

UNIT 3

LANGUAGE STRUCTURE AND USE

In this unit we will focus on the importance of using correct grammar in an academic environment. We will be revisiting some of the grammatical theory that you had done at some point in your school career, but also learn about techniques and strategies you can apply to improve your academic and professional communication.

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to do the following:

- Apply the correct punctuation marks when writing academically
- Demonstrate an understanding of basic sentence structure
- Demonstrate an understanding of parts of speech
- Demonstrate an understanding of the correct use of concord
- Apply techniques and strategies for editing and proofreading of documents

1. PUNCTUATION MARKS

Punctuation is the tool that allows us to organise our thoughts and make it easier to review and share our ideas. The Standard English punctuation is as follows: comma, apostrophe, quotation, question, exclamation, brackets, parenthesis, dash, hyphen, ellipsis, colon, and semicolon. Below is an explanation of how these punctuation marks should be used.

Use different punctuation marks to show different meanings in the sentence below:

A woman without her man is nothing

1. *A woman, without her man, is nothing.*
2. *A woman without her man, is nothing.*
3. *A woman: without her, man is nothing.*

The first example implies that a woman who does not have a man is missing out on the most important relationship in life. The second one is similar to the first one but with a different attitude. It depicts a sexist tone: she is not a complete person unless she has a male partner.

The third example is completely different as it implies that man is nothing without his woman.

1.1. Comma ,

- Commas are primarily used to help in clarity and to join two independent clauses with a conjunction.
- They set off introductory phrases and set off series.
- They also are used to separate independent and dependent clauses.

Examples:

At the beginning of the performance, two dancers appeared from behind the curtain.

I had eggs, toast and orange juice.

Commas can also be used to note an interjection in a sentence.

Examples:

The criminal said the judge was an idiot.

The criminal, said the judge, was an idiot.

Explain the difference in meaning in these two sentences.

1.2. Apostrophe ‘

Apostrophes are used to mark possession (belonging) and to mark contractions.

Examples:

It was Thato's car that the drunk driver hit.

It's going to be a very long year, I can just feel it.

When you are using an apostrophe to show possession, then the position of the apostrophe depends on whether you have a *singular* or *plural* noun to denote the possessor.

In these examples, the apostrophe is attached to a *singular noun*:

That pen is Simon's.

In these cases, *apostrophe 's'* is added after the noun to show possession. This is the correct position for a *singular noun*.

If the relevant *noun* is in the plural, the apostrophe is placed *after* the 's':

The students' belongings...

Psychologists' theories have suggested...

Exceptions:

Some words have unusual plural forms, such as children (plural of child), women (plural of woman). In these cases, because the plural is different from the singular, the apostrophe goes in the singular position, *before* the 's'. For example:

The children's party ... (*not* childrens')

The women's meeting ... (*not* womens' ...)

1.3.Quotation ” “

- Quotation marks are used to inform a reader either of something that was spoken or something that is being directly copied from another work.
- Quotes should also be placed around a word if it is used in a specific context or otherwise bears special attention.
- In informal applications, quotations can also be used to denote something that is ironic.

Examples:

Dr. Shruti claims, "The use of violence against women in India is on the rise."

I had a visit from my "friend" the tax man.

Is there a difference between single quotation ‘ ’ and double quotation “ ” marks?

When are single quotation marks and when are double quotation marks used?

Please note:

Use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

Dan said: "In a town outside Brisbane, I saw 'Tourists go home' written on a wall."

1.4.Question and Exclamation marks ? !

Question and exclamation marks are used to note interrogative and exclamatory sentences. Neither of these punctuation marks are commonly used in academic writing. In general, a writer should not be shouting at the reader in formal writing or posing too many questions.

1.5.Hyphen –

Hyphens are most commonly used to pair compound words, e.g. throw-away, high-speedchase, merry-go-round, user-friendly.

Hyphens joining prefixes to other words

Hyphens can be used to join a prefix to another word, especially if the prefix ends in a vowel and the other word also begins with one (e.g. *pre-eminent* or *co-own*). This use is less common than it used to be, though, and one-word forms are becoming more usual (e.g. *prearrange* or *cooperate*).

Use a hyphen to separate a prefix from a name or date, e.g. *post-Aristotelian* or *pre-1900*.

