as you can safely assume your readers also know the jargon. For example, if you are a lawyer writing to others in the legal profession, using legal jargon is perfectly fine. On the other hand, if you are writing for people outside the legal profession, using legal jargon would most likely be confusing, and you should avoid it. Of course, lawyers must use legal jargon in papers they prepare for customers. However, those papers are designed to navigate within the legal system and may not be clear to readers outside of this demographic.

#### Examples:

Jargon: I need to hammer out this report by tomorrow.

Alternative: I need to type up this report by tomorrow.

Euphemism: My uncle is vertically challenged.

Alternative: My uncle is only five feet tall.

## Principle 3: Use a Positive Tone When Possible

Unless there is a specific reason not to, use positive language wherever you can. Positive language benefits your writing in two ways. First, it creates a positive tone, and your writing is more likely to be well-received. Second, it clarifies your meaning, as positive statements are more concise. Take a look at the following negatively worded sentences and then their positive counterparts, below.

### Examples:

Negative: Your car will not be ready for collection until Friday.

Positive: Your car will be ready for collection on Friday.

Negative: You did not complete the exam.

Positive: You will need to complete the exam.

Negative: Your holiday time is not approved until your manager clears it.

Positive: Your holiday time will be approved when your manager clears it.

Avoid using multiple negatives in one sentence, as this will make your sentence difficult to understand. When readers encounter more than one negative construct in a sentence, their brains have to do more cognitive work to decipher the meaning; multiple negatives can create convoluted sentences that bog the reader down.

### Examples:

Negative: A decision will not be made unless all board members agree.

Positive: A decision will be made when all board members agree.

Negative: The event cannot be scheduled without a venue.

Positive: The event can be scheduled when a venue has been booked.

## Principle 4: Write for Your Reader

When you write for your readers and speak to an audience, you have to consider who they are and what they need to know. When readers know that you are concerned with their needs, they are more likely to be open to your message, and will be more likely to:

- take the action you are asking them to and
- focus on important details.

Your message will mean more to your reader if they get the impression that it was written directly to them. When you sit down to write, either for a paper or a presentation, consider the audience analysis tool presented earlier in this module.

Then try to answer these questions in your writing with user-friendly language.

Speaking directly to the audience using you-oriented language helps to personalize the message and make it easier to understand. Using the second-person pronoun you tells your reader that the message is intended for them. You might be inclined to use he, she, or they instead, but those terms are not as direct or personal. Using the pronoun you makes the message feel relevant.

Consider the following sentences:

1. Employees arriving at the Sands Hotel for the team's day out should assemble in the lobby.
2. When you arrive at the Sands Hotel for the team's day out, please join us in the lobby.

Which one is more inviting? Most people will find the second sentence more friendly and inviting because it addresses the reader directly.

## Organize Your Document to Meet Your Readers' Needs

When you write, ask yourself, "Why would someone read this message?" Often, it is because the reader needs a question answered. What do they need to know to prepare for the upcoming meeting, for example, or what new company policies do they need to abide by? Think about the questions your readers will ask and then organize your document to answer them.

## Principle 5: Keep Words and Sentence Short (Conciseness)

It is easy to let your sentences become cluttered with words that do not add value to your message. Improve cluttered sentences by eliminating repetitive ideas, removing repeated words, and editing to eliminate unnecessary words.

### Eliminating Repetitive Ideas

Unless you are providing definitions on purpose, stating one idea twice in a single sentence is redundant. Read each example below and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove repetitive phrasing. Then look at the suggested revision.

Examples:

Original: Use a very heavy skillet made of cast iron to bake an extra-juicy meatloaf.

Revision: Use a cast-iron skillet to bake a juicy meatloaf.

Original: Joe thought to himself, I think I'll make caramelized grilled salmon tonight.

Revision: Joe thought, I think I'll make caramelized grilled salmon tonight.

## Removing Repeated Words

As a general rule, you should try not to repeat a word within a sentence. Sometimes you simply need to choose a different word. But often you can actually remove repeated words. Read this example and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove a repeated word that adds wordiness. Then check out the revision below the sentence.

**Example:**

Original: The student who won the cooking contest is a very talented and ambitious student.

Revision: The student who won the cooking contest is very talented and ambitious.

## Rewording to Eliminate Unnecessary Words

If a sentence has words that are not necessary to carry the meaning, those words are unneeded and can be removed. Read each example and think about how you could revise the sentence; then check out the suggested revisions.

**Examples:**

Original: Andy has the ability to make the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.

Revision: Andy makes the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.

Original: For his part in the cooking class group project, Malik was responsible for making the mustard reduction sauce.

Revision: Malik made the mustard reduction sauce for his cooking class group project.

## Avoid Expletive Pronouns (Most of the Time)

Many people create needlessly wordy sentences using expletive pronouns, which often take the form of "There is ..." or "There are ..."

Now, if you remember, pronouns (e.g., I, you, he, she, they, this, that, who, etc.) are words that we use to replace nouns (i.e., people, places, things), and there are many types of pronouns (e.g., personal, relative, demonstrative, etc.). However, expletive pronouns are different from other pronouns because unlike most pronouns, they do not stand for a person, thing, or place; they are called expletives because they have no



“value.” Sometimes you will see expletive pronouns at the beginning of a sentence, sometimes at the end. Look at the following expletive constructs:

**Examples:**

1. There are a lot of reading assignments in this class.
2. I can't believe how many reading assignments there are!

Note: These two examples are not necessarily bad examples of using expletive pronouns. We included them to help you first understand what expletive pronouns are so you can recognize them.

The main reason we should generally avoid writing with expletive pronouns is that they often cause us to use more words in the rest of the sentence than we have to. Also, the empty words at the beginning tend to shift the more important subject matter toward the end of the sentence. The above sentences are not that bad, but at least they are simple enough to help you understand what expletive pronouns are. Here are some more examples of expletive pronouns, along with better alternatives.

**Examples:**

Original: There are some people who love to cause trouble.

Revision: Some people love to cause trouble.

Original: There are some things that are just not worth waiting for.

Revision: Some things are just not worth waiting for.

Original: There is a person I know who can help you fix your computer.

Revision: I know a person who can help you fix your computer

While not all instances of expletive pronouns are bad, writing sentences with expletives seems to be habit forming. It can lead to trouble when you are explaining more complex ideas, because you end up having to use additional strings of phrases to explain what you want your reader to understand. Wordy sentences, such as those with expletive pronouns, can tax the reader's mind.

**Example:**

Original: There is a button you need to press that is red and says STOP.

Revision: You need to press the red STOP button. Or: Press the red STOP button.

Of course, most rules and guideline have exceptions, and expletive pronouns are no different. In many cases common expressions, particularly if they are short, are not worth revising—especially in live communications such as presentations, lectures, and speeches.

**Examples:**

There is no place I'd rather be.

There are good days, and there are bad days.

There is no way around this.

How many ways are there to solve this puzzle?

The above sentences use expletive pronouns but are fine because they are short and easy on the reader's mind. In fact, revising them would make for longer, more convoluted sentences!

So when you find yourself using expletives, always ask yourself if omitting and rewriting would give your reader a clearer, more direct, less wordy sentence. Can I communicate the same message using fewer words without taking away from the meaning I want to convey or the tone I want to create? Practise evaluating your own writing and playing with alternative ways to say the same thing.

### Note

Do not confuse expletive pronouns with passive voice (as also noted briefly in Principle 1: Use the Active Voice). Both expletive sentences and passive voice use forms of the verb to be, often result in wordiness, and sometimes obscure important information, but they are not the same thing grammatically. The following example should help to clear up any mix-up between the two.

Example:

The following sentence uses passive voice:

- A few people can be called upon to help you.

It is passive because the subject of the sentence (people) are not the doers of the verb called. The active agent who will be "calling" is missing. Are you to call upon these people, or will someone else call upon them?

But the following example uses an expletive pronoun and is not in passive voice, because it has an active agent (you) doing the "calling":

- There are a few people you can call upon to help you.

But even though passive voice and expletive constructs are not the same, it is possible—but rarely advisable—to write a sentence that uses both!

- There are a few people who can be called upon to help you.

The active agent doing the “calling” is, once again, missing; and the sentence starts with the expletive “There are.” What a convoluted sentence!

A better sentence that uses neither passive voice nor expletive pronouns would be:

- You can call upon a few people to help you.

Ah! Much better!

## Conclusion

In this chapter, you have recognized plain language as a way to get your message across clearly and concisely when writing and speaking. You have identified five principles of plain-language writing: use active voice, use common words instead of complex words, use a positive tone when possible, write for your reader, and keep words and sentences short. You should now be ready to get more practice using the questions in this chapter, or move on to the next topic.

## Further Readings

- *Five-step checklist to write better* (<http://centerforplainlanguage.org/5-steps-to-plain-language/>). Center for Plain Language.

## Key Takeaways and Check In

### Key Takeaways

- Write using the active voice to make sentences more interesting.
- Limit the use of jargon to situations where your audience recognizes it. Remove slang and euphemisms from professional writing.
- Use positive instead of negative tone.
- Examine the subject matter, audience, and purpose to determine the level of formality for your writing or presentation.
- State ideas only once within a single sentence.

## Final Check In Questions

Aim to achieve 100% on these final, check in questions. Good luck!



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/?p=5249#h5p-295>

### Final Check In Questions (Text version)

1. “Best practices,” “centres of excellence,” “core competencies,” “mission critical,” “roll out,” and “performance management” are all examples of:
  - a. Jargon
  - b. Cliches
  - c. Sexism
  - d. Slang
  
2. The following statement lacks which principle of plain language? “Despite the fact that Mrs. Armadio will not be present at the commencement of her kitchen renovation project, as her legal representative, I am authorized to coordinate with the foreman of the construction crew about how the project will proceed.”
  - a. Organization
  - b. Common words
  - c. Active Voice
  - d. Positive tone
  - e. Conciseness
  
3. Which of the following is FALSE?
  - a. Jargon should be avoided at all times, because it is too occupation specific.
  - b. Clichés are communication obstacles because they are overused.
  - c. You can use slang to target specific audiences.
  - d. Doublespeak is not ethical.
  
4. Read the following statement: “It was determined by the committee that the report was

inconclusive.” Identify which of the five plain-language principles the writer has NOT followed.

- a. Common Words
  - b. Reader Focus
  - c. Active voice
  - d. Conciseness
  - e. Positive Tone
5. One of the pages on the University of Midland’s Human Resources website starts with the following paragraph: “The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) replaced the Tuition Remission and Reimbursement Program (TRR) effective November 1, 2004. This program was implemented with the Spring Semester 2005. TAP is an employee supplemental educational assistance program.” Is this an effective message? Why, or why not?
- a. Yes, it is effective, because it starts by making sure readers are not confused by the changes in the program.
  - b. No, it is not effective, because it contains information that is now irrelevant and defines the most important term last instead of first.
  - c. Yes, it is effective, because it contains precise information and identifies abbreviations (TAP, TRR) before using them.
  - d. No, it is not effective, because when the new program was implemented is irrelevant and the name of the old program communicated the benefit more accurately than the new name.
6. Each of the options above contains flawed details, and so none are 100 percent correct.
- a. Which of the following is NOT a good way to ensure that your document’s tone matches its intent?
  - b. Read it out loud, so you can hear how the words you have chosen reflect the tone of your messages.
  - c. Get several people to read your work and give you feedback on its tone.
  - d. Listen to or watch presentations that are known for having used tone effectively.
  - e. Publish or send the document and wait for feedback from your readers.\*

**Check your Answers:**<sup>10</sup>

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## Notes

1. 1. d, 2. c, 3. b, 4. a
2. 1. b, 2. c, 3. a, 4. d
3. 1. Passive, 2. Active, 3. Passive, 4. Active.
4. Elizabeth innocently snapped the photo, and the lion let out a roar that sent Elizabeth scrambling backward until she tumbled down the hill.
5. A giraffe’s neck towers far above its body and often weighs as much as 500 pounds.
6. In one day, an elephant slurps down 80 gallons of water and munches away on 1,000 pounds of vegetation.
7. The zoo workers fed the zebras. (six words)

8. The elephant spewed water in the air. (seven words)
9. Hank the Hippo Man cleaned up and tidied the hippopotamus's home. (11 words)
10. 1. a, 2. e, 3. a, 4. c, 5. d, 6. e

# 13.6 - WORKING WITH WORDS: END-OF-CHAPTER EXERCISES

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## Learning Objectives

- Use the skills you have learned in the chapter.
- Work collaboratively with other students.

## Exercise 1

Proofread the paragraph and correct any commonly confused words and misspelled words.

Grunge, or the Seattle sound, is a type of rock music that became quiet popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It began in Seattle, Washington. Grunge musicians rejected the dramatic an expensive stage productions that were trendy at the time. There music was striped down with an emphasis on distorted electric guitars. Grunge musicians did not ware makeup or sport extravagant hairstyles like many of the day's rock musicians and bands. Many grunge musicians would by they're clothes from secondhand stores. The lyrics too grunge songs were also quit different compared two what was populer at the time. Grunge lyrics are charecterized by dark or socially conscience themes. Grunge music is still admired today buy music lovers of all ages.



## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by filling in the blank line with the correct homonym or frequently misspelled word.

1. Kevin asked me a serious question and \_\_\_\_\_(then, than) interrupted me when I attempted to answer.
2. A hot compress will \_\_\_\_\_(lessen, lesson) the pain of muscle cramps.
3. Jason was not a graceful \_\_\_\_\_(looser, loser) because he knocked his chair over and stormed off the basketball court.
4. Please consider the \_\_\_\_\_(effects, affects) of not getting enough green vegetables in your diet.
5. \_\_\_\_\_(Except, Accept) for Ajay, we all had our tickets to the play.
6. I am \_\_\_\_\_(threw, through) with this magazine, so you can read it if you like.
7. I don't care \_\_\_\_\_(whose, who's) coming to the party and \_\_\_\_\_(whose, who's) not.
8. Crystal could \_\_\_\_\_(sea, see) the soaring hawk through her binoculars.
9. The \_\_\_\_\_(principal, principle) gave the students a very long lecture about peer pressure.
10. Dr. Frankl nearly lost his \_\_\_\_\_(patience, patients) with one of his \_\_\_\_\_(patience, patients).

### Check Your Answers:<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “13.5 – Working With Words: End-Of-Chapter Exercises” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Exercise 3

Rewrite the following personal essay by replacing the slang, clichés, and overly general language with stronger, more precise language.

