

Grammar Focus

50 essential grammar rules



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Introduction

Grammar Focus is a systematic approach to learning important rules for standardized tests of English. These fifty rules are essential knowledge for **multiple-choice sentence correction**, **identification of sentence errors** and **editing in context** questions that occur on tests such as GMAT, SAT and ACT.

The rules are grouped into eight sets covering the major areas that feature in tests of English usage. You can study the groups in any order. Print out one set at a time for effective learning.

Each rule is on a separate page. We suggest you study the sample sentences and explanations first. Then check how much you have learned by doing the additional sentences at the bottom of each page.

If your knowledge of basic grammar terms is weak, you can refer to parts of speech in the 'Extras' section.

Once you have studied the rules, try out the grammar tests on [www.major**tests**.com](http://www.majortests.com). You will find these tests in both GMAT and SAT areas of the site.

Where relevant, the explanations to the questions on [www.major**tests**.com](http://www.majortests.com) indicate which rule applies. You will need to revise the rules several times during your test preparation.

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Pronouns

Compound subjects



My sister, my brother and **me** invited them to the party.



My sister, my brother and **I** invited them to the party.

Explanation

A *compound subject* is two or more subjects joined by *and*. All of the parts of the subject must be in the subjective case.

There is no difference in the subjective case and objective case for nouns, but if the subject of a sentence is a pronoun (or includes a pronoun) you need the correct form. For example, **we invited** is fine, but **us invited** is obviously wrong. (See list of subject pronouns below.)

Generally the subject of a verb does the action. You can usually find the subject by putting the question words *who* or *what* before the verb. In the case above you would ask, *Who invited?*

In the example above, *My sister, my brother and I* forms the subject of the verb *invited*. Hence the pronoun must be **I** not **me**.

Note: You can check this type of sentence by testing the pronoun on its own: '.....**I** invited them to the party,' is obviously correct.

Subject pronouns are: **I, you, he, she, it, we, they, who**

More Examples

- The two supervisors, Julia and **me / I** will interview the candidates tomorrow.
(**I** is correct – read as: *I will interview*)
- **He / him** and his family are looking for a new home.
(**He** is correct. Read: *He is looking for a new home.*)
- Ask whether, after all our hard work, Suzie and **I / me** are adequately prepared for the competition.
(*I am prepared.* In this case you need to alter the form of the verb to check the sentence.)

Pronouns

Compound objects



The article cited Brown and **she** as the best examples.



The article cited Brown and **her** as the best examples.

Explanation

A *compound object* is two or more objects joined by *and*.

All of the parts of the object must be in the object case. *Brown and her* forms the object of the verb *cited*.

Generally the object of a verb has the action done to it. You can usually find the object by putting the question words **whom** or **what** after the verb. In the case above you would ask *Cited whom?* (The answer is the object: *Brown and her*.) There is no difference in the subjective case and objective case for nouns. But if the object of a sentence is a pronoun you need the object form. *Cited them* is fine, but *cited they* is obviously wrong.

Note: You can check this type of sentence by testing the pronoun on its own: *The article cited her*, is obviously correct.

Object pronouns are: *me, you, him, her, it, us, them, whom*

More Examples

- It is difficult to see how the rule will affect you and **I / me**.
(**Me** is correct. Read as: *the rule will affect me*.)
- My parents said that my sister had taken both my brother and **they / them** to the new restaurant.
(**Them** is correct. Read as: *taken them*.)
- Joe complained that the journalist interviewed the witnesses and **he / him**, but not the police officer.
(Interviewed **him**)

Pronouns

A

03

Pronoun predicates



It was **me** who knocked on the door.



It was **I** who knocked on the door.

Explanation

What follows a form of the verb **to be** is called the predicate (not the object). This is a technical matter that need not concern us except that we need to know that we shouldn't put the object form of a pronoun after this verb. In practice this means that the verb *to be* has the same case before as after.

The verb **to be** can be used as a verb in its own right (*he was old; she will be there etc.*) but it is also used as an auxiliary verb. An auxiliary verb is a verb used to 'help' another verb form different tenses. For example, the verb **to play** can form simple tenses on its own: *I play; he played etc.*, but uses **to be** to form other tenses: *I am playing; he will be playing etc.*

Be careful that you check your pronouns with the full verb not just the auxiliary. For example, *I was calling my sister and him.* (**Him** is part of the object of the verb **was calling**.) Or, *It was my sister and he that I called.* (**He** is part of the predicate after **was**.)

Note: Since **to be** has the same case after as before, try switching the parts to check for reversibility. *It was I = I was it.* (Obviously it can't be '*it was me*' because the reverse '*me was it*' is incorrect.)

Common forms of the verb 'to be' include: **am, is, are, was, were, will be**

More Examples

- The winners will be **they / them** who produce the most elegant answers.
(**They** will be the winners.)
- Few agree with my selection but I still think it should be **she / her**.
(**She** should be it.)
- They were expecting my brother, but when I entered they thought I was **he / him**.
(**He** was I.)

Pronouns

A

04

Pronouns in apposition



The club accepted two new members, Ajay and *I*.



The club accepted two new members, Ajay and *me*.

Explanation

A word or phrase in *apposition* is placed next to another word or phrase in order to rename it. The appositive is set off from the rest of the sentence by commas. A pronoun in apposition is always in the same case (subject or object) as the noun or pronoun to which it refers. The 'two members' are the object of the verb *accepted* and so we need the object form in the appositive.

Note: Put the pronoun in the sentence in place of what it renames, and then check for sound effect. (*The club accepted I* is clearly incorrect.)

More Examples

- The winners, Tom and *he / him*, displayed the trophy to the audience.
(*He* displayed the trophy.)
- Let's you and *I / me* send a thank you note to her.
(First note that *let's* is short for *let us*. Then replace *us* with the disputed pronoun. *Let me send a note.*)
- When we worked at the shop the owner decided to send the two of us, Anita and *I / me*, on a training course.
(*Send me.*)

Pronouns

A

05

Pronoun-noun pairs



It was **us** novices who had difficulty with the task.



It was **we** novices who had difficulty with the task.

Explanation

In the case of expressions such as **we students** and **us examiners**, always ignore the noun when checking the pronoun. In this case, **it was we** is correct because the verb to be does not take an objective case. [See rule A03]

Note: Put the pronoun in the sentence without its partner noun. (*It was us* is incorrect.)

More Examples

- **We / us** winners displayed the trophy to the audience.
(*We displayed the trophy.*)
- The layman cannot appreciate the thrill **we / us** entomologists experience on discovering a new beetle.
(*We experience....*)
- He failed to convince **we / us** students that he had graded our work fairly.
(*Convince us....*)

Pronouns

A

o6

Pronouns in comparisons



He works harder than **her**.



He works harder than **she**.

Explanation

A pronoun following the prepositions **than** and **as** should be in the subjective case. In ordinary speech we say, 'I am taller than him' or, 'I run as fast as him'. Or at least most of us do. However, for our present purposes this is incorrect. The reason is that we are supposed to complete the comparison (mentally, that is). So we have:

He works harder than she (does).

I am taller than he (is).

But we leave out the last verb.

Note: Try to add a verb to complete the comparison. For example, *I can work as hard as he (can).*

More Examples

- Now that they have won the lottery, they are as rich as **we / us**.
(*They are as rich as we (are).*)
- They received the news later than **she / her**.
(*They received the news later than she (did).*)
- Juan is as tall as Susan, she is younger than **he / him**.
(*She is younger than he (is).*)

Pronouns

A

07

Pronouns after prepositions



Mother told father about Tom and *I*.



Mother told father about Tom and *me*.

Explanation

Pronouns that follow prepositions (such as *by, for, from, to, with, except, against* etc.) are in the objective case [See rule A02]. *About me* is correct, but *about I* is incorrect.

The exception to the rule is *than* and *as* in comparisons [See rule A06]

Also watch out for *who* and *whom* which could be in the subject form even after *to* depending on what follows [See rule A08]

Note: Always check pronouns first on tests. Get used to looking for pronouns in any grammar question.