Use a hyphen to avoid confusion with another word: for example, to distinguish *re-cover* (= provide something with a new cover) from *recover* (= get well again).

Hyphens showing word breaks

Hyphens can also be used to divide words that are not usually hyphenated.

They show where a word is to be divided at the end of a line of writing. Always try to split the word in a sensible place, so that the first part does not mislead the reader: for example, *hel-met* not *he-lmet*; *dis-abled* not *disa-bled*.

Hyphens are also used to stand for a common second element in all but the last word of a list, e.g.:

You may see a yield that is two-, three-, or fourfold.

1.6.Dash –

A dash is used:

- in pairs, to mark off information or ideas that are not essential to an understanding of the rest of the sentence:

Example:

Thousands of children – like the girl in this photograph – have been left homeless.

- to show other kinds of break in a sentence where a comma, semicolon, or colon would be traditionally used:

Examples:

One thing's for sure – he doesn't want to face the truth.

Things have changed a lot in the last year – mainly for the better.

Dashes are especially common in informal writing, such as personal emails or blogs, but it's best to use them sparingly when you are writing formally.

Example:

I think that my dog is a genius — but doesn't everybody think their pet is?

Dashes are able to substitute for commas and semicolons in the right situation. They can replace commas to note non-essential information or semicolon to note an example. Despite, and because of this versatility dashes should not be frequently employed in your writing. The multitude of applications make dashes easy to overuse taking away from, rather than adding to clarity in your writing.

Note: Dashes can either connect to the surrounding words or be separated by a space, it is an issue of style, be sure to ask your lecturers if they have a preference.

1.7.Parenthesis () and Brackets []

- Parenthesis note non-essential information that could be skipped without altering the meaning of a sentence.
- Brackets are most commonly employed in academic writing within a quotation where the writer is omitting or explaining something. In either case, the writer places a bracket within the quote [explains or places an ellipsis and] closes the bracket to continue the quote.

Examples:

Cora (the woman who lives down the street from Jane) works as a paralegal.

Professor Brown claims, “She [the novel's central character] is an example of a strong African-American woman”.

1.8.Ellipsis ...

Ellipsis marks the omission of a word or words. If the omission includes the end of a sentence the glyph has four dots (...) instead of three.

1.9.Colon :

Colons make the statement: note what follows. Whatever information that follows the colon must, in some way, explain, prove, or describe what ever came before it. To properly employ a colon, ensure that the clause that follows the mark is able to stand on its own (unless it is a list).

Example:

That is the secret to my extraordinary life: always do the unexpected.

A colon can also be used to introduce a list:

Example:

The price includes the following: travel to London, flight to Venice, hotel accommodation, and excursions.

Colons are also used before a quotation, and sometimes before direct speech:

Examples:

The headline read: "Taxi Driver Battles Gangsters."

They shouted: "Our families are starving! We need land!"

1.10. Semicolon ;

A semicolon can be used to join two related main clauses.

Example:

James Left a mess at his desk after he left work; Sarah had to clean it up.

Another way to employ a semicolon to join two related main clauses is to include a conjunctive adverb such as: however, moreover, nevertheless, furthermore, consequently, or thus. Conjunctive adverbs can also be used with a comma.

Example:

James left a mess at his desk after he left work; consequently, Sarah had to clean it up.

The simplest way to deal with two independent main clauses is to make two sentences. If the topic of the two sentences is not related, or if one (or both) of the sentences are already long, joining them could make the sentence too long and be a burden on the reader.

Exercise 1: Explain how the use of these punctuation marks alters the meaning in each of the sentences below.

1. Most of the time, travellers worry about their luggage.

2. Most of the time travellers worry about their luggage.

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1. Let's eat, grandpa.

2. Let's eat grandpa.

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2. PARTS OF SPEECH

Understanding the different parts of speech is important in understanding how words can and should be joined together to make sentences that are both grammatically correct and readable. An understanding of the parts of speech is also important for knowing how to correctly punctuate sentences. Traditional grammar classifies words based on eight parts of speech: the verb, the noun, the pronoun, the adjective, the adverb, the preposition, the conjunction, and the interjection.

2.1. Noun

A noun is a word that represents a person, a place, or a thing. A thing in this definition can be a physical entity or it can be an abstract idea.

