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Ch. 1 : Grammar

(i) Subject-Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs must agree in number.

1. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular too.
   Example: **She** writes every day.
   Exception: When using the singular "they," use plural verb forms.
   Example: The participant expressed satisfaction with their job. **They** are currently in a managerial role at the organization.

2. If the subject is plural, the verb must also be plural.
   Example: **They** write every day.

Sometimes, however, it seems a bit more complicated than this.

3. When the subject of the sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by *and*, use a plural verb.
   Example: **The doctoral student *and* the committee members** write every day.
   Example: **The percentage of employees who called in sick *and* the number of employees who left their jobs within 2 years** are reflective of the level of job satisfaction.

4. When there is one subject and more than one verb, the verbs throughout the sentence must agree with the subject.
   Example: **Interviews** are one way to collect data and allow researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants.
   Example: **An assumption** is something that is generally accepted as true and is an important consideration when conducting a doctoral study.

5. When a phrase comes between the subject and the verb, remember that the verb still agrees with the subject, not the noun or pronoun in the phrase following the subject of the sentence.
   Example: **The student,** as well as the committee members, is excited.
   Example: **The student** with all the master's degrees is very motivated.
   Example: **Strategies** that the teacher uses to encourage classroom participation include using small groups and clarifying expectations.
   Example: **The focus** of the interviews was nine purposively selected participants.

6. When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by "or" or "nor," use a singular verb.
   Example: **The chairperson or the CEO** approves the proposal before proceeding.

7. When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by "or" or "nor," the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is closest to the verb. This is also called the rule of proximity.
   Example: **The student *or* the committee members** write every day.
   Example: **The committee members *or* the student** writes every day.

8. The words and phrases "each," "each one," "either," "neither," "everyone," "everybody," "anyone," "anybody," "nobody," "somebody," "someone," and "no one" are singular and require a singular verb.
   Example: **Each** of the participants was willing to be recorded.
   Example: **Neither** alternative hypothesis was accepted.
   Example: I will offer a $5 gift card to **everybody** who participates in the study.
   Example: **No one** was available to meet with me at the preferred times.

9. Noncount nouns take a singular verb.
   Example: **Education** is the key to success.
   Example: **Diabetes** affects many people around the world.
   Example: **The information** obtained from the business owners was relevant to include in the study.
   Example: **The research** I found on the topic was limited.

10. Some countable nouns in English such as *earnings, goods, odds, surroundings, proceeds, contents,* and *valuables* only have a plural form and take a plural verb.
    Example: **The earnings** for this quarter exceed expectations.
    Example: **The proceeds** from the sale go to support the homeless population in the city.
    Example: **Locally produced goods** have the advantage of shorter supply chains.

11. In sentences beginning with "there is" or "there are," the subject follows the verb. Since "there" is not the subject, the verb agrees with what follows the verb.
    Example: There is little **administrative support**.
    Example: There are many **factors** affecting teacher retention.

12. Collective nouns are words that imply more than one person but are considered singular and take a singular verb. Some examples are "group," "team," "committee," "family," and "class."
    Example: **The group** meets every week.
    Example: **The committee** agrees on the quality of the writing.

    However, the plural verb is used if the focus is on the individuals in the group. This is much less common.
    Example: **The committee** participate in various volunteer activities in their private lives.

(ii) Nouns and Pronouns

Singular Noun, Singular Pronoun

When writing a sentence, using the same word more than once can get repetitive.

Example: Francine edited her ***paper*** because her ***paper*** was full of errors.
- Rather than repeating "paper" twice, it is possible to use a pronoun.

Revision: Francine edited her ***paper*** because ***it*** was full of errors.
- Since "paper" is singular (there is only one), use a singular pronoun ("it") to replace it.

Remember to find the true subject of the sentence to determine if the pronoun should be singular or plural.

Example: ***Each*** student must find ***his or her*** own note-taking strategy.
- Since the subject is singular ("each"), the pronoun ("his or her") must also be singular.

Example: ***Neither*** Bob nor Alex believed ***he*** would receive the award.
- Since the subject is singular ("neither"), the pronoun ("he") must also be singular.

Example: ***A community group*** of teachers is meeting tonight to see if ***it*** can find a way to help students improve their SAT scores.
- Since the subject is singular ("a community group"), the pronoun ("it") must also be singular.

Singular "They"

Recently, many academic and popular publications have started accepting the use of the pronoun "they" as a singular pronoun, meaning writers use "they" to correspond to singular subjects in an effort to avoid gendered pronouns. Although the pronoun "they" is only a plural pronoun in some style guides, writers to use "they" as a singular or plural pronoun with the specific intention of embracing gender diversity.

“When transgender and gender nonconforming people (including agender, genderqueer, and other communities) use the singular "they" as their pronoun, writers should likewise use the singular "they" when writing about them”.

With this understanding in mind, when writers are specifically writing about a person or group of people who prefer the singular "they," writers should also use the singular "they." Where relevant, we recommend writers explicitly explain that they are using the singular "they" to follow the self-identifications of the people they are discussing.

Additionally, writers can often avoid the issue of gender-neutral singular pronouns by revising a sentence to make the subject plural:

Original sentence: ***A teacher*** should carefully choose professional development opportunities that address ***her*** gaps in knowledge.

Revised sentence: ***Teachers*** should carefully choose professional development opportunities that address ***their*** gaps in knowledge.

Plural Noun, Plural Pronoun

When the subject of the sentence is plural, the pronoun in the sentence becomes plural as well.
Example: When ***students*** arrive on the first day of school, ***students*** need help finding the right classroom.
- Since "students" is plural, use a plural pronoun to replace it.

Revision: When ***students*** arrive on the first day of school, ***they*** need help finding the right classroom.
Remember to find the true subject of the sentence to determine if the pronoun should be singular or plural. See our webpage on subject–verb agreement for more on singular and plural subjects.
Example: When ***a supervisor and an employee*** disagree, ***they*** should discuss the situation.

- Since the subject is plural ("a supervisor and an employee"), the pronoun ("they") must also be plural.

Example: The professor hoped that the ***students*** had reviewed ***their*** notes carefully.

- Since the subject is plural ("students"), the pronoun ("their") must also be plural.

Example: ***Both*** Smith (2016) and Taylor (2017) believed ***their*** results would lead to social change.

- Since the subject is plural ("both"), the pronoun ("their") must also be plural.

Pronoun Ambiguity

Although pronouns are useful to help writers avoid repetition, they should be used sparingly to keep the meaning of the sentence clear. Take a look at this sentence:
Example: When Jeff and Brian joined the team members, ***they*** were scared.

- The pronoun here ("they") is unclear--to whom does it refer? Was the team scared? Were Jeff and Brian scared? In this example, because the pronoun "they" is ambiguous, choosing a noun rather than a pronoun will help with clarity.

Revision: When Jeff and Brian joined the team members, ***the team members*** were scared.

Introduction to Count and Noncount Nouns

Count and noncount nouns vary from language to language. In some languages, there are no count nouns (e.g., Japanese). In addition, some nouns that are noncount in English may be countable in other languages (e.g., hair or information).

Errors with count and noncount nouns can result in errors with article usage and with subject verb agreement.

Count Nouns
What is a count noun?
Count nouns can be separated into individual units and counted. They usually have both a singular and a plural form. Most English nouns are count nouns.

- one phone, two phones
- one dog, two dogs
- one shirt, two shirts

However, a few countable nouns only have a plural form in English. Here are a few examples:

- clothes
- pants
- jeans
- shorts
- pajamas

These are often used with some sort of quantifier, or quantity word, to show how they are counted (e.g., "a pair of" pants, "two pairs of" pants, "some" pants).

How are count nouns made plural?

Count nouns are usually made plural by adding an "-s" or an "-es."

- one boy, two boy**s**
- one folder, two folder**s**
- one box, two box**es**
- one church, two church**es**

If the noun ends in "-y," change the "-y" to "-ies" to make it plural.

- one family, two famil**ies**
- one party, two part**ies**

However, if a vowel precedes the "-y," add just an "-s" to make it plural.

