

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

Except where otherwise noted, this OER is licensed under CC BY NC 4.0
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

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

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:¹

Activity Source: Exercise 1 is adapted from “15.1 – Word Order” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

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.

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.

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

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: ¹

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: ²

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:³

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 will 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 was angry.	Today I am not angry.	Tomorrow I will be angry.
To Do	I did my best yesterday.	I do my best every day.	Tomorrow I will do my best.
To Have	Yesterday I had ten dollars.	Today I have ten dollars.	Tomorrow I will have 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

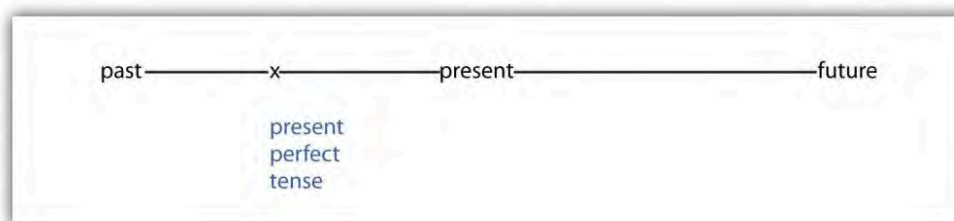
Up to this point, we have studied the three simple verb tenses—simple present, simple past, and simple future. Now we will add three more tenses, which are called perfect tenses. They are present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect. These are the three basic tenses of English. A past participle 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.

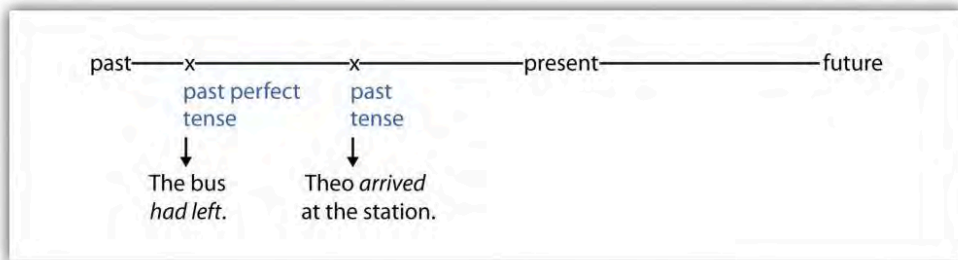
- Dmitri **has just received** an award from the Dean of Students.

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.



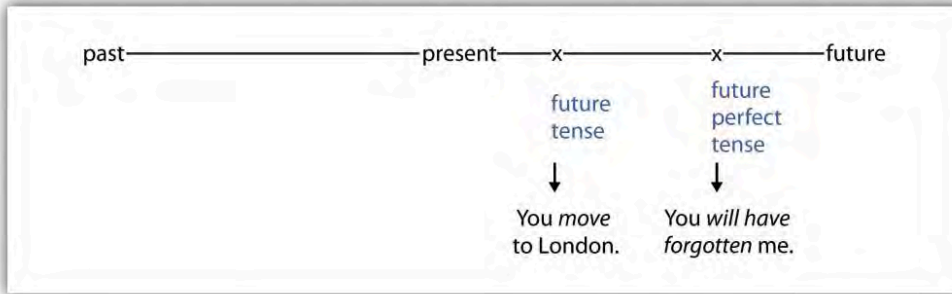
- The bus **had left** by the time Theo **arrived** at the station.

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: ¹

Activity Source: Exercise 4 is adapted from “15.4 – Verb Tenses” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

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:

Past tense form of <i>to be</i> +	-ing (present participle)
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: ²

Activity Source: Exercise 5 is adapted from “15.4 – Verb Tenses” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

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 moving to Paris.
cleaning	I hate cleaning the bathroom.
winning	Nate imagines winning an Oscar one day.
worrying	Mom says she has stopped worrying .
taking	She admitted taking 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

Infinitive	Verb Followed by Infinitive
to help	Jessica offered to help her move.
to arrive	Mick expects to arrive early.
to win	Sunita wants to win the writing contest.
to close	He forgot to close the curtains.
to eat	She likes to eat 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 began crying. 2. John began to cry.
hate	1. Marie hated talking on the phone. 2. Marie hated to talk on the phone.
forget	1. Wendell forgot paying the bills. 2. Wendell forgot to pay the bills.
like	1. I liked leaving messages. 2. I liked to leave messages.
continue	1. He continued listening to the news. 2. He continued to listen to the news.
start	1. I will start recycling immediately. 2. I will start to recycle immediately.
try	1. Mikhail will try climbing the tree. 2. Mikhail will try to climb the tree.
prefer	1. I prefer baking. 2. I prefer to bake.
love	1. Josh loves diving. 2. Josh loves to dive.

