

FOR REVIEW ONLY
* CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE *

English COMPOSITION



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Chapter 10

Grammatical Sentences

Lesson 10.1

Common Sentence Errors

Writing a basic sentence is fairly easy. All you need is a **subject**, a **verb**, and a complete thought. In some situations, however, these simple sentences aren't strong enough to communicate your ideas fully. Imagine reading a book that contained only basic sentences. It might sound something like this:

Mara woke up. She lay in her bed for a few minutes. She wondered about the day. What was going to happen? Worry began to pool in her stomach. Her alarm clock suddenly began ringing. She decided that she wasn't ready to wake up. So she pulled a pillow over her head. She went back to sleep.

Even though all the sentences in this **paragraph** are grammatically correct, they do not express the ideas in the most effective way. Combining some of this information into more complex sentences will help you demonstrate the relationships between ideas.

Mara woke up. Lying in bed, she began to think about the day. What was going to happen? As worry began to pool in her stomach, her alarm clock suddenly began ringing. Not ready to wake up, she pulled a pillow over her head and went back to sleep.

While moving and combining information can help you write more effectively, these changes can also introduce errors into your writing. Being able to correct these mistakes will ensure that you are communicating your ideas in the best way possible.

Reflection Questions

What makes a sentence? How short could a sentence be—one word, two? How long might a sentence be? What's average?

This lesson will teach you how to recognize and fix three types of sentence errors:

Fragments

Run-on Sentences

Comma Splices

Fragments

A **fragment** is a sentence without a subject or verb which does not express a complete thought.

Behind the baseball field

During the final moments of the hurricane

Some fragments are **phrases**, which are word groups that do not form a complete thought. Phrases are usually missing a subject or a verb. Look at the following examples:

Dreaming about life somewhere else

One of the best sports arenas in the country, Camden Yards

After the afternoon spent painting with her sister

To correct these types of fragments, you can either add the missing subject and verb or combine the fragment with another sentence by using a **conjunction** and/or **comma**.

Behind the baseball field, Yolanda was practicing the national anthem.

I was dreaming about life somewhere else when my ringing phone called me out of my stupor.

After the afternoon spent painting with her sister, Nicole took a walk through Central Park.

Helpful Hint

If you are having a hard time finding the subject and verb in a sentence, follow these steps:

1. First, put (parentheses) around any **prepositional phrases**.
2. Look for an **action verb** or state-of-being verb.
3. Finally, ask yourself whom or what is doing the action or being described.

Another type of fragment is a dependent clause. Remember that **dependent clauses** have a subject and a verb, but they do not express a complete thought.

Even though I exercised all summer.

Although my mother's apple pie did not win the county competition.

Dependent clauses usually start with a word that makes the rest of the clause sound incomplete. Some dependent clauses can be made complete by simply removing this word.

~~Even though~~ I exercised all summer.

~~Although~~ my mother's apple pie did not win the county competition.

Dependent clauses can also be combined with another sentence to show a relationship between the two thoughts. Make sure to adjust the punctuation and wording if necessary.

Even though I exercised all summer, I did not meet my weight loss goal.

Although my mother's apple pie did not win the county competition, we thoroughly enjoyed eating it after dinner that evening.

In these examples, the dependent clauses are combined with **independent clauses** to create complete sentences. Notice that a comma is used after the introductory clause.

Sometimes, when providing examples and supporting detail for our work, we fall into the trap of using a fragment. Look at the example below:

There are many career opportunities available for those with a degree in medicine. For example, pediatrics, a field of medical study that specializes in children’s health.

Since this second sentence has no verb, it is incomplete. Look at the corrected version below.

There are many career opportunities available for those with a degree in medicine. For example, pediatrics, a field of medical study that specializes in children’s health, can provide a wonderfully fulfilling career.

In this sentence, the verb *can provide* completes the sentence.

Writing Environment: Everyday

Most readers of emails, blogs, and other casual communications are fairly tolerant of fragmented sentences. In fact, some writers use fragments deliberately to give their writing style a breathless quality or to make a short punchline or witty comment. When using fragments in this way, be sure you are still communicating your intended message.

On Your Own

Read the paragraph below, and circle the sentence fragments that need to be corrected.

It’s only a matter of time until environmental pollution catches up to us. Pollution, which has been a growing problem for decades now. There are numerous negative effects on our planet, including spreading disease amongst humans and animals, destroying plants and vegetation, and disgracing otherwise aesthetic scenery. To do your part to end pollution.

Run-On Sentences

When two sentences or independent clauses are combined, they form a **compound sentence**. These types of sentences are always joined with a semicolon or a comma and a **coordinating conjunction**.

I was running late for history class; I had to hail a cab to get there in time.

My grandmother’s recipe for spaghetti and meatballs is a family classic, but I never make it as well as she did.

A **run-on sentence** incorrectly joins two independent clauses without using a comma and conjunction.

The pizza delivery man showed up thirty minutes late I had to convince my friends that we should still tip him.

My sunburn was so bad last weekend I need to be more careful in the future.

Helpful Hint

To remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, use the acronym FANBOYS.

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

Because compound sentences are made up of two independent clauses, both halves of the sentence express a complete thought. These are different from compound subjects and verbs. In a sentence with a compound subject or verb, both of the subjects or both of the verbs are part of the same complete thought.

I **ran and walked** on my exercise route today.

My **mother and father** both attended my graduation ceremony.

In contrast, a compound sentence is made up of two completely separate thoughts, each with its own subject and verb.

I can eat an entire calzone to myself, **but I feel sick afterwards.**

Ramona gardens on a regular basis; she wants to be a botanist one day.

Writing Environment: Academic

At times, you will be tasked with meeting a minimum word or page length requirement for a piece of writing. Filling up your writing with run-on sentences is never advised. This tactic produces a difficult-to-read text, and is often obvious to your readers and instructors. Instead, fix your run-ons and consider how you can better support the well-written content with more concise supporting details.

Comma Splices

The final type of sentence error is a comma splice. A **comma splice** joins two independent clauses with just a comma.

Our boss gets mad if she sees us on social media, Amanda got in trouble for it just last week.

During the week before finals, the Cooper library was silent, all eight floors were full of students who were studying and writing.

Both run-on sentences and comma splices are incorrect because they leave out an important word and/or punctuation mark.

There are three ways to fix compound sentence errors. The first way is to add the missing comma and/or **conjunction** between the two independent clauses.

The fox scurried into the woods, **and** the dog followed close behind.

I have a huge exam in the morning, **and** I have a meeting for my intramural soccer team at night.

Helpful Hint

Your choice of coordinating conjunctions is important because it could potentially change the meaning of your sentence. Think through the following examples. How does the choice of conjunctions affect the sentence?

The president conducted the meeting, and her assistants answered the reporters' questions.

The president conducted the meeting, but her assistants answered the reporters' questions.

The president conducted the meeting, for her assistants answered the reporters' questions.

The president conducted the meeting, yet her assistants answered the reporters' questions.

The president conducted the meeting, so her assistants answered the reporters' questions.

Another way to fix a run-on sentence or a comma splice is to use a semicolon. The **semicolon** shows a close relationship between the two ideas in the sentence.

My mom made the difficult decision to retire, but it was not an easy one.

My mom made the difficult decision to retire; it was not an easy one.

The final way to fix a run-on sentence or comma splice is to split the sentence into two separate sentences. This method works best for two sentences that aren't closely related.

Andrew and Marnie have been married for two years; they have been together for over five.

Andrew and Marnie have been married for two years. They live in Orlando, FL.

On Your Own

Read the sentences below, and underline the sentence that uses correct punctuation.

Amanda and Justin just received news that their first baby is on the way, this has been extremely exciting news for the couple. It came at a great time, as they just lost their family dog and could use some positivity.

Writing Environment: Professional

Comma splices are a common grammatical mistake that you'll want to avoid in the workplace. Your employers will expect that you know the appropriate use of basic punctuation, particularly a comma and a period. Take a look at the examples below. Who would you hire?

Thank you for your consideration in this matter, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon

This simple change in punctuation communicates that you have a stronger demand of the English language.