- one toy, two toy**s**
- one donkey, two donkey**s**

If the noun ends in "-o," add "-es" to make it plural.

- one potato, two potato**es**
- one tomato, two tomato**es**

If the noun ends in "-f" or "-fe," change the "-f" to a "-v" and add "-es."

- one thief, two thiev**es**
- one hoof, two hoov**es**

Some count nouns have irregular plural forms. Many of these forms come from earlier forms of English.

- one foot, two **feet**
- one person, two **people**
- one tooth, two **teeth**
- one criterion, two **criteria**

When unsure of the plural form, please consult the dictionary. An English learner's dictionary (such as Merriam-Webster, Cambridge, Oxford, or Longman) may be the most useful.

Important: Singular count nouns must have a word in the determiner slot. This could be an article, a pronoun, or a possessive noun (i.e., "a," "an," "the," "this," or a possessive noun). Please see our page on article usage for more information.

Noncount Nouns

What is a noncount noun?

Noncount (or uncountable) nouns exist as masses or abstract quantities that cannot be counted. They have no plural form. Although most English nouns are count nouns, noncount nouns frequently occur in academic writing.

Here are some common categories of noncount nouns. Like all things in English (and language in general), there may be exceptions.

A mass: work, equipment, homework, money, transportation, clothing, luggage, jewelry, traffic

A natural substance: air, ice, water, fire, wood, blood, hair, gold, silver

Food: milk, rice, coffee, bread, sugar, meat, water

An abstract concept: advice, happiness, health, education, research, knowledge, information, time

A game: soccer, tennis, basketball, hockey, football, chess, checkers

A disease: diabetes, measles, polio, influenza, malaria, hypothyroidism, arthritis

A subject of study: economics, physics, astronomy, biology, history, statistics

A language: Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, English

An activity (in the "-ing" form): swimming, dancing, reading, smoking, drinking, studying

Important: Noncount nouns do not use the indefinite articles "a" or "an." They can, however, use the definite article "the" if what is being referred to is specific. They can also use no article if what is being referred to is general (generic) or nonspecific.

Double Nouns

Some nouns can be both count and noncount. When they change from a count to a noncount noun, the meaning changes slightly. In the noncount form, the noun refers to the whole idea or quantity. In the count form, the noun refers to a specific example or type. When the noun is countable, it can be used with the indefinite article "a" or "an" or it can be made plural.
Check the published literature in your field of study to determine whether specific nouns are used in a countable or an uncountable way. Sometimes, a noun that is generally countable becomes uncountable when used in a technical way.
Here are a few examples:

- **life**
  - **Life** is a gift. (noncount)
  - She leads *a* very fulfilling **life**. (count = This specifies the type of life. It could be a boring life, a dangerous life, and so on.)

- **cheese**
  - I like **cheese**. (noncount)
  - *The* **cheeses** of France are my favorite. (count = This specifies the type of cheese.)

- **language**
  - The study of **language** is called linguistics. (noncount)
  - English is often considered *an* international **language**. (count)

Quantity Words

Quantity words are used to add information about the number or amount of the noun. Some quantity words can only be used with countable singular nouns (e.g., computer, pen, and crayon), some can only be used with countable plural nouns (e.g., printers, flashdrives, and keyboards), some can only be used with uncountable nouns (i.e., paper, ink), and some can be used with both plural countable nouns and with uncountable nouns.

With countable singular nouns (e.g., computer, pen, crayon):
- **each**
  - *each* computer
- **every**
  - *every* computer
- **another**
  - *another* computer

With countable plural nouns (e.g., printers, flashdrives, and keyboards):
- **several**
  - *several* printers
- **a large/small number of**
  - *a large number of* printers
  - *a small number of* printers
- **(not/too) many**
  - *not many* printers
  - *too many* printers
  - *many* printers
- **a few***
  - *a few* printers
- **(very) few***
  - *very few* printers
  - *few* printers
- **fewer**
  - *fewer* printers

With uncountable nouns (e.g., paper or ink):

- **a great deal of**
  - *a great deal of* paper
- **a large/small amount of**
  - *a large amount of* paper
  - *a small amount of* paper
- **(not/too) much**
  - *not much* paper
  - *too much* paper
  - *much* paper
- **a little***
  - *a little* paper
- **(very) little***
  - *very little* paper
  - *little* paper
- **less**
  - *less* paper

With countable plural nouns and with uncountable nouns (e.g., printers, flashdrives, keyboards; paper, or ink):

- **some**
  - *some* printers
  - *some* ink
- **any**
  - *any* printers
  - *any* ink
- **a lot of**
  - *a lot of* printers
  - *a lot of* ink
- **hardly any**
  - *hardly any* printers
  - *hardly any* ink
- **(almost) all**
  - *(almost) all* printers
  - *(almost) all* ink
- **no**
  - *no* printers
  - *no* ink
- **none of**
  - *none of* the printers
  - *none of* the ink

- **not any**
  - *not any* printers
  - *not any* ink
- **other**
  - *other* printers
  - *other* ink

Note the difference between "few/little" (almost none) and "a few/a little" (some, but not many/much). "Few/little" tend to have a negative connotation. "A few/a little" tend to be more positive.

- There are **few** solutions. (There are not many solutions.)
- There are **a few** solutions. (There are some solutions.)
- He received **little** education. (He did not receive much education.)
- He received **a little** education. (He received some education.)

(iii) Conjunctions

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions connect words or phrases that serve the same grammatical purpose in a sentence. There are seven main coordinating conjunctions in English, which form the acronym FANBOYS:

F: **for**: The teachers were frustrated, **for** the school had cut funding for all enrichment programs.*

A: **and**: In this course, I will write a literature review, a case study, **and** a final paper.**

N: **nor**: The students did not complete their homework, **nor** did they pass the test.

B: **but**: The study is several years old **but** still valuable to this study.

O: **or**: At the end of the class, the students can choose to write an essay **or** take a test.

Y: **yet**: The patient complained of chronic pain, **yet** she refused treatment.

S: **so**: I have only been a nurse for one year, **so** I have little experience with paper charting.

* "For" is rarely used as a conjunction in modern English.
** When the conjunctions "and" and "or" connect three or more words or phrases, use a serial comma to separate items in the series.

Transitional words such as "however" and "therefore" can also function as conjunctions:

- The authors agreed on the prevalence of the problem; **however**, they disagreed on the problem's cause.
- Several employees complained about the new policies, and **therefore**, the manager held an all-staff meeting to address their concerns.

Paired Conjunctions

Paired conjunctions consist of two words or phrases that help make a point or establish alternatives. Although paired conjunctions can be helpful in structuring a sentence, they can also make sentences wordier than necessary, so use these conjunctions sparingly.

- both…and
  - The project will require significant investments of **both** time **and** money.
  - **Both** the students **and** the teachers were satisfied with the pilot program.

  Note: When two subjects are connected by "both…and," use a plural verb (such as "are" or "were").
- not only…but also
  - Students who did not complete the assignment received **not only** a poor grade **but also** a warning from the teacher.
  - **Not only** did the student include full sentences from the source without using quotation marks, **but** he **also** failed to properly cite paraphrased material.
- either…or
  - **Either** the students were unprepared **or** the assessment was poorly written.
  - Participants in the survey could **either** choose from a list of possible answers **or** write in their own responses.
- neither…nor
  - Students who did not complete the project received **neither** praise **nor** rewards.
  - The staff **neither** followed the new policy **nor** asked for clarification.

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions join a subordinate clause to a main clause and establishes a relationship between the two. There are many subordinating clauses, but here are some of the most common:

- after
- although
- as much as/as soon as/as long as
- as though
- because
- before
- how
- if
- in order to/in order that
- once
- since
- than
- that
- though
- unless
- until
- when/whenever
- where/wherever
- whether
- while

There are two ways to structure a sentence using a subordinating conjunction:

1. Main clause + subordinate clause
   - The teacher administered the test after giving instructions.
   - The author must avoid bias if she wants to maintain a scholarly tone.
   - I will turn in this assignment at midnight whether or not I complete it.
2. Subordinate clause + , + main clause
   - After giving instructions, the teacher administered the test.
   - If she wants to maintain a scholarly tone, the author must avoid bias.
   - Whether or not I complete this assignment, I will turn it in at midnight.