More Examples

- Everyone except *he / him* was well prepared for the test.
(*Except* is a preposition and should be followed by the object case: *him*.)
- They received the news from the neighbor before they heard from my girlfriend and *I / me*.
(*From* is a preposition and needs the object case: *me*. Note the compound object here [See rule A02])
- I gave the new book to a friend who promised to deliver it to *we / us* eager readers.
(*To* is a preposition and requires the object case: *us*. Note the pronoun-noun pair [See rule A05])

Pronouns

A

08

Who and whom



They will give the award to **whomever** deserves it.



They will give the award to **whoever** deserves it.

Explanation

Who and **whoever** are subject forms and **whom** and **whomever** are object forms.

These 'annoying' pronouns need to be tested in the clause to which they apply.

A useful rule is to ignore all the words in the sentence up to **who / whom** and then consider only the next part of the sentence, rewording if needed. Test out the case required by substituting **he / him** or **she / her** (or **they / them**). For example:

They will give the award to **whoever / whomever** deserves it.

Cut the first part to leave: **whoever / whomever** deserves it.

Replace **who / whom** with **he / him** or **she / her**: **she** deserves it.

Since **she** *deserves it* sounds better than **her**, a subject is required, and **whoever** is correct.

Note: Remove parenthetical expression (*I think, we believe, it is said etc.*) before testing **who** and **whom**.

[See rules A01 and A02 for lists of subjects and objects]

More Examples

- We did not know **who / whom** would be able to repair the hard drive.
(**Who**. Cut the first part; change to he/him – '**he would be able..**' Hence we need a subject.)
- They will take the money from **whoever / whomever** they think most able to afford it.
(**Whoever**. Do not choose *whomever* just because it follows the preposition **from!** The whole clause '*whoever....amount*' is the object of *from*. Always test **who** in its own clause. Remove the parenthetical expression *they think*. Now we have **he is most able to afford.**)
- The lawyer **who / whom** you chose to represent you is doing an excellent job.
(Cut, replace, rearrange...to get: *you chose her*. **Her** is an object and so **whom** is correct.)

Pronouns

Pronouns and gerunds



I was annoyed by *him* singing.



I was annoyed by *his* singing.

Explanation

A pronoun DIRECTLY in front of a **gerund** should be in the possessive form. A **gerund** is a present participle used as a noun. Or in simpler terms, a gerund is an 'ing' word, such as *cooking*, *singing*, and *eating*.

The reasoning in the example above goes like this: I am not annoyed by *him*. It is the *singing* that annoys me. I am specifying that it is *his singing* in particular that annoys me.

Note: If other words intervene between pronoun and gerund, do not use the possessive.

Note: If there is a noun in front of a gerund, that noun will need to be in the possessive form. For example, *There is no objection to the **girl's** going for the interview.*

Possessive forms include: *my*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *its*, *our*, *their*

More Examples

- She took *me / my* cooking her dinner for granted.
(Cooking is a gerund and so the possessive form is correct: *my*.)
- I don't object to *them / their* leaving the meeting early.
(*Their* is a possessive form and is needed because *leaving* is a gerund. Note that we shouldn't be tempted to put *them* to follow the preposition *to*, because the expression *their leaving* forms the object and not the pronoun alone.)
- Organic gardeners object to *us / our* using chemical pesticides.
(Gardeners do not object to *us*. They object to *our using*.)

Pronouns

Possessive pronouns and adjectives



The dog wagged *it's* tail.



The dog wagged *its* tail.

Explanation

None of the possessive forms of pronouns have apostrophes. Only nouns use apostrophes to form possessives.

The form *it's* is a shortened form of *it is*. Similarly *who's* is a shortened form of *who is*.

Possessive pronouns include: *mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs*

Possessive adjectives include: *my, your, his, her, our, their*

Note: Possessive forms are mainly tested in connection with the gerund rule [See rule Aog]. For full information on the apostrophe see rule Goz.

More Examples

- *Its / it's* my birthday today.
(Full form: *It is my birthday* and so *it's* is correct.)
- The disc player they sold on eBay is *ours / ours'* and not *theirs / their's / theirs'*.
(Since no possessive form of a pronoun requires an apostrophe it is obvious that *ours* and *theirs* are correct. The other forms can NEVER be correct.)
- *Whose / who's* party will you attend? *Hers / her's* or mine?
(Since we do not mean *who is* we must choose *whose* party. *Hers* is correct because the other version is NEVER correct.)

Verb agreement

Verb-subject agreement



The murmur of bees buzzing around the grassy meadows **sound** delightful.



The murmur of bees buzzing around the grassy meadows **sounds** delightful.

B

01

Explanation

Every sentence has a verb that agrees in number with its subject. Thus we say, 'The gardener **digs**' but, 'The gardeners **dig**'. This is a speech pattern that we don't need to analyze; it just comes naturally. We only get confused if, for some reason, we fail to match up the verb with the correct subject. Insertion of long phrases between the subject and verb can lead to confusion. In this case *The murmur* is the subject and requires a singular verb: *sounds*.

Common phrases that need to be ignored when finding the subject include those beginning with:

<i>with</i>	<i>as well as</i>
<i>along with</i>	<i>in addition to</i>
<i>together with</i>	<i>accompanied by</i>

Note: Generally a phrase starting with a preposition (*of, by, for, with* etc.) is not the subject of the verb. (So ignore these phrases when checking agreement.)

More Examples

- The cardamom, along with the cinnamon and apple, **give / gives** the dish its unusual flavor.
(*The cardamom gives the dish its flavor.* Ignore the 'along with' phrase!)
- In today's newspaper the case of the missing child as well as the recent murders of policemen **is / are** discussed in the editorial.
(*The case is discussed.* Ignore the 'as well as' phrase.)
- The number of students taking standardized tests **increase / increases** every year.
(*The number increases.* Ignore the prepositional phrase!)

Verb agreement

Compound subjects linked by 'and'



The television set and the washing machine **was** damaged by the short circuit.



The television set and the washing machine **were** damaged by the short circuit.

B

02

Explanation

Two singular subjects joined by **and** must have a plural verb. This can sound strange: *A crow and a pigeon **are** sitting on the fence.* One crow and one pigeon make two birds and require a plural verb.

Note: Do not get confused by the fact that a verb ending in 's' is singular. *He walks*, but *they walk!*

More Examples

- A diamond necklace and an emerald ring **was / were** stolen from the hotel safe.
(*A necklace and a ring* are two items and so **were** stolen is correct.)
- Interviews with prominent activists and a letter from the Prime Minister **form / forms** the core of the objections to the plan.
(*Interviews* and *a letter* constitute a compound subject and need a plural verb: *They **form** the core.*)
- The robin and the holly branch, along with mistletoe and the fir tree, **appear / appears** on innumerable cards every Christmas.
(*The robin and the holly branch **appear**.....*)

Verb agreement

Subject placed after the verb



There **is**, in this early work, a lightness of touch and a gaiety not seen in Hardy's later novels.



There **are**, in this early work, a lightness of touch and a gaiety not seen in Hardy's later novels.

B

03

Explanation

We need to be extra careful in sentences in which the subject follows the verb. The verb must still agree with its subject. In this case *a lightness of touch* and *a gaiety* form a compound subject and so we need a plural verb.

Note: Find the real subject of the verb by asking *who* or *what* before the verb. (In the case above: *Who or what is there?*)

More Examples

- **Is / are** the dessert and the cheese in the fridge?
(*The dessert and the cheese* forms a compound subject, so use **are**. Note that the verb precedes the subject in questions.)
- From such enemies **comes / come** some of our clearest insights.
(*Some of our clearest insights* **come**...)
- Tucked away at the back of the cupboard **was/were** my teddy bear along with other childhood relics.
(*My teddy bear* **was**. This is not a compound subject because *along with* is used, not *and*.)

Verb agreement

Either and neither



Neither of the students **are** prepared for the interview.



Neither of the students **is** prepared for the interview.

B

04

Explanation

Neither and *either* are singular and require a singular verb. In this case, the phrase *of the students* needs to be ignored when sorting out the verb agreement.

This rule applies to the words *either* and *neither* but not to the paired conjunctions *either....or* and *neither....nor* which are explained in rule B05.

Note: Inserting the word *one* after the words *neither* or *either* can make the answer sound more obvious. As in: *Neither **one** of your solutions is correct.*

More Examples

- Neither of them **is / are** going on the excursion.
(Ignore '*of them*'. *Neither is going.*)
- In today's newspaper neither of the controversial cases **appear / appears** on the front page.
(Singular verb to go with *neither*: *neither appears.*)
- I am not convinced that either of your excuses **pass / passes** the test.
(Singular verb to go with *neither*: *neither passes.*)

Verb agreement

Neither...nor and either...or



Neither the passengers nor the driver **were** hurt.