On Your Own

Read through the following paragraphs and underline or highlight all the examples of common sentence errors.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, known as PTSD, affects millions of people each year. Individuals develop PTSD in response to experiencing some type of traumatic event. The most common forms of trauma include enduring physical or sexual abuse or experiencing the death of a close friend, witnessing wars or acts of terrorism can also cause PTSD. Although some people react to these events in a healthy manner, many find their grief or fear overwhelming.

Psychiatry first recognized post-traumatic stress disorder over one hundred years ago. At the end of the Civil War, documented a condition named "Da Costa's Syndrome," which closely resembles PTSD. In subsequent years, people called the disorder combat fatigue or shell shock. Only after the Vietnam War, however, did the medical community begin to study post-traumatic stress disorder in earnest.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Action Verb: a verb that indicates a physical or mental action

Comma: a punctuation mark used to separate items in a list; join compound sentences; mark introductory words, phrases, and clauses; add extra or unnecessary details to a sentence; and separate similar adjectives

Comma Splice: a sentence error made when two independent clauses are combined with a comma but no conjunction

Compound Sentence: two independent clauses joined by a comma and a conjunction

Conjunction: a word that makes a connection between other words or a group of words

Coordinating Conjunction: a conjunction that joins similar words or groups of words together

Dependent Clause: a group of words, with a subject and a verb, which does not express a complete thought

Fragment: a sentence, without a subject or verb, which does not express a complete thought

Independent Clause: a group of words, with a subject and a verb, which expresses a complete thought

Paragraph: a short piece of writing that focuses on one main idea

Phrase: a word group that does not form a complete thought

Prepositional Phrase: a group of related words that starts with a preposition and ends with a noun or pronoun

Run-on Sentence: a sentence error made when two independent clauses are combined without a comma and conjunction

Semicolon: a punctuation mark used to combine two independent clauses and separate long list items

Subject: whom or what a sentence is about

Verb: a word that represents an action, relationship, or state of being

Writing Sample: Common Sentence Errors

The Dream Act Girl

When Daniella Zepeda first came to America, she sneaked in with her father, who was an experienced field hand, carpenter, and roofer. She was five years old and ready to start school, so she stayed with her aunt in Bowie, Texas, where she could enroll. Her father followed the trail of work. Eventually, Daniella graduated from high school; she then joined the navy because she had never seen the ocean. She qualified for training on radar and sonar, as well as for electronics repair technician; she served her four years and headed for college to become an engineer. Using her GI benefits to fund her college, she graduated in the class of 2012 and immediately filed for US citizenship. A few years later, she finally reunited with her father, whom she had only seen when he occasionally came to visit between jobs. She eventually secured his green card, and he was able to live and work openly anywhere in America.

Lesson 10.2

Using Consistent Subjects and Verbs

Writing is sometimes a balancing act. And whether we want to believe it or not, grammar often plays a big role in achieving this balance. This is particularly true when writing a single sentence.

A **complete sentence** always contains at least one **subject** and one **verb**. These subjects and verbs must match each other in **number**. Number refers to a way to divide words into two groups: singular and plural. Singular subjects are always used with singular verbs; plural subjects are always used with plural verbs. This consistency is known as **subject-verb agreement**.



Using consistent subjects and verbs gives your writing balance.

This consistency helps to create stability and rhythm in your writing, and allows your readers to better understand your main point without the obstacle of awkward language.

Knowing how to use subject-verb agreement correctly will help you eliminate errors from your writing.

In this lesson, you will learn about the following:

Recognizing Subject-Verb Agreement

Identifying Situations with Abnormal Subject-Verb Agreement

Recognizing Subject-Verb Agreement

All subjects and verbs are either singular or plural. Look at the following examples:

Charlie walks to school every day.

The students walk to school every day.

In the first example, both the subject (*Charlie*) and the verb (*walks*) are singular. In the second example, both the subject (*students*) and the verb (*walk*) are plural.

Notice that the spelling of singular and plural verbs appears reversed. Singular verbs (those that accompany singular subjects) usually end in the letter *s*, while plural verbs (those that accompany plural nouns) do not.

Singular subjects are always paired with singular verbs, and plural subjects are always paired with plural verbs. Here are some additional examples:

Singular The store **owner rents** a booth at the local flea market.

Plural **We rent** a booth at the local flea market.

Singular **Mom is selling** the house.

Plural **They are selling** the house.

Writing Environment: Academic

For a sociology or anthropology research paper, you may refer to a nation, a culture, a people or natives of a particular country. Although each of these nouns refers to many (plural) humans, the words are not necessarily plural. It's important to recognize collective nouns (nation, culture) and match them with appropriate verbs: "the nation is"; "the Anasazi were"; "the human race is"; "members of the Mayan civilization were"; "The Inca were", etc.

Identifying Situations with Abnormal Subject-Verb Agreement

While subject-verb agreement is fairly straightforward, these situations can complicate the sentence:

- Compound subjects
- Indefinite pronouns
- Collective nouns as subjects

- Distracting words and phrases
- Inverted word order

Compound Subjects

A **compound subject** is a subject made up of two nouns or pronouns, usually joined by a conjunction. When a sentence contains this, you must use special guidelines to decide if the subject is singular or plural.

If the sentence uses the **conjunctions** *and* or *both/and*, the subject is plural.

| Myra and John answer questions at the end of each training session.

However, if the sentence uses any of the following conjunctions, use the subject closest to the verb to decide if the subject is singular or plural.

Nor Neither, nor

Or Either, or

Look at this example:

| **Either** the bathroom **or** the **kitchen is** being remodeled this year.

This sentence uses the conjunction *either, or* to join a compound subject. The subject *kitchen* is closest to the verb, so the subject is considered singular.

Here's another example:

| Amy or the **twins are** coming with us today.

In this sentence, the subject *the twins* is closest to the verb, so the subject is considered plural. If the order were reversed, the subject would be singular—as *Amy* is a singular subject:

| The twins or **Amy is** coming with us today.

Indefinite Pronouns

Subject-verb agreement can become complicated when the sentence uses an **indefinite pronoun** as a subject. Indefinite pronouns refer to unnamed nouns. Some indefinite pronouns are always singular or plural, while others change form depending on their use in the sentence.

Singular		Plural	Both
anybody	nobody	both	all
anyone	no one	few	any
anything	nothing	many	most
each	somebody	several	none
everybody	someone		some
everyone	something		
everything			

To determine whether the words *all*, *any*, *most*, *none*, or *some* are plural, look at the meaning of the sentence.

Singular All of the cake has already been eaten.

Plural All of the orders have been filled on time.

Singular Most of the floor is covered by carpeting.

Plural Most of the apartments are carpeted.

Some indefinite pronouns are misleading when combined with a plural subject:

Each of the cheerleaders has her own megaphone.

Although the word *cheerleaders* is plural, the subject is *each*, denoting individuals. If we remove “of the cheerleaders,” the sentence is still intact, and it clearly refers to individuals.



Simplifying the sentence to noun, verb, and object of the verb, as in the diagram above, is also a good test to see whether the verb should be singular. We might also say “each cheerleader,” which clearly refers to ONE. Another clue is the singular *megaphone* at the end of the sentence. If the subject were plural (*cheerleaders*) the object of the verb would be plural (*megaphones*).

Collective Nouns as Subjects

Collective nouns denote a group, but are treated as **singular** nouns. Look at the following examples:

class	club	team	clique
family	band	congregation	faculty
company	choir	cast	department

Each of these collective nouns refers to a *single* group. Of course the group is made up of many people, but if your sentence subject contains a collective noun, it’s to be treated as singular.

On Your Own

For each of the following sentences, check the box next to the correct verb.

Our football team _____ going to the state playoffs.

- is
 are

The entire cast _____ offered free season tickets at the theatre.

- were
 was

Mr. Simpson’s class _____ in the library on Friday mornings.

- meet
 meets

Mount Bethel’s choir _____ at nursing homes every Sunday.

- sings
 sing
-

Writing Environment: Professional

Business memos often address groups of people using collective nouns such as “marketing department”, “summit planning committee”, “focus group” and such. Throughout the memo, you may refer to “committee” (singular); “committee members” (plural); or “each member of the committee” (singular), but be consistent in your application of appropriate verb forms each time you vary the noun.

Distracting Words and Phrases

The more words and phrases that come between a subject and its verb, the more confusing that sentence seems.