Examples of nouns are:

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2.2. Adjectives

An adjective is the word which is used to modify a noun or pronoun.

Adjectives are words that are used to describe (what kind of?) nouns and pronouns and to quantify (how much of?) and identify (which one of?) them.

An adjective is usually used before a noun. It is a word that adds something to the meaning of a noun, that is, it tells us more about the noun.

Examples:

1. *Lebohang is a cheerful person* - What kind of person is Lebohang?
2. *Those apples are very healthy*-Which apples are healthy?
3. *Baroka FC scored six points during the match.* -How many points did Kaizer Chiefs score?
4. *The brown one is his puppy*– Whose puppy is the brown one?
5. *I am thankful for the abundant grace I experienced during my life.* - How much grace did you experience?

2.3.Verbs

A verb is a word that describes action or a state of being. The second part of this definition is important, as many believe that verbs are always action words that can be visualized.

This is true of action verbs: run, walk, play, jump, sing, scream, etc.

However, there are also linking verbs, and these types of verbs do not express action; instead, they express identity, classification, or existence. (The following are the most common linking verbs: is, am, was, were, are, and verb phrases ending in be, been, being.)

These are examples of verbs:

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2.4. Adverbs

An adverb is a word that modifies or qualifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

An adverb indicates manner, time, place, cause, or degree and answers questions such as **where, when, how, how often, to what extent**. A modifier makes the meaning of another word more specific.

Examples:

1. Look there is Peter! – Where?
2. Lerato seldom attends lectures. - How often?
3. You have to start working now. – When?
4. Sifiso spoke softly. – How?
5. The students have partially completed their assignment. - to what extent?

An adverb can be found in various places within the sentence. An adverb that modifies a verb may be before or after the verb it modifies; it may be in the middle of a verb phrase that it modifies; or it may be at the beginning of the sentence, nowhere near the verb that it modifies.

Examples:

1. The seamstress quickly repaired the coat. (In this sentence, the adverb quickly modifies the verb repaired and is used before the verb.)
2. The invigilators waited patiently for the students to finish. (In this sentence the adverb patiently modifies the verb waited and is used after the verb.)

While some adverbs can be identified by the **-ly** suffix added to an adjective, most of them must be identified by untangling the grammatical relationships within the sentence or clause as a whole.

Examples:

Jonathan is a cautious (adjective) driver. **BUT** Jonathan drives cautiously (adverb).
Karabo has a loud (adjective) voice. **BUT** Karabo can sing loudly (adverb).

However, not all words that end in **-ly** are adverbs, e.g.

It was a costly expedition.

Mary is a friendly person.

Costly and friendly are adjectives.

2.5. Pronouns

Pronouns are words like **I, it, which, who, that, his, herself**. They are used 'in place of' (Latin: pro) a **noun** or a noun phrase. To avoid repetition, we use a pronoun for the second and subsequent mentions of the same person or thing:

I saw **the dog**, I think **it** was chewing your shoe.

Noun and pronoun agreement

A pronoun is a word that refers to a noun and can stand in its place. By using a pronoun, you can refer to the same person, place, thing, or idea repeatedly without using the same noun every time. For example, the following sentence becomes far less awkward when pronouns are used:

WITHOUT PRONOUNS: **Molly** thinks that **Molly** should sell **Molly's** car to **Molly's** brother.

WITH PRONOUNS: **Molly** thinks that **she** should sell **her** car to **her** brother.

Agreement in Number

A pronoun must match its antecedent in number. In other words, if the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural, and if the antecedent is singular, the pronoun must be singular.

EXAMPLE: **Freddy** wears **his** Superman outfit at least twice a week. (Since the word *Freddy* is singular, the pronoun that refers to it is also singular.)

EXAMPLE: Freddy's **parents** believe that **their** son is slightly peculiar. (Because the word *parents* is plural, the pronoun referring to it must also be plural.)

Agreement in Gender

A pronoun must match its antecedent in gender. If the antecedent is feminine, the pronouns *she*, *her*, and *hers* should be used, and if it is masculine, the pronouns *he*, *him*, and *his* should be used. Plural pronouns (*they*, *them*, *their*, and *theirs*) refer to plural nouns of either gender.