My biggest regret happened in high school. I had always felt like a fish out of water, so when I started grade 9 I was determined to fit in with the cool people. Man, was that an uphill battle. I don't even know why I tried, but hindsight is 20/20 I guess. The first thing I did was change the way I dressed. I went from wearing clothes I was comfortable in to wearing stuff that was so not me. Then I started wearing a ton of makeup, and my brother was all like, "What happened to your face?" Not only did my looks change, my personality changed a lot too. I started to act all stuck up and bossy with my friends, and they didn't know how to respond to this person that used to be me. Luckily, this phase didn't last more than a couple of months. I decided it was more fun to be me than to try to be someone else. I guess you can't fit a square peg in a round hole after all.

## Exercise 4

### Exercise 4 (Text Version)

Write the correct synonym for each word.

1. lenient \_\_\_\_\_ (relaxed, callous)
2. abandon \_\_\_\_\_ (vacate, deceive)
3. berate \_\_\_\_\_ (criticize, encourage)
4. experienced \_\_\_\_\_ (callow, matured)
5. spiteful \_\_\_\_\_ (malevolent, mellow)
6. tame \_\_\_\_\_ (subdued, wild)
7. tasty \_\_\_\_\_ (savory, bland)
8. banal \_\_\_\_\_ (common, interesting)

9. contradict \_\_\_\_\_(deny, revolt)  
 10. vain \_\_\_\_\_(boastful, simple)

### Check Your Answers:<sup>2</sup>

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## Notes

- |    |                          |                          |                        |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | 1. then                  | 5. Except                | 9. principal           |
|    | 2. lessen                | 6. through               | 10. patience           |
|    | 3. looser                | 7. who's                 |                        |
|    | 4. effects               | 8. see                   |                        |
| 2. | 1. lenient - relaxed     | 5. spiteful - malevolent | 9. contradict - revolt |
|    | 2. abandon - vacate      | 6. tame - subdued        | 10. vain - boastful    |
|    | 3. berate - criticize    | 7. tasty - savory        |                        |
|    | 4. experienced - matured | 8. banal - common        |                        |

# CHAPTER 14: REFINING YOUR WRITING: HOW DO I IMPROVE MY WRITING TECHNIQUE?

## ***Communication Essentials for College* by Jen Booth, Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell**

- 14.1 – Sentence Variety
- 14.2 – Coordination and Subordination
- 14.3 – Parallelism
- 14.4 – Refining Your Writing: End-of-Chapter Exercises

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(<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/>) to access the complete book,  
interactive activities and ancillary resources.

# 14.1 - SENTENCE VARIETY

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## Learning Objectives

- Identify ways to vary sentence structure.
- Write and revise sentence structure at the beginning of sentences.
- Write and revise sentence structure by connecting ideas.

Have you ever ordered a dish in a restaurant and been not happy with its taste, even though it contained most of your favorite ingredients? Just as a meal might lack the finishing touches needed to spice it up, so too might a paragraph contain all the basic components but still lack the stylistic finesse required to engage a reader. Sometimes writers have a tendency to reuse the same sentence pattern throughout their writing. Like any repetitive task, reading text that contains too many sentences with the same length and structure can become monotonous and boring. Experienced writers mix it up by using an assortment of sentence patterns, rhythms, and lengths.

In this chapter, you will follow a student named Naomi who has written a draft of an essay but needs to refine her writing. This section discusses how to introduce sentence variety into writing, how to open sentences using a variety of techniques, and how to use different types of sentence structure when connecting ideas. You can use these techniques when revising a paper to bring life and rhythm to your work. They will also make reading your work more enjoyable.

## Incorporating Sentence Variety

Experienced writers incorporate sentence variety into their writing by varying sentence style and structure. Using a mixture of different sentence structures reduces repetition and adds emphasis to important points in the text. Read the following example:

## Read a sample passage

During my time in office I have achieved several goals. I have helped increase funding for local schools. I have reduced crime rates in the neighbourhood. I have encouraged young people to get involved in their community. My competitor argues that she is the better choice in the upcoming election. I argue that it is ridiculous to fix something that isn't broken. If you reelect me this year, I promise to continue to serve this community.

In this extract from an election campaign, the writer uses short, simple sentences of a similar length and style. Writers often mistakenly believe that this technique makes the text more clear for the reader, but the result is a choppy, unsophisticated paragraph that does not grab the audience's attention.

## Now read the revised paragraph with sentence variety

During my time in office, I have helped increase funding for local schools, reduced crime rates in the neighbourhood, and encouraged young people to get involved in their community. Why fix what isn't broken? If you reelect me this year, I will continue to achieve great things for this community. Don't take a chance on an unknown contender; vote for the proven success.

Notice how introducing a short rhetorical question among the longer sentences in the paragraph is an effective means of keeping the reader's attention. In the revised version, the writer combines the choppy sentences at the beginning into one longer sentence, which adds rhythm and interest to the paragraph.

## Tip

Effective writers often implement the “rule of three,” which is basically the thought that things that contain three elements are more memorable and more satisfying to readers than any other number. Try to use a series of three when providing examples, grouping adjectives, or generating a list.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Rewrite the following sentences by moving the adverbs to the beginning.

1. The red truck sped furiously past the camper van, blaring its horn.
2. Jeff snatched at the bread hungrily, polishing off three slices in under a minute.
3. Underage drinking typically results from peer pressure and lack of parental attention.
4. The firefighters bravely tackled the blaze, but they were beaten back by flames.
5. Mayor Johnson privately acknowledged that the budget was excessive and that further discussion was needed.

### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

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## Using Sentence Variety at the Beginning of Sentences

Read the following sentences and consider what they all have in common:

John and Amanda will be analyzing this week’s financial report.

The car screeched to a halt just a few inches away from the young boy.

Students rarely come to the exam adequately prepared.

If you are having trouble figuring out why these sentences are similar, try underlining the subject in each. You will notice that the subject is positioned at the beginning of each sentence—*John and Amanda, the car, students*. Since the subject-verb-object pattern is the simplest sentence structure, many writers tend to overuse this technique, which can result in repetitive paragraphs with little sentence variety.

Naomi wrote an essay about the 2008 government bailout.

### Read this excerpt from Naomi's essay:

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

This section examines several ways to introduce sentence variety at the beginning of sentences, using Naomi's essay as an example.

## Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

One technique you can use so as to avoid beginning a sentence with the subject is to use an adverb. An adverb is a word that describes a verb, adjective, or other adverb and often ends in *-ly*. Examples of adverbs include *quickly, softly, quietly, angrily, and timidly*. Read the following sentences:

She slowly turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

Slowly, she turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

In the second sentence, the adverb *slowly* is placed at the beginning of the sentence. If



you read the two sentences aloud, you will notice that moving the adverb changes the rhythm of the sentence and slightly alters its meaning. The second sentence emphasizes how the subject moves—slowly—creating a buildup of tension. This technique is effective in fictional writing.

Note that an adverb used at the beginning of a sentence is usually followed by a comma. A comma indicates that the reader should pause briefly, which creates a useful rhetorical device. Read the following sentences aloud and consider the effect of pausing after the adverb:

Cautiously, he unlocked the kennel and waited for the dog's reaction.

Solemnly, the policeman approached the mayor and placed him under arrest.

Suddenly, he slammed the door shut and sprinted across the street.

In an academic essay, moving an adverb to the beginning of a sentence serves to vary the rhythm of a paragraph and increase sentence variety.

### An excerpt from Naomi's essay

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Naomi has used two adverbs in her essay that could be moved to the beginning of their respective sentences. Notice how the following revised version creates a more varied paragraph:

## The revised excerpt from Naomi's essay

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Finally, the government opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. Optimistically, the government expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

### Tip

Adverbs of time—adverbs that indicate when an action takes place—do not always require a comma when used at the beginning of a sentence. Adverbs of time include words such as yesterday, today, later, sometimes, often, and now.

## Exercise 2

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences by moving the adverbs to the beginning.

1. The red truck sped furiously past the camper van, blaring its horn.
2. Jeff snatched at the bread hungrily, polishing off three slices in under a minute.
3. Underage drinking typically results from peer pressure and lack of parental attention.

4. The firefighters bravely tackled the blaze, but they were beaten back by flames.
5. Mayor Johnson privately acknowledged that the budget was excessive and that further discussion was needed.

### Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Starting a Sentence with a Prepositional Phrase

A prepositional phrase is a group of words that behaves as an adjective or an adverb, modifying a noun or a verb. Prepositional phrases contain a preposition (a word that specifies place, direction, or time) and an object of the preposition (a noun phrase or pronoun that follows the preposition).

### Common Prepositions

- above
- beneath
- into
- till
- across
- beside
- like
- toward
- against
- between
- near
- under
- after
- beyond
- off
- underneath
- among
- by
- on
- until
- around
- despite
- over
- up
- at
- except
- past
- with
- before
- for
- since
- without
- behind
- from
- through
- below
- inside
- throughout

Read the following sentence:

The terrified child hid **underneath the table**.

In this sentence, the prepositional phrase is *underneath the table*. The preposition *underneath* relates to the object that follows the preposition—*the table*. Adjectives may be placed between the preposition and the object in a prepositional phrase.

The terrified child hid **underneath the heavy wooden table**.

Some prepositional phrases can be moved to the beginning of a sentence in order to create variety in a piece of writing. Look at the following revised sentence:

**Underneath the heavy wooden table**, the terrified child hid.

Notice that when the prepositional phrase is moved to the beginning of the sentence, the emphasis shifts from the subject—the terrified child—to the location in which the child is hiding. Words that are placed at the beginning or end of a sentence generally receive the greatest emphasis. Take a look at the following examples. The prepositional phrase is underlined in each:

The bandaged man waited **in the doctor's office**.

**In the doctor's office**, the bandaged man waited.

My train leaves the station **at 6:45 a.m.**

**At 6:45 a.m.**, my train leaves the station.

Teenagers exchange drugs and money **under the railway bridge**.

**Under the railway bridge**, teenagers exchange drugs and money.

Prepositional phrases are useful in any type of writing. Take another look at Naomi's essay on the government bailout.

## An excerpt from Naomi's essay about the 2008 government bailout

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Now read the revised version.

### Revised version

Throughout 2007 and 2008, the subprime mortgage crisis worsened, leaving many financial institutions in jeopardy. According to some economists, the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Despite public objections, the government finally opted to bail out the banks. Since the 2008 bill passed, it has acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

A revised version of Naomi's essay with 4 prepositional phrases underlined: 1- "Throughout 2007 and 2008", 2 - "According to some economists", 3 - "Despite public objections" and "Since the 2008 bill passed" .

The underlined words are all prepositional phrases. Notice how they add additional information to the text and provide a sense of flow to the essay, making it less choppy and more pleasurable to read.

## Unmovable Prepositional Phrases

Not all prepositional phrases can be placed at the beginning of a sentence. Read the following sentence:

I would like a chocolate sundae **without whipped cream**.

In this sentence, *without whipped cream* is the prepositional phrase. Because it describes the chocolate sundae, it cannot be moved to the beginning of the sentence. “Without whipped cream I would like a chocolate sundae” does not make as much (if any) sense. To determine whether a prepositional phrase can be moved, we must determine the meaning of the sentence.

### Overuse of Prepositional Phrases

Experienced writers often include more than one prepositional phrase in a sentence; however, it is important not to overload your writing. Using too many modifiers in a paragraph may create an unintentionally comical effect as the following example shows:

The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall, near the schoolyard, where children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

A sentence is not necessarily effective just because it is long and complex. If your sentence appears cluttered with prepositional phrases, divide it into two shorter sentences. The previous sentence is far more effective when written as two simpler sentences:

The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall. In the nearby schoolyard, children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

## Writing at Work

The overuse of prepositional phrases often occurs when our thoughts are jumbled and we are unsure how concepts or ideas relate to one another. If you are preparing a report or a proposal, take the time to organize your thoughts in an outline before writing a rough draft. Read the draft aloud, either to yourself or to a colleague, and identify areas that are rambling or unclear. If you notice that a particular part of your report contains several sentences over twenty words, you should double check that particular section to make certain that it is coherent and does not contain unnecessary prepositional phrases. Reading aloud sometimes helps detect unclear and wordy sentences. You can also ask a colleague to paraphrase your main points to ensure that the meaning is clear.

## Starting a Sentence by Inverting Subject and Verb

As we noted earlier, most writers follow the subject-verb-object sentence structure. In an inverted sentence, the order is reversed so that the subject follows the verb. Read the following sentence pairs:

1. A truck was parked in the driveway.
2. Parked in the driveway was a truck.

1. A copy of the file is attached.
2. Attached is a copy of the file.

Notice how the second sentence in each pair places more emphasis on the subject—*a truck* in the first example and *the file* in the second. This technique is useful for drawing the reader's attention to your primary area of focus. We can apply this method to an academic essay. Take another look at Naomi's paragraph.

## Naomi's original paragraph

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economics argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

To emphasize the subject in certain sentences, Naomi can invert the traditional sentence structure. Read her revised paragraph:

## Naomi's revised paragraph

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. The banks were too big to fail, argued some economists. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. These assets will rise in value, expects the government optimistically. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Naomi's revised paragraph with 2 inverted sentences underlined: 1 – The banks were too big to fail, argued some economists and 2- These assets will rise in value, expects the government optimistically.

Notice that in the first underlined sentence, the subject (*some economists*) is placed after the verb (*argued*). In the second underlined sentence, the subject (*the government*) is placed after the verb (*expects*).



## Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences as inverted sentences.

1. Teresa will never attempt to run another marathon.
2. A detailed job description is enclosed with this letter.
3. Bathroom facilities are across the hall to the left of the water cooler.
4. The well-dressed stranger stumbled through the doorway.
5. My colleagues remain unconvinced about the proposed merger.

### Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Connecting Ideas to Increase Sentence Variety

Reviewing and rewriting the beginning of sentences is a good way of introducing sentence variety into your writing. Another useful technique is to connect two sentences using a modifier, a relative clause, or an appositive. This section examines how to connect ideas across several sentences in order to increase sentence variety and improve writing.

### Joining Ideas Using an *-ing* Modifier

Sometimes it is possible to combine two sentences by converting one of them into a modifier using the *-ing* verb form—*singing, dancing, swimming*. A modifier is a word or phrase that qualifies the meaning of another element in the sentence. Read the following example:

**Original sentences:** Steve checked the computer system. He discovered a virus.

**Revised sentence:** Checking the computer system, Steve discovered a virus.

To connect two sentences using an *-ing* modifier, add *-ing* to one of the verbs in the sentences (*checking*) and delete the subject (*Steve*). Use a comma to separate the modifier from the subject of the sentence. It is important to make sure that the main idea in your revised sentence is contained in the main clause, not in the modifier. In this example, the main idea is that Steve discovered a virus, not that he checked the computer system.