If there are words or phrases between the subject and the verb, make sure the verb agrees with the subject—not with any of the words that come between. Here is an example:

- | The people in the elevator is stuck between the third and fourth floors.
- | The people in the elevator are stuck between the third and fourth floors.

Which sentence is correct? Remember that the subject of a sentence will never appear inside a **prepositional phrase**, a group of related words that starts with a preposition and ends with a noun or pronoun. Try putting all of the prepositional phrases in **parentheses** to help you locate the true subject of the sentence.

- | The people (in the elevator) is stuck (between the third and fourth floors).
- | The people (in the elevator) are stuck (between the third and fourth floors).

Once you’ve identified the true subject, you can make sure that you’ve used the correct type of verb. In this example, the second version of the sentence is correct. Both the subject and the verb are plural.

- | The **people** in the elevator **are** stuck between the third and fourth floors.

Inverted Word Order

In a sentence with **regular word order**, the subject comes before the verb. However, sentences with **inverted word order** switch the locations of these sentence parts, so the verb comes before the subject. Look at the following example:

- | Into the store walks three mysterious-looking men.
- | Into the store walk three mysterious-looking men.

To decide if the subject and verb are singular or plural, you must identify the true subject of the sentence.

1. Mark
prepositional
phrases

2. Identify the
verb

3. Find the
subject

First, put parentheses around any prepositional phrases.

(Into the store) walks three mysterious-looking men.
 (Into the store) walk three mysterious-looking men.

Next, identify your verb.

(Into the store) walks three mysterious-looking men.
 (Into the store) walk three mysterious-looking men.

Finally, find your subject.

(Into the store) walks three mysterious-looking men.
 (Into the store) walk three mysterious-looking men.

Once you've determined your subject and verb, you can decide if the verb should be singular or plural.

(Into the store) walk three mysterious-looking men.

On Your Own

Read through the following paragraph and underline or highlight the sentence with incorrect subject-verb agreement.

Photographs and video clips from the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, recall the fear and uncertainty that gripped the entire nation. Even for those who did not personally experience the loss of a loved one, images such as *The Falling Man* symbolizes the thousands of people killed on that day. This tragic, yet simple news photograph and others like it have accumulated more meaning and significance than the photographers could have imagined.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Collective Noun: a noun that denotes a group, but is treated as a singular noun

Complete Sentence: a sentence that contains at least one subject and one verb and expresses a complete thought

Compound Subject: a subject made up of two nouns or pronouns, usually joined by a conjunction

Conjunction: a word that makes a connection between other words or a group of words

Indefinite Pronoun: a pronoun that does not rename a specific noun

Inverted Word Order: when the verb comes before the subject in a sentence

Number: a way to divide words into two groups: singular and plural

Paragraph: a short piece of writing that focuses on one main idea

Parentheses: a pair of punctuation marks used to add extra information to a sentence or introduce an abbreviation

Phrase: a sentence either without a subject or a verb

Prepositional Phrase: a group of related words that starts with a preposition and ends with a noun or pronoun

Regular Word Order: when the subject comes before the verb in a sentence

Subject: whom or what a sentence is about

Subject-Verb Agreement: when a subject and verb used in a sentence are both singular or both plural

Verb: a word that represents an action, relationship, or state of being

Writing Sample

George Orwell said "History is written by the winners", and he couldn't have been more accurate. Studying history can be frustrating, especially when we realize how much of it has been written from a biased perspective. It's difficult to determine the truth about the past. Many details are whitewashed or intentionally concealed. One example is the early settlement of North America. Everyone reads about the English colonists and their struggle for independence from England. History texts mention the lost colonies of Roanoke and Croatoan. But public schools don't mention St. Elena, even though this Spanish stronghold was established over 30 years before the fort at Jamestown. In fact, until the early 1990s, no one knew much about St. Elena since it was abandoned, in 1587.

Lesson 10.3

Using Consistent Pronouns and Antecedents

A **pronoun** takes the place of a **noun** in a sentence. Using pronouns makes your writing smoother and less repetitive.

While pronouns are easy to use, they follow a strict set of rules. Pronouns are almost always paired with an **antecedent**, the word that a pronoun renames. As a result, pronouns must agree with their antecedent in both **gender** and **number**. This is known as **pronoun-antecedent agreement**.

In this lesson, you will learn about pronoun reference and consistent pronoun-antecedent agreement.

Pronoun Reference

Pronouns must refer to a clear antecedent. Otherwise, your writing will become confusing and potentially misleading. Take a look at these examples:

Clear antecedent Jennifer left the party and drove her car home.

Ambiguous antecedent Jennifer left Susan's party and drove her car home.

Missing antecedent She gave her the present, left her party and then drove her car home.

In the first example, the antecedent is clear. We know whose car Jennifer is driving home.

The second example is ambiguous, or unclear, because there are two possible antecedents: *Jennifer* and *Susan*.

In the third example, pronouns rename other pronouns instead of antecedents, so we can't be sure whose car or party is being discussed.

On Your Own

Read the sentences in the table below. Then, replace *they* with a specific noun.

I went to the doctor's office, but they told me to see a dentist.		
I went to the doctor's office, but		told me to see a dentist.
After touring the ruins of the Roman Colosseum, they took a train to Florence.		
After touring the ruins of the Roman Colosseum,		took a train to Florence.

To learn more about reference and pronoun case, see Lesson 10.4.

Writing Environment: Professional

Proper pronoun-antecedent connections are extremely important for business communication with clients and between colleagues. Your message often addresses multiple departments in different locations. A team memo or client communication must be clear, specific, and inclusive. "The marketing *department*" is a singular, gender-neutral noun (even though the department includes many people of both genders) so the pronoun *it* is appropriate. "Members of the marketing team" is plural, so the pronoun *they* could replace it. These are important details to remember for business communication.

Gender

The gender of a pronoun must match the gender of its antecedent. If a sentence includes a male antecedent, use male pronouns. If the sentence includes a female antecedent, use female pronouns.

Male	Female	Neutral
he, him, his	she, her, hers	I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours, you, your, yours, it, its, they, them, their, theirs

Male That **man** mows **his** yard every Saturday.

Female **Kayla** left **her** purse on the subway.

Neutral The maple **tree** is losing **its** leaves.

If the gender of an individual person is unknown, use the term "he or she".

If a **student** is interested in volunteering, **he or she** can sign up in the school office.

An **athlete** should stretch before **he or she** exercises.

Because using the term “he or she” can sound wordy, this isn’t always the best option. You can also make the **subject** plural and use the neutral pronoun *they*.

If **students** are interested in volunteering, **they** can sign up in the school office.

Athletes should stretch before **they** exercise.

Writing Environment: Academic

In conversation, you probably use the neutral pronoun *they* for both singular and plural subjects.

If anyone wants to ride with me to the game, they can.

While this is slowly becoming more acceptable in writing, it's best to use singular pronouns for singular subjects when writing for school.

Number

In addition to gender, pronouns can also be singular or plural. *Singular* refers to one thing, and *plural* refers to multiple things. Singular antecedents are always paired with singular pronouns; plural antecedents are always paired with plural pronouns.

Singular	Plural
I, me, my, mine	we, us, our, ours
you, your, yours	you, your, yours
he, him, his, she, her, hers, it, its	they, them, their, theirs

Here is an example:

Devynne made some very life-changing **plans**, but she has not shared **them** with anyone.

In this sentence, the word *plans* is renamed with the pronoun *them*. Both of these words are plural, so the sentence is correct.

Indefinite pronouns, pronouns that do not rename a specific noun, can be a little harder to use. These pronouns are also labeled singular or plural.

Singular		Plural	Both
anybody	nobody	both	all
anyone	no one	few	any
anything	nothing	many	most
each	somebody	several	none
everybody	someone		some
everyone	something		
everything			

When a singular indefinite pronoun is used as an antecedent, make sure you rename it with a singular personal pronoun. Here is an example:

Someone in the previous class left **his or her** backpack under the table.

In this sentence, the indefinite pronoun *someone* is singular. Since you don't know the gender of the person, it's best to use the singular term "his or her."

Some indefinite pronouns can be both singular and plural depending on how they're used in a sentence. To decide how the words *all*, *any*, *most*, *none*, or *some* are being used, look at what the indefinite pronoun is renaming.