"That" as a Conjunction for Noun Clauses

"That" has a few different functions in English. This can lead to confusion because some instances of "that" are more optional than others in academic writing.
One important use of "that" is for embedding (inserting) a certain type of dependent clause called a noun clause into an independent clause. Frequently, such "that" clauses serve as the direct object of a reporting verb (such as found, reported, posited, argued, claimed, maintained, and hypothesized) to introduce a paraphrase, summary, or quotation.

Key: **Yellow, bold** = subject; green, underline = verb; *blue, italics* = object

For example,

- **Smith (2015)** reported *that more research was necessary*.
  - **Smith (2015)** = subject
  - reported = verb
  - *that more research was necessary* = dependent clause, direct object of the verb "reported"

- **The authors** hypothesized *that there would be significant results*.
  - **The authors** = subject
  - hypothesized = verb
  - *that there would be significant results* = dependent clause, direct object of the verb "hypothesized"

- **Jones (2014)** asserted *that confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.*
  - **Jones (2014)** = subject
  - asserted = verb
  - *that confidentiality was maintained throughout the study* = dependent clause, direct object of the verb "asserted"

- Rephrasing these sentences into questions and answers is one way to see that the "that" clauses are acting as direct objects.
  - What did Smith (2015) report?
    Answer: ***that*** *more research was necessary*
  - What did the authors hypothesize?
    Answer: ***that*** *there would be significant results*
  - What did Jones (2014) assert?
    Answer: ***that*** *confidentiality was maintained throughout the study*

In formal written English, for clarity, most academic writers choose to keep "that" when it introduces a noun clause. Leaving out "that" can cause the reader to misread (at first anyway) the subject of the dependent clause as being the object of the reporting verb.

- For example, if readers see the sentence, "Smith reported more research was necessary (without 'that')," they may understand "more research" as the thing Smith reported and then have to backtrack and reread upon seeing "was necessary."
- Any structure that leads to misinterpretation, even temporarily, can be an unwanted distraction from the writer's message.
- In spoken English, however, "that" may be dropped in such sentences. (Intonation patterns—rising and falling pitch—give the listener clues that may not be present in writing.)

(iv) Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Transitive Verbs

A transitive verb is a verb that requires an object to receive the action.
Example:

Correct: The speaker **discussed** *different marketing strategies* in the video.

Incorrect: The speaker **discussed** in the video.

The verb "discuss" requires an object ("different marketing strategies"). It is necessary to state what the speaker discussed.

Example Sentences

Some other examples of transitive verbs are "address," "borrow," "bring," "discuss," "raise," "offer," "pay," "write," "promise," and "have."

The instructor **addressed** *the student's question*.

Miriam **borrowed** *the methodology book* from her classmate because she forgot her copy.

Can you **bring** *your copy of the textbook* to our study group meeting?

Donovan **gave** *the gift* to his sister.

The committee members **will raise** *money* for the new project.

Direct and Indirect Objects

A transitive verb can take more than one object.
Donovan **gave** *his sister a laptop*.

In this sentence, there is an indirect object, "his sister," and a direct object, "a laptop." However, there is another way to say this same idea using a prepositional phrase.

Donovan **gave** *a laptop* to his sister.

In English, an indirect object may come between a transitive verb and the direct object, like the first example sentence about Donovan, or the indirect object could be in the form of a prepositional phrase, like the second example sentence about Donovan.

An indirect object is only needed if the action is being done to or for somebody; when using a transitive verb, you need to include a direct object, but you may not need to include an indirect object.

Finding the Object

You can figure out the direct object by using this question format: "The subject did what?" or "The subject [verb] what?"

The instructor **addressed** what?
the student's question

Miriam **borrowed** what?
the methodology book

Can you **bring** what?
your copy of the text book

The speaker **discussed** what?
different marketing strategies

The committee members **will raise** what?
money

You can find the indirect object by asking the question "To whom?" or "For whom?"
Donovan **gave** *a laptop* to whom?
his sister

Intransitive Verbs

An intransitive verb does not take an object. Using an object immediately after an intransitive verb will create an incorrect sentence. However, there may be other information after the verb, such as one or more prepositional phrases or an *adverb*.
Example:

Correct: The students **arrived** at the residency in Houston.

Incorrect: The students **arrived** *Houston*.

The second sentence is incorrect because the verb cannot take an object.

Example Sentences

Some other examples of intransitive verbs are "deteriorate," "vote," "sit," "increase," "laugh," "originate," "fluctuate," and "trend."

The patient's health **deteriorated *quickly***.

Ahmad **voted** in the local election.

May I **sit** ***here***?
Attendance **increased** at the weekly study sessions as finals drew near.

Susan **laughed**.

Note: An intransitive verb can take more than one prepositional phrase or adverb.

The patient's health **deteriorated** ***quickly*** during the night.

Ahmad **voted** for the incumbent in the local election.

Verbs That Are Both Transitive and Intransitive

Some verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, depending on the situation. In some instances, such a verb may require an object, while in others it does not require an object.

Example Sentences

Format reminder: **verb**, *object*, propositional phrase, ***adverb***

continue

We will **continue** *the meeting* after the break. (transitive)

The meeting **continued** after the break. (intransitive)

play

Three of the students **play** *the guitar*. (transitive)

The students will **play** ***outside today***. (intransitive)

return

Javier **returned** *the book* to the library. (transitive)

The students **returned** to school after the winter break. (intransitive)

grow

I **grow** *zucchini* in my garden. (transitive)

My daughter **is growing** ***quickly***. (intransitive)

If you are unsure about whether a verb is transitive or intransitive, you can check a dictionary. Most dictionaries, such as the online version of Merriam Webster, indicate whether a verb, and each definition of the verb, is transitive or intransitive. Whether a verb is transitive or intransitive may depend on whether the verb has multiple meanings. Make sure to read through the examples provided in the dictionary, if available, to ensure that you are using the verb correctly.

(v) Articles

Article Basics

What is an article?

- Articles ("a," "an," and "the") are determiners or noun markers that function to specify if the noun is general or specific in its reference. Often the article chosen depends on if the writer and the reader understand the reference of the noun.
- The articles "a" and "an" are indefinite articles. They are used with a singular countable noun when the noun referred to is nonspecific or generic.
- The article "the" is a definite article. It is used to show specific reference and can be used with both singular and plural nouns and with both countable and uncountable nouns.

Many languages do not use articles ("a," "an," and "the"), or if they do exist, the way they are used may be different than in English. Multilingual writers often find article usage to be one of the most difficult concepts to learn. Although there are some rules about article usage to help, there are also quite a few exceptions. Therefore, learning to use articles accurately takes a long time. To master article usage, it is necessary to do a great deal of reading, notice how articles are used in published texts, and take notes that can apply back to your own writing.

A few important definitions to keep in mind:

- **Countable noun**: The noun has both a singular and plural form. The plural is usually formed by adding an "–s" or an "–es" to the end of it.
  - one horse, two horses
  - one chair, two chairs
  - one match, two matches

  Countable nouns may also have irregular plural forms. Many of these forms come from earlier forms of English.
  - one child, two children
  - one mouse, two mice

- **Uncountable noun**: The noun refers to something that cannot be counted. It does not have a plural form.
  - Information
  - Grammar

- **Proper noun**: The name of a person, place, or organization and is spelled with capital letters.
  - Tim Smith
  - McDonalds

"A" or "An"

When to Use "A" or "An"

"A" and "an" are used with singular countable nouns when the noun is nonspecific or generic.

- I do not own ***a*** *car*.
  - In this sentence, "car" is a singular countable noun that is not specific. It could be any car.

- She would like to go to ***a*** *university* that specializes in teaching.
  - "University" is a singular countable noun. Although it begins with a vowel, the first sound of the word is /j/ or "y." Thus, "a" instead of "an" is used. In this sentence, it is also generic (it could be any university with this specialization, not a specific one).
- I would like to eat ***an*** *apple*.
  - In this sentence, "apple" is a singular countable noun that is not specific. It could be any apple.