EXAMPLE: Freddy's **father** is embarrassed by **his** son.

However, Freddy's **mother** thinks **her** son is cute.

Freddy's **aunts** always take pictures of **their** nephew.

2.6. Prepositions

Prepositions are relationship words. They give clues and guidance regarding how the remainder of the sentence fits together. A preposition is a word that explains the time, space or logical relationship between the other parts of the sentence. In other words, it links all the other words together, so the reader can understand how the pieces of the sentence fit.

There are hundreds of prepositions in the English language. One easy way to remember prepositions is that they are words that tell you everywhere a bunny can run; for example, a bunny can run up, down, near, far, around.

The following words are the most commonly used prepositions:

<i>About</i>	<i>Below</i>	<i>Excepting</i>	<i>Off</i>	<i>Toward</i>
<i>Above</i>	<i>Beneath</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>On</i>	<i>Under</i>
<i>Across</i>	<i>beside(s)</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Onto</i>	<i>underneath</i>
<i>After</i>	<i>between</i>	<i>In</i>	<i>out</i>	<i>Until</i>
<i>Against</i>	<i>Beyond</i>	<i>in front of</i>	<i>outside</i>	<i>Up</i>

Exercise 2: Identify the incorrect prepositions and replace them with the correction.

1. The speaker was well received from his audience.....
2. Are there any questions on the audience?.....
3. Let's start the race at time.....
4. In these circumstances, you should be at home.....
5. The crowd was under an ugly mood.....
6. On this example, you should now understand the word.....
7. The man appeared in court at a charge of fraud.....
8. The sweets were divided among Gary and Edward.....
9. The old man is suffering with arthritis.....
10. The rifle is aimed for the target.....

2.7. Conjunctions

Conjunctions are connecting words that join two or more sentences into a single sentence.

They also join words, phrases or clauses.

Different kinds of conjunctions join different kinds of grammatical structures.

The following are the **kinds of conjunctions**:

a. Coordinating conjunctions (fanboys)

for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

Coordinating conjunctions join equals to one another:

words to words, phrases to phrases, clauses to clauses.

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b. Subordinating conjunctions

They come at the beginning of subordinate clauses and are used to connect the subordinate clause to the rest of the sentence (also referred to as the independent clause). Common subordinating conjunctions include after, as, although, because, before, even though, if, once, rather than, since, that, though, unless, until, when, whenever, whereas and while.

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c. Correlative conjunctions

either. . . or both. . . and neither. . . nor
not only. . . but also

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d. Conjunctive adverbs are transitional words used to connect one sentence to another.

Common conjunctive adverbs include additionally, in addition, moreover, also, consequently, furthermore, otherwise, instead, for instance, for example, however, on the other hand, conversely, nevertheless, accordingly, therefore, generally, in fact, in other words, in conclusion, finally.

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Position

Conjunctions are usually found in the middle of a sentence, however, certain conjunctions may be used to begin a sentence.

2.8. Interjections

An interjection is a word added to a sentence to convey emotion and is not grammatically related to any other part of the sentence. Interjections can also serve as a single word sentence (e.g. Wow!). Interjections are rarely used in academic writing and their use should be avoided in most essays.

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3. SENTENCE STRUCTURE

A sentence is a group of words which expresses a complete thought. It may be divided into:

➤ The Subject

The subject reflects who or what we are talking about. It is the person or thing who / that / which is performing the action. E.g. **The race** was exciting.

The Predicate

The predicate is the rest of the subject. It expands on the subject and always begins with the verb. E.g. The race **was exciting**.

Remember: sentences always start with the subject. Although the expression “love you” is understood by all and is commonly used when texting, remember to use the subject when writing academically, that is “I love you”.

4. SENTENCE CLASSIFICATION

Sentences can be categorised based on different criteria, one way of categorising them is based on their structure. When that is done, we find that there are four sentence structures.

1. Simple Sentence

This has one finite verb and deals with one idea. A simple sentence contains only one independent clause. It requires only one punctuation mark at the end (a full stop, exclamation or question mark).

An independent clause is a group of words that has both a subject and a verb, and expresses a complete thought.

Example: I kicked the ball is an independent clause.

It contains a subject (I) and a verb (kicked), and it expresses a complete thought.