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:³

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

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “5.5 Verb Tenses (<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writingsuccess/chapter/5-5-verb-tenses/>)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

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 can lift this forty-pound box. (ability)
		We can embrace green sources of energy. (possibility)
		I could beat 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 could bake a pie! (present possibility)
		Could we pick some flowers from the garden? (future permission)
		I may attend the concert. (uncertain future action)
may	Expresses uncertain future action; permission; ask a yes-no question	You may begin the exam. (permission)
		May I attend the concert? (yes-no questions)
might	Expresses uncertain future action	I might attend the concert (uncertain future action—same as <i>may</i>)
shall	Expresses intended future action	I shall go to the opera. (intended future action)
should	Expresses obligation; ask if an obligation exists	I should mail my RSVP. (obligation, same as <i>ought to</i>)
		Should I call my mother? (asking if an obligation exists)
		I will get an A in this class. (intended future action)
will	Expresses intended future action; ask a favor; ask for information	Will you buy me some chocolate? (favor)
		Will you be finished soon? (information)
		I would like the steak, please. (preference)
would	States a preference; request a choice politely; explain an action; introduce habitual past actions	Would you like to have breakfast in bed? (request a choice politely)
		I would go with you if I didn't have to babysit tonight. (explain an action)

Modal Auxiliary	Use	Modal Auxiliary + Main Verb
		He would write to me every week when we were dating. (habitual past action)
must	Expresses obligation	We must be on time for class.
ought to	Expresses obligation	I ought to mail 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.

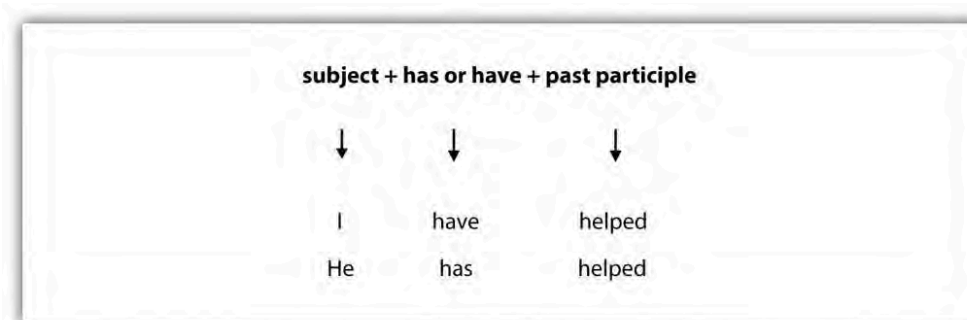
Exercise 1

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:¹

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.

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
2. have croaked
3. have smiled
4. have cheered
5. has giggled

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 agrees with me.
apologize for	to express regret for something, to say sorry about something	I apologize for being late.
apply for	to ask for something formally	I will apply for that job.
believe in	to have a firm conviction in something; to believe in the existence of something	I believe in educating the world's women.
care about	to think that someone or something is important	I care about the health of our oceans.
hear about	to be told about something or someone	I heard about the teachers' strike.
look after	to watch or to protect someone or something	Will you look after my dog while I am on vacation?
talk about	to discuss something	We will talk about the importance of recycling.
speak to, with	to talk to/with someone	I will speak to his teacher tomorrow.
wait for	to await the arrival of someone or something	I will wait for 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:¹

Activity Source: Exercise 2 is adapted from “15.6 – Prepositions” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

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 angry about the oil spill in the ocean.
confused about	to be unable to think with clarity about someone or something.	Shawn was confused about the concepts presented at the meeting.
disappointed in, with	to feel dissatisfaction with someone or something	I was disappointed in my husband because he voted for that candidate.
dressed in	to clothe the body	He was dressed in a pin-striped suit.
happy for	to show happiness for someone or something	I was happy for my sister who graduated from college.
interested in	giving attention to something, expressing interest	I am interested in musical theater.
jealous of	to feel resentful or bitter toward someone or something (because of their status, possessions, or ability)	I was jealous of her because she always went on vacation.
thankful for	to express thanks for something	I am thankful for my wonderful friends.
tired of	to be disgusted with, have a distaste for	I was tired of driving for hours without end.
worried about	to express anxiety or worry about something	I am worried about 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:²

Activity Source: Exercise 3 is adapted from “15.6 – Prepositions” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, licensed under CC BY-NC- 4.0.

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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.