"A" is used when the noun that follows begins with a consonant sound.
- ***a*** book
- ***a*** pen
- ***a*** uniform (Note that "uniform" starts with a vowel, but the first sound is /j/ or a "y" sound. Therefore "a" instead of "an" is used here.)

"An" is used when the noun that follows begins with a vowel sound.
- ***an*** elephant
- ***an*** American
- ***an*** MBA (Note that "MBA" starts with a consonant, but the first sound is /ɛ/ or a short "e" sound. Therefore, "an" instead of "a" is used here.)

Sometimes "a" or "an" can be used for first mention (the first time the noun is mentioned). Then, in subsequent sentences, the article "the" is used instead.
- He would like to live in ***a*** large *house*. ***The*** *house* should have at least three bedrooms and two bathrooms.
  - In the first sentence (first mention), "a" is used because it is referring to a nonspecified house. In the second sentence, "the" is used because now the house has been specified.

"The"

When to Use "The"
"The" is used with both singular and plural nouns and with both countable and uncountable nouns when the noun is specific.
- ***The*** *book* that I read last night was great.
  - In this sentence, "book" is a singular, countable noun. It is also specific because of the phrase "that I read last night." The writer and reader (or speaker and listener) know which book is being referred to.
- ***The*** *books* assigned for this class are very useful.
  - In this sentence, "books" is a plural, countable noun. It is also specific because of the phrase "for this class." The writer and reader (or speaker and listener) know which books are being referred to.
- ***The*** *advice* you gave me was very helpful.
  - In this sentence, "advice" is an uncountable noun. However, it is specific because of the phrase "you gave me." It is clear which piece of advice was helpful.

Here are some more specific rules:

"The" is used in the following categories of proper nouns:
- **Museums and art galleries**: ***the*** Walker Art Center, ***the*** Minneapolis Institute of Art
- **Buildings**: ***the*** Empire State Building, ***the*** Willis Tower
- **Seas and oceans**: ***the*** Mediterranean Sea, ***the*** Atlantic Ocean
- **Rivers**: ***the*** Mississippi, ***the*** Nile
- **Deserts**: ***the*** Sahara Desert, ***the*** Sonora Desert
- **Periods and events in history:** ***the*** Dark Ages, ***the*** Civil War
- **Bridges:** ***the*** London Bridge, ***the*** Mackinac Bridge
- **Parts of a country**: ***the*** South, ***the*** Upper Midwest

In general, use "the" with plural proper nouns.
- ***the*** Great Lakes
- ***the*** French
- ***the*** Rockies (as in the Rocky Mountains)

"The" is often used with proper nouns that include an “of” phrase.
- ***the*** United States of America
- ***the*** University of Minnesota
- ***the*** International Swimming Hall of Fame

Use "the" when the noun being referred to is unique because of our understanding of the world.
- ***The*** Earth moves around ***the*** sun.
- Wolves howl at ***the*** moon.

Use "the" when a noun can be made specific from a previous mention in the text. This is also known as second or subsequent mention.
- My son bought a cat. I am looking after ***the*** cat while he is on vacation.
- I read a good book. ***The*** book was about how to use articles correctly in English.

"The" is used with superlative adjectives, which are necessarily unique (the first, the second, the biggest, the smallest, the next, the only, etc.).
- It was ***the*** **first** study to address the issue.
- She was ***the*** **weakest** participant.
- He was ***the*** **only** person to drop out of the study.

No Article (Generic Reference)

Writers sometimes struggle with the choice to include an article or to leave it out altogether. Keep in mind that if the noun is singular, countable, and nonspecific or generic (e.g., book, author), the articles "a" and "an" may be used. However, if the noun is countable and plural (e.g.., "research studies") or uncountable (e.g., "information") and it is being used in a nonspecific or generic way, no article is used.
Here are some more specifics:

- No article is used when a plural countable noun is generic or nonspecific.
  - I bought new ***pens*** and ***pencils*** at the store. (general, not specific ones)
  - ***Cats*** have big eyes that can see in the dark. (cats in general, all of them)
  - ***Babies*** cry a lot. (babies in general, all of them)

- No article is used when a noncount noun is generic or nonspecific.
  - I bought ***milk*** and ***rice*** at the store. (generic reference)
  - We were assigned ***homework*** in this class. (generic reference)
  - There has been previous ***research*** on the topic. (generic reference)

Articles in Phrases and Idiomatic Expressions

Sometimes article usage in English does not follow a specific rule. These expressions must be memorized instead.
Here are some examples of phrases where article usage is not predictable:

- Destinations: *go to* ***the*** *store, go to* ***the*** *bank*, **but** *go to school, go to church, go to bed, go home*
- Locations: *in school, at home, in bed,* **but** *in* ***the*** *hospital* (in American English)
- Parts of the day: *in* ***the*** *morning, in* ***the*** *evening,* **but** *at night*
- Chores: *mow* ***the*** *lawn, do* ***the*** *dishes, do* ***the*** *cleaning*

There are also numerous idiomatic expressions in English that contain nouns. Some of these also contain articles while others do not.
Here are just a few examples:

- To give someone ***a*** hand
- In ***the*** end
- To be on time

(vi) Modifiers

Modifier Basics

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that modifies—that is, gives information about—another word in the same sentence. For example, in the following sentence, the word "burger" is modified by the word "vegetarian":

Example: I'm going to the Saturn Café for a **vegetarian** burger.
- The modifier "vegetarian" gives extra information about what kind of burger it is.

A modifier can be an adjective (a word that modifies a noun, like "burger"), but it can also be an adverb (a word that modifies a verb):

Example: The student **carefully** proofread her draft.
- The adverb "carefully" is the modifier in this example—it modifies the verb "proofread," giving important details about how the proofreading was conducted.

A modifier can even be a phrase or clause, as in the following example:

Example: She studied **in the library**.
- Here, the phrase "in the library" gives us extra information about the verb, "studied."

Modifiers can also be used for sentence variety.

Misplaced Modifiers

When a modifier is ambiguously or illogically modifying a word, we consider it a *misplaced modifier*.

Example: Dolger discovered an ancient Mayan civilization **using astronavigation**.

- The modifier, "using astronavigation," is unclear in this sentence. Does it modify "Dolger" or "civilization"? A reader will wonder, "Was Dolger using astronavigation? Or was the civilization he discovered using astronavigation?"

Revision 1: **Using astronavigation**, Dolger discovered an ancient Mayan civilization.

- This modifier placement makes it clear that "Dolger" is the one using astronavigation.

Revision 2: Dolger discovered an ancient Mayan civilization that used astronavigation.

- This modifier placement makes it clear that the "civilization" used astronavigation.

Dangling Modifiers

When a modifier is not modifying a specific word, we call it a *dangling modifier.*

Example: **After consulting a selection of current publications**, research in this area has been sparse.

- In this example, it is not clear who is consulting the selection of current publications. In other words, there is no referent in the sentence.

Revision 1: **After consulting a selection of current publications, I** determined that the research in this area has been sparse.

- Now the subject in the sentence “I” matches the modifier “after consulting a selection of current publications.”

Revision 2: **According to the selection of current publications, research** in this area has been sparse.

- Now the modifier “according to the selection of current publications” matches the subject “research.”

Most Common Verb Tenses in Academic Writing

According to corpus research, in academic writing, the three tenses used the most often are the **simple present**, the **simple past**, and the **present perfect**. The next most common tense is the **future**;

Simple present: Use the simple present to describe a general truth or a habitual action. This tense indicates that the statement is generally true in the past, present, and future.

- Example: The hospital **admits** patients whether or not they have proof of insurance.

Simple past: Use the simple past tense to describe a completed action that took place at a specific point in the past (e.g., last year, 1 hour ago, last Sunday). In the example below, the specific point of time in the past is 1998.

- Example: Zimbardo (1998) **researched** many aspects of social psychology.

Present perfect: Use the present perfect to indicate an action that occurred at a nonspecific time in the past. This action has relevance in the present. The present perfect is also sometimes used to introduce background information in a paragraph. After the first sentence, the tense shifts to the simple past.