Singular	All of the cake has already been eaten.
	Most of the floor is covered by carpeting.
Plural	All of the orders have been filled on time.
	Most of the apartments are carpeted.

Helpful Hint

All of the singular indefinite pronouns except *each* can be broken up into two word parts. For example, *some* + *one* = *someone*. Notice that the second part, *one*, is singular. If an indefinite pronoun fits this same pattern, it is singular.

Finally, when a sentence contains a **compound subject**, you must use special guidelines to decide if the subject is singular or plural. A subject that is joined by the **conjunctions** *and* or *both/and* is plural.

Myra **and** John answer questions at the end of each training session.

Because *Myra* and *John* are joined by the conjunction *and*, they are a singular compound subject.

However, if the sentence uses any of the following conjunctions, use the subject closest to the **verb** to decide if the subject is singular or plural.

- nor
- neither/nor
- or
- either/or

Look at this example:

Either the bathroom **or** the kitchen **is** being remodeled this year.

This sentence uses the conjunction *either/or* to join a compound subject. The subject *kitchen* is closest to the verb, so the subject is considered singular. Notice that the highlighted verb is also singular.

Here's another example:

Amy **or** the twins **are** coming with us this afternoon.

In this sentence, *twins* is closest to the verb, so the subject is considered plural. Notice that the highlighted verb is also plural.

On Your Own

Read through the following **paragraph** and underline or highlight the sentence with a pronoun and antecedent that do not agree in gender and/or number.

Little is known about the subjective experience of breast cancer survivors after primary treatment. However, these experiences are important because it shapes their communication about their illness in everyday life. The present study investigated this topic by combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

(Excerpt courtesy of "Breast Cancer Survivors' Recollection of Their Illness and Therapy" by Patricia Lindberg, et al.)

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Antecedent: the word that a pronoun renames

Compound Subject: a subject made up of two nouns or pronouns, usually joined by a conjunction

Conjunction: a word that makes a connection between other words or a group of words

Gender: a way to divide words into three groups: male, female, and neutral

Indefinite Pronoun: a pronoun that does not rename a specific noun

Noun: a word that represents a person, place, thing, event, or idea

Number: a way to divide words into two groups: singular and plural

Paragraph: a short piece of writing that focuses on one main idea

Pronoun: a word that takes the place of a noun in a sentence

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: when a pronoun and its antecedent in a sentence are the same in gender and number

Subject: whom or what a sentence is about

Verb: a word that represents an action, relationship, or state of being

Writing Sample

Serena Williams is a very talented athlete. Her ability on the tennis court has given her almost legendary status. But Serena's versatility is even more amazing. She has also developed her own line of clothing, and is promoting it on Home Shopping Network. As if that wasn't impressive enough, the tennis star also recently co-starred with Beyoncé Knowles in the music video for "Lemonade." Serena has also used her celebrity standing to help others. She recently made a generous donation to the construction of a school in Jamaica for underprivileged children. She volunteered to help build the school and made a special appearance at the ribbon-cutting

ceremony. In fact, she's the one who cut it. Serena and her sister Venus hold an annual dance competition together, and they have agreed to make a movie about the competition.

Lesson 10.4

Using Correct Pronoun Reference and Case

Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns in a sentence. They are usually short words; most are made up of fewer than four letters. Although they are small in size, they can have a huge impact on your writing. Misusing them can be especially confusing for your reader. To ensure that your writing is as effective as possible, you must pay close attention to pronoun case.

Pronoun **case** refers to the form of the pronoun. Which form is correct depends on the function of the pronoun in the sentence: as a subject, an object, or to show possession. Consider these examples:

- Subjective** He went to school in East Texas.
Objective David's girlfriend gave him a new video game.
Possessive Kyle lost his glasses again.

In this lesson, you will learn how to:

Identify Subjective, Objective, and Possessive Pronoun Case

Apply Correct Case with Difficult Wording

Use Correct Pronoun Reference

Identify Subjective, Objective, and Possessive Pronoun Case

Personal pronouns have three main functions in a sentence. They act as subjects; they act as objects; or they show possession. These functions match the three pronoun cases: subjective, objective, and possessive.

To avoid errors in your writing, you must make sure that the case of the pronoun matches the way the pronoun is being used in the sentence. Review the table below for examples of each case.

To learn more about pronoun use in sentences, see Lesson 10.3.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive
I	me	mine
you	you	yours
she	her	hers
he	him	his
they	them	their/theirs
we	us	our/ours
it	it	its

Subjective Case

Subjective case pronouns are always used as the **subject** of the sentence.

I am heading to the gym right after I finish grocery shopping.

Last night, you told me you were going to finish cleaning these dishes!

Objective Case

Objective case pronouns are used in two ways. First, they function as **objects of prepositions**: words that complete the meaning of a **prepositional phrase**.

Unexpectedly, the mail carrier delivered a package addressed (to me).

Did you mean to send this email (to him)?

The second function of objective case pronouns is as direct and indirect objects of **verbs**. **Direct objects** follow a verb and receive some kind of action. **Indirect objects**, on the other hand, receive the direct object.

Direct Object

Don't forget to thank her for your new birthday gift!

Even though Jeanine thought the sandwich in the refrigerator was untouched, she threw it in the trash.

Indirect Object

Mia's soccer coach gave her a list of areas in which he wanted her to improve.

The pizza made us feel queasy.

Writing Environment: Everyday

Maybe you've been told not to say "my friend and me," and that "my friend and I" is correct. The truth is, it depends on how you're using "my friend and me." How can you tell which is correct? Test the pronoun case by removing one of the nouns.

Usage in each of these sentences is correct:

Object of a Verb

The teacher provided (my classmates and) me with some helpful writing strategies.

Object of a Preposition

My grandma's surprise birthday party was pretty boring for (my brother and) me.

Subject

(My best friend and) I can't wait to ride a motorcycle one day!

Subject

(My best friend and) I planned to study, but it turned into a binge-watching session of our favorite TV show.

If you remove “my best friend” from the last two examples, you’ll see that using *me* is completely correct. You would never say “Me planned to study . . .” or “Me can’t wait to ride . . .”

Possessive Case

The last personal pronoun form is the possessive case. **Possessive** case pronouns show possession. They can function as **adjectives** or as regular pronouns.

Adjectives	Any idea who put on her makeup? My parents purposely hid their holiday presents from one another.
Pronouns	Johnson was angry that the new car was not a gift of his. Mine was loud, but yours is quiet.

Possessive case pronouns are spelled the same way as both subjects and objects.

I put **our** tickets in my pocket.

Ours are in my pocket.

Helpful Hint

Notice that none of the possessive pronouns need apostrophes. In this way, possessive pronouns are the opposite of possessive nouns, which always need an apostrophe.

Apply Correct Case with Difficult Wording

Relative pronouns are used to introduce **dependent clauses**, groups of words with a subject and a verb that do not express a complete thought.

My new recipe **that was comprised of four food groups** was a hit at the party.

The couple, **who have been dating for seven years**, decided to break up last July.

Here are the seven relative pronouns:

that	whoever
which	whom
whichever	whomever
who	

Although *who* and *whom* are relative pronouns, and not personal pronouns, they do have case. *Who* is a subjective case pronoun, and *whom* is an objective case pronoun. To decide which one you should use in a sentence, try substituting *he* for *who* and *him* for *whom*. You may need to rearrange the words in the sentence slightly.

Who ran the vacuum in the house yesterday?

He ran the vacuum through the house yesterday.

Whom are they looking for outside?

They are looking for **him** outside.

Writing Environment: Academic

Academic writing tends to be slightly more formal than business writing. While writing for business certainly must be professional, concise, and compelling, it's also more direct and focused on brevity. You'll be much more likely to encounter the use of *whom* in academic writing. This sounds unusually stiff and formal, but it is correct grammar. You might ask, "With whom are you conducting your research?" when interviewing a primary source for an essay.

Demonstrative pronouns take the place of a noun phrase, or serve as adjectives for that noun.

Demonstrative pronoun

That is much heavier than **this**.

Demonstrative adjective

This piano is more properly tuned than **that** one.

Having so many pronouns available makes it hard to know when to use *which* and when to use *that*. But these two pronouns are not interchangeable. Here's a good rule of thumb: *which* indicates unnecessary detail.

If the sentence doesn't need the clause being connected, use *which*.