Make your own examples in the space below:

.....

.....

2. Compound Sentence

This has **two or more finite** verbs. It contains at least two independent clauses. It may be made up of two or more simple sentences joined by a **co-ordinating** conjunction (**for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so**) and/or by a suitable punctuation mark (comma or semi-colon). You join sentences which are closely related in content to make the writing more fluid.

Example: I kicked the ball and it hit Zola.

I kicked the ball is an independent clause. *It hit Zola* is also an independent clause. *And* is a co-ordinating conjunction.

Create your own examples in the space below:

3. Complex Sentence

This contains one **independent (main) clause** and one or **more dependent (subordinate) clauses** which provide additional information. An independent clause is a clause that can stand alone as a sentence (i.e. it expresses a complete thought). A dependent clause is a group of words that has a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. Dependent clauses can refer to the subject (*who, which*) the sequence/time (*since, while*), or the causal elements (*because, if*) of the independent clause. You can use subordinating conjunctions (*after, since, because, although, etc*) or relative pronouns (*who, whom, whose, which, that, etc*).

Examples

John is a diligent student, because he wants to qualify for a bursary.

John, who is a diligent student, wants to qualify for a bursary.

Zola cried because the ball hit him.

Zola cried is an independent clause. *Because the ball hit him* is a dependent clause.

Provide your own examples below:

4. Compound-Complex Sentence

This is a combination of compound and complex sentences. It contains at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

Zola cried because the ball hit him, and I apologized immediately.

Zola cried and *I apologized immediately* are both independent clauses. They are joined by the co-ordinating conjunction *and*.

Because the ball hit him is a dependent clause.

Provide your own examples:

Using different sentence types

Using some compound-complex sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety. Sentence structure refers to the physical nature of a sentence and how the elements of that sentence are presented. Just like word choice, writers should strive to vary their sentence structure to create rhythmic prose and keep their reader interested. This will be explained in detail under writing skills.

We use different sentence types when we want to link closely related thoughts, show the relationships between ideas and give continuity to writing. Once you are aware of the different types of sentence construction, you can then choose and correctly punctuate the most appropriate type of sentences for the expression of your idea.

Compare the following paragraphs to see how to connect ideas and improve understanding.

The following series of short sentences, whilst grammatically correct, do not read fluently.

Lelo is confident. She is a good speaker. She is considered to be an excellent presenter. Everyone finds her inspiring. No one has been critical. Her presentations are always creative.

These sentences can be combined to make more fluid writing by **combining sentences** which are closely related, using the rules described earlier.

Lelo is confident, and she is a good speaker. She is considered to be an excellent presenter. As her presentations are always creative, everyone finds her inspiring, and no one has been critical.

The following sentence is overly long and complicated. By **shortening sentences** that could confuse the reader, you can make the writing easier to follow.

If you consider buying a puppy, whatever age or breed, always consider the type of house you have, as this is the most important first step, because without considering this

first you can find yourself with a dog that, despite your good intentions, you just cannot keep.

If you consider buying a puppy, whatever age or breed, always consider the type of house you have. This is the most important first step. Without considering this first, you can find yourself with a dog that you just cannot keep, despite your good intentions.

Use these guidelines to identify types of sentence construction in your own writing. To check the clarity of your sentence structure, try reading the writing aloud, stopping as indicated by the punctuation. Does each sentence stand on its own as a complete idea? Use the guidelines to either break an overly long sentence into shorter sentences, or join abrupt sentences together to make the writing more fluid. The clarity of your writing will improve if you vary the length and type of sentences and you use correct punctuation.

5. CONCORD (SUBJECT – VERB AGREEMENT)

The words in a sentence must match or agree with one another.

The subject and verb must agree in number and person.

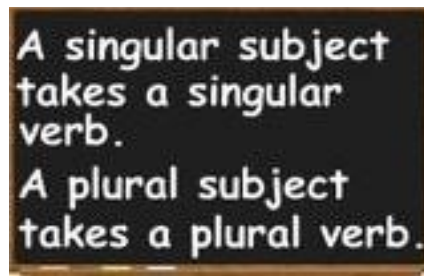
There should also be agreement between nouns and pronouns.