- Example: Numerous researchers **have used** this method.
- Example: Many researchers **have studied** how small business owners can be successful beyond the initial few years in business. They found common themes among the small business owners.

Future: Use the future to describe an action that will take place at a particular point in the future

Example: I **will conduct** semistructured interviews.

(vii) Verb Tenses

Guidelines on Verb Tense

Avoid unnecessary shifts in verb tense within a paragraph or in adjacent paragraphs to help ensure smooth expression.

- Use the past tense (e.g., researchers **presented**) or the present perfect (e.g., researchers **have presented**) for the literature review and the description of the procedure if discussing past events.
- Use the past tense to describe the results (e.g., test scores **improved** significantly).
- Use the present tense to discuss implications of the results and present conclusions (e.g., the results of the study **show**…).

When explaining what an author or researcher wrote or did, use the past tense.

- Patterson (2012) **presented, found, stated, discovered…**

However, there can be a shift to the present tense if the research findings still hold true:

- King (2010) **found** that revising a document three times **improves** the final grade.
- Smith (2016) **discovered** that the treatment **is** effective.

Simple Past Versus the Present Perfect

Rules for the use of the present perfect differ slightly in British and American English. Researchers have also found that among American English writers, sometimes individual preferences dictate whether the simple past or the present perfect is used. In other words, one American English writer may choose the simple past in a place where another American English writer may choose the present perfect.

Keep in mind, however, that the simple past is used for a completed action. It often is used with signal words or phrases such as "yesterday," "last week," "1 year ago," or "in 2015" to indicate the specific time in the past when the action took place.

- I **went** to China *in 2010*.
- He **completed** the employee performance reviews *last month*.

The present perfect focuses more on an action that occurred without focusing on the specific time it happened. Note that the specific time is not given, just that the action has occurred.

- I **have travelled** to China.

The present perfect focuses more on the result of the action.

- He **has completed** the employee performance reviews.

The present perfect is often used with signal words such as "since," "already," "just," "until now," "(not) yet," "so far," "ever," "lately," or "recently."

- I **have *already* travelled** to China.
- He **has *recently* completed** the employee performance reviews.
- Researchers **have used** this method ***since*** it was developed.

Summary of English Verb Tenses

The 12 main tenses:

- **Simple present**: She ***writes*** every day.
- **Present progressive:** She ***is writing*** right now.
- **Simple past**: She ***wrote*** last night.
- **Past progressive:** She ***was writing*** when he called.
- **Simple future**: She ***will write*** tomorrow.
- **Future progressive:** She ***will be writing*** when you arrive.
- **Present perfect**: She ***has written*** Chapter 1.
- **Present perfect progressive:** She ***has been writing*** for 2 hours.
- **Past perfect:** She ***had written*** Chapter 3 before she started Chapter 4.
- **Past perfect progressive:** She ***had been writing*** for 2 hours before her friends arrived.
- **Future perfect:** She ***will have written*** Chapter 4 before she writes Chapter 5.
- **Future perfect progressive:** She ***will have been writing*** for 2 hours by the time her friends come over.

(viii) Prepositions

Preposition Basics

A preposition is a word or group of words used before a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase to show direction, time, place, location, spatial relationships, or to introduce an object. Some examples of prepositions are words like "in," "at," "on," "of," and "to."
Prepositions in English are highly idiomatic. Although there are some rules for usage, much preposition usage is dictated by fixed expressions. In these cases, it is best to memorize the phrase instead of the individual preposition.

A Few Rules

Prepositions of Direction
To refer to a direction, use the prepositions "to," "in," "into," "on," and "onto."

- She drove ***to*** the store.
- Don't ring the doorbell. Come right ***in(to)*** the house.
- Drive ***on(to)*** the grass and park the car there.

Prepositions of Time

To refer to one point in time, use the prepositions "in," "at," and "on."

Use "in" with parts of the day (not specific times), months, years, and seasons.

- He reads ***in*** the evening.
- The weather is cold ***in*** December.
- She was born ***in*** 1996.
- We rake leaves ***in*** the fall.

Use "at" with the time of day. Also use "at" with noon, night, and midnight.

- I go to work ***at*** 8:00.
- He eats lunch ***at*** noon.
- She often goes for a walk ***at*** night.
- They go to bed ***at*** midnight.

Use "on" with days.

- I work ***on*** Saturdays.
- He does laundry ***on*** Wednesdays.

To refer to extended time, use the prepositions "since," "for," "by," "during," "from…to," "from…until," "with," and "within."

- I have lived in Minneapolis ***since*** 2005. (I moved there in 2005 and still live there.)
- He will be in Toronto ***for*** 3 weeks. (He will spend 3 weeks in Toronto.)
- She will finish her homework ***by*** 6:00. (She will finish her homework sometime between now and 6:00.)
- He works part time ***during*** the summer. (For the period of time throughout the summer.)
- I will collect data ***from*** January ***to*** June. (Starting in January and ending in June.)
- They are in school ***from*** August ***until*** May. (Starting in August and ending in May.)
- She will graduate ***within*** 2 years. (Not longer than 2 years.)

Prepositions of Place

To refer to a place, use the prepositions "in" (the point itself), "at" (the general vicinity), "on" (the surface), and "inside" (something contained).

- They will meet ***in*** the lunchroom.
- She was waiting ***at*** the corner.
- He left his phone ***on*** the bed.
- Place the pen ***inside*** the drawer.

To refer to an object higher than a point, use the prepositions "over" and "above." To refer to an object lower than a point, use the prepositions "below," "beneath," "under," and "underneath."

- The bird flew ***over*** the house.
- The plates were on the shelf ***above*** the cups.
- Basements are dug ***below*** ground.
- There is hard wood ***beneath*** the carpet.
- The squirrel hid the nuts ***under*** a pile of leaves.
- The cat is hiding ***underneath*** the box.

To refer to an object close to a point, use the prepositions "by," "near," "next to," "between," "among," and "opposite."

- The gas station is ***by*** the grocery store.
- The park is ***near*** her house.
- Park your bike ***next to*** the garage.
- There is a deer ***between*** the two trees.
- There is a purple flower ***among*** the weeds.
- The garage is ***opposite*** the house.

Prepositions of Location

To refer to a location, use the prepositions "in" (an area or volume), "at" (a point), and "on" (a surface).

- They live ***in*** the country. (an area)
- She will find him ***at*** the library. (a point)
- There is a lot of dirt ***on*** the window. (a surface)

Prepositions of Spatial Relationships

To refer to a spatial relationship, use the prepositions "above," "across," "against," "ahead of," "along," "among," "around," "behind," "below,"
"beneath," "beside," "between," "from," "in front of," "inside," "near," "off," "out of," "through," "toward," "under," and "within."

- The post office is ***across*** the street from the grocery store.
- We will stop at many attractions ***along*** the way.
- The kids are hiding ***behind*** the tree.
- His shirt is ***off***.
- Walk ***toward*** the garage and then turn left.
- Place a check mark ***within*** the box.

Prepositions Following Verbs and Adjectives

Some verbs and adjectives are followed by a certain preposition. Sometimes verbs and adjectives can be followed by different prepositions, giving the phrase different meanings. To find which prepositions follow the verb or an adjective, look up the verb or adjective in an online dictionary, such as Merriam Webster, or use a corpus, such as The Corpus of Contemporary American English. Memorizing these phrases instead of just the preposition alone is the most helpful.

Some Common Verb + Preposition Combinations

About: worry, complain, read

- He ***worries about*** the future.
- She ***complained about*** the homework.
- I ***read about*** the flooding in the city.

At: arrive (a building or event), smile, look

- He ***arrived at*** the airport 2 hours early.
- The children ***smiled at*** her.
- She ***looked at*** him.

From: differ, suffer
- The results ***differ from*** my original idea.
- She ***suffers from*** dementia.

For: account, allow, search
- Be sure to ***account for*** any discrepancies.
- I returned the transcripts to the interviewees to ***allow for*** revisions to be made.
- They are ***searching for*** the missing dog.

In: occur, result, succeed
- The same problem ***occurred in*** three out of four cases.
- My recruitment strategies ***resulted in*** finding 10 participants.
- She will ***succeed in*** completing her degree.