In the following example, an *-ing* modifier indicates that two actions are occurring at the same time:

1. Noticing the police car, she shifted gears and slowed down.

This means that she slowed down at the same time she noticed the police car.

2. Barking loudly, the dog ran across the driveway.

This means that the dog barked as it ran across the driveway.

You can add an *-ing* modifier to the beginning or the end of a sentence, depending on which fits best.

**Beginning:** Conducting a survey among her friends, Amanda found that few were happy in their jobs.

**End:** Maria filed the final report, meeting her deadline.

## Dangling Modifiers

A common mistake when combining sentences using the *-ing* verb form is to misplace the modifier so that it is not logically connected to the rest of the sentence. This creates a dangling modifier. Look at the following example:

Jogging across the parking lot, my breath grew ragged and shallow.

In this sentence, *jogging across the parking lot* seems to modify *my breath*. Since breath cannot jog, the sentence should be rewritten so that the subject is placed immediately after the modifier or added to the dangling phrase.

Jogging across the parking lot, I felt my breath grow ragged and shallow.

For more information on dangling modifiers, see Chapter 11 “Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?”.

## Joining Ideas Using an *-ed* Modifier

Some sentences can be combined using an *-ed* verb form—*stopped*, *finished*, *played*. To use this method, one of the sentences must contain a form of *be* as a helping verb in addition to the *-ed* verb form. Take a look at the following example:

**Original sentences:** The Jones family was delayed by a traffic jam. They arrived several hours after the party started.

**Revised sentence:** Delayed by a traffic jam, the Jones family arrived several hours after the party started.

In the original version, *was* acts as a helping verb—it has no meaning by itself, but it serves a grammatical function by placing the main verb (*delayed*) in the perfect tense.

To connect two sentences using an *-ed* modifier, drop the helping verb (*was*) and the subject (*the Jones family*) from the sentence with an *-ed* verb form. This forms a modifying phrase (*delayed by a traffic jam*) that can be added to the beginning or end of the other sentence according to which fits best. As with the *-ing* modifier, be careful to place the word that the phrase modifies immediately after the phrase in order to avoid a dangling modifier.

Using *-ing* or *-ed* modifiers can help streamline your writing by drawing obvious

connections between two sentences. Take a look at how Naomi might use modifiers in her paragraph.

### Naomi's paragraph with modifiers

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Opting to bail out the banks, the government acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. It optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Naomi's original paragraph with a modifier on the sentence "Opting to bail out the banks, the government acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008."

The revised version of the essay uses the *-ing* modifier *opting* to draw a connection between the government's decision to bail out the banks and the result of that decision—the acquisition of the mortgage-backed securities.

## Joining Ideas Using a Relative Clause

Another technique that writers use to combine sentences is to join them using a relative clause. A relative clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and describes a noun. Relative clauses function as adjectives by answering questions such as *which one?* or *what kind?* Relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun, such as *who*, *which*, *where*, *why*, or *when*. Read the following examples:

**Original sentences:** The managing director is visiting the company next week. He lives in Calgary.

**Revised sentence:** The managing director, who lives in Calgary, is visiting the company next week.

To connect two sentences using a relative clause, substitute the subject of one of the

sentences (*he*) for a relative pronoun (*who*). This gives you a relative clause (*who lives in Calgary*) that can be placed next to the noun it describes (*the managing director*). Make sure to keep the sentence you want to emphasize as the main clause. For example, reversing the main clause and subordinate clause in the preceding sentence emphasizes where the managing director lives, not the fact that he is visiting the company.

**Revised sentence:** The managing director, who is visiting the company next week, lives in Calgary.

Relative clauses are a useful way of providing additional, nonessential information in a sentence. Take a look at how Naomi might incorporate relative clauses into her essay.

### Naomi's paragraph with relative clauses

The subprime mortgage crisis, which had been steadily building throughout 2007 and 2008, left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists, who favoured the bailout, argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists, who opposed the bailout, argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Naomi's paragraph with 3 relative clauses incorporated: 1- "which had been steadily building throughout 2007 and 2008", 2- "who favored the bailout" and 3- "who opposed the bailout".

Notice how the underlined relative clauses can be removed from Naomi's essay without changing the meaning of the sentence.

### Tip

To check the punctuation of relative clauses, assess whether or not the clause can be taken out of the

sentence without changing its meaning. If the relative clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should be placed in commas. If the relative clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it does not require commas around it.

## Joining Ideas Using an Appositive

An appositive is a word or group of words that describes or renames a noun or pronoun. Incorporating appositives into your writing is a useful way of combining sentences that are too short and choppy. Take a look at the following example:

**Original sentences:** Harland Sanders began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930. He is Colonel Sanders or “the Colonel.”

**Revised sentence:** Harland Sanders, “the Colonel,” began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930.

In the revised sentence, “*the Colonel*” is an appositive because it renames Harland Sanders. To combine two sentences using an appositive, drop the subject and verb from the sentence that renames the noun and turn it into a phrase. Note that in the previous example, the appositive is positioned immediately after the noun it describes. An appositive may be placed anywhere in a sentence, but it must come directly before or after the noun to which it refers:

**Appositive after noun:** Scott, a poorly trained athlete, was not expected to win the race.

**Appositive before noun:** A poorly trained athlete, Scott was not expected to win the race.

Unlike relative clauses, appositives are always punctuated by a comma or a set commas. Take a look at the way Naomi uses appositives to include additional facts in her essay.

## Naomi's paragraph with appositives

The subprime mortgage crisis, the biggest financial disaster since the 1929 Wall Street crash, left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government, the institution that would decide the fate of the banks, finally opted to bail them out. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Naomi's paragraph with 2 appositives underlined: 1- "the biggest financial disaster since the 1929 Wall street crash" and 2- "the institution that would decide the fate of the banks".

## Exercise 4

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentence pairs as one sentence using the techniques you have learned in this section.

1. Baby sharks are called pups. Pups can be born in one of three ways.
2. The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest ocean. It extends from the Arctic in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south.
3. Ashley introduced her colleague Dan to her husband, Jim. She speculated that the two of them would have a lot in common.
4. Cacao is harvested by hand. It is then sold to chocolate-processing companies at the Coffee, Sugar, and Cocoa Exchange.

### Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Writing at Work

In addition to varying sentence structure, consider varying the types of sentences you are using in a report or other workplace document. Most sentences are declarative, but a carefully placed question, exclamation, or command can pique colleagues' interest, even if the subject material is fairly dry. Imagine that you are writing a budget analysis. Beginning your report with a rhetorical question, such as "Where is our money going?" or "How can we increase sales?" encourages people to continue reading to find out the answers. Although they should be used sparingly in academic and professional writing, questions or commands are effective rhetorical devices.

## Key Takeaways

- Sentence variety reduces repetition in a piece of writing and adds emphasis to important points in the text.
- Sentence variety can be introduced to the beginning of sentences by starting a sentence with an adverb, starting a sentence with a prepositional phrase, or by inverting the subject and verb.
- Combine ideas, using modifiers, relative clauses, or appositives, to achieve sentence variety.

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## Attribution & References

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## Notes

1.
  1. Furiously, the red truck sped past the camper van, blaring its horn.
  2. Hungrily, Jeff snatched at the bread, polishing off three slices in under a minute.
  3. Typically, underage drinking results from peer pressure and lack of parental attention.
  4. Bravely, the firefighters tackled the blaze, but they were beaten back by flames.
  5. Privately, Mayor Johnson acknowledged that the budget was excessive and that further discussion was needed.

## 14.2 - COORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION

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### Learning Objectives

- Identify coordination and subordination in writing.
- Combine sentences and ideas using coordination.
- Combine sentences and ideas using subordination.

In the previous section, we learned how to use different patterns to create sentence variety and to add emphasis to important points in our writing. Next, we will examine two ways in which we can join sentences with related ideas:

- Coordination . Joining two related ideas of equal importance.
- Subordination . Joining two related ideas of unequal importance.

Connecting sentences with coordinate or subordinate clauses creates more coherent paragraphs, and in turn, produces more effective writing. In this section, you will read excerpts from Joshua, who drafted an essay about wine production.

## Read this excerpt from Joshua's essay

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

This section examines several ways to combine sentences with coordination and subordination, using Joshua's essay as an example.

## Coordination

Coordination joins two independent clauses that contain related ideas of equal importance.

**Original sentences:** I spent my entire paycheck last week. I am staying home this weekend.

In their current form, these sentences contain two separate ideas that may or may not be related. Am I staying home this week *because* I spent my paycheck, or is there another reason for my lack of enthusiasm to leave the house? To indicate a relationship between the two ideas, we can use the coordinating conjunction *so*:

**Revised sentence:** I spent my entire paycheck last week, **so** I am staying home this weekend.

The revised sentence illustrates that the two ideas are connected. Notice that the

sentence retains two independent clauses (*I spent my entire paycheck; I am staying home this weekend*) because each can stand alone as a complete idea.

## Coordinating Conjunctions

A coordinating conjunction is a word that joins two independent clauses. The most common coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. Note that a comma precedes the coordinating conjunction when joining two clauses.

Table 1 – Coordinating Conjunction Examples

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
I will not be attending the dance.	for (indicates a reason or cause)	I have no one to go with.	I will not be attending the dance, for I have no one to go with.
I plan to stay home.	and (joins two ideas)	I will complete an essay for class.	I plan to stay home, and I will complete an essay for class.
Jessie isn't going to be at the dance.	nor (indicates a negative)	Tom won't be there either.	Jessie isn't going to be at the dance, nor will Tom be there.
The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance.	but (indicates a contrast)	I don't think many people are going.	The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance, but I don't think many people are going.
I might go to the next fundraising event.	or (offers an alternative)	I might donate some money to the cause.	I might go to the next fundraising event, or I might donate some money to the cause.
My parents are worried that I am antisocial.	yet (indicates a reason)	I have many friends at school.	My parents are worried that I am antisocial, yet I have many friends at school.
Buying a new dress is expensive.	so (indicates a result)	By staying home I will save money.	Buying a new dress is expensive, so by staying home I will save money.

### Tip

To help you remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, think of the acronym FANBOYS: for, and,

nor, but, or, yet, so. Remember that when you use a coordinating conjunction in a sentence, a comma should precede it.

## Conjunctive Adverbs

Another method of joining two independent clauses with related and equal ideas is to use a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon (see Chapter 12 “Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?” for information on semicolon usage). A conjunctive adverb is a linking word that demonstrates a relationship between two clauses. Read the following sentences:

**Original sentences:** Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics. She trains every day.

Since these sentences contain two equal and related ideas, they may be joined using a conjunctive adverb. Now, read the revised sentence:

**Revised sentence:** Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics; therefore, she trains every day.

The revised sentence explains the relationship between Bridget’s desire to take part in the next Olympics and her daily training. Notice that the conjunctive adverb comes after a semicolon that separates the two clauses and is followed by a comma.

Review the following table of some common conjunctive adverbs with examples of how they are used:

Table 2 – Common Conjunctive Adverb Examples

Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Addition	also, furthermore, moreover, besides	Alicia was late for class and stuck in traffic; furthermore, her shoe heel had broken and she had forgotten her lunch.
Comparison	similarly, likewise	Recycling aluminum cans is beneficial to the environment; similarly, reusing plastic bags and switching off lights reduces waste.
Contrast	instead, however, conversely	Most people do not walk to work; instead, they drive or take the train.
Emphasis	namely, certainly, indeed	The Siberian tiger is a rare creature; indeed, there are fewer than five hundred left in the wild.
Cause and Effect	accordingly, consequently, hence, thus	I missed my train this morning; consequently, I was late for my meeting.
Time	finally, next, subsequently, then	Tim crossed the barrier, jumped over the wall, and pushed through the hole in the fence; finally, he made it to the station.

Take a look at Joshua’s essay on wine production and identify some areas in which he might use coordination.

### Joshua’s essay on wine production

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Now look at Joshua’s revised essay. Did you coordinate the same sentences? You may

find that your answers are different because there are usually several ways to join two independent clauses.

### Joshua's revised essay with coordinated sentences

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed, for they contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized and also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes; however, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Joshua's revised essay, showing 3 sentences that were coordinated: 1 – “The stems are removed, for they contain harsh-tasting tannins.”, 2 – “It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized and also destroys bacteria.” and 3- “Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes; however, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.”

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using either a coordinating conjunction or a conjunctive adverb. Then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Pets are not allowed in Mr. Taylor's building. He owns several cats and a parrot.
2. New legislation prevents drivers from sending or reading text messages while driving. Many people continue to use their phones illegally.
3. The coroner concluded that the young man had taken a lethal concoction of drugs. By the time his relatives found him, nothing could be done.

4. Amphibians are vertebrates that live on land and in the water. Flatworms are invertebrates that live only in water.
5. Ashley carefully fed and watered her tomato plants all summer. The tomatoes grew juicy and ripe.
6. When he lost his car key, Simon attempted to open the door with a wire hanger, a credit card, and a paper clip. He called the manufacturer for advice.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “14.2 – Coordination And Subordination” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Writing at Work

When writing an essay or a report, it is important that you do not use excessive coordination. Workplace documents should be clear and concise, so only join two clauses that are logically connected and can work together to make one main point. If you repeat the same coordinating conjunction several times in a sentence, you are probably including more than one idea. This may make it difficult for readers to pick out the most important information in each sentence.

## Subordination

Subordination joins two sentences with related ideas by merging them into a main clause (a complete sentence) and a dependent clause (a construction that relies on the main clause to complete its meaning). Coordination allows a writer to give equal weight to the two ideas that are being combined, and subordination enables a writer to emphasize one idea over the other. Take a look at the following sentences:

**Original sentences:** Tracy stopped to help the injured man. She would be late for work.



To illustrate that these two ideas are related, we can rewrite them as a single sentence using the subordinating conjunction *even though*.

**Revised sentence:** Even though Tracy would be late for work, she stopped to help the injured man.

In the revised version, we now have an independent clause (*she stopped to help the injured man*) that stands as a complete sentence and a dependent clause (*even though Tracy would be late for work*) that is subordinate to the main clause. Notice that the revised sentence emphasizes the fact that Tracy stopped to help the injured man, rather than the fact she would be late for work. We could also write the sentence this way:

**Revised sentence:** Tracy stopped to help the injured man even though she would be late for work.

The meaning remains the same in both sentences, with the subordinating conjunction *even though* introducing the dependent clause.