Concord

- Another term for grammatical **agreement** between two words in a sentence.
- Subject-verb concord in terms of number is conventionally marked by inflections (or word endings), e.g. –s in she sings.
- Noun-pronoun concord calls for agreement between a pronoun and its antecedent in terms of number, person, and gender.

The basic principles of **subject-verb agreement**

The principle of subject-verb agreement applies to **finite verbs** in the present tense and, in a limited way, to the past forms of the verb *to be* (*was* and *were*).



The Basic Principle

- The rule is that with subjects and verbs, and with quantity words and the nouns they modify, singular is matched with singular form and plural is matched with plural form;
- Within any clause with a present tense verb, the subject and verb must agree in person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural);
- The ending *-s* is added to nouns and verbs in English, but in very different contexts;
- An *-s* ending on a noun is a plural signal: *her brothers* (more than one) and an *-s* ending on a verb is a singular signal;
- *-s* is added to a third person singular verb in the present tense: *Her mother wears gold jewellery*. The third person subject of the verb determines the form of the verb: plural subject, plural verb form (no *-s*); singular subject, singular verb form (with *-s*).

In Standard English, a third person singular subject must have a singular verb (with *-s*), and a plural subject must have a plural verb (with no *-s*).

Subject verb agreement: Some problem points

The basic principle of **subject-verb agreement** is simple. If the subject is singular, it should be followed by a singular verb. If the subject is plural, it should be followed by a plural verb.

- My brother **is** a games developer. (Here the singular verb **is** agrees with the singular subject **brother**.)
- My brothers **are** games developers. (Here the plural verb **are** agrees with the plural subject **brothers**.)

Concord rules – problem cases

Sometimes it is not easy to see whether a subject is singular or plural. Here are some general guidelines.

Indefinite pronouns

The indefinite pronouns **anyone, everyone, someone, no one** and **nobody** are always singular and take singular verbs.

- **Everybody has** brought his or her violin. (NOT Everybody have...)
- **Someone has** let the cat in. (NOT Someone have ...)

The pronoun referring back to a singular indefinite verb is usually singular. However, this can be a problem when the sex of the person is unknown. And hence plural pronouns are now used to refer to indefinite pronouns in a less formal style.

- **Everybody** has brought **their** violins.
- **Anyone** who is interested in improving **their** English can join the club.

Some indefinite pronouns can be plural or singular depending upon the context.

Examples are: **some** and **all**. When they are used to modify uncountable nouns, they take the singular verb. When they are used to modify plural nouns, they take a plural verb.

- **Some** of the eggs **are** rotten.
- **Some** of the meat **has** gone stale.

All, meaning everything, takes a singular verb, e.g.

All is lost.

All, meaning all of us/them, takes a plural verb, e.g.

All are happy.

The indefinite pronoun **none** can be either singular or plural – it doesn't really matter whether it is followed by a singular verb or plural verb.

Agreement of the verb with the subject

A **finite verb** must agree with its subject in number and person. Read the examples given below.

I am wrong.

They are mistaken.

As you can see, the exact form of the verb used in a sentence is determined by the number and person of the subject.

Error of proximity

When the subject is a phrase consisting of more than one noun, students sometimes choose a verb that agrees with the noun that stands near it. This can cause error.

Study the examples given below.

The state of affairs are sure to cause him anxiety.

Here the student used a verb that agrees with the plural noun affairs. This leads to an error because the real subject is the singular noun state (of affairs).

*The **state** of affairs **is** sure to cause him anxiety.*

*The **introduction** of reforms **was** not liked by the aristocracy.* (NOT The introduction of reforms were...)

Here the real subject is the introduction (of reforms), and not reforms.

The conjunction and

Two or more singular nouns or pronouns joined by **and** require a plural verb.

*Jane and Adam **are** good swimmers.*

But if two nouns joined by **and** refer to the same person or thing or suggest one idea to the mind, the verb is singular.

Examples are given below.

Shakespeare, the author and poet, **is** dead. (Here the two nouns author and poet refer to the same person.)

The horse and carriage **is** ready. (NOT The horse and carriage are ready.)

*Slow and steady **wins** the race.*

*Bread and butter **is** wholesome.*

As well as, together with etc.

Two singular nouns joined by the words/phrases **with, as well as, besides, together with, no less than** and similar expressions require a singular verb.