Neither the passengers nor the driver **was** hurt.

B

05

Explanation

In these sentences the verb agrees with the subject that follows **nor**. If we change the order of the subjects in this sentence we will get: *Neither the driver nor the passengers **were** hurt.*

The same rule applies to **either...or**. For example: *Either your parents or your sister **is** required to attend.*

Note: Remember that *neither* or *either* on its own (i.e. without *nor/or*) is singular. [See rule B04]

More Examples

- Neither black pepper nor pimento **has / have** the pungency of green chili.
(In **neither... nor** constructions, the verb agrees with the last mentioned item: *pimento **has***.)
- Either the two beds or the wardrobe **has / have** to be left behind as the removal van is too full.
(The verb agrees with the last mentioned item: *wardrobe **has***.)
- The surgeon insisted that neither he nor his nurses **was / were** responsible for the error.
(The verb agrees with the last mentioned item: *nurses **were***.)

Verb agreement

Singular indefinite pronouns



Each of the supervisors **want** to leave early.



Each of the supervisors **wants** to leave early.

B

o6

Explanation

The following words take singular verbs:

someone / anyone / everyone / somebody / anybody

everybody / each / one / either / nobody / no one / neither

None is nearly always singular. (For the purposes of grammar tests we can safely assume that it is always singular.) For example: **None** of the students **is** able to understand this rule.

Note: Remember to ignore the prepositional phrases following the indefinite pronouns listed above. [See rule B01]

More Examples

- Anybody foolish enough to go near the hot lava **is / are** likely to get burned or to inhale noxious fumes.
(*Anybody is*. Remember to ignore the descriptive phrase.)
- The survey shows that none of the respondents **wants / want** to live close to the radio antenna.
(*None wants*. Remember that it is best to treat **none** as singular, and remember to ignore the phrase after **none**.)
- Gardeners know that everybody, regardless of experience, who **tends / tend** a garden **is / are** going to encounter unexpected problems with certain plants.
(*Everybody who tends is*. Both verbs are singular because they refer to **everybody**.)

Verb agreement

Latin and Greek plurals



Your data *is* not sufficient to justify your conclusion.



Your data *are* not sufficient to justify your conclusion.

B

07

Explanation

Certain words of foreign origin are so often used in the plural that we forget they have singular forms. Check you know the following singular/plural pairs:

memorandum/memoranda

datum/data

criterion/criteria

phenomenon/phenomena

medium/media

analysis/analyses

Note: Remember that some common words are the same for singular and plural: *one species, two species; one aircraft, two aircraft; one deer, two deer etc.*

More Examples

- The phenomena currently under investigation by scientists **concerns / concern** the interactions of laser light with biological materials.
(*Phenomena* is plural and so choose the plural verb **concern**.)
- The criteria used to select the finalist **was / were** unclear to the audience.
(*Criteria* is plural and so choose **were**.)
- Our research failed because the data on Etruscan antiquities **was / were** impossible to obtain in the time available.
(*Data* is plural and so choose **were**.)

Verb agreement

Collective nouns



The orchestra **perform** best in the new auditorium.



The orchestra **performs** best in the new auditorium.

B

08

Explanation

Collective nouns such as *jury*, *team*, *army*, *orchestra*, *equipment* normally take singular verbs.

It is possible for collective nouns to be plural if all the members of the collective are acting independently.

Note: On multiple choice grammar tests it is fairly safe to assume that collective nouns are singular.

More Examples

- An army **march / marches** on **its / their** stomach.
(*Army* is a collective noun so use the singular verb: **marches**, and the singular pronoun: **its**.)
- The new group, consisting of just four young but talented musicians, **makes / make** the old school band seem out-dated.
(Treat *the group* as singular, so use **makes**.)
- The jury, as directed by the judge, **was / were** sequestered for four days.
(The *jury* **was**.)

Verb agreement

A number of / the number of



The number of children contracting these dangerous diseases **are** falling.



The number of children contracting these dangerous diseases **is** falling.

B

09

Explanation

The expression **the number of** takes a singular verb.

The expression **a number of** takes a plural verb. For example:

A number of artists **are** now using this technique.

Note: Do not get distracted by the fact that the modifier is plural.

More Examples

- I wonder whether the number of philosophy students **is / are** about to increase.
(**The number of... is**)
- A number of the trainees that we recruited **has / have** already dropped out.
(**A number of... have**)
- The number of blogs commenting on international affairs **has / have** continued to rise, but at a lower rate.
(**The number of ...has**)

Verb tense, voice and mood

Past perfect tense



Last year I **had gone** on holiday with my brother.



Last year I **went** on holiday with my brother.

Explanation

Use the simple past tense for an action in the past, no matter how long ago the action took place.

The past perfect tense (**had gone, had eaten, had worked** etc.) is used for an action in the past that predates some other action in the past.

For example:

When I **arrived** at the hotel, I found that he **had** already **left**. (**Arrived** is a simple past tense, and **had left** is a past perfect, to signify that the action of leaving was completed before the arriving.)

Note: Imagine marking two past events on a timeline. If one past event clearly precedes the other, put the earlier one in the past perfect tense.

More Examples

- As she took her seat on the train she realized that she **left / had left** her briefcase in the station cafeteria.
(Since leaving the briefcase came before taking her seat, use **had left**.)
- The dinosaurs **roamed / had roamed** the earth in the Jurassic.
(Use the simple past: **roamed**.)
- He said that he **ate / had eaten** the whole cake to prevent giving offense to his host.
(This is an example of indirect speech. When he **said** something he was referring to something earlier and so we should use the past perfect tense: **had eaten**.)

C

01

Verb tense, voice and mood

Present perfect tense



Pollution *is* a problem in this area for the last three years.



Pollution *has been* a problem in this area for the last three years.

Explanation

The present perfect tense (*has been, have worked, has talked, have used* etc.) is used for an action that started in the past and is still continuing (or just finishing).

She has worked for us for two years implies that she is still with us, (or just about to leave). Compare this with: *She worked for us for two years*. Here the use of the simple past tense suggests that she is no longer working for us.

Note: The word *since* (indicating from a particular point in time) requires a present perfect tense. For example: *He has been studying hard since Tuesday*.

More Examples

- The architect *works / has worked / worked* on the plans every day for the last fortnight. (Since the action started in the past and continues, or has just finished, use the present perfect: *has worked*.)
- Until this moment, I *have / have had / had* a tendency to underrate your abilities. (Use the present perfect: *have had* because the tendency continues right up to the present moment.)
- Since he *has suffered / suffered / had suffered* indignities in the past, he was placed under special supervision when he arrived. (The word *since* in this context means *because* and does not necessarily need a present perfect. In fact the past perfect *had suffered* is best because he suffered before he arrived. [See rule C01])

C

02

Verb tense, voice and mood

Future perfect tense



By the time I arrive, the program **will finish**.



By the time I arrive, the program **will have finished**.

Explanation

If two actions are to take place in the future but one will be completed before the other, we use the future perfect tense (**will have finished**, **will have worked**, **will have studied** etc.) for the event that finishes first.

Note: In English we often use the present tense to indicate a future event. In the example above, **arrive** implies a future event.

More Examples

- Next year will be too late to take action, because, by then, the damage **will be / will have been** done.
(Use the future perfect: **will have been done** because the damage will occur before next year arrives.)
- I know that when I go to visit him next week, he **will not have / will not have had** time to complete the assignment.
(The 'assignment' will not have been completed by 'next week', and so use the future perfect: **will not have had**.)
- The director predicts that more students **will / will have** enrolled by the time the course actually starts.
(Use the future perfect: **will have enrolled**.)

C

03

Verb tense, voice and mood

General statements in the present tense



In her works, Elizabeth Gaskell **showed** a strong sympathy with the plight of the poor in the North of England in the 19th century.



In her works, Elizabeth Gaskell **shows** a strong sympathy with the plight of the poor in the North of England in the 19th century.

Explanation

We refer to published materials that are still in existence in the present tense.