### Tip

To punctuate sentences correctly, look at the position of the main clause and the subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, use a comma. If the subordinate clause follows the main clause, no punctuation is required.

## Subordinating Conjunctions

A subordinating conjunction is a word that joins a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause. Review the following table of some common subordinating conjunctions and examples of how they are used:

Table 3 – Common Subordinating Conjunction Examples

Function	Subordinating Conjunction	Example
Concession	although, while, though, whereas, even though	Sarah completed her report even though she had to stay late to get it done.
Condition	if, unless, until	Until we know what is causing the problem, we will not be able to fix it.
Manner	as if, as, though	Everyone in the conference room stopped talking at once, as though they had been stunned into silence.
Place	where, wherever	Rita is in San Jose where she has several important client meetings.
Reason	because, since, so that, in order that	Because the air conditioning was turned up so high, everyone in the office wore sweaters.
Time	after, before, while, once, when	After the meeting had finished, we all went to lunch.

Take a look at the excerpt from Joshua's essay and identify some areas in which he might use subordination.

### Excerpt from Joshua's essay

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Now look at Joshua's revised essay and compare your answers. You will probably notice that there are many different ways to subordinate sentences.

## Joshua's revised essay

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. Because the stems contain harsh-tasting tannins, they are removed. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added in order to prevent the liquid from becoming oxidized. Sulfur dioxide also destroys bacteria. Although some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Joshua's revised essay has 3 different ways to subordinate sentences underlined: 1 – “Because the stems contain harsh-tasting tannins, they are removed.”, 2- “Here, sulfur dioxide is added in order to prevent the liquid from becoming oxidized.” and 3 – “Although some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.”

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using a subordinating conjunction and then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Jake is going to Mexico. There are beautiful beaches in Mexico.
2. A snowstorm disrupted traffic all over the east coast. There will be long delivery delays this week.
3. My neighbor had his television volume turned up too high. I banged on his door and asked him to keep the noise down.
4. Jessica prepared the potato salad and the sautéed vegetables. Ashley marinated the chicken.
5. Romeo poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “14.2 – Coordination And Subordination” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Exercise 3

Copy the following paragraph from Joshua’s essay onto your own sheet of paper. Then edit using the techniques you have learned in this section. Join the underlined sentences (Sentence #1, #3, #8 & #9) using coordination or subordination. Check your revised sentences for punctuation.

The yeast is added to the must. Alcoholic fermentation then begins. Here, the red wine production process differs from the method used in white wine production. Red wine is fermented for a shorter time. It is fermented at a higher temperature. Whereas white wines may ferment for over a month, red wines typically ferment for less than two weeks. During fermentation, contact between the skins and the juice release tannins and flavor compounds into the must. This process is known as maceration. Maceration may occur before, during, or after fermentation. The fermentation process is completed. The next stage is pressing. Many methods are used for pressing, the most common of which is basket pressing.

## Key Takeaways

- Coordination and subordination join two sentences with related ideas.
- Coordination joins sentences with related and equal ideas, whereas subordination joins sentences with related but unequal ideas.

- Sentences can be coordinated using either a coordinating conjunction and a comma or a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon.
- Subordinate sentences are characterized by the use of a subordinate conjunction.
- In a subordinate sentence, a comma is used to separate the main clause from the dependent clause if the dependent clause is placed at the beginning of the sentence.

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## Attribution & References

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## Notes

1. Pets are not allowed in Mr. Taylor’s building yet he owns several cats and a parrot.
  2. New legislation prevents drivers from sending or reading text messages while driving for many people continue to use their phones illegally.
  3. The coroner concluded that the young man had taken a lethal concoction of drugs and by the time his relatives found him, nothing could be done.
  4. Amphibians are vertebrates that live on land and in the water however, flatworms are invertebrates that live only in water.
  5. Ashley carefully fed and watered her tomato plants all summer hence, the tomatoes grew juicy and ripe.
  6. When he lost his car key, Simon attempted to open the door with a wire hanger, a credit card, and a paper clip and he called the manufacturer for advice.
1. Jake is going to Mexico because there are beautiful beaches in Mexico.
  2. A snowstorm disrupted traffic all over the east coast now there will be long delivery delays this week.
  3. My neighbor had his television volume turned up too high until I banged on his door and asked him to keep the noise down.
  4. Jessica prepared the potato salad and the sautéed vegetables whereas Ashley marinated the chicken.
  5. Romeo poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.

## 14.3 - PARALLELISM

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### Learning Objectives

- Identify sentences that are parallel and not parallel.
- Identify ways to create parallelism in writing.
- Write and revise sentences using parallelism.

Earlier in this chapter, we learned that increasing sentence variety adds interest to a piece of writing and makes the reading process more enjoyable for others. Using a mixture of sentence lengths and patterns throughout an essay is an important writing technique. However, it is equally important to avoid introducing variation within individual sentences. A strong sentence is composed of balanced parts that all have the same structure. In this section, we will examine how to create a balanced sentence structure by using parallelism .

### Using Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of similar structure in related words, clauses, or phrases. It creates a sense of rhythm and balance within a sentence. As readers, we often correct faulty parallelism—a lack of parallel structure—intuitively because an unbalanced sentence sounds awkward and poorly constructed. Read the following sentences aloud:

**Faulty parallelism:** Kelly had to iron, do the washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

**Faulty parallelism:** Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and to have good eyesight.

**Faulty parallelism:** Ali prefers jeans to wearing a suit.

All of these sentences contain faulty parallelism. Although they are factually correct, the construction is clunky and confusing. In the first example, three different verb forms are used. In the second and third examples, the writer begins each sentence by using a noun (*coordination, jeans*), but ends with a phrase (*to have good eyesight, wearing a suit*). Now read the same three sentences that have correct parallelism.

**Correct parallelism:** Kelly had to do the ironing, washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

**Correct parallelism:** Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and good eyesight.

**Correct parallelism:** Ali prefers wearing jeans to wearing a suit.

When these sentences are written using a parallel structure, they sound more aesthetically pleasing because they are balanced. Repetition of grammatical construction also minimizes the amount of work the reader has to do to decode the sentence. This enables the reader to focus on the main idea in the sentence and not on how the sentence is put together.

### Tip

A simple way to check for parallelism in your writing is to make sure you have paired nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, and so on. Underline each element in a sentence and check that the corresponding element uses the same grammatical form.

## Creating Parallelism Using Coordinating Conjunctions

When you connect two clauses using a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*), make sure that the same grammatical structure is used on each side of the conjunction. Take a look at the following example:

**Faulty parallelism:** When I walk the dog, I like **to listen to music** and **talking to friends** on the phone.

**Correct parallelism:** When I walk the dog, I like **listening to music** and **talking to friends** on the phone.

The first sentence uses two different verb forms (*to listen, talking*). In the second sentence, the grammatical construction on each side of the coordinating conjunction (*and*) is the same, creating a parallel sentence.

The same technique should be used for joining items or lists in a series:

**Faulty parallelism:** This committee needs to decide whether the company should **reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages**.

**Correct parallelism:** This committee needs to decide whether the company should **reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lower workers' wages**.

The first sentence contains two items that use the same verb construction (*reduce, cut*) and a third item that uses a different verb form (*lowering*). The second sentence uses the same verb construction in all three items, creating a parallel structure.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using coordinating conjunctions.

1. Mr. Holloway enjoys reading and to play his guitar at weekends.
2. The doctor told Mrs. Franklin that she should either eat less or should exercise more.
3. Breaking out of the prison compound, the escapees moved carefully, quietly, and were quick on their feet.



4. I have read the book, but I have not watched the movie version.
5. Deal with a full inbox first thing in the morning, or by setting aside short periods of time in which to answer e-mail queries.

**Check Your Answers:** <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “14.3 – Parallelism” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Creating Parallelism Using *Than* or *As*

When you are making a comparison, the two items being compared should have a parallel structure. Comparing two items without using parallel structure can lead to confusion about what is being compared. Comparisons frequently use the words *than* or *as*, and the items on each side of these comparison words should be parallel. Take a look at the following example:

**Faulty parallelism:** **Swimming in the ocean** is much tougher than **a pool**.

**Correct parallelism:** **Swimming in the ocean** is much tougher than **swimming in a pool**.

In the first sentence, the elements before the comparison word (*than*) are not equal to the elements after the comparison word. It appears that the writer is comparing an action (*swimming*) with a noun (*a pool*). In the second sentence, the writer uses the same grammatical construction to create a parallel structure. This clarifies that an action is being compared with another action.

To correct some instances of faulty parallelism, it may be necessary to add or delete words in a sentence.

**Faulty parallelism:** **A brisk walk** is as beneficial to your health as **going for a run**.

**Correct parallelism:** **Going for a brisk walk** is as beneficial to your health as **going for a run**.

In this example, it is necessary to add the verb phrase *going for* to the sentence in order to clarify that the act of walking is being compared to the act of running.

## Exercise 2

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using *than* or *as*.

1. I would rather work at a second job to pay for a new car than a loan.
2. How you look in the workplace is just as important as your behavior.
3. The firefighter spoke more of his childhood than he talked about his job.
4. Indian cuisine is far tastier than the food of Great Britain.
5. Jim's opponent was as tall as Jim and he carried far more weight.

## Creating Parallelism Using Correlative Conjunctions

A correlative conjunction is a paired conjunction that connects two equal parts of a sentence and shows the relationship between them. Common correlative conjunctions include the following:

- either...or
- not only...but also
- neither...nor
- whether...or
- rather...than
- both...and

Correlative conjunctions should follow the same grammatical structure to create a parallel sentence. Take a look at the following example:

**Faulty parallelism:** We can neither **wait** for something to happen nor **can we take** evasive action.

**Correct parallelism:** We can neither **wait** for something to happen nor **take** evasive action.

When using a correlative conjunction, the words, phrases, or clauses following each part should be parallel. In the first sentence, the construction of the second part of the sentence does not match the construction of the first part. In the second sentence, omitting needless words and matching verb constructions create a parallel structure. Sometimes, rearranging a sentence corrects faulty parallelism.

**Faulty parallelism:** It was both a long movie and poorly written.

**Correct parallelism:** The movie was both long and poorly written.

## Tip

To see examples of parallelism in use, read some of the great historical speeches by rhetoricians such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. Notice how they use parallel structures to emphasize important points and to create a smooth, easily understandable oration.

Here is a link to text, audio, video, and the music of Martin Luther King's speech "I Have a Dream" [New tab] (<http://www.mlkonline.net/dream.html>).

## Writing at Work

Speechwriters use parallelism not only within sentences but also throughout paragraphs and beyond. Repeating particular key phrases throughout a speech is an effective way of tying a

paragraph together as a cohesive whole and creating a sense of importance. This technique can be adapted to any piece of writing, but it may be especially useful for creating a proposal or other type of persuasive workplace document.

Note that the spelling and grammar checker on most word processors will not draw attention to faulty parallelism. When proofreading a document, read it aloud and listen for sentences that sound awkward or poorly phrased.

### Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using correlative conjunctions.

1. The cyclist owns both a mountain bike and has a racing bike.
2. The movie not only contained lots of action, but also it offered an important lesson.
3. My current job is neither exciting nor is it meaningful.
4. Jason would rather listen to his father than be taking advice from me.
5. We are neither interested in buying a vacuum cleaner nor do we want to utilize your carpet cleaning service.

### Exercise 4

Read through the following excerpt from Alex's essay and revise any instances of faulty parallelism. Rewrite the sentences to create a parallel structure.

Owning a pet has proven to be extremely beneficial to people's health. Pets help lower blood pressure, boost immunity, and are lessening anxiety. Studies indicate that children who grow up in a household with cats or dogs are at a lower risk of developing allergies or suffer from asthma. Owning a dog offers an additional bonus; it makes people more sociable. Dogs are natural conversation starters and this not only helps to draw people out of social isolation but also they are more likely to find a romantic partner.

Benefits of pet ownership for elderly people include less anxiety, lower insurance costs, and they also gain peace of mind. A study of Alzheimer's patients showed that patients have fewer anxious outbursts if there is an animal in the home. Some doctors even keep dogs in the office to act as on-site therapists. In short, owning a pet keeps you healthy, happy, and is a great way to help you relax.

## Key Takeaways

- Parallelism creates a sense of rhythm and balance in writing by using the same grammatical structure to express equal ideas.
- Faulty parallelism occurs when elements of a sentence are not balanced, causing the sentence to sound clunky and awkward.
- Parallelism may be created by connecting two clauses or making a list using coordinating conjunctions; by comparing two items using *than* or *as*; or by connecting two parts of a sentence using correlative conjunctions.

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## Attribution & References

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## Notes

1.
  1. Mr. Holloway enjoys reading and playing his guitar at weekends.
  2. The doctor told Mrs. Franklin that she should either eat less or should exercise more.
  3. Breaking out of the prison compound, the escapees moved carefully, quietly, and were quick on their feet
  4. I have read the book, but I have not watched the movie version.
  5. Deal with a full inbox first thing in the morning, or by setting aside short periods of time in which to answer e-mail queries.

# 14.4 - REFINING YOUR WRITING: END-OF-CHAPTER EXERCISES

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## Learning Objectives

- Use the skills you have learned in the chapter.
- Work collaboratively with other students.
- Work with a variety of academic and on-the-job, real-world examples.

## Exercises

1. Children's stories are deliberately written in short, simple sentences to avoid confusion. Most sentences are constructed using the standard subject-verb-object format. Choose a children's story that is suitable for eight- to ten-year-olds. Rewrite a chapter of the story so that it appeals to a slightly older age group, by editing for sentence variety. Experiment with the techniques you learned in Section 15.1 "Sentence Variety", including the three different ways to vary sentence structure at the beginning of a sentence and the three different ways to connect ideas between sentences. Compare the revised chapter with the original version and consider how sentence variety can be used to target a particular audience.  
**Collaboration:** Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.
2. Compile a selection of real-life writing samples from the workplace or around the home. You might like to choose one of the following: e-mail, junk mail, personal letter, company report,

social networking page, local newspaper, bulletin-board posting, or public notice. Choose two samples that lack sentence variety. Highlight areas of each writing sample that you would edit for sentence variety and explain why. Replace any recognizable name with a pseudonym, or a fictitious name.