*Silver as well as gold **is** a precious metal.*

*No one, besides Jack, **knows** it.*

*Mark, and not you, **has** won the prize.*

*John together with his friends **was** present at the venue.*

Collective nouns

Collective nouns are usually treated as singular and take singular verbs.

The committee has decided that it is safe to return to campus.

However, they may take a plural verb when we are talking about the individual members within the group, or if there is some division within a group of people.

The committee were unable to agree on the exact date for students to return to campus.

A number of

The phrase **a number of** should be followed by a plural noun and a plural verb.

A number of objections were raised against the proposal.

*A number of issues still **need** to be resolved.*

When the sentence begins with '**The number of**', the verb should be singular.

***The number of** available jobs **is** shrinking rapidly.* (Here the subject is 'number', not 'jobs'.)

A half of, a part of

Fractional expressions such as **a half of, a part of** and **a majority of** can be followed by a singular or a plural verb. It depends on the meaning.

For part of one thing we use a singular verb

Half the ice-cream has been eaten.

For part of many things we use a plural verb.

Half the sandwiches have been eaten.

*A large percentage of the population **is** angry with the ruling party.*

*Nearly 60 percent of the members **are** in favor of the new policy.*

The expression 'more than one' takes a singular verb.

*More than one student **has** tried to cheat on the exam.*

*More than one person **has been** diagnosed with the novel Corona virus.*

A positive and a negative subject together

When you put a positive and a negative subject together, the verb must agree with the positive subject.

*The **members**, but not the chairman, **have** decided to vote against the proposal. (Here the plural verb have agrees with the positive subject 'the members'.)*

*It **is** his attitude, not his ideas, that **invites** criticism.*

A plural noun that names a single subject

When a group of words containing a plural noun represents a single object, you must use a singular verb.

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer **was** enjoyed by us all.*

*Gulliver's Travels **was** written by Jonathan Swift.*

None

None may be used with a singular or plural verb.

*None of them **was/were** present.*

A plural verb is also possible in a less careful style.

*None of his friends **was** there to help him. (Formal)*

*None of his friends **were** there to help him. (Less formal)*

Or and nor

Two singular nouns connected by **or** or **nor** take a singular verb.

*Neither Charles **nor** Benjamin **was** present there.*

*Neither he **nor** his dad **is** good at driving.*

When one of the nouns connected by **or** or **nor** is plural, the verb must be plural, and the plural subject must be placed next to the verb.

*Neither Peter **nor his parents were** aware of this. (More natural than 'Neither his parents nor Peter was aware of this.')*

When the subjects connected by **or** or **nor** are of different persons, the verb agrees with the noun that comes closer to it.

*Neither you **nor he is** responsible for this.* (Here the verb **is** agrees with the third person pronoun **he**.)

*Either he **or you are** to clean up the mess.* (Here the verb **are** agrees with the second person pronoun **you**.)

*Either you **or John has** to pay for the drinks.*

The determiners each, every, anybody, every one etc.

The determiners **each, every, every one, anybody, either, neither, no one** and **nobody** should be followed by a singular noun and a singular verb.

Neither candidate is fit for the job. (NOT Neither candidates are fit for the job.)

Much, many, little and few

We use **many, few, fewer** for things we can count (plural words).

*There **are** many books in the library.*

We use **much, little, less and least** for things we cannot count (singular words)

*There **is** much work to do.*

More and most

More and most are sometimes singular and sometimes plural, e.g.

*There **are** more students than I thought.*

*There **is** more work than I can handle.*

*Most of the students **are** present.*

*Most of the work **has** been done.*

When a **verb** comes before the **subject**, find out what the real subject is before you decide whether the verb must be singular or plural.

*Where **have** Jane and Tony gone?*

*Who **are** those fellows?*

Exercise 4: Underline the standard verb form for each of the following sentences.