We also make general observations in the present tense, for example: *I have observed that students **are not familiar with the fundamentals of the subject.***

C

04

Note: A clause in the past tense such as 'the report showed', or 'the survey noted' is often followed by a general statement in the present tense. For example: *The survey **conducted last year shows that fathers as well as mothers often suffer from 'empty nest' syndrome.***

More Examples

- My name **did / does** not appear in the latest telephone directory.
(Since the telephone directory is still in existence, use the present tense to refer to its contents: **does not appear.**)
- The critic **claims / claimed** in the guest lecture that a skilled dramatist **knew / knows** that what is not said is as important as what is said.
(Since the guest lecture is in the past, use the past tense: **claimed.** But use the present tense for the general claim that the lecturer made: *dramatist **knows.***)
- The physiotherapist remarked that posture **is / was** more important than most people **realize / realized.**
(Use the present tense for both verbs as both are part of the general observation that the physiotherapist made. *Posture **is....people realize.***)

Verb tense, voice and mood

Future and conditional tenses



It was predicted that the green party **will** capture more votes in this election.



It was predicted that the green party **would** capture more votes in this election.

Explanation

The conditional tenses (**would capture**, **might study**, **would have taught**, etc.) are not used after present tenses. So we can write, *He says that he will go*, but not *He says that he would go*.

Future tenses (**will capture**, **will talk**, **will have talked**) are not used after past tenses. So we can write, *He said that he would go*, but not *He said that he will go*.

Note: In future tenses use *will* not *shall*. *Shall* is now considered old fashioned. (*I shall go out tonight* is perfectly correct, but sounds stilted.)

More Examples

- The newspaper reports that he **will / would** apply for re-election next year.
(*Reports* is present tense and so use **will**.)
- The warning that the volcano might erupt in the near future, has made me think that it **will / would** be better not to go.
(*Has made* is present perfect tense and so use **will**.)
- If you **eat / ate** more vegetables, you would build up your immunity.
(Since *would* is a conditional tense, use the past tense **ate** for the preceding verb.)

Verb tense, voice and mood

'If' constructions



If you **would have done** this for me I would have been grateful.



If you **had done** this for me I would have been grateful.

Explanation

Conditional sentences follow a few common patterns.

In the following examples one part of the sentence is the condition (we can call this the *if clause*), and one part is the main clause (we can call this the *non-if clause*).

Note the verb tenses in these four classic cases:

1. If he **works** hard, he **will** do well.
2. If he **worked** hard, he **would** do well.
3. If he **had worked** hard, he **would have** done well.
4. If he **were** to work hard, he **would** do well.

Note that the verb in the *if clause* determines the verb in the *non-if clause* (i.e. present tense is used with future; past with conditional; past perfect with past conditional; and subjunctive with conditional).

Note: There is never a *would* in an *if clause*.

Note: The *if clause* does not have to come first in the sentence.

More Examples

- The business would prosper, if you **lower / lowered** the fees.
(Use the past tense **lowered** to match the conditional tense.)
- Were you to include a preface to the book, I **would / will** be happy to help you write it.
(In this sentence *if* is implied not stated: *If you were.....I would....*)
- The archeologist claimed that if the first excavation had been conducted properly, there **would / would have** been no need for the second dig.
(With the past perfect *had been conducted*, use the past conditional: **would have**.)

Verb tense, voice and mood

The passive voice



New enthusiasm was generated when the director praised the workforce.



The director generated new enthusiasm when he praised the workforce.

Explanation

In an active sentence the subject does the action: *I closed the door.*

In a passive sentence the action is done to the subject: *The door was closed by me.*

We should use active constructions wherever possible because they are simpler and make it clear who is doing the action. For example if we say, *the cup was broken*, we do not know who broke the cup; the active form, *I broke the cup*, is much more direct.

In the 'incorrect' specimen sentence we do not know who 'generated' the enthusiasm. In the correct answer, the ***director*** 'generated' the enthusiasm.

Note: Active sentences are less wordy, and for most sentences 'shorter is better' as long as the grammar is correct!

More Examples

Change passive to active where necessary:

- A number of disease states were described by the medical director in his lecture.
(The active version might begin: *In his lecture, the medical director described a number of...*)
- In the well-known story, the giant, Goliath, is slain by David.
(This is passive. The active version is: *David slays the giant, Goliath.* In this case, whether you choose active or passive will depend on whom you want to emphasize.)
- The liquid is boiled to concentrate the solution.
(This passive voice implies that the liquid is boiled by someone who does not need to be mentioned. There is no need to change the sentence, but the active form would have to invent a 'do-er', for example: *We boil the liquid to...*)

Verb tense, voice and mood

The subjunctive in impossible / very unlikely situations



If Mahatma Gandhi **was** alive today, he would deplore the rise of terrorism.



If Mahatma Gandhi **were** alive today, he would deplore the rise of terrorism.

Explanation

Use **were** rather than **was** for something impossible, counter to fact, or highly unlikely. In this case it is impossible for Gandhi to be alive today, and so use **were**.

For the other main use of the subjunctive, see rule Cog.

C
08

Note: The subjunctive is rare in spoken English but common on grammar tests!

More Examples

- If it **was / were** a simple matter of refunding the amount, we would be glad to agree to your request.
(Use **were** since it is clearly not a simple matter.)
- I wish that I **was / were** with you at this difficult time.
(Use **were** since the sentence implies that it is impossible to be there.)
- If I **was / were** you, I would revise this rule.
(I cannot be you, and so use **were**.)

Verb tense, voice and mood

The subjunctive in indirect commands



It is of utmost importance that the judge **should examine** the statements.



It is of utmost importance that the judge **examine** the statements.

Explanation

Strong statements such as, *it is required that, it is of great importance that, the law requires that, the government insists that, the expert recommends that*, are followed by a subjunctive (*examine, be done, write* etc).

These 'strong statements' are usually indirect commands. Note that the main verb is followed by the word *that*.

We do not use the forms *should write, should examine* or *writes, examines* etc. in indirect commands.

This subjunctive is most often associated with legal and governmental matters.

Consider another example: *The law requires that seat belts **be** worn.*

Note: The subjunctive mood is formed by dropping 'to' from the infinitive.

More Examples

- The coach ordered that the injured player **rest / rested / should rest**.
(Use the subjunctive: **rest**)
- It is required that forms **be / are / should be** prepared and circulated before the meeting.
(Use the subjunctive: **be**)
- It is possible that he **will make / make / might make** a mistake.
(This is not a subjunctive, as no command is implied. Not all verbs followed by 'that' require a subjunctive. In this case use **will make**.)

Parallelism

Lists



I am interested in geology, playing chess and going to the cinema.



I am interested in ***studying geology, playing chess and going to the theatre.***

Explanation

All items in a list or series should be in the same grammatical form. Look for items separated by commas.

Look for items linked by conjunctions (*but, and, nor, or* etc.) In the example above, the list of subjects is joined by *and*.

When you see '*and*' check that the linked items are in the same grammatical form. In the case above an alternative 'correct' version is: *I am interested in geology, chess and cinema.*

Take another example:

*Her new job involves **answering** letters, **meeting** new clients and **handling** the day to day problems that arise in the office.*

In this sentence all the items are in the same form (participle phrases) and so are correct.

Note: In a list where the items are of unequal length (different numbers of words) we usually put the longest item last.

More Examples

Change the indicated word or phrase where required:

- Good interpersonal communication requires the ability to listen as well as talking.
(Change ***talking*** to ***talk***.)
- It is claimed that handwriting reveals traits such as ambition, optimism, confidence and ***whether the writer is imaginative***.
(Change to ***imagination***.)
- You must be careful to read the instructions on the packet, measure out the exact quantity of water and ***to stir*** the soup while it cooks.
(Remove '*to*' from ***to stir***. Alternatively, this sentence could have been improved by using infinitives in all elements of the list: ***to read, to measure and to stir***.)

Parallelism

Paired conjunctions



Her latest novel is both *an original work* and *exciting*.



Her latest novel is both *original* and *exciting*.

Explanation

Ideas requiring parallel constructions can be linked by a simple conjunction such as *and* or by a pair of conjunctions such as:

both...and...
not...but...
either...or...
more...than...
as much...as...
not only...but also...

Put the same part of speech after both conjunctions.