**Collaboration:** Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

3. **Group activity.** Choose a well-known speech, such as Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, Winston Churchill’s “Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat” speech, or Barack Obama’s inaugural address. Make a copy of the speech and, as a group, underline examples of parallelism. Discuss the effects of using parallelism and consider whether it is always used to achieve the same result or whether the writer manipulates parallelism to create a variety of responses among his or her audience.
4. **Group activity.** Working in a small group, select a workplace document or academic essay. Examine each paragraph and identify examples of sentence variety, coordination and subordination, and parallelism. Then, choose one particular paragraph and discuss the following questions:
  - Does the writer use sentence variety effectively?
  - Does the writer connect his or her ideas effectively?
  - Does the writer use subordination and coordination correctly?
  - Does the writer use parallelism to emphasize his or her points?

As a group, identify the weaker areas of the paragraph and rewrite them. Focus on sentence structure and sentence variation. Use coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions to join sentences.

5. Choose a college essay or a recent piece of writing from your work or everyday life. Use the techniques you have learned throughout this chapter to edit your writing for sentence variety, appropriate coordination and subordination, and parallelism. When you have finished, compare the two versions and write a brief analysis of how sentence variety, coordination and subordination, and parallelism help refine a piece of writing.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “7.4 Refining Your Writing:



End-of-Chapter exercises (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/7-4-refining-your-writing-end-of-chapter-exercises/>)" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

# CHAPTER 15: HELP FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

## ***Communication Essentials for College* by Jen Booth, Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell**

- 15.1 – Word Order
- 15.2 – Negative Statements
- 15.3 – Count and Noncount Nouns and Articles
- 15.4 – Verb Tenses
- 15.5 – Modal Auxiliaries
- 15.6 – Prepositions
- 15.7 – Slang and Idioms
- 15.8 – Help for English Language Learners: End-of-Chapter Exercises

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Please visit the web version of *Communication Essentials for College*  
(<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/gccomm/>) to access the complete book,  
interactive activities and ancillary resources.

# 15.1 - WORD ORDER

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## Learning Objectives

- Identify the basic structures of sentences.
- Determine ways to turn sentences into questions.
- Define adjectives and how they are used.

If your first language is not English, you will most likely need some extra help when writing in Standard, or formal, English. New students of Standard English often make similar kinds of errors. Even if you have been speaking English for a long time, you may not feel as confident in your written English skills. This chapter covers the most common errors made by English language learners and helps you avoid similar mistakes in your writing.

## Basic Sentence Structures

The most basic sentence structure in English is a subject plus a verb . A subject performs the action in the sentence, and the verb identifies the action. Keep in mind that in some languages, such as Spanish and Italian, an obvious subject does not always perform the action in a sentence; the subject is often implied by the verb. However, every sentence in English must have a subject and a verb to express a complete thought.

subject + verb  
Samantha sleeps.

Not all sentences are as simple as a subject plus a verb. To form more complex

sentences, writers build upon this basic structure. Adding a prepositional phrase to the basic sentence creates a more complex sentence. A preposition is a part of speech that relates a noun or a pronoun to another word in a sentence. It also introduces a prepositional phrase. If you can identify a preposition, you will be able to identify a prepositional phrase.

subject + verb + prepositional phrase  
Samantha sleeps on the couch.

*On* is the preposition. *On the couch* is the prepositional phrase.

## Common Prepositions

- about
- above
- across
- after
- against
- along
- among
- around
- at
- before
- behind
- beside
- between
- by
- during
- except
- for
- from
- in
- into
- like
- of
- off
- on
- over
- through
- to
- toward
- under
- until
- up
- with
- without

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Underline the prepositional phrases.

1. Linda and Javier danced under the stars.
2. Each person has an opinion about the topic.
3. The fans walked through the gates.

4. Jamyra ran around the track.
5. Maria celebrated her birthday in January.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

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Another sentence structure that is important to understand is subject + verb + object. There are two types of objects: direct objects and indirect objects .

A direct object receives the action of the verb.

subject + verb + direct object  
Janice writes a letter.

The letter directly receives the action of the verb *writes*.

**Tip**

A quick way to find the direct object is to ask *what?* or *who?*

**Sentence:** Maurice kicked the ball.

*What* did Maurice kick? The direct object, *ball*.

**Sentence:** Maurice kicked Tom by accident.

*Who* did Maurice kick? The direct object, *Tom*.

An indirect object does not receive the action of the verb.

subject + verb + indirect object  
Janice writes me a letter

The action (*writes*) is performed for or to the indirect object (*me*).

## Tip

Even though the indirect object is not found after a preposition in English, it can be discovered by asking to whom? or for whom? after the verb.

**Sentence:** Dad baked the children some cookies.

For whom did Dad bake the cookies? The indirect object, children.

## Exercise 2

On a separate sheet of paper, identify the subject, verb, direct object, and indirect object in the following sentences.

1. Captain Kirk told the crew a story.
2. Jermaine gave his girlfriend a dozen yellow tulips.
3. That hospital offers nurses better pay.
4. Dad served Grandma a delicious dinner.
5. Mom bought herself a new car.

## Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the sentences in the correct order. If the sentence is correct as it is, write *OK*.

1. The pizza Jeannine burnt.

2. To the Mexican restaurant we had to go for dinner.
3. Jeannine loved the food.
4. So full were we during the walk home.
5. I will make the pizza next time.

## Questions

English speakers rely on the following two common ways to turn sentences into questions:

1. Move the helping verb and add a question mark.
2. Add the verb *do*, *does*, or *did* and add a question mark.

Move the helping verb and add a question mark.

**Sentence:** Sierra can pack these boxes.

**Question: Can** Sierra pack these boxes?

Add the verb *do*, *does*, or *did*, and add a question mark:

**Sentence:** Jolene skated across the pond.

**Question: Did** Jolene skate across the pond?

## Exercise 4

On a separate sheet of paper, create questions from the following sentences.

1. *Slumdog Millionaire* is a film directed by Danny Boyle.
2. The story centers on a character named Jamal Malik.

3. He and his older brother find different ways to escape the slums.
4. His brother, Salim, pursues a life of crime.
5. Jamal ends up on the game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

## Adjectives

An adjective is a kind of descriptive word that describes a noun or a pronoun. It tells *which one, what kind, and how many*. Adjectives make your writing more lively and interesting. Keep in mind, a common error that English language learners make is misplacing the adjectives in a sentence. It is important to know where to place the adjective in a sentence so that readers are not confused.

If you are using more than one adjective to describe a noun, place the adjectives in the following order before the noun:

1. **Opinion:** an interesting book, a boring movie, a fun ride
2. **Size:** a large box, a tiny turtle, a tall woman
3. **Shape:** a round ball, a long hose, a square field
4. **Age:** a new day, an old horse, a modern building
5. **Color:** an orange sunset, a green jacket, a red bug
6. **Ethnicity:** Italian cheese, French wine, Chinese tea
7. **Material:** silk shirt, wool socks, a cotton dress

### Tip

Adjectives can also be placed at the end of a sentence if they describe the subject of a sentence and appear after the verb.

Sentence: My English teacher is excellent.



## Exercise 5

On a separate sheet of paper, place the following sets of adjectives in the correct order before the noun. The first one has been done for you.

1. book: old, small, Spanish

a small old Spanish book (age, size, ethnicity)

2. photograph: new, strange
3. suit: wool, green, funny
4. opinion: refreshing, new
5. dress: fashionable, purple

## Key Takeaways

- The most basic sentence structure is a subject plus a verb that expresses a complete thought.
- Adding a prepositional phrase or a direct or indirect object to a sentence makes it more complex.
- English speakers change a sentence into a question in one of the following two ways: moving the helping verb and adding a question mark or adding the verb do, does, or did and adding a question mark.
- Adjectives follow a particular order before the noun they describe. The order is opinion, size, shape, age, color, ethnicity, and material.

## Writing Application

Write a paragraph about a memorable family trip. Use at least two adjectives to describe each noun in your paragraph. Proofread your paragraph, and then exchange papers with a classmate. Check your classmate's use of adjectives to make sure they are correct.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from "5.1 Word Order" (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/5-1-word-order/>) In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

- |    |          |            |       |
|----|----------|------------|-------|
| 1. | 1. under | 3. through | 5. in |
|    | 2. about | 4. around  |       |

# 15.2 - NEGATIVE STATEMENTS

## Learning Objectives

- Identify a negative statement.
- Write negative statements.

Negative statements are the opposite of positive statements and are necessary to express an opposing idea. The following charts list negative words and helping verbs that can be combined to form a negative statement.

### Negative Words

- |           |          |            |
|-----------|----------|------------|
| • never   | • no     | • scarcely |
| • nobody  | • none   | • barely   |
| • no one  | • not    | • rarely   |
| • nowhere | • hardly |            |

### Common Helping Verbs

- |         |         |            |
|---------|---------|------------|
| • am    | • would | • will     |
| • was   | • is    | • ought to |
| • being | • were  | • are      |
| • has   | • been  | • be       |
| • does  | • had   | • have     |
| • could | • did   | • do       |
| • must  | • may   | • can      |

- might
- should
- used to

The following examples show several ways to make a sentence negative in the present tense.

### Negative sentences – present tense

1. A helping verb used with the negative word *not*.

**Sentence:** My guests are arriving now.

**Negative:** My guests **are not** arriving now.

2. The negative word *no*.

**Sentence:** Jennie has money.

**Negative:** Jennie **has no** money.

3. The contraction *n't*.

**Sentence:** Janetta does miss her mom.

**Negative:** Janetta **doesn't** miss her mom.

4. The negative adverb *rarely*.

**Sentence:** I always go to the gym after work.

**Negative:** I **rarely** go to the gym after work.

5. The negative subject *nobody*.

**Sentence:** Everybody gets the day off.

**Negative:** **Nobody** gets the day off.

## Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the positive sentences as negative sentences. Be sure to keep the sentences in the present tense.

1. Everybody is happy about the mandatory lunch.
2. Deborah likes to visit online dating sites.
3. Jordan donates blood every six months.
4. Our writing instructor is very effective.
5. That beautiful papaya is cheap.

The following sentences show you the ways to make a sentence negative in the past tense.

## Negative sentences – past tense

**Sentence:** Paul called me yesterday.

**Negative:** Paul **did not** call me yesterday.

**Sentence:** Jamilee went to the grocery store.

**Negative:** Jamilee **never went** to the grocery store.

**Sentence:** Gina laughed when she saw the huge pile of laundry.

**Negative:** Gina **did not laugh** when she saw the huge pile of laundry.

Notice that when forming a negative in the past tense, the helping verb *did* is what signals the past tense, and the main verb *laugh* does not have an *-ed* ending.

## Exercise 2

Rewrite the following paragraph by correcting the errors in the past-tense negative sentences.

Celeste no did call me when she reached Manitoba. I was worried because she not drove alone before. She was going to meet her friend, Terry, who lived in a town called Steinbach, Manitoba. I did never want to worry, but she said she was going to call when she reached there. Finally, four hours later, she called and said, "Mom, I'm sorry I did not call. I lost track of time because I was so happy to see Terry!" I was relieved.

### Collaboration

Once you have found all the errors you can, please share with a classmate and compare your answers. Did your partner find an error you missed? Did you find an error your partner missed? Compare with your instructor's answers.

Double negatives are two negatives used in the same phrase or sentence. They are considered incorrect in Standard English. You should avoid using double negatives in all formal writing. If you want to say something negative, use only one negative word in the sentence. Return to the beginning of this section for a list of negative words, and then study the following examples.

Double negative (incorrect)	Single negative (correct)
neg. + neg. I couldn't find no paper	neg. I couldn't find any paper.
neg. + neg. I don't want nothing.	neg. I don't want anything.

### Tip

Ain't is considered a contraction of am not. Although some may use it in everyday speech, it is considered incorrect in Standard English. Avoid using it when speaking and writing in formal contexts.

## Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, correct the double negatives and rewrite the following sentences.

1. Jose didn't like none of the choices on the menu.
2. Brittany can't make no friends with nobody.
3. The prairies hardly had no rain last summer.
4. My kids never get into no trouble.
5. I could not do nothing about the past.

## Key Takeaways

- Negatives are usually formed using a negative word plus a helping verb.
- Double negatives are considered incorrect in Standard English.
- Only one negative word is used to express a negative statement.

## Writing Application

Write a paragraph describing your favorite meal. Use rich, colorful language to describe the meal. Exchange papers with a classmate and read his or her paragraph. Then rewrite each sentence of your classmate's paragraph using negatives. Be sure to avoid double negatives. Share your negative

paragraphs with each other.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “5.2 Negative Statements” (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/5-2-negative-statements/>) In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.



# 15.3 - COUNT AND NONCOUNT NOUNS AND ARTICLES

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## Learning Objectives

- Define and use count and noncount nouns.
- Recognize and use definite and indefinite articles.

Nouns are words that name things, places, people, and ideas. Right now, you may be surrounded by desks, computers, and notebooks. These are called count nouns because you can count the exact number of desks, computers, and notebooks—three desks, one computer, and six notebooks, for example.

On the other hand, you may be carrying a small amount of money in your wallet and sitting on a piece of furniture. These are called noncount nouns. Although you can count the pieces of furniture or the amount of money, you cannot add a number in front of *money* or *furniture* and simply add *-s* to the end of the noun. Instead, you must use other words and phrases to indicate the quantity of money and furniture.

**Incorrect:** five moneys, two furnitures

**Correct:** some money, two pieces of furniture

By the end of this section, you will grasp the difference between the two types of nouns and be able to use them confidently in speaking and writing.

## Count and Noncount Nouns

A count noun refers to people, places, and things that are separate units. You make count nouns plural by adding *-s*.

Table 1 – Count Nouns

Count Noun	Sentence
Quarter	It takes six quarters to do my laundry.
Chair	Make sure to push in your chairs before leaving class.
Candidate	The two candidates debated the issue.
Adult	The three adults in the room acted like children.
Comedian	The two comedians made the audience laugh.

A noncount noun identifies a whole object that cannot separate and count individually. Noncount nouns may refer to concrete objects or abstract objects. A concrete noun identifies an object you can see, taste, touch, or count. An abstract noun identifies an object that you cannot see, touch, or count. There are some exceptions, but most abstract nouns cannot be made plural, so they are noncount nouns. Examples of abstract nouns include anger, education, melancholy, softness, violence, and conduct.

Table 2 – Types of Noncount Nouns

Type of Noncount Noun	Examples	Sentence
Food	sugar, salt, pepper, lettuce, rice	Add more sugar to my coffee, please.
Solids	concrete, chocolate, silver, soap	The ice cream was covered in creamy chocolate.
Abstract Nouns	peace, warmth, hospitality, information	I need more information about the insurance policy.