Of: approve, consist, smell
- I ***approve of*** the idea.
- The recipe ***consists of*** three basic ingredients.
- The basement ***smells of*** mildew.

On: concentrate, depend, insist
- He is ***concentrating on*** his work.
- They ***depend on*** each other.
- I must ***insist on*** following this rule.

To: belong, contribute, lead, refer
- Bears ***belong to*** the family of mammals.
- I hope to ***contribute to*** the previous research.
- My results will ***lead to*** future research on the topic.
- Please ***refer to*** my previous explanation.

With: (dis)agree, argue, deal
- I ***(dis)agree with*** you.
- She ***argued with*** him.
- They will ***deal with*** the situation.

Although verb + preposition combinations appear similar to phrasal verbs, the verb and the particle (in this case, the preposition) in these combinations cannot be separated like phrasal verbs. See more about this on our verb choice page.

Some Common Adjective + Preposition Combinations

	About	At	By	From	For	In	Of	To	With
Accustomed								X	
Aware							X		
Beneficial								X	

	About	At	By	From	For	In	Of	To	With
Capable							X		
Characteristic							X		
Composed			X				X		
Different				X					
Disappointed						X			X
Employed		X	X						
Essential								X	
Familiar									X
Good		X			X				
Grateful					X			X	
Interested						X			
Happy	X				X				X
Opposed								X	
Proud							X		
Responsible					X				
Similar								X	
Sorry	X				X				

Ending a Sentence with a Preposition

At one time, schools taught students that a sentence should never end with a preposition. This rule is associated with Latin grammar, and while many aspects of Latin have made their way into English, there are times when following this particular grammar rule creates unclear or awkward sentence structures. Since the purpose of writing is to clearly

communicate your ideas, it is acceptable to end a sentence with a preposition if the alternative would create confusion or is too overly formal.

Example: The car had not been paid for. (Ends with a preposition but is acceptable)
Unclear Revision: Paid for the car had not been. (Unclear sentence.)

Example: I would like to know where she comes from. (Ends with a preposition but is acceptable)

Overly Grammatical Revision: I would like to know from where she comes. (Grammatical but overly formal. Nobody actually speaks like this.)

However, in academic writing, you may decide that it is worth revising your sentences to avoid ending with a preposition in order to maintain a more formal scholarly voice.

Example: My research will focus on the community the students lived in.

Revision: My research will focus on the community in which the students lived.

Example: I like the people I am working with.

Revision: I like the people with whom I am working.

Prepositional Phrases and Wordiness

Like with pronouns, too many prepositional phrases can create wordiness in a sentence:

Example***:*** The author chose the mixed-method design to explain that the purpose ***of*** the study was to explore the leadership qualities ***of*** the principals ***in*** the schools as a means to gauge teacher satisfaction ***in*** the first year ***of*** teaching.
This type of sentence could be shortened and condensed to minimize the prepositional phrases and bring clarity to the writer's intent:

Revision: The author chose the mixed-method design to explore the principals' leadership qualities and their impact ***on*** first-year teachers' satisfaction.

Unnecessary Prepositions

If the preposition is unnecessary, leave it out. This creates more clear and concise writing.

Example: Where are the plates ***at***?

Revision: Where are the plates?

Example: She jumped ***off of*** the balance beam.

Revision: She jumped ***off*** the balance beam.

Related Resource

Parallel Construction Basics

Parallel ideas must be presented in parallel grammatical form, which means that each part of a sentence uses the same grammatical structure.

Examples of Parallel Construction

"Between" and "And"

Incorrect: We debated the difference between **the weather in Minnesota in the winter** and **how hot it is in the summer**.

Correct: We debated the difference between **the weather in Minnesota in the winter** and **the weather in Minnesota in the summer.**

"Both" and "And"

Incorrect: The films were enjoyable both **to watch** and **for discussing**.

Correct: The films were enjoyable both **to watch** and **to discuss**.

"Neither" and "Nor"*; "*Either" and "Or"

Incorrect: Neither **the responses to the questionnaire** nor **what we asked on the survey** were answered.

Correct: Neither **the responses to the questionnaire** nor **the responses to the survey** were answered.

"Not Only" and "But Also"

Incorrect: It was surprising not only **that the house sold,** but also **it sold well over the asking price.**

Correct: It was surprising not only **that the house sold** but also that **it sold well over the asking price.**

Parallel Construction in a List

Sentences with lists require particular attention to parallel construction.

Example 1:
Incorrect: This paper will address **No Child Left Behind, how to teach effectively, and instructing with multimedia aids**.

Correct: This paper will address No Child Left Behind **benchmarks**, effective teaching **strategies**, and multimedia instructional **aids**.
Now, the list has parallel elements (*benchmarks*, *strategies*, and *aids* are all plural nouns).

Example 2:

Incorrect: The students were unprepared, poorly behaved, and disrupted the class.

Correct: The students were **underprepared**, poorly **behaved**, and **disruptive**.
Now, the list has parallel elements ("underprepared," "behaved," and "disruptive" are all adjectives).

(ix) Basic Sentence Elements

Definitions and Examples of Basic Sentence Elements

Key: **Yellow, bold** = subject; green underline = verb, *blue, italics* = object,
pink, regular font = prepositional phrase

Independent clause: An independent clause can stand alone as a sentence. It contains a subject and a verb and is a complete idea.

- **I** like *spaghetti*.
- **He** reads *many books*.

Dependent clause: A dependent clause is not a complete sentence. It must be attached to an independent clause to become complete. This is also known as a subordinate clause.

- **Although I like spaghetti,…**
- **Because he reads many books,…**

Subject: A person, animal, place, thing, or concept that does an action. Determine the subject in a sentence by asking the question "Who or what?"

- **I** like spaghetti.
- **He** reads many books.

Verb: Expresses what the person, animal, place, thing, or concept does. Determine the verb in a sentence by asking the question "What was the action or what happened?"

- I like spaghetti.
- He reads many books.
- The movie is good. (The *be* verb is also sometimes referred to as a copula or a linking verb. It links the subject, in this case "the movie," to the complement or the predicate of the sentence, in this case, "good.")

Object: A person, animal, place, thing, or concept that receives the action. Determine the object in a sentence by asking the question "The subject did what?" or "To whom?/For whom?"

- I like *spaghetti*.
- He reads *many books*.

Prepositional Phrase: A phrase that begins with a preposition (i.e., in, at for, behind, until, after, of, during) and modifies a word in the sentence. A prepositional phrase answers one of many questions. Here are a few examples: "Where? When? In what way?"

- I like spaghetti for dinner.
- He reads many books in the library.

English Sentence Structure

The following statements are true about sentences in English:

- A new sentence begins with a capital letter.
  - **H**e obtained his degree.

- A sentence ends with punctuation (a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point).
  - He obtained his degree**.**
- A sentence contains a subject that is only given once.
  - ~~Smith~~ he obtained his degree.
- A sentence contains a verb or a verb phrase.
  - He **obtained** his degree.
- A sentence follows Subject + Verb + Object word order.
  - **He** (subject) **obtained** (verb) **his degree** (object).
- A sentence must have a complete idea that stands alone. This is also called an independent clause.
  - **He obtained his degree.**

Simple Sentences

A simple sentence contains a subject and a verb, and it may also have an object and modifiers. However, it contains only one independent clause.

Key: **Yellow, bold** = subject; green underline = verb, *blue, italics* = object, pink, regular font =prepositional phrase

Here are a few examples:
- **She** wrote.
- **She** completed *her literature review*.
- **He** organized *his sources* by theme.
- **They** studied *rules* for many hours.

Compound Sentences

A compound sentence contains at least two independent clauses. These two independent clauses can be combined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction or with a semicolon.
Key: independent clause = **yellow, bold;** comma or semicolon = pink, regular font; coordinating conjunction = green, underlined

Here are a few examples:
- She completed her literature review**, and** she created her reference list**.**
- He organized his sources by theme**;** then, he updated his reference list.
- They studied APA rules for many hours**, but** they realized there was still much to learn.

Using some compound sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.

Complex Sentences

A complex sentence contains at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. Dependent clauses can refer to the subject (who, which) the sequence/time (since, while), or the causal elements (because, if) of the independent clause.

