

English VI

General Hints to Improve Writing

MENG321 – 2022

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Lesson 6

I. Nouns: Countable and Non-Countable

Know the difference:

Countable nouns are nouns that can be counted. Most nouns in English are countable; can be singular or plural.

Examples:

- I can eat *six* hot dogs.
- Sandra bought *three* new handbags.
- Jessie has *ten* dollars.

I. Nouns: Countable and Non-Countable

Uncountable nouns are not counted in English. Therefore, they are **always** considered singular.

We often picture these nouns as a single concept or one big thing which is hard to divide. We do not use plural forms of these words. However some of these words do end in "s", so don't get confused.

Examples:

- Mary drinks a lot of *water*.
- Paul enjoys *politics*. Ends with "s" but uncountable.

II. Subject-Verb Agreement

Often it is difficult to reconcile agreement depending on whether one is using singular or plural nouns and pronouns, and the added complexities of person/speaker (first person, second person, and third person), to match the correct tense of the verb.

Need to fully understand conjugation of verbs (regular and irregular).

II. Subject-Verb Agreement

Example:

- The crowd are becoming increasingly angry by the moment.

In the context of the sentence, “the crowd” refers to a single entity (singular noun), and the sentence should be written:

- The crowd *is* becoming increasingly angry by the moment.

II. Subject-Verb Agreement

Sometimes, a reference to a group may emphasize an individual or some members' actions:

- *The staff was* divided about the new office policy.

Revise the sentence to clarify the meaning and emphasis is often needed:

- *Members of the staff were* divided about the new office policy.

III. Prepositional Phrases

Confusion when a prepositional phrase comes between a noun and a verb:

- The manner in which you spoke to those people are disrespectful.

Do not assume that “*people*” and the verb that follows it must agree. The verb that follows, “*be*” is associated not with the immediately preceding noun but with the subject noun, “*manner*”.

III. Prepositional Phrases

“Manner” is singular:

- The manner in which you spoke to those people *is* disrespectful.

To explain in another way, the phrase or clause “*in which you spoke to those people*” is irrelevant to the sentence’s subject-verb agreement.

The important root statement, “The [your] manner are disrespectful,” should read, “The [your] manner is disrespectful.”

IV. Parallel Structure or Parallelism

Phrases or clauses in a series should have the same grammatical structure. This is called Parallelism. Parallelism shows that ideas have the same level of importance. This structure improves readability by giving a natural flow to your written work.

- I like to read, writing, and painting. **X** (infinitive, gerund, gerund)
- I like reading, writing, and painting. (gerund, gerund, gerund)

IV. Parallel Structure or Parallelism

Other Examples:

- She is professional, courteous, and she always comes to work on time. **X** (adjective, adjective, independent clause)
- She is professional, courteous, and punctual. (adjective, adjective, adjective) **Better**

IV. Parallel Structure or Parallelism

Examples using consistent verb tense:

- My mother is very busy *gathering* the laundry, *dusting* the furniture, and *washing* the dishes. (present tense; gerund)
- My face *is washed*, my hair *is combed*, and my teeth *are brushed*. (present tense with past participle - the past participle of the verb acts as an adjective)

IV. Parallel Structure or Parallelism

Examples using consistent voice:

- We could fill this position now, or someone could be hired next year. **X** (active voice, passive voice)
- We could fill this position now or hire someone next year. (active voice, active voice)

V. Reduce Wordy Phrases

Many long phrases can be reduced to shorter, more concise phrases or words. Keep it simple!

- *It is necessary that you apply* for a visa before traveling to Indonesia. X (passive voice)
- *You need to apply* for a visa before traveling to Indonesia. (active voice)

V. Reduce Wordy Phrases

Keep it direct and to the point!

- In the event of the fire alarm going off, it is important that you leave the building immediately. X
- If the fire alarm goes off, leave the building immediately. (passive voice)

V. Reduce Wordy Phrases

Sometimes we can replace a series of words with one verb. Examples:

- *We have to make a decision* by Friday. X
- *We have to decide* by Friday.
- *We have conducted interviews with* most of the candidates. X
- *We have interviewed* most of the candidates.

VI. Eliminate Unnecessary Information or Clauses

Sentences that contain too much information are difficult to follow and/or understand. Try writing using shorter sentences. Examples:

- When will we have the necessary information to make a decision on which candidate to hire for the position? X
- When will we decide whom to hire? Once the applications are complete?

VI. Eliminate Unnecessary Information or Clauses

Examples:

- I talked to my supervisor and she informed me that she would approve my vacation request. X
- I spoke to my supervisor; she approved my vacation request.

VII. Sentences and Paragraphs

General suggestions:

- Concentrate on one main point per paragraph. Summarize this point in the lead sentence.
- All sentences that follow the lead sentence support the main point.
- Vary the lengths and types of the sentences.
- An important point is best emphasized in a short sentence, especially if that sentence is between two longer sentences.

VII. Sentences and Paragraphs

General suggestions:

- The last sentence is used as a transition to the next paragraph. The paragraphs are linked for a natural flow of information.
- Avoid one-sentence paragraphs. Vary the lengths of your paragraphs as well.