Note: *Not...only* is a favorite with examiners. It can also be correct to use *not only...but*, or *not only...but rather*, or *not...but rather*.

D

02

More Examples

Correct where needed to improve parallelism:

- Purdie has been credited more with logic than the ability to empathize.
(Change *the ability to empathize* to *with empathy*.)
- It is not his spending his own money that I object to, but that he wastes money on gadgets that he will never use.
(Change *that he wastes* to *his wasting*.)
- The task is to scrutinize both the data on which the conclusion is based and examine the assumptions underlying the research.
(Remove *examine* after *and*.)

Parallelism

Verb tense and voice continuity



The journalist wrote his article yesterday, and ***it was submitted by him*** today.



The journalist wrote his article yesterday, and ***submitted it*** today.

Explanation

Avoid shifts from active to passive voice (at least when the subject is the same).

Also avoid unnecessary shifts in tense. For example:

Incorrect: Every day he runs, swims and ***will play*** tennis.

Correct: Every day he runs, swims and ***plays*** tennis.

Note: The items in a list are separated by commas, but you can leave out the comma before ***and***. It is not incorrect to put a comma before ***and*** – it is just a matter of style.

D

03

More Examples

Improve the parallelism where needed:

- As soon as the director said 'cut', she used to run off the set, would rush to the dressing room, changed clothes and went home.

(Change the last three verbs to ***rush, change, and go***.)

- You are required not only to wash and dry the dishes but they should also be put away.

(Change ***they should also be put away*** to ***to put them away***.)

- For security reasons, no cameras or phones may be brought into the exhibition, but a visitor can carry a small purse.

(Make the second part passive: ***but a small purse can be carried***. Or make the sentence active: ***a visitor can carry a small purse but not a camera or a phone***.)

Parallelism

Pronoun continuity



One should take **one's** health seriously and not endanger **your** life by smoking.



You should take **your** health seriously and not endanger **your** life by smoking.

Explanation

The indefinite pronoun **one** must be used consistently; you cannot change from **one** to **he** or **you** in the same sentence.

Similarly other pronouns must be used consistently to maintain parallelism and continuity in number. For example:

Incorrect: *A person must apply for a license before **they** can fish in this river.*

(**A person** is singular and for number continuity we will have to change to **he/she**)

Note: Avoid the indefinite pronoun **one** in your essay writing – it makes the style seem old fashioned and stilted, and you get stuck with it because you cannot shift to another pronoun without sounding inconsistent.

More Examples

Correct where needed:

- As we followed the trail along the edge of the lake, a boat suddenly appeared from the mist over the water giving you an eerie feeling.
(Change **you** to **us**. Note the way test makers put in so many words between the troublesome pronouns.)
- The giant squid has not often been photographed in its native environment, mainly because they are rare and live at great depth in the ocean.
(Change **they** to **it** because *the giant squid* is the name of a species and is singular.)
- Anyone who attended the workshop must submit their assessment sheets before the end of the week.
(With **anyone** we need a singular pronoun in place of **their**. To avoid using **his** or **her**, we could change **anyone** to **all those**.)

Dangling modifiers and misplaced parts

Misplaced words



I **only** walked as far as the end of the avenue.



I walked **only** as far as the end of the avenue.

Explanation

To avoid ambiguity put adverbs such as *nearly*, *hardly*, *only*, *almost*, *just*, *even*, *merely*, next to the words they modify.

In the incorrect sentence above, *only walked* would imply that I walked but did not do anything else like run or drive. Similarly, *I almost ate all the cake*, and *I ate almost all the cake*, would have different meanings.

Note: Avoid ending sentences with *only*.

More Examples

Correct where needed:

- He had nearly solved the puzzle when he was interrupted by a noise that almost was deafening.
(Change *almost was* to *was almost*)
- I am not the actual owner; I am the tenant only.
(Move *only* in front of *the tenant*.)
- After making the cake, I just had enough flour to make one quiche.
(Put *just* in front of *enough flour*.)

E

01

Dangling modifiers and misplaced parts

Misplaced parts



When his son went to boarding school, **he was already an old man.**



He was already an old man when his son went to boarding school.

Explanation

Incorrect sentence order can distort the meaning.

In the incorrect version above, it appears that the son was old when he went to boarding school.

The words used in both sentences are identical, but the word order changes the meaning.

Note: Where possible avoid placing a modifier between subject and verb. For example, the following order would be awkward: *He, when his son went to school, was already old.*

More Examples

Correct where needed:

- The manuscript has been submitted to the editor that we accepted yesterday.
(Change to ***The manuscript that we accepted...***)
- The tour takes you to Petra, a city which traded in spices over two millennia ago, in present-day Jordan.
(The position of the commas helps us to understand that Petra is now in Jordan, but it would be better to make this point clearer by moving ***in present-day Jordan*** so that it follows *Petra*.)
- We found the photograph of our parents both wearing flowered shirts in the bottom of the drawer.
(The parents were not in the drawer, so move ***in the bottom of the drawer*** to the beginning of the sentence.)

Dangling modifiers and misplaced parts

Dangling modifiers



Sitting around the dinner table, *family decisions* were taken



Sitting around the dinner table, *the family* took decisions.

Explanation

Dangling modifiers are phrases that should describe or modify a noun, but are misleading because the noun is omitted or the modifier is next to the wrong noun.

In the example above, we need to know **who** is sitting around the dinner table.

Similarly, *A good student, the teacher gave him an excellent recommendation*, makes it sound as though **a good student** describes the teacher.

To correct a dangling modifier that starts a sentence, either add a suitable noun or pronoun after the comma, or introduce a noun or pronoun before the comma. For example:

Incorrect: *Arriving late, they started the game without me.*

Better: *Arriving late, I missed the start of the game.*

Or: *I arrived late, so they started the game without me.*

Note: Watch out for dangling modifiers at the end of sentences. For example: *Insomnia can be a problem when jetlagged.* (*Insomnia* is not *jetlagged*!)

E

03

More Examples

Identify the problem and suggest a correction:

- While working at a vineyard in France, the idea of producing wines in India excited Kumar.
(Sounds as though the *idea* was working in France. Rearrange so that the name *Kumar* comes after the comma.)
- The innovative bed is stowed away under the floor and appears when pressing a button.
(Sounds as though the *bed* is pressing a button. Change to the passive *when a button is pressed* or insert a pronoun, e.g. *when you press a button*)
- The stereotypical scientist solves arcane problems, struggling alone in a laboratory.
(Sounds as though the *problems* are struggling. Move the modifier *struggling...laboratory* to the beginning of the sentence so that *the stereotypical scientist* follows logically.)

Idiom and diction

Idiom



Marie Curie is **considered as** the archetypal female scientist.



Marie Curie is **considered** the archetypal female scientist.

Explanation

The word **consider** should not be followed by **as**.

If we had changed '*considered*' to '*regarded*' then we would need to use '*as*'.

We say that such wording is idiomatic English. Idioms are expressions in a language which are considered correct usage but for which it would be difficult to find a rational explanation. Why do we say **different from**, and not **different than**? Or why **try to**, and not **try and**? The answer is the correct versions are accepted usage. See the 'top 20 idioms' page in the extras section.

Note: The best way to find the idioms that you don't know is by doing practice tests. The mistakes you make will tell you which ones you need to write down and learn.

More Examples

Correct where needed:

- The photographer was on the verge to give up his search when he came across a suitable subject.
(*On the verge of* giving...)
- We credited him as having more common sense than he showed in handling the problem.
(*Credited with* having. Use *credited with* for a quality. But *credited to* an account is fine.)
- The offender was charged with arson after he set light to the wooden shed.
(No error)

F

01

Idiom and diction

Diction



When the committee member absented herself without permission, she **flaunted** the rules that she had helped to formulate.



When the committee member absented herself without permission, she **flouted** the rules that she had helped to formulate.

Explanation

The use of an incorrect word is termed a *diction error*.

The word **flaunt** means to show off, whereas **flout** means disregard.

There are several pairs of words that are commonly confused that might be tested on a grammar examination. They include: **disinterested/uninterested**, **imply/infer**, and **to affect/to effect**. Make sure you know the difference in each case. See the 'top 25 diction errors' page in the extras section.

Note: The best way to find the diction errors that you don't know is by doing practice tests. The mistakes you make will tell you which ones you need to write down and learn.