The dress, **which** had a rip in the side, was laying across the chair.

If the clause being connected is essential for clarity, the proper pronoun is *that*.

The dress **that** had a rip in the side was laying across the chair.

Writing Environment: Professional

Business writing tends to be short, focused, and concise. Using *which* is probably unnecessary. If you use a lot of clauses starting with *which*, there's a good chance you're providing too much unnecessary detail. For example, "The funds, which were allocated for the project, were quickly spent" requires two commas, while "The funds that were allocated for the project were quickly spent" is far more precise and requires no commas.

This is a good rule of thumb for proofreading and editing down your cover letter, memos, proposals, and other business-related documents.

Apply Correct Pronoun Reference

Every time you use a pronoun, it must refer back to a clear **antecedent**, or a word that a pronoun renames. Otherwise, your writing will become confusing and potentially misleading. Read this example:

Last week, Monica accidentally hit Leslie's car when it was parked at the bank. She started worrying about how to handle the situation. Since they are friends, she isn't sure the best way to proceed with the money necessary to fix the car.

These sentences contain important information. However, their meaning has been completely mixed up by incorrect pronoun reference. Who was worrying? Who didn't know how to handle the necessary money? Monica or Leslie?

No Clear Antecedents

One common pronoun error is using a pronoun without any antecedent at all. Look at the following examples:

After the house was tragically burned down, **they** started to search the rubble for any treasured items.

Ross tried to get ahold on his university, but **they** put him on hold.

In both of these sentences, the pronoun *they* is unclear. Who exactly is *they*? To fix these examples, add a more specific noun in place of the pronoun.

After the house was tragically burned down, **the O'Brien family** started to search the rubble for any treasured items.

Ross tried to get ahold on his university, but **the secretary at the registrar's office** put him on hold.

Another pronoun commonly used without an antecedent is *it*. Whenever possible, use a noun instead.

There has been an ongoing debate about the use of chemical pesticides in the food we consume. In her article, "Chemical Dependency," Ariel Beck argues that "we ingest food in our system now that will one day become illegal to use in the creation of our crops and food production." While many people support Beck's claim, there are only a small number of individuals who have actively rallied against this issue. Unfortunately, *it* is more likely to change if more people speak up.

The last sentence in the paragraph above is unclear because it starts with the word *it*. Replacing this word with a noun, like *policy*, would make the meaning much clearer.

Multiple Antecedents

A pronoun can also become confusing when it has more than one possible antecedent.

Oscar revealed to Jonah that he had a new job offer coming.

Who had a new job offer coming? From the information provided in this sentence, there's no clear way to know. The best way to correct this sentence would be to replace the pronoun with a noun and re-word the sentence as necessary.

As soon as Oscar got his new job offer, he told Jonah immediately.

Despite both men wanting the job, Jonah was happy for Oscar when Oscar was awarded the new position.

Without clear antecedents, pronouns can quickly become quite complicated.

Antecedent Rules

Finally, the antecedent of a pronoun will always be a noun, not an adjective. This is because adjectives function differently in a sentence than nouns or pronouns. Here's an example:

I called Rob's phone all morning, but he never picked up.

In this sentence, the word *Rob's* is an adjective and cannot act as the antecedent for *he*. This sentence can be fixed by replacing the pronoun with the correct noun.

I called Rob's phone all morning, but Rob never picked up.

Using a noun instead of a pronoun may feel a bit repetitive in some cases. Keep in mind, however, that using correct pronoun reference will help your readers understand exactly what your sentence means.

On Your Own

Read the following paragraph and underline or highlight the sentence that contains an incorrect pronoun reference.

Before the pair went out on stage, Elliot asked Jerry for some help. He listened closely during the conversation. After feeling much more confident, Elliot and Jerry performed a set that the audience loved.

To learn more about pronouns and antecedents, see Lesson 10.3.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Adjective: a word that describes a noun or pronoun

Antecedent: a word that a pronoun renames

Apostrophe: a punctuation mark used for possessive nouns, contractions, and shortened numbers and words

Compound Subject: a subject made up of two nouns or pronouns, usually joined by a conjunction

Demonstrative Pronoun: a pronoun that takes the place of a noun phrase, or serves as adjectives for that noun

Direct Object: a word that receives the action of a verb

Indirect Object: a word that receives the direct object

Noun: a word that represents a person, place, thing, event, or idea

Object of the Preposition: a word that completes the meaning of a prepositional phrase

Objective Case: a pronoun used as the object of a preposition, a direct object, or an indirect object

Personal Pronoun: a pronoun that renames a specific person, animal, object, or place

Possessive Case: a pronoun that shows possession or functions as an adjective

Prepositional Phrase: a group of related words that starts with a preposition and ends with a noun or pronoun

Pronoun: a word that takes the place of a noun in a sentence

Pronoun Case: the form of a pronoun, depending on how it functions in a sentence

Pronoun Reference: which antecedent a pronoun is referring to

Relative Pronoun: a pronoun used to introduce a dependent clause

Subject: whom or what a sentence is about

Subjective Case: a pronoun used as the subject of a sentence

Verb: a word that represents an action, relationship, or state of being

Writing Sample

Although most people recognize Thomas Jefferson as the architect of the Declaration of Independence, this was only one of his many achievements. Jefferson also designed his own home, Monticello. Studying architecture was a passion and a source of amusement for him. He often remarked that he enjoyed “putting things up and tearing them down.” Jefferson was especially impressed with the Neoclassical style, and many of the Romanesque Greek Revival-style government buildings were built under his influence. Their classical details communicate a sense of clean, powerful, and enduring strength. In his lifetime, Jefferson was often consulted about plans for building state capitols because people who knew his passion for architecture had a great respect for his opinions.

Lesson 10.5

Correcting Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Modifiers are words or groups of words that add extra information to a sentence. The most common types of modifiers are **adjectives** and **adverbs**. However, some **phrases** and even some clauses can also be considered modifiers.

Here is an example of each type:

Adjective My **new, white** sneakers are now covered in mud.

Adverb New York sports fans are **occasionally** known to get rowdy.

Phrase **Hiding tucked under her umbrella**, Sarah made a mad dash to her car.

All of the modifiers in the sentences below give additional meaning and clarity. Look at those same sentences without modifiers:

My sneakers are now covered in mud.

New York sports fan are known to get rowdy.

Sarah made a mad dash to her car.

In each example, the sentence still makes sense; however, it doesn't have the same effect as the original version.

The purpose of modifiers is to add extra meaning or clarity to sentences. Using a modifier incorrectly, however, will result in a sentence that is unclear and confusing. Think about this example:

Jenny heard a bird playing the piano last week.

Playing the piano last week, Jenny heard a bird.

Which meaning is correct? Most likely, Jenny didn't hear a bird who was playing the piano. By placing the modifier as close to *Jenny* as possible, you can ensure that your audience understands exactly what you're trying to say.

Each type of modifier describes a particular part of speech. See the chart below for the breakdown:

Part of Speech	Modifies
Adjective	Nouns
Adverb	Verbs
Adjective Phrase	Nouns/noun phrases
Adverbial Phrase	Verbs/verb phrases

It's also perfectly acceptable for a sentence to contain more than one type of modifier, as in the examples below:

Adverb phrase + Adjective:

While driving home from class, I developed a splitting headache.

Two Adverbial Phrases:

As I came into the kitchen, I saw my cat jumping quickly off the counter.

To be effective, modifiers must be placed properly – close to the word they modify.

This lesson will help you correct two types of incorrect modifiers:

Misplaced Modifiers

Dangling Modifiers

Misplaced Modifiers

A **misplaced modifier** is placed too far away from the word it modifies. This makes the sentence potentially confusing to your audience. Here's an example:

Daniel saw a strange-looking bird using his new binoculars.

This modifier is misplaced because it suggests that a bird was using Daniel's new binoculars. To fix this sentence, move the modifier as close as possible to the word being modified.

Using his new binoculars, Daniel saw a strange-looking bird.

Helpful Hint

Don't forget to add in the proper punctuation when changing the location of modifiers. If a modifying phrase is at the beginning of a sentence, it requires a comma after it.

One-word modifiers should also be placed near the words they modify.

Consider this sentence:

Rebecca gave a presentation to her entire company, **bravely**.