## Exercise 1

### Exercise 1 (Text Version)

Label each of the following nouns as count or noncount.

1. Electricity \_\_\_\_\_
2. Water \_\_\_\_\_
3. Book \_\_\_\_\_
4. Sculpture \_\_\_\_\_
5. Advice \_\_\_\_\_

### Check Your Answers: <sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 1 is adapted from “15.3 – Count And Noncount Nouns And Articles” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Identify whether the italicized noun in the sentence is a count or noncount noun by writing C or NC above the noun.

1. The amount of *traffic* on the way home was terrible.
2. *Forgiveness* is an important part of growing up.
3. I made caramel sauce for the organic *apples* I bought.
4. I prefer film *cameras* instead of digital ones.
5. My favorite subject is *history*.

### Check Your Answers: <sup>2</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “15.3 – Count And Noncount Nouns And Articles” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Definite and Indefinite Articles

The word *the* is a definite article . It refers to one or more specific things. For example, *the woman* refers to not any woman but a particular woman. The definite article *the* is used before singular and plural count nouns.

The words *a* and *an* are indefinite articles . They refer to one nonspecific thing. For example, *a woman* refers to any woman, not a specific, particular woman. The indefinite article *a* or *an* is used before a singular count noun.

Definite Articles (*The*) and Indefinite Articles (*A/An*) with Count Nouns

I saw **the** concert. (singular, refers to a specific concert)

I saw **the** concerts. (plural, refers to more than one specific concert)

I saw **the** U2 concert last night. (singular, refers to a specific concert)

I saw **a** concert. (singular, refers to any nonspecific concert)

### Exercise 3

#### Exercise 3 (Text Version)

Write the correct article in the blank for each of the following sentences. Write OK if the sentence is correct.

1. (A/An/The) camel can live for days without water. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I enjoyed (a/an/the) pastries at the Bar Mitzvah. \_\_\_\_\_
3. (A/An/The) politician spoke of many important issues. \_\_\_\_\_

4. I really enjoyed (a/an/the) actor's performance in the play. \_\_\_\_\_
5. (A/An/The) goal I have is to run a marathon this year. \_\_\_\_\_

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>3</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 3 is adapted from "15.3 – Count And Noncount Nouns And Articles" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Exercise 4

Correct the misused or missing articles and rewrite the paragraph.

Stars are large balls of spinning hot gas like our sun. The stars look tiny because they are far away. Many of them are much larger than sun. Did you know that a Milky Way galaxy has between two hundred billion and four hundred billion stars in it? Scientists estimate that there may be as many as five hundred billion galaxies in an entire universe! Just like a human being, the star has a life cycle from birth to death, but its lifespan is billions of years long. The star is born in a cloud of cosmic gas and dust called a nebula. Our sun was born in the nebula nearly five billion years ago. Photographs of the star-forming nebulas are astonishing.

**Collaboration**

Once you have found all the errors you can, share with a classmate and compare your answers. Did your partner find an error you missed? Did you find an error your partner missed? Compare with your instructor's answers.

## Key Takeaways

- You can make count nouns plural by adding -s.
- Count nouns are individual people, places, or things that can be counted, such as politicians, deserts, or candles.
- Noncount nouns refer to whole things that cannot be made plural, such as salt, peace, or happiness.
- The is a definite article and is used to refer to a specific person, place, or thing, such as the Queen of England.
- A and an are indefinite articles, and they refer to nonspecific people, places, or things, such as an apple or a bicycle.

## Writing Application

Write five sentences using the definite article *the*. Write five sentences using the indefinite article *a* or *an*. Exchange papers with a classmate and check each other's work.

---

## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “5.3 Count and Noncount Nouns and Articles” (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/5-3-count-and-noncount-nouns-and-articles/>) In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

1.
  1. Electricity noncount noun
  2. Water noncount
  3. Book count noun
  4. Sculpture count noun
  5. Advice noncount noun
2.
 

1. Count Noun	3. Count Noun	5. Noncount Noun
2. Noncount Noun	4. Noncount Noun	
3.
 

1. A	3. The	5. A
2. ok	4. The	

# 15.4 - VERB TENSES

---

## Learning Objectives

- Identify simple verb tenses.
- Recognize to be, to have, and to do verbs.
- Use perfect verb tenses.
- Apply progressive verb tenses.
- Define gerunds and infinitives.

You must always use a verb in every sentence you write. Verbs are parts of speech that indicate actions or states of being. The most basic sentence structure is a subject followed by a verb.

## Simple Verb Tenses

Verb tenses tell the reader when the action takes place. The action could be in the past, present, or future.

Past	← Present →	Future
Yesterday I jumped.	Today I jump.	Tomorrow I <b>will</b> jump.

Simple present verbs are used in the following situations:

1. When the action takes place now

I drink the water greedily.

2. When the action is something that happens regularly



I **always** cross my fingers for good luck.

3. When describing things that are generally true

College tuition is very costly.

Table 1 – Regular Simple Present Tense Verbs

Verb	I	He/She/It	You	We	They
ask	ask	asks	ask	ask	ask
bake	bake	bakes	bake	bake	bake
cook	cook	cooks	cook	cook	cook
cough	cough	coughs	cough	cough	cough
clap	clap	claps	clap	clap	clap
dance	dance	dances	dance	dance	dance
erase	erase	erases	erase	erase	erase
kiss	kiss	kisses	kiss	kiss	kiss
push	push	pushes	push	push	push
wash	wash	washes	wash	wash	wash

When it is *he*, *she*, or *it* doing the present tense action, remember to add *-s*, or *-es* to the end of the verb or to change the *y* to *-ies*.

Simple past verbs are used when the action has already taken place and is now finished:

- I washed my uniform last night.
- I asked for more pie.
- I coughed loudly last night.

Table 2 – Regular Simple Past Tense Verbs

Verb	I	He/She/It	You	We	They
ask	asked	asked	asked	asked	asked
bake	baked	baked	baked	baked	baked
cook	cooked	cooked	cooked	cooked	cooked
cough	coughed	coughed	coughed	coughed	coughed
clap	clapped	clapped	clapped	clapped	clapped
dance	danced	danced	danced	danced	danced
erase	erased	erased	erased	erased	erased
kiss	kissed	kissed	kissed	kissed	kissed
push	pushed	pushed	pushed	pushed	pushed
wash	washed	washed	washed	washed	washed

When *he*, *she*, or *it* is doing the action in the past tense, remember to add *-d* or *-ed* to the end of regular verbs.

Simple future verbs are used when the action has not yet taken place:

- I will work late tomorrow.
- I will kiss my boyfriend when I see him.
- I will erase the board after class.

Table 3 – Regular Simple Future Tense Verbs

Verb	I	He/She/It	You	We	They
ask	will ask	will ask	will ask	will ask	will ask
bake	will bake	will bake	will bake	will bake	will bake
cook	will cook	will cook	will cook	will cook	will cook
cough	will cough	will cough	will cough	will cough	will cough
clap	will clap	will clap	will clap	will clap	will clap
dance	will dance	will dance	will dance	will dance	will dance
erase	will erase	will erase	will erase	will erase	will erase
kiss	will kiss	will kiss	will kiss	will kiss	will kiss
push	will push	will push	will push	will push	will push
wash	will wash	will wash	will wash	will wash	will wash

*Going to* can also be added to the main verb to make it future tense:

- I am **going to** go to work tomorrow.

## Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, complete the following sentences by adding the verb in the correct simple tense.

1. Please do not (erase, erased, will erase) what I have written on the board.
2. They (dance, danced, will dance) for hours after the party was over.
3. Harrison (wash, washed, will wash) his laundry after several weeks had passed.
4. Yesterday Mom (ask, asked, will ask) me about my plans for college.
5. I (bake, baked, will bake) several dozen cookies for tomorrow's bake sale.

## Exercise 2

Correct the verb tense mistakes in the following paragraph.

Last summer, I walk around Walden Pond. Walden Pond is in Concord, Massachusetts. It is where the philosopher Henry David Thoreau will live during the mid-nineteenth century. During his time there, he wrote a book called *Walden*. *Walden* is a book of Thoreau's reflections on the natural environment. It will be consider a classic in American literature. I did not know that Walden Pond is consider the birthplace of the environmental movement. It was very relaxing there. I will listen to birds, frogs, and crickets, not to mention the peaceful sound of the pond itself.

### Collaboration

Once you have found all the errors you can, please share with a classmate and compare

your answers. Did your partner find an error you missed? Did you find an error your partner missed? Compare with your instructor's answers.

## To Be, To Do, and To Have

There are some irregular verbs in English that are formed in special ways. The most common of these are the verbs *to be*, *to have*, and *to do*.

Table 4 – Verb Forms of To Be, To Do, and To Have

Base Form	Present Tense Form	Past Tense Form	Future Tense Form
be	am/is/are	was/were	will be
do	do/does	did	will do
have	have/has	had	will have

### Tip

Memorize the present tense forms of *to be*, *to do*, and *to have*. A song or rhythmic pattern will make them easier to memorize.

Review these examples of *to be*, *to do*, and *to have* used in sentences.

Verb	Past	← Present →	Future
To Be	Yesterday I <b>was</b> angry.	Today I <b>am</b> not angry.	Tomorrow I <b>will be</b> angry.
To Do	I <b>did</b> my best yesterday.	I <b>do</b> my best every day.	Tomorrow I <b>will do</b> my best.
To Have	Yesterday I <b>had</b> ten dollars.	Today I <b>have</b> ten dollars.	Tomorrow I <b>will have</b> ten dollars.

Remember the following uses of *to be*, *to have* and *to do*:

### To Be

- I → am/was/will be
- you/we/they → are/were/will be
- he/she/it → is/was/will be

### To Have

- I/you/we/they → have/had/will have
- he/she/it → has/had/will have

### To Do

- I/you/we/they → do/did/will do
- he/she/it → does/did/will do

## Tip

Remember, if you have a compound subject like *Marie and Jennifer*, think of the subject as *they* to determine the correct verb form.

- Marie and Jennifer (*they*) have a house on Bainbridge Island.

Similarly, single names can be thought of as *he*, *she*, or *it*.

- LeBron (*he*) has scored thirty points so far.

## Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, complete the following sentences by circling the correct form of the verbs *to be*, *to have*, and *to do* in the three simple tenses.

1. Stefan always (do, does, will do) his taxes the day before they are due.
2. We (are, is, was) planning a surprise birthday party for my mother.
3. Turtles (have, had, has) the most beautiful patterns on their shells.
4. I always (do, did, will do) my homework before dinner, so I can eat in peace.
5. You (is, are, was) so much smarter than you think!

## Perfect Verb Tenses

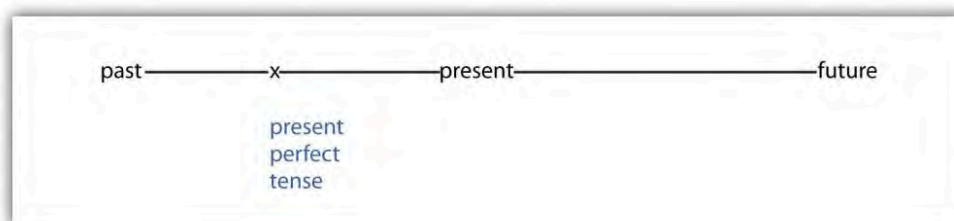
Up to this point, we have studied the three simple verb tenses—simple present, simple past, and simple future. Now we will add three more tenses, which are called perfect tenses. They are present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect. These are the three basic tenses of English. A past participle is often called the *-ed* form of a verb because it is formed by adding *-d* or *-ed* to the base form of regular verbs. Past participles can also end in *-t* or *-en*. Keep in mind, however, the past participle is also formed in various other ways for irregular verbs. The past participle can be used to form the present perfect tense.

Review the following basic formula for the present perfect tense:

**Subject + has or have + past participle**

I have helped.

The present perfect tense has a connection with the past and the present.



The present perfect tense sits between the past and present on a timeline from past -> present -> future

Use the present perfect tense to describe a continuing situation and to describe an action that has just happened.

- I **have worked** as a caretaker since June.

This sentence tells us that the subject has worked as a caretaker in the past and is still working as a caretaker in the present.

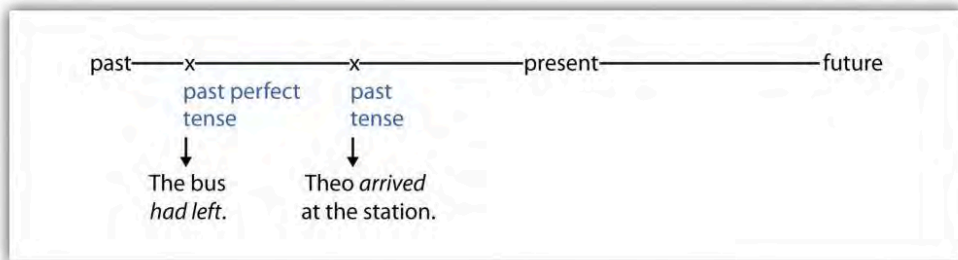
- Dmitri **has just received** an award from the Dean of Students.

This sentence tells us that Dmitri has very recently received the award. The word *just* emphasizes that the action happened very recently.

Study the following basic formula for the past perfect tense:

**Subject + had or have + past participle**

I had listened.



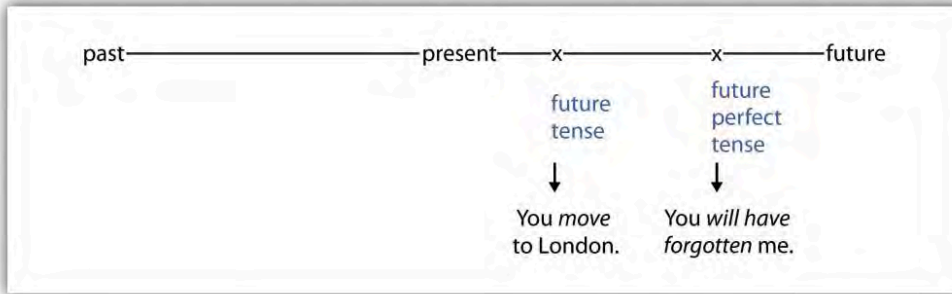
- The bus **had left** by the time Theo **arrived** at the station.

Notice that both actions occurred entirely in the past, but one action occurred before the other. At some time in the past, Theo *arrived* (simple past tense) at the station, but at some time before that, the bus *had left* (past perfect).