More Examples

- The punishment failed to **affect / effect** any change in the child's behavior.
(*effect*)
- Your students might have **inferred / implied** that your knowledge of **economic/ economical** matters is deficient because you **implied / inferred** in your lecture that a cut in the bank rate would **further / farther** aggravate the problem.
(*inferred; economic; implied; further*)
- The results of the survey **compliment / complement** the study **sited / cited** in the grant application.
(*complement; cited*)

Punctuation

The semicolon



His musical taste is certainly eclectic, he has recordings ranging from classical to rock, jazz and even Chinese opera.



His musical taste is certainly eclectic; he has recordings ranging from classical to rock, jazz and even Chinese opera.

Explanation

The error in the sentence above is called a *comma splice*: a comma is used incorrectly to separate sentences.

The main use of the semicolon is to separate two sentences. Two sentences can be linked by conjunctions such as *and* or *but*, or separated by a period (full stop) or a colon or semicolon.

The following is **incorrect** because the second half is not a complete sentence (there is no main verb):

His lectures were always soporific; the pedestrian matter sending the students to sleep.

Note: Semicolons can also be used to separate the items in a list when the items themselves are long and include commas.

More Examples

Insert a semicolon where needed:

- The aspirin has not relieved my headache, however, my temperature is less.

(Change the first *comma* to a *semicolon*. Note that **however** cannot fill the role of a coordinating conjunction, and cannot replace a period. Also note the need for the comma after **however**.)

- Tomorrow's meeting is certainly timely, further delay will worsen matters.

(Change the *comma* to a *semicolon*.)

- I cannot be held responsible for his actions, even though he is my brother.

(No semicolon needed.)

Punctuation

The apostrophe



Lets paint the childrens' room while they are away.



Let's paint the children's room while they are away.

Explanation

The apostrophe can be used to signify *omission* or *possession*. In the case above, **let's** is short for let us (omission). **Children's room** requires an apostrophe after **children** as they are the 'possessors' of the room.

Possession: In the case of possessive pronouns or adjectives such as **its, ours, theirs, yours, his, hers, whose**, an apostrophe is not required. In the case of a noun we use an apostrophe after the name of the possessor: *the boy's cycle; the women's room; James's novels; the students' journals*.

Omission: In common expressions such as **don't, didn't, won't, can't**, and **it's**, the apostrophe indicates something missing. So **it's** is a contraction of **it is**, and **who's** a contraction of **who is**.

Note: To make a noun possessive, put an apostrophe after the full name of the 'possessor', and **add an 's' if it is needed for sound effect**. For example, the *dresses of the girls* becomes **girls' dresses**; the *blades of the scissors* becomes the **scissors' blades**; the movement of women becomes **women's movement**.

More Examples

Decide whether and where apostrophes are needed:

- I wouldnt worry about whose paying for the boys education; their parents arent short of money.

(**Wouldn't; who's; boys'; aren't**)

- Its revealing that the dog never wags its tail at the sound of its owners voice.

(**It's... owner's**. Note that **its** tail and **its** owner's are correct.)

- Dont you think we ought to take the girls to tomorrows concert?

(**Don't; tomorrow's**)

Punctuation

The colon



The realist is concerned with verisimilitude; the depiction of situations and events that give the impression of fidelity to life.



The realist is concerned with verisimilitude: the depiction of situations and events that give the impression of fidelity to life.

Explanation

The main use of a colon is to *introduce a list, definition or quotation*.

In the incorrect sentence above, a semicolon is inappropriate since the second part of the sentence does not have a main verb. The colon is better because the second part **defines** the word **verisimilitude**.

Note: What follows a colon does **not have to be** a full sentence (although it could be!)

More Examples

Decide whether and where a colon is needed:

- My best friends include Daisy, Kim and Kwame.
(No colon needed.)
- The conservationists decided that four rooms needed restoration, kitchen, master bedroom, library, and study.
(Replace the comma after *restoration* with a colon.)
- Her exact words were He should never have been chosen for the role because his face does not have the required range of expressions.
(Put a colon before the quotation.)

Miscellaneous

Which and that



The results of the experiment are ambiguous, **which** is surprising since the phenomenon seems so clear-cut.



The results of the experiment are ambiguous, **a surprising outcome** since the phenomenon appears so clear-cut.

Explanation

The relative pronouns *which* and *that* should normally introduce expressions that relate to a clearly identifiable noun that precedes them. *The statue, which is priceless, is kept in the storeroom*, is correct because the phrase **which is priceless** refers to the noun **statue**.

In the incorrect sentence above, **which is surprising** has no preceding noun to which it refers.

Note: On most grammar tests you do not need to choose between **which** and **that**. If the word **which** has no noun to which it refers, then changing to **this** or **that** won't help.

More Examples

Correct where necessary:

- The population of lions in the Gir Forest has failed to increase, which worries conservationists.
(Change *which* to *a fact that* or a similar expression.)
- The book that you lent me last week lies unread on the desk.
(No change.)
- Seasonal fruits have increased in price, which makes it difficult for families to eat healthily.
(Change *which* to *a situation that* or a similar expression.)

Miscellaneous

Among / between and one another / each other



There was an argument **between** the students, teachers and administrators about the site of the new canteen.



There was an argument **among** the students, teachers and administrators about the site of the new canteen.

Explanation

Between is used when there are two items/groups/ people etc. and **among** is used when there are more than two.

Similarly, **each other** is used for two people and **one another** for more than two.

For example:

*The two researchers tried to convince **each other** of the correctness of their positions.*

Note: Check other **number** problems in rule Ho4

More Examples

- My children argue **among / between** themselves about their toys but the youngest of the three usually has the last word.
(Since there are three, **among** is correct.)
- Police forces in different countries often exchange information and even support **one another / each other** by lending experts in particular cases.
(Since more than two countries are implied, use **one another**.)

Miscellaneous

Comparative and superlative



Of the two choices, this is the **best** solution.



Of the two choices, this is the **better** solution.

Explanation

The comparative forms **better**, **cleverer**, **shorter**, **clearer**, **more beautiful**, **more intelligent** etc. are used when referring to two items.

The superlative forms **best**, **cleverest**, **shortest**, **clearest**, **most beautiful**, **most intelligent** etc. are used for more than two.

Be careful with **superior** and **inferior**. These words are already comparatives and cannot be used with *more*.

Note: *Unique* is superlative and so we cannot say **most unique**.

More Examples

- The **shorter / shortest** sentence is the one to choose if you can see no major grammatical error in either.
(The use of *either* tells us we are talking about two sentences and so **shorter** is correct.)
- The view from the top of the hill was one of the **most / more** beautiful I have ever seen.
(Since we are talking about one out of many, use **most**.)
- Of your two essays, the first is **worse / worst**; the second is **more superior / superior** both in terms of language and content.
(**Worse** is a comparative and is correct because there are two essays. **Superior** is already comparative and so we do not need *more*.)

Miscellaneous

Less/fewer and amount/number



There were **less** problems with the new approach.



There were **fewer** problems with the new approach.

Explanation

Fewer is used to refer to items that are individually countable: problems, people, wheat grains etc.

Less is used for things that cannot be counted: sugar, wheat, love, strength etc.

Similarly, we have a **number** of people or grains of wheat, but an **amount** of love or wheat.

Note: Lesser is reserved for describing things and people of lower status/quality etc. For example:

*This is the **lesser** of two evils.*

*Of the two philanthropists, he is the **lesser** man because his motivation is not as noble.*

More Examples

- The study showed that teenagers who ate more vitamin A had **less / fewer / lesser** spots on their skin and **less / fewer / lesser** dandruff.
(...**fewer** spots...**less** dandruff)
- The pupils complained about the **amount / number** of books they had to get through.
(**Number** of books)
- On a cloudy night there appears to be **less / fewer / lesser** stars.
(**Fewer** stars. Stars are individually countable, even if we can't count all of them!)

Miscellaneous

Other and else



Some believe that Pope was more technically competent than **any** poet of his generation.



Some believe that Pope was more technically competent than **any other** poet of his generation.

Explanation

In the example above, if we omit the word **other**, we are not including Pope in the category 'poet'.

Similarly, we need **other** in the following sentence: *The United States uses more energy than does any other country in the world.*

(If we omit **other**, we are saying that the United States is not a country.)