The meaning of this sentence would be much clearer to the audience if the modifier *bravely* were placed closer to the word it modifies.

Rebecca bravely gave a presentation to her entire company.

Sometimes, misplaced modifiers are harder to catch because both meanings seem realistic. Consider these two versions of the same sentence:

The food **in the cafeteria** cannot be eaten.

The food cannot be eaten **in the cafeteria**.

In the first version of the sentence, none of the food in the cafeteria can be consumed. In the second version, the food can only be consumed outside of the cafeteria. The intended meaning of your sentence will determine which version is the correct choice.

Here's a slightly trickier example:

The hiring manager **nearly** had to review one hundred applications.

The hiring manager had to review **nearly** one hundred applications.

The first version of the sentence implies that the hiring manager didn't have to look through any of the applications. The second version, on the other hand, states that the hiring manager did look through the applications, all ninety-nine of them.

Writing Environment: Professional

In your job or career, it's important to write as clearly and concisely as possible. While modifiers are sometimes important to make a specific point, they're often the first stop for editors. Cutting excessive adverbs is a "best practice" for business writing. It's imperative, however, to be sure any modifiers you keep are properly placed. In the following sentence, the misplaced modifier makes an ambiguous point.

The CEO said **on Friday** the company would publish their stock policy.

How would you reposition "on Friday" to indicate when this was said?

How would you reposition "on Friday" to indicate when the stock policy will be published?

Reflection Questions

Simply changing the location of a modifier can transform the meaning of your sentences. Can you think of any specific sentences where changing the location of the modifier creates a funny mistake?

Writing Environment: Everyday

Emails and conversations are often confusing when modifiers are misplaced. Although this can sometimes be good for a laugh, it's easy to see how misplaced modifiers cause breakdowns in communication as well. The following email raises a number of questions:

I was drinking the coffee I had bought slowly while walking my dog without success. Drinking my coffee, the dog made me trip and fall.

- Why did you buy coffee slowly?
- How is a dog unsuccessful?
- Why does the dog drink coffee?

Dangling Modifiers

The second type of incorrect modifier is a **dangling modifier**. In these cases, the word that is being modified is completely missing from the sentence. Look at this example:

Before showing up to the doctor's appointment, the virus got worse.

The modifier in this sentence is dangling, because the sentence never identifies who has yet to show up to their doctor's appointment.

To correct this sentence, simply add the missing information as close to the modifier as possible.

Before showing up to the doctor's appointment, Henry's virus got worse.

This sentence is now correct because the audience knows that Henry is the one who has the appointment.

On Your Own

Read the following sentences and underline or highlight the one with correct modifiers.

Making the bed, my sheets were untucked at the bottom.

Since announcing his presidential campaign, the phones have been ringing all day.

After finishing the exam, students began collecting their materials.

Helpful Hint

As you proofread your own writing, you sometimes skip over mistakes without even realizing it. Consider asking a friend to proofread your work and help you find misplaced and dangling modifiers.

Writing Environment: Academic

Although both types of errors are equally problematic, it's wise to learn the difference between misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers. This distinction helps you to proofread your papers more efficiently and to give clear, specific feedback to your friends or colleagues when they approach you for a peer review.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Adjective: a word that describes a noun or pronoun

Adverb: a word that describes a verb, adjective, or another adverb

Dangling Modifier: a modifier that has no word to modify

Misplaced Modifier: a modifier that is too far away from the word it modifies

Modifier: a word or group of words that adds extra information to a sentence

Phrase: a word group that does not form a complete thought

Writing Sample: Modifier Errors

I had suspected that the moving company was untrustworthy all along. Picking up the poorly packed boxes, they fell apart and my glassware shattered, which hadn't been taped shut. Without hesitating, my letter of complaint was sent the next morning. No one responded after waiting for 48 hours. I called and asked to speak with the customer service manager early Tuesday morning. She didn't seem surprised at the problems I had encountered with the movers when we talked on the phone. Her lack of professionalism and support proved my point about the company which was obvious from her tone.

Corrected:

I had suspected all along that the moving company was untrustworthy. As I picked up the poorly packed boxes, which hadn't been taped, my glassware shattered. Without hesitating, I sent my letter of complaint the next morning. I waited for 48 hours but no one responded. Early Tuesday morning, I called and asked to speak with the customer service manager. When we talked on the phone, she didn't seem surprised at the problems I had encountered with the movers. Her lack of professionalism and support was obvious from her tone, and proved my point about the company.

Lesson 10.6

Using Active and Passive Voice

When you think of the words *active* and *passive*, what comes to mind?

The word *active* probably reminds you of outdoor activities or exercise. An active person is energetic and involved. The word *passive*, on the other hand, probably reminds you of someone who is quiet or timid. This person shrinks into the background and avoids conflict at any cost.

In writing, active voice keeps your sentences energetic and excited, while passive voice slows them down. Too many passive sentences make a text slow and boring. Look at this example:

In contrast, Antigone's actions are interpreted by Mary Dietz as an affirmation of the importance of politics over family. Antigone is established by Deitz's argument as a model for "citizenship with a feminist face" and as an advocate for religious and civil customs (1112). In Dietz's opinion, political reform rather than maternal awareness must be devoted to by modern feminists.

This **paragraph** is written almost entirely in passive voice. As you read, you probably noticed that the sentences were tedious. Using active voice in the paragraph would make it more interesting and engaging.

While active voice can improve your writing, using *only* active voice would sound repetitive and aggressive. Learning to find a good balance of active and passive voice will help you refine your writing skills and communicate your ideas better.

This lesson will teach you how to use both active and passive voice.

Active Voice

When a sentence uses **active voice**, the **subject** is performing an action.

My basketball team won last year's championship game against our rivals.

In this sentence, the subject, *basketball team* did the winning. Therefore, this sentence is considered active.

Active voice makes your writing more energetic. Look at the following examples. Which sentence seems more exciting?

Despite the potential for heat exhaustion, a mile-high climb was completed by Autumn and I.

Despite the potential for heat exhaustion, Autumn and I climb the mile-high mountain.

The second sentence uses active voice to show the subjects performing an action. This sentence has more energy than the first sentence, which is written in passive voice.

On Your Own

Read the following sentences and underline or highlight the sentences using active voice.

The whole chapter was reviewed by my study group.

Erica considered her options; she could go home now or try to wait out the storm.

I ran home as fast as possible to catch the game on TV.

When you use active voice, your writing is often more direct and clear than when you use passive voice. Think about these sentences:

I was reminded by my doctor's receptionist that I have an appointment tomorrow.

My doctor's receptionist reminded me that I have an appointment tomorrow.

Both of these examples express the same basic idea. However, the sentence in active voice communicates its meaning in a much more direct way.

To turn a passive sentence into an active sentence, make sure that the doer of the action is the subject. Sometimes, this information is already included in the sentence. Other times, however, you need to supply the new subject. Here are a few examples:

Passive	The research was conducted by a group of Yale students.
Active	A group of Yale students conducted the research.
Passive	At the convention, environmental issues were argued.
Active	At the convention, the politicians argued about environmental issues.

Writing Environment: Academic

In research writing, classwork, and other academic writing assignments, active voice is preferred. Many of your purposes will be persuasive in some measure, so you will want to sound as authoritative and compelling as possible. State your case with confidence and support it in an organized manner. Make your claims and support your argument with confidence. Passive voice can sound hesitant, less convincing, less connected to the action, and less confident. Passive voice usually requires more words as well, which may interfere with clarity and concision.

Passive Voice

When a sentence is in **passive voice**, the subject is receiving an action.

The movie was made by a first-time director.

In this example, the subject, *movie*, is not doing anything. Something else, the *first-time director*, is doing the action to the subject.

Sentences in passive voice contain a **helping verb** in addition to a main **verb**.

To learn more about types of verbs, see Lesson 9.1.

In your writing, passive voice can sound both wordy and vague. Look at this example:

Henry's house will be renovated by the contractors after agreeing on plans with an architect.

This sentence is confusing. A much better version would sound like this:

The contractors will renovate Henry's house after agreeing on plans with an architect.

Passive voice can also confuse your audience when the person or object doing the action is not named in the sentence. Here are two examples:

A cake was baked for the faculty meeting this afternoon.

It has been argued that students should not have to wear school uniforms.