1. The members of the band (has, have) arrived for practice.

2. The price of houses (keeps, keep) increasing every year.
3. The twins, along with their mother, (is, are) going to the exhibition.
4. One of the women (is, are) planning to give a karate demonstration.
5. (Has, Have) the pair of earrings been found?
6. The sale of shirts (has, have) been scheduled for next Monday.
7. Tom, together with three friends, (is, are) going camping next week.
8. The directors of the bank (is, are) meeting at ten o'clock.
9. One of the books (talks, talk) about Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma.
10. The library, with its thousands of books, (is, are) free to all.
11. Ms. Taylor, along with the other teachers, (is, are) attending a convention.
12. The chairman of the board, together with the directors, (is, are) now coming into the room.
13. The girls in the glee club (was, were) planning a concert.
14. My cousin, along with her friends, (is, are) planning to be in the Vaal next week.
15. Mrs. Thomas, together with other members of the club, (is, are) planning a golf tournament.
16. The seats in the first-grade classroom (was, were) very small.
17. Delivery of the groceries (is, are) being made today.
18. Susan, as well as her neighbours, (is, are) planning a garage sale.
19. The box of Life skills textbooks, (has, have) not arrived yet.
20. My order for the oranges (was, were) placed last week.

1.5. PROOFREADING AND EDITING

Editing has become increasingly relevant in all fields of life. Many people use the terms editing and proofreading interchangeably, but there is actually a substantial difference between the two. Both words refer to checking documents for accuracy, but there is more to the process than that.

Proofreading involves correcting mistakes and errors that are visible to the naked eye including misspelling, incorrect grammar incorrect/missed punctuation and inconsistencies. Proper proofreading still requires specialised knowledge and experience to be effective. It is considered as a science. Programs such as Microsoft Word help us to proofread our work by including tools such as the spelling and grammar functions. These should never be relied upon completely as the program does not have the ability to pick up on some contextual errors, or will tell you that things are incorrect when they are not in that instance. You should always proofread your own work, and if the document is particularly important, ask someone else to check your work for you as well to ensure that everything is above board.

Editing is a much more involved process than editing. Proofreading is involved in editing, but there is more to editing than fixing spelling and/or grammatical errors. To put it simply, editing is the process of improving the overall quality of writing. That includes among other things, readability, clarity, checking of facts and the tone of the text. It also corrects issues at the core of writing like sentence construction and language clarity.

General techniques for proofreading

1. Punctuation marks

Punctuation marks play an important role in giving intended meaning to the language. The use of wrong marks of punctuation or even wrong placement of marks can change the meaning of the sentence completely and sometimes even convert the sentence to complete nonsense.

2. Capitalization

Like punctuation, capitalization helps convey information. The first word of every sentence is capitalized, signalling that a new sentence has begun. Proper nouns – the name of a particular person, place, or thing – are capitalized to indicate uniqueness. However, it is not correct to use capitalization merely to make a word look or seem important.

3. Words in context (Unit 1)

One of the useful tips that can be used in proofreading is to carefully look at the words and the context within which they are used. This you can do by paying attention to and distinguishing between homonyms and homophones. You also need to be cautious when using commonly confused words and ensure that you are using the correct word in the given context. Finally, you also need to pay attention to ambiguous statements and ensure that there is no confusion in your writing brought by ambiguity.

4. Misspellings

Misspellings occur as a result of an error or a mistake. Although there are spell checkers in word processing, human skill is still required because computer programs may not understand the context in which a particular word is used. Moreover, it is important to note that there are several areas in which British and American spelling are different. In South Africa, we have adopted the British English spelling rules for writing.

General techniques for editing

1. Read the text aloud as if you are reading a story.

Listen for errors. If you listen carefully, you will be able to correct any errors that you hear. Listen for incomplete phrases, sentences and ideas, as well as things that “sound funny.”

Stop and change anything you wish as soon as you see it – punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure. Move through the paper at a reasonable rate.

Read the entire paper. Listen for spots that are not readable, that feel or sound awkward, or that do not seem clear. Mark these spots. Then, when you are done reading the whole paper, go back to fix them.

Allow yourself some time between writing your paper and editing. Ideally, wait a day; this allows the writing to “get cold,” giving you an opportunity to “see” the errors.

Read one sentence at a time.

Using a sheet of clean paper, cover all the text except the first sentence. Read this sentence carefully. Does it sound and look correct? Does it say what you want it to say? Continue down the page in the same way.

Look for patterns of error.

Personal patterns: All writers make mistakes that are typical of their writing. If you always forget commas, check for commas. If you always have trouble with transitions, look for transitions.