Look at the following basic formula for the future perfect tense:

**Subject + will have + past participle**

I will have graduated.



The future perfect tense describes an action from the past in the future, as if the past event has already occurred. Use the future perfect tense when you anticipate completing an event in the future, but you have not completed it yet.

- You **will have forgotten** me after you **move** to London.

Notice that both actions occur in the future, but one action will occur before the other. At some time in the future, the subject (*you*) *will move* (future tense) to London, and at some time after that, the subject *will have forgotten* (future perfect tense) the speaker, *me*.

## Exercise 4

### Exercise 4 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by using the correct perfect verb tense for the verb in parentheses.

1. I plan to start a compost bin because I \_\_\_\_\_ (to want) one for a long time now.
2. My brother told me he \_\_\_\_\_ (to argue) with his friend about politics.
3. By the time we reach the mountain top the sun \_\_\_\_\_ (to set).
4. Denise \_\_\_\_\_ (to walk) several miles in the past three hours.
5. His mother \_\_\_\_\_ (to offer) to pay him to work in her office.

**Check Your Answers:** <sup>1</sup>



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## Progressive Verb Tenses

Progressive verb tenses describe a continuing or unfinished action, such as *I am going*, *I was going*, or *I will be going*.

The present progressive tense describes an action or state of being that takes place in the present and that continues to take place.

To make verbs in the present progressive tense, combine these two parts:

Present tense form of <i>to be</i>	+	<i>-ing</i> (present participle)
am/is/are		help helping

You should use the present progressive tense to describe a planned activity, to describe an activity that is recurring right now, and to describe an activity that is in progress, although not actually occurring at the time of speaking:

- Preeti **is starting** school on Tuesday.

This sentence describes a planned activity.

- Janetta **is getting** her teeth cleaned right now.

This sentence describes an activity that is occurring right now.

- I **am studying** ballet at school.

This sentence describes an activity that is in progress but not actually occurring at the time of speaking.

The past progressive tense describes an action or state of being that took place in the past and that continues to take place.

To make verbs in the past progressive tense, combine these two parts:

<b>Past tense form of <i>to be</i> +</b>	<b>-ing (present participle)</b>
was/were	helping

You should use the past progressive tense to describe a continuous action in the past, to describe a past activity in progress while another activity occurred, or to describe two past activities in progress at the same time:

- Ella and I **were planning** a vacation.

This sentence describes a continuous action in the past.

- I **was helping** a customer when I smelled delicious fried chicken.

This sentence describes a past activity in progress while another activity occurred.

- While I **was finishing** my homework, my wife **was talking** on the phone.

This sentence describes two past activities in progress at the same time.

The future progressive tense describes an action or state of being that will take place in the future and that will continue to take place. The action will have started at that future moment, but it will not have finished at that moment.

To make verbs in the future progressive tense, combine these parts:

**Future tense form of *to be* + -ing (present participle)**

will be helping

Use the future progressive tense to describe an activity that will be in progress in the future:

- Samantha and I **will be dancing** in the school play next week.
- Tomorrow Agnes **will be reading** two of her poems.

## Exercise 5

### Exercise 5 (Text Version)

Revise the following sentences, written in simple tenses, using the progressive tenses indicated in parentheses.

1. He prepared the food while I watched. (past progressive tense)
2. Jonathan will speak at the conference. (future progressive)
3. Josie traveled to Egypt last July. (past progressive tense)
4. My foot aches, so I know it will rain. (present progressive tense)
5. Micah will talk a lot when I see him. (future progressive)
6. I yawn a lot because I feel tired. (present progressive tense)

### Check Your Answers: <sup>2</sup>

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Similar to the present perfect tense, the present perfect progressive tense is used to indicate an action that was begun in the past and continues into the present. However, the present perfect progressive is used when you want to stress that the action is ongoing.

To make verbs in the present perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

**Present tense form of** *to have* + **Been** + **-ing (present participle)**

has or have been helping

- She **has been talking** for the last hour.

This sentence indicates that *she* started talking in the past and is continuing to talk in the present.

- I **have been feeling** tired lately.

This sentence indicates that *I* started feeling tired in the past, and *I* continue to feel

tired in the present. Instead of indicating time, as in the first sentence, the second sentence uses the adverb *lately*. You can also use the adverb *recently* when using the present perfect progressive tense.

Similar to the past perfect tense, the past perfect progressive tense is used to indicate an action that was begun in the past and continued until another time in the past. The past perfect progressive does not continue into the present but stops at a designated moment in the past.

To make verbs in the past perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

**Past tense form of** *to have* + **been** + **-ing (present participle)**

had been helping

- The employees **had been talking** until their boss arrived.

This sentence indicates that the employees were talking in the past and they stopped talking when their boss arrived, which also happened in the past.

- I **had been working** all day.

This sentence implies that *I* was working in the past. The action does not continue into the future, and the sentence implies that the subject stopped working for unstated reasons.

The future perfect progressive tense is rarely used. It is used to indicate an action that will begin in the future and will continue until another time in the future.

To make verbs in the future perfect progressive tense, combine the following parts:

**Future tense form of** *to have* + **been** + **-ing (present participle)**

will have Been helping

- By the end of the meeting, I **will have been hearing** about mortgages and taxes for eight hours.

This sentence indicates that in the future *I* will hear about mortgages and taxes for

eight hours, but it has not happened yet. It also indicates the action of *hearing* will continue until *the end of the meeting*, something that is also in the future.

## Gerunds

A gerund is a form of a verb that is used as a noun. All gerunds end in *-ing*. Since gerunds function as nouns, they occupy places in a sentence that a noun would, such as the subject, direct object, and object of a preposition.

You can use a gerund in the following ways:

### 1. As a subject

**Traveling** is Cynthia's favorite pastime.

### 2. As a direct object

I enjoy **jogging**.

### 3. As an object of a proposition

The librarian scolded me for **laughing**.

Often verbs are followed by gerunds. Study Table 5 – “Gerunds and Verbs” for examples.

Table 5 – Gerunds and Verbs

Gerund	Verb Followed by a Gerund
moving	Denise considered <b>moving</b> to Paris.
cleaning	I <b>hate cleaning</b> the bathroom.
winning	Nate <b>imagines winning</b> an Oscar one day.
worrying	Mom says she <b>has stopped worrying</b> .
taking	She <b>admitted taking</b> the pumpkin.

## Infinitives

An infinitive is a form of a verb that comes after the word *to* and acts as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

*to* + verb = infinitive

Examples of infinitives include to move, to sleep, to look, to throw, to read, and to sneeze.

Often verbs are followed by infinitives. Study Table 6 – “Infinitives and Verbs” for examples.

**Table 6 – Infinitives and Verbs**

<b>Infinitive</b>	<b>Verb Followed by Infinitive</b>
to help	Jessica <b>offered to help</b> her move.
to arrive	Mick <b>expects to arrive</b> early.
to win	Sunita <b>wants to win</b> the writing contest.
to close	He <b>forgot to close</b> the curtains.
to eat	She <b>likes to eat</b> late.

You may wonder which verbs can be followed by gerunds and which verbs can be followed by infinitives. With the following verbs, you can use either a gerund or an infinitive.

Table 7 – Infinitives and Gerunds Verbs

Base Form of Verb	Sentences with Verbs Followed by Gerunds <i>and</i> Infinitives
begin	1. John <b>began crying</b> . 2. John <b>began to cry</b> .
hate	1. Marie <b>hated talking</b> on the phone. 2. Marie <b>hated to talk</b> on the phone.
forget	1. Wendell <b>forgot paying</b> the bills. 2. Wendell <b>forgot to pay</b> the bills.
like	1. I <b>liked leaving</b> messages. 2. I <b>liked to leave</b> messages.
continue	1. He <b>continued listening</b> to the news. 2. He <b>continued to listen</b> to the news.
start	1. I <b>will start recycling</b> immediately. 2. I <b>will start to recycle</b> immediately.
try	1. Mikhail <b>will try climbing</b> the tree. 2. Mikhail <b>will try to climb</b> the tree.
prefer	1. I <b>prefer baking</b> . 2. I <b>prefer to bake</b> .
love	1. Josh <b>loves diving</b> . 2. Josh <b>loves to dive</b> .

## Exercise 6

### Exercise 6 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct infinitive or gerund.

1. I meant \_\_\_\_\_ (to kiss, kissing) my kids before they left for school.
2. The children hoped (to go, going) to a restaurant for dinner.
3. Do you intend \_\_\_\_\_ (to eat, eating) the entire pie?

4. Crystal postponed \_\_\_\_\_ (to get dressed, getting dressed) for the party.
5. When we finish \_\_\_\_\_ (to play, playing) this game, we will go home.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>3</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 6 is adapted from “15.4 – Verb Tenses” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Key Takeaways

- Verb tenses tell the reader when the action takes place.
- Actions could be in the past, present, or future.
- There are some irregular verbs in English that are formed in special ways. The most common of these irregular verbs are the verbs to be, to have, and to do.
- There are six main verb tenses in English: simple present, simple past, simple future, present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect.
- Verbs can be followed by either gerunds or infinitives.

## Writing Application

Write about a lively event that is either remembered or imagined. Ask yourself the following three questions: What happened during the event? What happened after the event? Looking back, what do you think of the event now? Answer each question in a separate paragraph to keep the present, past, and future tense verbs separate.



## Attribution & References

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## Notes

1.
  1. wanted
  2. had argued
  3. was setting
  4. had walked
  5. was offering
2.
  1. He was preparing the food while I watched.
  2. Jonathan will be speaking at the conference.
  3. Josie was travelling to Egypt last July.
  4. My foot aches, so I know it is going to rain.
  5. Micah was talking a lot when I saw him.
  6. I am yawning a lot because I feel tired.
3.
  1. to kiss
  2. to go
  3. to eat
  4. getting dressed
  5. playing

# 15.5 - MODAL AUXILIARIES

---

## Learning Objectives

- Define and identify modal auxiliaries.
- Learn how and when to use modal auxiliaries.

We all need to express our moods and emotions, both in writing and in our everyday life. We do this by using modal auxiliaries .

## Modal Auxiliaries

Modal auxiliaries are a type of helping verb that are used only with a main verb to help express its mood.

The following is the basic formula for using a modal auxiliary:

Subject +	modal auxiliary +	main verb
James	may	call

There are ten main modal auxiliaries in English.

Table 1 – Modal Auxiliaries

Modal Auxiliary	Use	Modal Auxiliary + Main Verb
can	Expresses an ability or possibility	I <b>can lift</b> this forty-pound box. (ability)
		We <b>can embrace</b> green sources of energy. (possibility)
		I <b>could beat</b> you at chess when we were kids. (past ability)
could	Expresses an ability in the past; a present possibility; a past or future permission	We <b>could bake</b> a pie! (present possibility)
		<b>Could we pick</b> some flowers from the garden? (future permission)
		I <b>may attend</b> the concert. (uncertain future action)
may	Expresses uncertain future action; permission; ask a yes-no question	You <b>may begin</b> the exam. (permission)
		<b>May I attend</b> the concert? (yes-no questions)
might	Expresses uncertain future action	I <b>might attend</b> the concert (uncertain future action—same as <i>may</i> )
shall	Expresses intended future action	I <b>shall go</b> to the opera. (intended future action)
should	Expresses obligation; ask if an obligation exists	I <b>should mail</b> my RSVP. (obligation, same as <i>ought to</i> )
		<b>Should I call</b> my mother? (asking if an obligation exists)
		I <b>will get</b> an A in this class. (intended future action)
will	Expresses intended future action; ask a favor; ask for information	<b>Will you buy</b> me some chocolate? (favor)
		<b>Will you be finished</b> soon? (information)
		I <b>would like</b> the steak, please. (preference)
would	States a preference; request a choice politely; explain an action; introduce habitual past actions	<b>Would you like</b> to have breakfast in bed? (request a choice politely)
		I <b>would go</b> with you if I didn't have to babysit tonight. (explain an action)

Modal Auxiliary	Use	Modal Auxiliary + Main Verb
		He <b>would write</b> to me every week when we were dating. (habitual past action)
must	Expresses obligation	We <b>must be</b> on time for class.
ought to	Expresses obligation	I <b>ought to mail</b> my RSVP. (obligation, same as may)

## Tip

Use the following format to form a yes-no question with a modal auxiliary:

Modal auxiliary +	subject +	main verb
Should	I	drive?

Be aware of these four common errors when using modal auxiliaries:

- Using an infinitive instead of a base verb after a modal

**Incorrect:** I can to move this heavy table.

**Correct:** I can move this heavy table.

- Using a gerund instead of an infinitive or a base verb after a modal

**Incorrect:** I could moving to Sweden.

**Correct:** I could move to Sweden.

- Using two modals in a row

**Incorrect:** I should must *renew* my passport.

**Correct:** I must **renew** my passport.

**Correct:** I should **renew** my passport.

- Leaving out a modal

**Incorrect:** I renew my passport.

**Correct:** I must **renew** my passport.

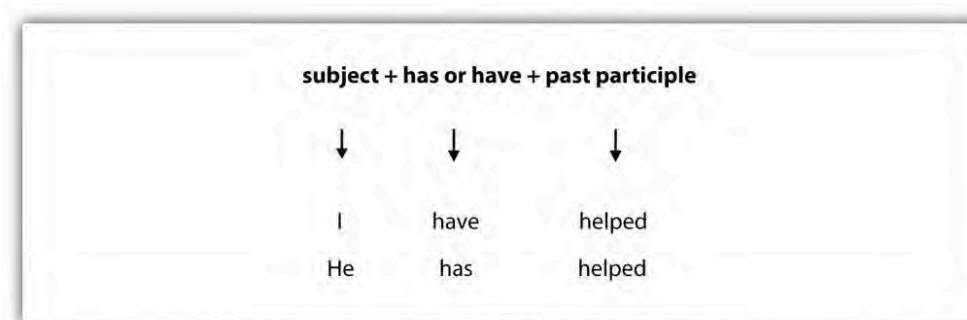
## Exercise 1

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the common modal auxiliary errors.

I may to go to France on vacation next summer. I shall might visit the Palace of Versailles. I would to drive around the countryside. I could imagining myself living there; however, I will not move to France because my family should miss me very much.

## Modals and Present Perfect Verbs

In the previous section, we defined present perfect verb tense as describing a continuing situation or something that has just happened.