These sentences never tell the audience who is doing the actions.

On Your Own

The following sentences are written in the passive voice. In the table below, rewrite them so that they are in the active voice.

The trip was planned entirely by Frankie.	
The project goals were set out by the leader of the group.	
Laws are being changed by many corporations in regards to electricity usage.	
The computer was restored by a brilliant technician.	

Writing Environment: Professional

In the United States, our style of interaction is bold, assertive, and direct. We tend to emphasize authoritative, confident writing. However, some cultures value passivity, and in many respects it's an admirable quality to show humility, unselfishness, and respect for authority. This is often evident in the use of passive voice. For example, "The research was conducted by me." Sometimes this difference creates frustration in the workplace, with misperceptions about competence and credibility of our coworkers. Active voice is far more common in our business communications than it may be in other cultures. Awareness of this (and other cultural differences) may enhance your chances for success.

Why Use Passive Voice?

While active voice is usually a better choice for your writing, there are reasons to use passive voice. First, you may want to keep the emphasis of the sentence on a word other than your subject. Look at these examples:

Maddox, Kyle and Lauryn's new puppy, was adopted last week!

Kyle and Lauryn adopted a new puppy, Maddox, last week.

The first sentence would be a better choice for an exciting announcement sent to family and friends— they might be much more interested in the puppy than the fact that you adopted him.

Another reason to use passive voice would be to keep the meaning of the sentence purposefully vague. Look at this example:

Due to employee oversight, your recent insurance claim was unable to be processed.

This example purposefully uses vague language to make the insurance company sound less responsible for the oversight. Think about what the active version of this sentence might sound like:

An employee overlooked your recent insurance claim.

Further Resources

The passive voice is often used by politicians to avoid taking blame for mistakes or scandals. One famous phrase, "Mistakes were made," has been used so many times, it has its own Wikipedia page (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mistakes_were_made).

Another reason to use passive voice would be to add sentence variety to a text. Too many active sentences in a row can sound choppy. Adding a few passive sentences will help you keep your writing smooth.

Jimmy will plan the rest of his school year next week. He will create lessons, tests, and projects for his students.

Jimmy will plan the rest of his school year next week. Creating lessons, tests, and projects will be most important.

In the second example, one sentence is active, and one is passive. Not only does the passive sentence add variety to the text, but this sentence also helps the reader make a connection between the two sentences.

One final reason to use passive voice is to emphasize facts. For example, you might see this in medical or scientific writing, to focus on the condition under observation. Take a look at the example below:

Patient's symptoms were exacerbated by low blood sugar and dizziness. Dosage of antibiotics was increased and intravenous glucose raised by 10 ccs.

Writing Environment: Everyday

You might sometimes see acknowledgements presented in passive voice. For example, an event or party may feature a menu with the caption, "Catering provided by," "Flowers arranged by" or "Instrumental solo by . . ." etc.

Programs for performances, church, or civic events list similar passive voice credits. This draws attention to the service provided, as attendees and guests will recognize the service they received, but may not recognize the company name if it simply appears in a list of providers.

Group Activity

As a group, decide which of the following sentences are active and which are passive. Then, rewrite each sentence in the opposite voice.

Carpentry school was much harder than Karissa had thought.

While developing a cure for cancer has not been easy, much work has gone into the progress doctors have already made.

Yesterday, Jane and I took turns reading aloud to our daughter.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Active Voice: when a sentence is written so that the subject is performing an action

Helping Verb: a word that changes the form of the main verb so that it grammatically fits the sentence

Paragraph: a short piece of writing that focuses on one main idea

Passive Voice: when a sentence is written so that the subject is receiving an action

Subject: whom or what a sentence is about

Verb: a word that represents an action, relationship, or state of being

Writing Sample

In the following excerpt from a press release, active and passive voice work together.

Earlier this week, film industry representatives announced the rollout of a new videobase platform. Developed by World Vision Films in conjunction with the Firebrand Collection, this new subscription-based service features thousands of movies from Hollywood studios and independent filmmakers. Subscriptions are being offered via a monthly membership program, and members will have unlimited access to the videobase. Special categories contributed by WorldVision include a “Bollywood” section, with a large selection of subtitled movies from India; an “Ancient Release” section featuring rare silent films from the 1920s; a “Film Noir” collection; and an impressive collection of sports footage from Super Bowls of the past thirty years. Comedies, musicals, documentaries, dramas, and Hollywood classics are also being added by Firebrand.

Lesson 10.7

Maintaining Consistency in Tense and Person



Words can indicate the past, present, or future, as well as perspective; that's why it's important for them to be consistent. Photos courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page).

Filmmaker Quentin Tarantino is famous for non-linear storytelling. His movies often ignore chronological order, raising the level of suspense by slightly disorienting his audience with incomplete information. Pulp Fiction, Django Unchained, and The Hateful Eight are some examples.

Books sometimes do the same thing. Maybe the first chapter is set in the future, while the second chapter is set in the past. Authors sometimes use flashbacks and flash-forwards to make a dramatic story more interesting. As the reader, you must piece the story together as you observe the events from different points in time.

Similarly, some stories unfold through the different perspectives of the main characters. In the first half of the book, you might observe the events from one character’s point of view; then, in the second half, you see the events from another character’s point of view.

While these shifts in time and perspective can make a fictional story more interesting, the same strategies in a text for work or school could confuse your audience. This is because in academic and business writing, time and perspective are usually the same throughout the text. Using a consistent writing style will help ensure that your main idea is as clear as possible.

This lesson will help you avoid two types of inconsistencies in your writing:

Tense

Person

Tense

Take a look at the following sentence and decide whether the action takes place in the past, present, or future:

The human resources director was shocked to find out about the scandalous theft within the company.

You could probably tell that the action took place in the past, but how did you know?

Group Activity

As a group, try rewriting each of the following sentences in a different tense:

He is planning to complete graduate school and then go on to a doctorate degree.

Did you jump in the lake with all of your clothes on?

It isn’t fair to keep us from entering the concert!

Based on the group activity, what did you notice about changing the tense? What word determines the tense of the sentence?

Verbs use different **tenses** to tell the audience when an action took place—past, present, or future.

Past	Present	Future
swam	swim	will swim
jumped	jump	will jump
baked	bake	will bake

Switching tenses in the middle of the same thought is awkward. Look at this example:

A normal shift at work consisted of standing behind the counter and taking customer's orders. Once in a while, it included making simple salads and sandwiches. I've even had to run a few deliveries. Usually, I clean up before I leave.

Did you notice the shift? In the first three sentences, all of the action is happening in the past. Then, an awkward shift to the present interrupts the flow of the writing. To correct this mistake, the writer should change the verb tenses in the last sentence so that it matches the rest of the passage.

Past, Present, and Future Tense

Sometimes, writing in the **present tense** is the best way to communicate your message. In a narrative or a story, you may use present tense because you want the readers to feel as though the events are unraveling right before their eyes.

Writing Environment: Academic

No matter how long ago a novel was written, references to literature should always be in present tense, as if the story is happening for the first time. For example, an essay analyzing *The Kite Runner* might include a sentence like this:

Khaled Hosseini explores the rich and complex history of Afghanistan, as seen through the eyes of the story's protagonist, Amir, and his path to personal redemption.

This example uses present tense because the author is currently sharing his opinions about the book.

In a literary analysis paper or reflection essay, it may be necessary to use both present tense (to refer to the literature) and past tense (to refer to any historical events or author information).

While Odysseus is travelling home from the Trojan War, Homer was a storyteller in ancient Greece.

The **past tense** is used to report on an event or reflect on a past experience. Many fictional books are also written in the past.

Here's an example of past tense from an article about an experiment gone wrong:

The majority of the research participants **claimed** that they were not treated fairly. This **resulted** in shutting down the experiment.

The participants are not currently involved in the experiment; this event took place in the past.

Further Resources

To talk about the past using the present tense is sometimes called using the "historical present" tense, and it's used more frequently than you might have thought. Check out this podcast from Slate's "Lexicon Valley" to learn about the historical present in every type of media from Charlotte Brontë to *Seinfeld*:

(http://www.slate.com/articles/podcasts/lexicon_valley/2012/07/lexicon_valley_the_historical_present_in_seinfeld_and_the_novels_of_charlotte_bronte.html).