Else is required for a similar reason, for example: *He works harder than anyone else in the department.*

Note: For more examples of errors involving essential words that get left out see Comparisons [Rule Hog] and Ellipsis [Rule H10]

More Examples

- Most people fear a cobra more than **any / any other** snake, and any snake more than **any / any other** lizard.
(...more than any **other** snake.....any snake more than **any** lizard.)
- Thomas showed more aptitude than **any / any other** boy in the class.
(The answer here will depend on whether Thomas is in the same class as the other boys. If he is, use **any other**. If Thomas is not a class member, then use **any**.)

Miscellaneous

Hopefully



Hopefully, you can complete the project before the deadline.



I hope that you can complete the project before the deadline.

Explanation

Hopefully is an adverb and should be used to modify a verb.

Put more simply you can use **hopefully** when there is some action being done *hopefully*. For example: *Looking for the lights of his hometown, the tired traveler peered **hopefully** into the distance.*

Otherwise change hopefully to **I hope, we hope, it is to be hoped** etc.

Note that in everyday speech it is now acceptable to use *hopefully* to mean *it is to be hoped*.

Note: On a grammar test, a sentence starting with 'Hopefully' with a comma immediately after it, will be incorrect.

More Examples

Change 'hopefully' where necessary:

- The inveterate gambler is not rational; time after time he buys his chips and enters the casino hopefully.
(No change. The action *enters* is being done *hopefully*.)
- The noise is dreadful, but, hopefully, the work will be completed soon.
(Change to *I hope*, or *we hope* etc.)

Miscellaneous

Like



Gases **like** sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide cause acid rain.



Gases **such as** sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide cause acid rain.

Explanation

The word **like** can be used in comparisons, as in *I have a car like yours.*

Like cannot be used to introduce members of a category.

When introducing members of a group use **such as**. [See example above]

Like cannot be used interchangeably with the conjunction **as**.

Use **as** to introduce a clause (subject and verb). Use **like** to introduce a noun or pronoun.

For example: *He did **as** he said. He, **like** me, is going to be late. These cookies, **like** mine, are very tasty. These cookies are tasty, **as** are yours.*

Note: *Like* often sounds correct when it is not. Try putting *as* or *such as* in place of *like* – if either sounds correct, it will be!

More Examples

Change **like** where needed:

- My brother has a shirt like mine.
(No change)
- The works of authors like James and Joyce are difficult to comprehend.
(Change to **such as**)
- Unlike her predecessors, the present incumbent is approachable, just like she promised in her campaign.
(Change *just like* to **just as**.)

Miscellaneous

Comparisons



The wages of a recent graduate entering this firm are not much lower than ***an experienced worker***.



The wages of a recent graduate entering this firm are not much lower than ***those of an experienced worker***.



The wages of a recent graduate entering this firm are not much lower than ***an experienced worker's***.

Explanation

We must compare similar things. In this case compare wages with wages. Look out for the words ***like, unlike, similar to, compared with*** etc. and see that the items compared are really comparable.

Watch that you compare singular with singular and plural with plural. For example:

Incorrect: The children in this school eat more snacks than does a child in rural schools.

Better: The children in this school eat more snacks than do the children in a rural school.

Also fine: The children in this school eat more snacks than do children in rural schools.

Note: Make sure that *that* is used for singular, and *these* for plural items in comparisons.

More Examples

Correct where necessary:

- Sales of mobile telephones have increased this year much more than fixed connections.
(...*than have sales of fixed connections.*)
- Because they have limited capital, many young entrepreneurs are able to withstand late payments less well than big businesses.
(...*than do big businesses.*)
- The wages paid to a woman in this industry are less than those paid to men.
(Change *a woman* to *women*. Or change *men* to *a man*.)

Miscellaneous

Hardly and scarcely



Considering how late we arrived, we **couldn't hardly** complain about the service at the hotel.



Considering how late we arrived, we **could hardly** complain about the service at the hotel.

Explanation

The words **scarcely** and **hardly** are negative and are not used with other negatives.

Double negative errors such as *I don't want no education* are easier to spot.

Note: Other negative words to watch for include: **seldom**, **rarely**, and **but**.

More Examples

Correct where necessary:

- Such generosity is not seldom encountered.
(Remove **not**)
- I couldn't but protest when he claimed that he couldn't hardly manage to pay his rent.
(**I had to protest.....he could hardly manage....**)
- The patient said that he hadn't scarcely slept all night.
(**He had scarcely...**)

Miscellaneous

Ellipsis



I have to confess that I am ***uninterested*** and bored by American football.



I have to confess that I am ***uninterested in*** and bored by American football.

Explanation

The word *uninterested* cannot be followed by *by*, we need to use *in*. In trying to make sentences concise we need to check that we haven't omitted essential words.

Ellipsis is the term for omission of a word. The example above concerns a missing preposition. Sometimes an essential part of a verb is omitted, for example:

He has frequently, and, no doubt, will continue to make the same mistake in his annual address.

In this case, the first verb is incomplete and the sentence should start, *He has frequently made...*

Note: Check 'Comparisons' [Rule Hog] and 'Other and else' [Rule Ho5] for other cases where important words can get left out.

More Examples

Correct where necessary:

- Many people express enthusiasm and appreciation of the value of sports in the abstract, but never actually participate in any game.
(*Enthusiasm for...*)
- I have and will always be an advocate of animal rights.
(*I have **been**...*)
- He is and always was a hard worker.
(No change.)

Extras

Parts of Speech

Multiple choice grammar tests test your appreciation of effective sentence construction. They do not test your knowledge of grammatical terminology. You have no need to rush off for a copy of a grammar book to learn clause analysis, but a basic knowledge of the parts of speech might come in handy to understand the explanations of our 50 essential writing rules. So here is a checklist of elementary terms:

- **A noun** is a word that names something – it can be the name of an object (*pen, computer, tree*), a person (*Tom, Dick or Hari*), or an abstract quality (*love, hope, optimism*). Collective nouns refer to groups of things or people (*army, jury, herd*).
- **An adjective** is a word that describes a noun (*obsolete pen, advanced computer, evergreen tree, peeping Tom, foolish optimism*).
- **A verb** is a word that denotes an action or a state (*run, walk, fly, be, have, grow*). Verbs can be recognized by the fact that you can put *to* in front of them – *to struggle, to annoy, to be*. Verbs have tenses, moods and voices and have to agree with their subjects...as you will find explained in the 50 rules.
- **An adverb** is a word that describes a verb – it tells us how, where or when an action is done (*run fast, walk slowly, grow rapidly*). An adverb can also modify (**modify** = tell more about) an adjective – an *unnecessarily* devious question, for example.
- **An article** precedes a noun where needed – this is a tricky thing for people who learn English as a second language; they never know where to put *the, a, or an*. American grammar tests usually assume that you *do* know, so we don't have to bother too much about these.
- **A pronoun** is a little word that stands in place of a noun. *I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they, who, me, mine, her, hers, its* – are all pronouns. Life is too short to manage without pronouns. They save a lot of time but they are easy to misuse.
- **A relative pronoun** stands in for a noun but it also links parts of a sentence. *Who, which, that* are relative pronouns that are tested on grammar tests. For example, *The book that I gave you is interesting. That* relates to the noun *book*, and introduces the clause 'I gave you'.
- **A preposition** is one of those little words such as *in, by, for, between, against, from* and so on. They usually come before nouns to indicate position – *in* the garden, *up* the garden path. There is often no logic whatsoever in preposition usage – we say it is **idiomatic** English when we use expressions such as, different *from*, or compare *with*, or arrive *at* the party but arrive *on* time.
- **A conjunction** is a word used to connect clauses or to connect words with similar functions. *And, but, if, though, because, for, unless, yet, or* are common conjunctions.

Correlative conjunctions are paired conjunctions such as *not only...but also*, *either...or*, and *neither...nor*.