If a sentence begins with a dependent clause, note the comma after this clause. If, on the other hand, the sentence begins with an independent clause, there is not a comma separating the two clauses.
Key: independent clause = **yellow, bold;** comma = pink, regular font; dependent clause = *blue, italics*

Here are a few examples:

- *Although she completed her literature review*, **she still needed to work on her methods section.**
  - Note the comma in this sentence because it begins with a dependent clause.
- *Because he organized his sources by theme*, **it was easier for his readers to follow.**
  - Note the comma in this sentence because it begins with a dependent clause.
- **They studied APA rules for many hours** *as they were so interesting***.**
  - Note that there is no comma in this sentence because it begins with an independent clause.
- Using some complex sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.

Compound-Complex Sentences

Sentence types can also be combined. A compound-complex sentence contains at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.
Key: independent clause = **yellow, bold;** comma or semicolon = pink, regular font; coordinating conjunction = green, underlined; dependent clause = *blue, italics*

- **She completed her literature review**, **but she still needs to work on her methods section** *even though she finished her methods course last semester***.**
- *Although he organized his sources by theme*, **he decided to arrange them chronologically**, and **he carefully followed the MEAL plan for organization.**
- *With pizza and soda at hand*, **they studied APA rules for many hours**, and **they decided that writing in APA made sense** *because it was clear, concise, and objective***.**
- Using some complex-compound sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.
- Pay close attention to comma usage in complex-compound sentences so that the reader is easily able to follow the intended meaning.

Definitions and Examples

Noun

The name of something, like a person, animal, place, thing, or concept. Nouns are typically used as subjects, objects, objects of prepositions, and modifiers of other nouns.

- **I** finished the study.
  - **I** = subject
- Maggie wrote **the dissertation**.
  - **the dissertation** = object
- The author presented the results **in Chapter 4**.
  - **in Chapter 4** = object of a preposition
- His **research** findings can contribute to social change.
  - **research** = modifier

Verb

This expresses what the person, animal, place, thing, or concept does. In English, verbs follow the noun.

- It **takes** a good deal of dedication to complete a doctoral degree.
- She **studied** hard for the test.
- Writing a dissertation **is** difficult. (The "be" verb is also sometimes referred to as a copula or a linking verb. It links the subject, in this case "writing a dissertation," to the complement or the predicate of the sentence, in this case, "hard.")

Adjective

This describes a noun or pronoun. Adjectives typically come before a noun or after a stative verb, like the verb "to be."

- The **diligent** student completed her assignment early.
  - **Diligent** describes the student and appears before the noun *student*.
- It can be **difficult** to balance time to study and work responsibilities.
  - **Difficult** is placed after the *to be* verb and describes what it is like to balance time.

Remember that adjectives in English have no plural form. The same form of the adjective is used for both singular and plural nouns.

- A **different** idea
- Some **different** ideas
- INCORRECT: some ~~differents~~ ideas

Adverb

This gives more information about the verb and about how the action was done. Adverbs tells how, where, when, why, etc. Depending on the context, the adverb can come before or after the verb or at the beginning or end of a sentence.

- He completed the course **enthusiastically**.
  - **Enthusiastically** describes how he completed the course and answers the *how* question.
- Steven **recently** enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Communication program at Walden.
  - **Recently** modifies the verb enroll and answers the *when* question.
- **Then,** I verified that most of my sources were peer-reviewed.
  - **Then** describes and modifies the entire sentence. See this link on transitions for more examples of conjunctive adverbs (adverbs that join one idea to another to improve the cohesion of the writing).

Pronoun

This word substitutes for a noun or a noun phrase (e.g. it, she, he, they, that, those,…).

- Smith (2014) interviewed the applicants as **they** arrived.
  - **they** = applicants
- **He** was interested in ideas **that** were never previously recorded, not **those** that have already been published.
  - **He** = Smith; **that** = ideas; **those** = those ideas

Determiner

This word makes the reference of the noun more specific (e.g. his, her, my, their, the, a, an, this, these,…).

- Jones published **her** book in 2015.
- **The** book was very popular.

Preposition

This comes before a noun or a noun phrase and links it to other parts of the sentence. These are usually single words (e.g., on, at, by,…) but can be up to four words (e.g., as far as, in addition to, as a result of, …).

- I chose to interview teachers **in** the district closest to me.
- The recorder was placed **next to** the interviewee.
- I stopped the recording **in the middle of** the interview due to a low battery.

Conjunction

A word that joins two clauses. These can be coordinating (an easy way to remember this is memorizing FANBOYS = for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) or subordinating (e.g., because, although, when, …).

- The results were not significant, **so** the alternative hypothesis was accepted.
- **Although** the results seem promising, more research must be conducted in this area.

Auxiliary Verbs

Helping verbs. They are used to build up complete verbs.

- Primary auxiliary verbs (be, have, do) show the progressive, passive, perfect, and negative verb tenses.
- Modal auxiliary verbs (can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would) show a variety of meanings. They represent ability, permission, necessity, and degree of certainty. These are always followed by the simple form of the verb.
- Semimodal auxiliary verbs (e.g., be going to, ought to, have to, had better, used to, be able to,…). These are always followed by the simple form of the verb.
- Researchers **have** investigated this issue for some time. However, the cause of the problem **has not been** determined.
  - primary: **have investigated** = present perfect tense; **has not been determined** = passive, perfect, negative form
- He **could** conduct more research, which **may** lead to the answer.
  - The modal **could** shows ability, and the verb conduct stays in its simple form; the modal **may** shows degree of certainty, and the verb lead stays in its simple form.
- Future researchers **are going to** delve more into this topic. They **are about to** make a breakthrough discovery.
  - These semimodals are followed by the simple form of the verb.

Common Endings

Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs often have unique word endings, called *suffixes*. Looking at the suffix can help to distinguish the word from other parts of speech and help identify the function of the word in the sentence. It is important to use the correct word form in written sentences so that readers can clearly follow the intended meaning.

Here are some common endings for the basic parts of speech. If ever in doubt, consult the dictionary for the correct word form.

Common Noun Endings

-age: suffrage, image, postage
-al: arrival, survival, deferral
-dom: kingdom, freedom, boredom
-ee: interviewee, employee, trainee
-ence/ance: experience, convenience, finance
-er/or: teacher, singer, director
-ery: archery, cutlery, mystery
-hood: neighborhood, childhood, brotherhood
-ics: economics, gymnastics, aquatics
-ing: reading, succeeding, believing
-ism: racism, constructivism, capitalism
-ity/ty: community, probability, equality
-ment: accomplishment, acknowledgement, environment
-ness: happiness, directness, business
-ry: ministry, entry, robbery
-ship: scholarship, companionship, leadership
-tion/sion/xion : information, expression, complexion
-ure: structure, pressure, treasure

Common Verb Endings

-ate: congregate, agitate, eliminate
-en: straighten, enlighten, shorten
-(i)fy: satisfy, identify, specify
-ize: categorize, materialize, energize

Common Adjective Endings

-able/ible: workable, believable, flexible
-al: educational, institutional, exceptional
-ed: confused, increased, disappointed
-en: wooden, golden, broken
-ese: Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese
-ful: wonderful, successful, resourceful
-ic: poetic, classic, Islamic
-ing: exciting, failing, comforting
-ish: childish, foolish, selfish
-ive: evaluative, collective, abrasive
-ian: Canadian, Russian, Malaysian
-less: priceless, useless, hopeless
-ly: friendly, daily, yearly
-ous: gorgeous, famous, courageous
-y: funny, windy, happy

Common Adverb Endings

-ly: quickly, easily, successfully
-ward(s): backward(s), upwards, downwards
-wise: clockwise, edgewise, price-wise

Placement and Position of Adjectives and Adverbs

Order of Adjectives

If more than one adjective is used in a sentence, they tend to occur in a certain order. In English, two or three adjectives modifying a noun tend to be the limit. However, when writing, not many adjectives should be used. If adjectives are used, the framework below can be used as guidance in adjective placement.