Remember, when a sentence contains a modal auxiliary before the verb, the helping verb is always *have*.

subject + modal auxiliary+ have + past participle			
↓	↓	↓	↓
I	could	have	helped
He	could	have	helped
He	might	have	helped
He	may	have	helped
He	should	have	helped

Be aware of the following common errors when using modal auxiliaries in the present perfect tense:

- Using *had* instead of *have*

**Incorrect:** Jamie would had attended the party, but he was sick.

**Correct:** Jamie would have attended the party, but he was sick.

- Leaving out *have*

**Incorrect:** Jamie would attended the party, but he was sick.

**Correct:** Jamie would have attended the party, but he was sick.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by changing the given verb form to a modal auxiliary in present perfect tense.

- The man \_\_\_\_\_ (laugh).
- The frogs \_\_\_\_\_ (croak).
- My writing teacher \_\_\_\_\_ (smile).
- The audience \_\_\_\_\_ (cheer) all night.
- My best friend \_\_\_\_\_ (giggled).

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

**Activity Source:** Exercise 2 is adapted from “15.5 – Modal Auxiliaries” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

## Key Takeaways

- The basic formula for using a modal auxiliary is subject + modal auxiliary + main verb
- There are ten main modal auxiliaries in English: *can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must, and ought to*.
- The four common types of errors when using modals include the following: using an infinitive instead of a base verb after a modal, using a gerund instead of an infinitive or a base verb after a modal, using two modals in a row, and leaving out a modal.
- In the present perfect tense, when a sentence has a modal auxiliary before the verb, the helping verb is always *have*.
- The two common errors when using modals in the present perfect tense include using *had* instead of *have* and leaving out *have*.

## Writing Application

On a separate sheet of paper, write ten original sentences using modal auxiliaries.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “5.6 Modal Auxiliaries (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/5-6-modal-auxiliaries/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

1.      1. has laughed                              3. have smiled                              5. has giggled
2. have croaked                              4. have cheered



# 15.6 - PREPOSITIONS

## Learning Objectives

- Identify prepositions.
- Learn how and when to use prepositions.

A preposition is a word that connects a noun or a pronoun to another word in a sentence. Most prepositions such as *above*, *below*, and *behind* usually indicate a location in the physical world, but some prepositions such as *during*, *after*, and *until* show location in time.

## *In, At, and On*

The prepositions *in*, *at*, and *on* are used to indicate both location and time, but they are used in specific ways. Study the following tables to learn when to use each one.

Table 1 – *In*

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
in	year	in 1942	country	in Zimbabwe
	month	in August	state	in California
	season	in the summer	city	in Chicago
	time of day (not with <i>night</i> )	in the afternoon		

Table 2 – *On*

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
on	day	on Monday	surfaces	on the table
	date	on May 23	streets	on 124th Street
	specific days/dates	on Monday	modes of transportation	on the bus

Table 3 – *At*

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
at	time	at five o'clock	addresses	at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
	with <i>night</i>	at night	location	at Rooney's Grill

## Exercise 1

Edit the following letter from a resident to her landlord by correcting errors with *in*, *at*, and *on*.

Dear Mrs. Salazar,

I am writing this letter to inform you that I will be vacating apartment 2A in 356 Maple Street at Wednesday, June 30, 2010. I will be cleaning the apartment at the Monday before I leave. I will return the keys to you on 5 p.m., sharp, at June 30. If you have any questions or specific instructions for me, please contact me in my office. I have enjoyed living at Toronto, Ontario, but I want to explore other parts of the country now.

Sincerely,

Milani Davis

## Prepositions after Verbs

Prepositions often follow verbs to create expressions with distinct meanings. These expressions are sometimes called prepositional verbs. It is important to remember that these expressions cannot be separated.

Table 4 – Verbs + Prepositions

Verb + Preposition	Meaning	Example
agree with	to agree with something or someone	My husband always <b>agrees with</b> me.
apologize for	to express regret for something, to say sorry about something	I <b>apologize for</b> being late.
apply for	to ask for something formally	I will <b>apply for</b> that job.
believe in	to have a firm conviction in something; to believe in the existence of something	I <b>believe in</b> educating the world's women.
care about	to think that someone or something is important	I <b>care about</b> the health of our oceans.
hear about	to be told about something or someone	I <b>heard about</b> the teachers' strike.
look after	to watch or to protect someone or something	Will you <b>look after</b> my dog while I am on vacation?
talk about	to discuss something	We will <b>talk about</b> the importance of recycling.
speak to, with	to talk to/with someone	I will <b>speak to</b> his teacher tomorrow.
wait for	to await the arrival of someone or something	I will <b>wait for</b> my package to arrive.

## Tip

It is a good idea to memorize these combinations of verbs plus prepositions. Write them down in a notebook along with the definition and practice using them when you speak.

## Exercise 2

### Exercise 2 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by writing the correct preposition after the verb.

1. Charlotte does not \_\_\_\_\_ (apologize for, believe in) aliens or ghosts.
2. It is impolite to \_\_\_\_\_ (hear about, talk about) people when they are not here.
3. Herman said he was going to \_\_\_\_\_ (believe in, apply for) the internship.
4. Jonas would not \_\_\_\_\_ (talk about, apologize for) eating the last piece of cake.
5. I \_\_\_\_\_ (care about, agree with) the environment very much.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>1</sup>

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## Prepositions after Adjectives

Similar to prepositions after verbs, prepositions after adjectives create expressions with distinct meanings unique to English. Remember, like prepositional verbs, these expressions also cannot be separated.

Table 5 – Adjectives + Prepositions

Adjective + Preposition	Meaning	Example
angry at, about	to feel or show anger toward (or about) someone or something	I am <b>angry about</b> the oil spill in the ocean.
confused about	to be unable to think with clarity about someone or something.	Shawn was <b>confused about</b> the concepts presented at the meeting.
disappointed in, with	to feel dissatisfaction with someone or something	I was <b>disappointed in</b> my husband because he voted for that candidate.
dressed in	to clothe the body	He was <b>dressed in</b> a pin-striped suit.
happy for	to show happiness for someone or something	I was <b>happy for</b> my sister who graduated from college.
interested in	giving attention to something, expressing interest	I am <b>interested in</b> musical theater.
jealous of	to feel resentful or bitter toward someone or something (because of their status, possessions, or ability)	I was <b>jealous of</b> her because she always went on vacation.
thankful for	to express thanks for something	I am <b>thankful for</b> my wonderful friends.
tired of	to be disgusted with, have a distaste for	I was <b>tired of</b> driving for hours without end.
worried about	to express anxiety or worry about something	I am <b>worried about</b> my father's health.

## Exercise 3

### Exercise 3 (Text Version)

Complete the following sentences by writing the correct preposition after the verb.

1. Meera was deeply \_\_\_\_\_ (interested in, thankful for) marine biology.
2. I was \_\_\_\_\_ (jealous of, disappointed in) the season finale of my favorite show.
3. Jordan won the race, and I am \_\_\_\_\_ (happy for, interested in) him.

4. The lawyer was \_\_\_\_\_ (thankful for, confused about) the details of the case.
5. Chloe was \_\_\_\_\_ (dressed in, tired of) a comfortable blue tunic.

**Check Your Answers:**<sup>2</sup>

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**Tip**

The following adjectives are always followed by the preposition *at*.

- Good

She is really **good at** chess.

- Excellent

Henry is **excellent at** drawing.

- Brilliant

Mary Anne is **brilliant at** playing the violin.

**Key Takeaways**

- The prepositions *in*, *at*, and *on* are used to indicate both location and time, but they are used in specific ways.
- The preposition *in* is used when expressing the following: year, month, season, time of day (not with *night*), country, state, and city.
- The preposition *on* is used to express day, date, and specific days or dates and surfaces, streets, and transportation modes.

- The preposition *at* is used for expressions of time, with *night*, and with addresses and locations.
- Prepositions often follow verbs to create expressions with distinct meanings that are unique to English.
- Prepositions also follow adjectives to create expressions with distinct meanings that are unique to English.

## Writing Application

Write about a happy childhood memory using as many prepositions followed by verbs and adjectives as you can. Use at least ten. When you are finished, exchange papers with a classmate and correct any preposition errors you find.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “5.7 Prepositions (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/5-7-prepositions/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Notes

- |    |                    |                   |               |
|----|--------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. | 1. believe in      | 3. apply for      | 5. care about |
|    | 2. talk about      | 4. apologize for  |               |
| 2. | 1. interested in   | 3. happy for      | 5. dressed in |
|    | 2. disappointed in | 4. confused about |               |

# 15.7 - SLANG AND IDIOMS

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## Learning Objectives

- Recognize slang and idioms.
- Learn to avoid using slang and idioms in formal writing.

Words are the basis of how a reader or listener judges you, the writer and speaker. When you write an academic paper or speak in a business interview, you want to be sure to choose your words carefully. In our casual, everyday talk, we often use a lot of “ums,” “likes,” “yeahs,” and so on. This everyday language is not appropriate for formal contexts, such as academic papers and business interviews. You should switch between different ways of speaking and writing depending on whether the context is formal or informal.

## Slang

Hey guys, let’s learn about slang and other cool stuff like that! It will be awesome, trust me. This section is off the hook!

What do you notice about the previous paragraph? You might notice that the language sounds informal, or casual, like someone might talk with a friend or family member. The paragraph also uses a lot of slang . Slang is a type of language that is informal and playful. It often changes over time. The slang of the past is different than the slang of today, but some slang has carried over into the present. Slang also varies by region and culture. The important thing to understand is that slang is casual talk, and you should avoid using it in formal contexts. There are literally thousands of slang words and expressions. Table 1 “Slang Expressions” explains just a few of the more common terms.



Table 1 – Slang Expressions

Slang Word or Phrase	Meaning
check it out, check this out	v. look at, watch, examine
chocoholic, workaholic, shopaholic	n. a person who loves, is addicted to chocolate/work/shopping
stuff	n. things (used as a singular, noncount noun)
taking care of business	doing things that need to be done
pro	n. a person who is a professional
crack up	v. to laugh uncontrollably
veg (sounds like the <i>veg</i> in <i>vegetable</i> )	v. relax and do nothing
dude, man	n. person, man
all-nighter	n. studying all night
cool	adj. good, fashionable
gross, nasty	adj. disgusting
pig out	v. eat a lot, overeat
screw up	v. make a mistake
awesome	adj. great

## Exercise 1

Edit the business e-mail by replacing any slang words and phrases with more formal language.

Dear Ms. O'Connor:

I am writing to follow up on my interview from last week. First of all, it was awesome to meet you. You are a really cool lady. I believe I would be a pro at all the stuff you mentioned that would be required of me in this job. I am not a workaholic, but I do work hard and "take care of business." Haha. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

M. Ernest Anderson

## Idioms

Idioms are expressions that have a meaning different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words in the expression. Because English contains many idioms, nonnative English speakers have difficulties making logical sense of idioms and idiomatic expressions. The more you are exposed to English, however, the more idioms you will come to understand. Until then, memorizing the more common idioms may be of some help.

Table 2 – Idioms

Idiom	Definition
a blessing in disguise	a good thing you do not recognize at first
a piece of cake	easy to do
better late than never	it is better to do something late than not at all
get over it	recover from something (like a perceived insult)
I have no idea	I don't know
not a chance	it will definitely not happen
on pins and needles	very nervous about something that is happening
on top of the world	feeling great
pulling your leg	making a joke by tricking another person
the sky is the limit	the possibilities are endless

What if you come across an idiom that you do not understand? There are clues that can help you. They are called context clues. Context clues are words or phrases around the unknown word or phrase that may help you decipher its meaning.

1. **Definition or explanation clue.** An idiom may be explained immediately after its use.

**Sentence:** I felt like I was sitting *on pins and needles* I was so nervous.

2. **Restatement or synonym clues.** An idiom may be simplified or restated.

**Sentence:** The young girl felt as though she had been *sent to the dog house* when her mother punished her for fighting in school.

3. **Contrast or Antonym clues.** An idiom may be clarified by a contrasting phrase or antonym that is near it.

**Sentence:** Chynna thought the 5k marathon would be *a piece of cake*, *but* it turned out to be very difficult.

Pay attention to the signal word *but*, which tells the reader that an opposite thought or concept is occurring.

## Key Takeaways

- Informal language is not appropriate in formal writing or speaking contexts.
- Slang and idioms might not make logical sense to nonnative speakers of English.
- It is good to be aware of slang and idioms so they do not appear in your formal writing.

## Writing Application

Write a short paragraph about yourself to a friend. Write another paragraph about yourself to an employer. Examine and discuss the differences in language between the two paragraphs.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “5.8 Slang and Idioms (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/5-8-slang-and-idioms/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

# 15.8 - HELP FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: END-OF-CHAPTER EXERCISES

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## Learning Objectives

- Use the skills you have learned in the chapter.
- Work collaboratively with other students.

## Exercises

1. On a separate sheet of paper, create questions from the following sentences.
  - a. My daughter will have to think about her college options.
  - b. Otto is waiting in the car for his girlfriend.
  - c. The article talks about conserving energy.
  - d. We need to reduce our needs.
  - e. Rasha is always complaining about her work.
2. Underline the prepositional phrase in each of the following sentences.
  - a. Monica told us about her trip.
  - b. I hope we have sunshine throughout the summer.
  - c. The panther climbed up the tree.

- d. The little boy was standing behind his mother's legs.
  - e. We stayed awake until dawn.
3. Place the following sets of adjectives in the correct order before the noun.
- a. eyes: black, mesmerizing
  - b. jacket: vintage, orange, suede
  - c. pineapple: ripe, yellow, sweet
  - d. vacation: fun, skiing
  - e. movie: hilarious, independent
4. On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the positive sentences as negative sentences. Be sure to keep the sentences in the present tense.
- a. Sometimes I work on Saturdays.
  - b. The garden attracts butterflies and bees.
  - c. He breathes loudly at night.
  - d. I chew on blades of grass in the summer time.
  - e. I communicate well with my husband.
5. On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the following paragraph by correcting the double negatives.

That morning it was so hot Forrest felt like he couldn't hardly breathe. Ain't nothing would get him out the door into that scorching heat. Then he remembered his dog, Zeus, who started whining right then. Zeus was whining and barking so much that Forrest didn't have no choice but to get off the couch and face the day. That dog didn't do nothing but sniff around the bushes and try to stay in the shade while Forrest was sweating in the sun holding the leash. He couldn't not wait for winter to come.

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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from "5.9 Help for English Language Learners: End-of-Chapter Exercises (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/5-9-help-for-english-language-learners-end-of-chapter->

exercises/)" In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.