- **The infinitive** is best thought of as the official 'name' of a verb. Infinitives always start with 'to'. Examples: *to run*, *to be*, *to hate*, *to sing* etc.
- **Participles** are parts of verbs. There are two kinds, present and past participles. They are used along with an auxiliary verb to form a compound tense: *am **walking***, *was **sitting***, *had **been eating***; *has **eaten***, *had **walked*** etc. The present participle ends in 'ing'. The past participle usually ends in 'ed' – some of the exceptions are given in the next section: Top 20 Irregular Verbs. Participles can have other uses as nouns or adjectives. Participles often crop up on tests as part of modifiers (For example: *Rules, **taken** to the extreme, become very limiting*)
- **Gerunds** are present participles used as nouns. A gerund will, therefore, end in 'ing'. You need to know which is which because a pronoun before a participle is in the object case, but a pronoun before a gerund is in the possessive form. Study the three sentences below to help you distinguish a present participle from a gerund, and from a participle used as an adjective.
 1. He was **talking** on his phone during class. (Present participle used to form the present continuous tense of the verb *to talk*.)
 2. His **talking** on the phone disrupted the class. (Gerund)
 3. Look at him **talking** on the phone while we are trying to listen. (We are looking at *him*. *Talking* is giving more information about him, and so acts as an adjective.)

Extras

Top 20 irregular verbs

Regular verbs in English are sometimes called weak verbs. The past participle and the simple past tense have the same form in weak verbs.

For example:

I walk (present tense); *I walked* (simple past tense); *I have walked* (present perfect tense); *I had walked* (past perfect tense.)

A strong verb has a past participle that differs from the past tense.

For example:

I see; I saw; I have/had seen

Here are twenty strong verbs:

Present tense	Past tense	Past participle
Arise	Arose	Arisen
Bear	Bore	Borne
Become	Became	Become
Begin	Began	Begun
Choose	Chose	Chosen
Drink	Drank	Drunk
Fly	Flew	Flown
Forsake	Forsook	Forsaken
Lie (down)	Lay	Lain
Ring	Rang	Rung
Sew	Sewed	Sewn
Shrink	Shrank	Shrunk
Sink	Sank	Sunk
Slay	Slew	Slain
Smite	Smote	Smitten
Spring	Sprang	Sprung
Stink	Stank	Stunk
Strive	Strove	Striven
Swim	Swam	Swum
Weave	Wove	Woven

Extras

Top 20 idioms

There are too many idioms in English to give a comprehensive list, but here are twenty that are regular favorites with examiners.

Consider and regard

Consider X	He is considered an expert.
Regard as	She is regarded as an expert.

Insist and insistence

Insist on	I insist on good manners.
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Prohibit and prevent

Prohibit X	They prohibit smoking here.
Prevent from	We are prevented from appearing.

Forbid

Forbid someone to do	I forbid you to enter the room.
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Charge and credit

Charge with a crime/responsibility	The police charged her with murder.
Credit with a quality	I credited him with common sense.
Charge for an expense	I was charged for the broken item.
Give credit for	He gave me the credit for our success.
Charge to an account	I charged the flowers to my credit account.
Credit to an account	I credited ten dollars to my savings account.

Known

Known as (name)	I am known as Meg.
Known to be (quality)	We are known to be lazy.

Agree and disagree

Agree or disagree with a person	I agree with Jan.
Agree to do something	Jan agrees to go with me.
Agree on (or upon) a plan	We both agree on the timetable.

Angry

Angry with a person	You are angry with me.
Angry about a situation	We were angry about the theft.
Angry at a thing	He was angry at the car for breaking down.

Capable and incapable

Capable/incapable of	She is incapable of lying.
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Native

People are natives of a place	He is a native of Aberdeen.
Species are native to	The tomato plant is native to South America.

Distinguish

Distinguish X from Y	Distinguishing right from wrong is not easy.
Distinguish between X and Y	I cannot distinguish between left and right.

Help and helpful

Helps to do something	Aspirin helps to reduce fever.
Helpful in doing	Aspirin is helpful in reducing fever.

Remind and reminiscent

Remind of	You remind me of him.
Reminiscent of	This place is reminiscent of the wilderness.

Similar and different

Similar to	This material is similar to bone china.
Different from	Glass is different from crystal.

Compare

Compare with (for differences)	My essay cannot be compared with his.
Compare/comparable to (for similarities)	My essay is comparable to his.

Emigrate and immigrate

Emigrate from a country	The family emigrated from Poland.
Immigrate into/to a country	They immigrated to America from Poland.

Plan

Plan to do something	We plan to go for a picnic.
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Prefer and preference

Prefer to do	I prefer to wait.
Prefer X to Y	I prefer brown bread to white.
Preference for	My preference is for classical music.

Try and refrain

Try to do	I try to be tidy.
Refrain from doing	Please refrain from using your cell phone.

Dependent and independent

Dependent on	We are dependent on technology.
Independent of	My decision is independent of the cost.

Extras

Top 25 diction errors

Diction errors on grammar tests often focus on pairs of words that are commonly confused. Here are twenty of those commonly confused pairs. Study the sentences to see the difference in meaning and usage.

Imply	In his speech he <i>implied</i> that his predecessor was an idiot.
Infer	I <i>inferred</i> from what he said that his predecessor was an idiot.
Complementary	The use of <i>complementary</i> colors and textures enhanced the outfit.
Complimentary	The designer's <i>complimentary</i> remark pleased the model.
Disinterested	A judge must be a <i>disinterested</i> listener: bias cannot be allowed.
Uninterested	A person <i>uninterested</i> in fashion will not enjoy this exhibition.
Principal	The <i>Principal</i> of my school taught us the principles of grammar.
Principle	The <i>principle</i> of flotation formed the principal part of the lecture.
Flaunt	He ostentatiously <i>flaunted</i> his wealth and so antagonized the poor.
Flout	He <i>flouted</i> convention and refused to wear traditional dress.
Liabile	I am <i>liable</i> for the debts my son incurred.
Likely	It is <i>likely</i> that I will have to appear in court.
Advice (n)	If you take my <i>advice</i> , you will stay at home.
Advise (v)	I <i>advise</i> you to listen to his opinion.

Ingenious	His <i>ingenious</i> invention took everyone by surprise.
Ingenuous	His <i>ingenuous</i> nature meant that he was easily fooled.
All ready	We are <i>all ready</i> to depart.
Already	It is <i>already</i> late.
Allusion	The audience did not understand the <i>allusions</i> to Shakespeare.
Illusion	The disappearance of the car was an <i>illusion</i> created by mirrors.
Farther	Do not go <i>farther</i> than the outskirts of the town.
Further	I do not wish to hear of <i>further</i> instances of vandalism.
Canvas	She carried a bag made of thick white <i>canvas</i> .
Canvass	The campaigner <i>canvassed</i> for animal rights.
Moral	Smoking is a health risk, not a matter of <i>moral</i> concern.
Morale	The <i>morale</i> of the workers was adversely affected by layoffs.
Affect (v)	Heavy rain will <i>affect</i> the crop.
Effect (v)	The pilot struggled to <i>effect</i> a change in the plane's course.
Imaginary	Young children often have <i>imaginary</i> friends.
Imaginative	The child's drawing of the purple tree was highly <i>imaginative</i> .
Adapt	You have to <i>adapt</i> to changing circumstances.
Adopt	If we <i>adopt</i> this course of action, we are endorsing his plan.

Adverse	<i>Adverse</i> weather conditions prevented the landing.
Averse	I am not <i>averse</i> to going, but I might not have the time.
Credible	The suggestion, though <i>credible</i> , was not readily accepted.
Credulous	A <i>credulous</i> fool will fall prey to confidence tricks.
Discrete	The data fell into two <i>discrete</i> categories.
Discreet	The diplomat handled the sensitive data <i>discreetly</i> .
Economic	The project was rejected on <i>economic</i> grounds.
Economical	Be <i>economical</i> and travel by the cheaper route.
Elicit	The lawyer tried to <i>elicit</i> information from the witness.
Illicit	<i>Illicit</i> production of alcohol is a problem for the police.
Eminent	An <i>eminent</i> professor will give the guest lecture.
Imminent	His arrival is <i>imminent</i> so take your seats.
Stationary	<i>Stationary</i> vehicles blocked the access to the driveway.
Stationery	I ordered paper and envelopes from the <i>stationery</i> department.
Exceptional	The actor's <i>exceptional</i> performance won him accolades.
Exceptionable	Such <i>exceptionable</i> behavior will never be accepted.
Loose	I need <i>loose</i> clothing in hot weather.
Lose	I need to <i>lose</i> a few pounds in order to wear those trousers.

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