1. Determiner (e.g., this, that, these, those, my, mine, your, yours, him, his, hers they, their, some, our, several,…) or article (a, an, the)
2. Opinion, quality, or observation adjective (e.g., lovely, useful, cute, difficult, comfortable)
3. Physical description
    - (a) size (big, little, tall, short)
    - (b) shape (circular, irregular, triangular)
    - (c) age (old, new, young, adolescent)
    - (d) color (red, green, yellow)
4. Origin (e.g., English, Mexican, Japanese)
5. Material (e.g., cotton, metal, plastic)
6. Qualifier (noun used as an adjective to modify the noun that follows; i.e., campus activities, rocking chair, business suit)
7. Head noun that the adjectives are describing (e.g., activities, chair, suit)

For example:

- ***This*** (1) ***lovely*** (2) ***new*** (3) ***wooden*** (4) ***Italian*** (5) ***rocking*** (6) ***chair*** (7) is in my office.
- ***Your*** (1) ***beautiful*** (2) ***green*** (3) ***French*** (4) ***silk*** (5) ***business*** (6) ***suit*** (7) has a hole in it.

Commas With Multiple Adjectives

A comma is used between two adjectives only if the adjectives belong to the same category (for example, if there are two adjectives describing color or two adjectives describing material). To test this, ask these two questions:

1. Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written in reverse order?
2. Does the sentence make sense if the word “and” is written between them?

If the answer is yes to the above questions, the adjectives are separated with a comma. Also keep in mind a comma is never used before the noun that it modifies.

- **This *useful big round old green English leather* rocking chair is comfortable**. (Note that there are no commas here because there is only one adjective from each category.)

- **A *lovely large yellow, red, and green* oil painting was hung on the wall.** (Note the commas between yellow, red, and green since these are all in the same category of color.)

Position of Adverbs

Adverbs can appear in different positions in a sentence.

- At the beginning of a sentence: **Generally**, teachers work more than 40 hours a week.
- After the subject, before the verb: Teachers **generally** work more than 40 hours a week.
- At the end of a sentence: Teachers work more than 40 hours a week, **generally**.
- However, an adverb is not placed between a verb and a direct object. INCORRECT: Teachers work ~~**generally**~~ more than 40 hours a week.

More Detailed Rules for the Position of Adverbs

1. Adverbs that modify the whole sentence can move to different positions, such as certainly, recently, fortunately, actually, and obviously.
   - **Recently**, I started a new job.
   - I **recently** started a new job.
   - I started a new job **recently**.

2. Many adverbs of frequency modify the entire sentence and not just the verb, such as *frequently, usually, always, sometimes, often*, and *seldom*. These adverbs appear in the middle of the sentence, after the subject.
   - She **frequently** gets time to herself. (The adverb appears before the main verb.)
     - INCORRECT: ~~**Frequently**~~ she gets time to herself.
     - INCORRECT: She gets time to herself ~~**frequently**~~.
   - She has **frequently** exercised during her lunch hour. (The adverb appears after the first auxiliary verb.)
   - She is **frequently** hanging out with old friends. (The adverb appears after the *to be* verb.)

3. Adverbial phrases work best at the end of a sentence.
   - He greeted us **in a very friendly way**.
   - I collected data **for 2 months**.

(x) Conditionals

Zero conditional (general truths/general habits).

- Example: If I have time, I write every day.

First conditional (possible or likely things in the future).

- Example: If I have time, I will write every day.

Second conditional (impossible things in the present/unlikely in the future).

- Example: If I had time, I would write every day.

Third conditional (things that did not happen in the past and their imaginary results)

- Example: If I had had time, I would have written every day.

Subjunctive: This form is sometimes used in *that*-clauses that are the object of certain verbs or follow certain adjectives. The form of the subjective is the simple form of the verb. It is the same for all persons and number.

- Example: I recommend that he **study** every day.
- Example: It is important that everyone **set** a writing schedule.

(xi) Degrees : Descriptive-Comparative-Superlative

Adjective and Adverb Comparative Structures

Adjectives and adverbs can be used to make comparisons. The comparative form is used to compare two people, ideas, or things. The superlative form with the word "the" is used to compare three or more. Comparatives and superlatives are often used in writing to hedge or boost language.
Here are some rules and examples of how to form the comparatives and superlatives:

General Rules for Comparatives and Superlatives

	Adjective or Adverb	Comparative	Superlative
One-syllable adjectives	small	smaller	(the) smallest
	fast	faster	(the) fastest
	large	larger	(the) largest
	big	bigger (Note the spelling here)	(the) biggest
Most two-syllable adjectives	thoughtful	more/less thoughtful	(the) most/least thoughtful
	useful	more/less useful	(the) most/least useful
Adverbs ending in -ly	carefully	more/less carefully	(the) most/least careful
	slowly	more/less slowly	(the) most/least slowly
Two-syllable adjectives	sleepy	sleepier	(the) sleepiest

ending in -y	happy	happier	(the) happiest
	little	littler	(the) littlest
Two-syllable adjectives ending with –er, -le, -or, or –ow	narrow	narrower	(the) narrowest
	gentle	gentler	(the) gentlest
	intelligent	more/less intelligent	(the) most/least intelligent
Three or more syllable adjectives	important	more/less important	(the) most/least important

Two-Syllable Adjectives That Follow Two Rules (either form is correct)

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
clever	more/less clever	(the) most/least clever
	cleverer	(the) cleverest
simple	more/less simple	(the) most/least simple
	simpler	(the) simplest
friendly	more/less friendly	(the) most/least friendly
	friendlier	(the) friendliest

Irregular Adjectives

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
good	better	(the) best
bad	worse	(the) worst
far	farther	(the) farthest
little	less	(the) least
few	fewer	(the) fewest

To find other comparative structures, look up the word in an online dictionary such as Merriam Webster. If you are a multilingual writer, you may find Merriam Webster's Learner's Dictionary helpful for level-appropriate definitions and examples.
To form comparative sentences, use the **comparative** with the word "than." Here are some examples:

- **Fewer** participants volunteered for the study than I had anticipated.
- Business school was **less** expensive than law school.
- His application was processed **more quickly** than he thought.

It is also possible to use "(not) as…as" to express similarity or differences. Here are some examples:

- Reading is **as** enjoyable **as** writing.
- The results were **as** conclusive **as** in previous studies.
- Finding participants for the study was **not as** easy **as** I thought.
- Her level of expertise was **not as** extensive **as** her employer had hoped.

Transitions such as "and," "but," "in addition," "in contrast," "furthermore," and "on the other hand" can also be used to show comparison.

Miscellaneous Errors

Some Common Errors With Comparisons

Common Error 1: Using the comparative instead of the superlative

- INCORRECT: He is the *happier* person I know.
- REVISION: He is the *happiest* person I know.
- INCORRECT: She is the *more thoughtful* person I know.
- REVISION: She is the *most thoughtful* person I know.

Common Error 2: Doubling up comparisons or superlatives

- INCORRECT: His car is *more faster* than mine.
- REVISION: His car is *faster* than mine.
- INCORRECT: His car is *the most fastest*
- REVISION: His car is *the fastest*.

Common Error 3: Using empty comparisons (part of the comparison is missing)

- INCORRECT: The participants were more experienced.
- REVISION: The participants were more experienced *than* the previous participant pool.
- INCORRECT: The line moved more slowly.
- REVISION: The line moved more slowly *than* the line next to it.

Common Error 4: Using ambiguous comparisons (the comparison has more than one possible meaning)

- INCORRECT: She likes pizza better than her husband. (Does this mean that pizza is better than her husband?)

- REVISION: She likes pizza better than her husband does. (Now it is clear that the comparison is who likes pizza more.)

- INCORRECT: Her suitcase is bigger than John. (Does this mean that the size of the suitcase is larger than another person?)

- REVISION: Her suitcase is bigger than John's. (Now it is clear that the comparison is about two suitcases, not about John.)

Common Error 5: Missing the article "the" in the superlative

- INCORRECT: Finishing quickly was least important task.

- REVISION: Finishing quickly was *the* least important task.

- INCORRECT: The youngest girl was also littlest.

- REVISION: The youngest girl was also *the* littlest.

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