Helpful Hint

The present and past tenses are usually the most logical options for most writing.

The **future tense** is used to describe plans or instructions.

After the holiday party, the social committee **will discuss** plans for celebrating the owner's birthday.

Regardless of the tense you use, make sure to be as consistent as possible. You don't want to confuse your readers by switching back and forth between two different points in time.

Writing Environment: Professional

In some professions it becomes necessary to provide background for a proposal, a new project, a law, or a change in patient treatment. This often involves an introduction in the past tense, explaining previous conditions or policies, before delving into the current situation or recommendations for future changes. If such a scenario is part of your job or assigned writing task, cue the reader by signaling the time change in your paragraphs.

Helpful Hint

Although certain tenses are more appropriate for specific types of writing, your instructor might have guidelines for the tense that you should use in a writing assignment. Always remember to double-check the instructions.

Appropriate Tense Shifts

Occasionally, shifts in tense are unavoidable. You might need to describe events that happened at two different points in time.

Harry **lifted** one hundred pound weights at the gym last week, and this week he **is going** to try to lift two hundred pounds.

The first part of this example happened in the past, and the second part is happening in the future. In this case, it makes sense to use two different tenses in the same sentence.

Similarly, you might need to show that a current or future action is the direct result of a past action.

Carmen **spent** all night studying for his math final, so today he **is feeling** exhausted.

In this example, Carmen studied in the past, so he is feeling tired in the present.

Finally, tenses can also shift within a paragraph. Consider this example:

Iggy **gave** a poor public speech to her school with very little preparation. Next time, she **will be** sure to practice her speech aloud before she presents it.

Just a few moments ago, Iggy realized that she needed more preparation. In the future, she will prepare better.

On Your Own

Read the following passage and underline or highlight the paragraph that contains a shift in tense.

Ralph tries to fill the role of authority figure by maintaining the signal fire and building shelters. He will also assign tasks to different groups of boys to ensure that they will live in a civilized fashion. Unfortunately, since Ralph is only a young boy, his authority is not respected as much as an adult's authority would be respected.

Piggy plays the role of the father figure, which is reflected in his appearance. He wears thick glasses, and his hair does not seem to grow. He also provides the voice of reason on the island. When the "littluns" got scared and started talking about the beast, Piggy tried to calm their fears. He maintains order by explaining that life is based on science. When Jack gets the rest of the boys frenzied about hunting, Piggy exhibits common sense by refusing to participate.

Person

In addition to consistent verb tenses, good writing also includes consistency in **person**, or point of view. There are three different points of view that you can use:

- First Person** The narrator or writer is a member of the story or event.
- Second Person** The reader is a member of the story or event. Questions can be directed to the reader.
- Third Person** The narrator or writer is outside of the story or event. This writing strives to be unbiased.

On Your Own

Read the sentences below and underline or highlight the sentence that has a third-person point of view.

If you've never gone skydiving before, this will be an experience like nothing else.

My colleagues and I were concerned when we found the front door to the office wide open.

Even after the crime was solved, the neighbors felt unsafe while walking down certain blocks.

Personal pronouns can be first-person, second-person, or third-person. When you're determining point of view, these pronouns are clues or red flags:

Person	Singular	Plural
First person	I, me, my, mine	we, us, our, ours
Second person	you, your, yours	you, your, yours
Third person	he, him, his, she, her, hers, it, its	they, them, their, theirs

All nouns are considered third-person.

On Your Own

Read the following passage and underline or highlight all of the first-person pronouns in the passage.

Without hesitation, I jumped off of the couch and ran toward the door. There was a man lurking around outside, his back facing me. “Who is that?” I wondered aloud. After getting closer to the man, I was relieved to find that it was just my uncle Henry. He was there surprising my Dad and was trying to be discreet. It’s a good thing I didn’t call the cops!

Different perspectives are appropriate for different types of writing. When writing or revising, double-check any assignment guidelines to make sure that you are using the correct one. Here are some examples of commonly used points of view:

- **First person:** Informal writing and personal reflections
- **Second person:** Instructions and advice
- **Third person:** Formal academic and business writing

On Your Own

In the table below, rewrite each of the following sentences so that they use a different point of view:

Original	Re-written
Can you imagine if cell phones became illegal?	
We almost fell out of the cab when the driver sped away while we were still getting out.	
It is important to share accurate pricing when dealing with customers.	

If a piece of writing includes frequent shifts from one point of view to another, it can be difficult for your audience to follow. Consider the following examples:

The baseball team was disappointed in their loss, so **we** decided to try and cheer **ourselves** up with a night out.

The words *baseball team* are third-person, but the pronouns *we* and *ourselves* are first-person. This sentence is incorrect. To fix this shift in person, the word *we* should be changed to *they* and the word *ourselves* should be changed to *themselves*.

The baseball team was disappointed in their loss, so they decided to try and cheer themselves up with a night out.

On Your Own

Read the sentences below and decided which person (first, second, or third) is being used. Check the box to select your answer.

If you run several days a week, you will eventually get in shape.

- First Person
- Second Person
- Third Person

If one wants to get in shape, he or she will have to run several days a week.

- First Person
- Second Person
- Third Person

If I want to get in shape, I need to run several days a week.

- First Person
- Second Person
- Third Person

Point of view should also be consistent within paragraphs. Read the following example:

I will never forget my first trip to Disney World when I was ten years old. I was so excited to try out all of the rides. You could get a pass for access to different rides in different parks. I also wanted to meet all the characters and get pictures with them.

In this passage, the writer shifts the perspective from first-person to second-person. To correct the error, revise the third sentence so that it uses a first-person pronoun.

I will never forget my first trip to Disney World when I was ten years old. I was so excited to try out all of the rides. I could get a pass to access different rides in different parks. I also wanted to meet all the characters and get pictures with them.

Helpful Hint

Hearing your own writing is often a useful way to detect a shift in both tense and person. To check for consistent tense and person, try reading your paper aloud. You might hear issues that you missed while you were proofreading silently.

On Your Own

Read the following paragraph and underline or highlight the sentence that is inconsistent in person.

It is not easy to make changes to the law. However, if people feel that something needs to be corrected, they should speak up. One way to do this is to visit the local government offices. People can also make phone calls to their senators, or even go door-to-door to get neighbors' signatures and support. When I feel frustrated with something, I need to do a better job at taking a stand. Nothing will change if people don't speak up.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

- Future Tense:** when something has not happened yet
- Noun:** a word that represents a person, place, thing, or idea
- Paragraph:** a short piece of writing that focuses on one main idea
- Past Tense:** when something has already happened
- Person:** a way to divide words into three groups: first-, second-, and third-person
- Personal Pronoun:** a pronoun that renames a specific person, animal, object, or place
- Present Tense:** when something is currently happening
- Pronoun:** a word that takes the place of a noun in a sentence
- Subject:** whom or what a sentence is about
- Tense:** how a verb indicates when it took place: past, present, or future
- Verb:** a word that represents an action, relationship, or state of being

Writing Sample

Foliage in the Tennessee hills had begun to fade by November, but Chris still managed to spot a tree or two with a goldenrod crown. He pointed these out with enthusiasm, and I'd nod and smile, somewhat preoccupied. The weekend at the cabin hadn't been his idea, but his interest appeared to be growing steadily once we were out of town and on the road. My own enthusiasm was somewhat dampened by the prospect of bad weather. I also had work to focus on, so it wasn't going to be a complete pleasure trip. We had dinner plans with some friends and planned to spend at least a few hours kayaking.

It was dusk when Chris pulled into the driveway of the cabin, and I clicked the remote to turn on the front porch light. As light flooded the stairwell, I noticed a large brown cardboard box at the top of the landing. It didn't look familiar, and we weren't expecting any deliveries.

Lesson 10.8

Using Parallelism, Coordination, and Subordination

When you write, one of your main goals should be to show connections between ideas. Some ideas are equally important to your meaning, while others are less important. The way that you structure a sentence can help establish those relationships and give your writing a smoother flow.

Read through the following examples. Which **paragraph** is easier to read and understand?

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, because we want to establish justice, insuring domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, to promote the general welfare, and we secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

As you can see, the structure of these paragraphs greatly affects their meaning and flow. The first example is difficult to read, and the relationship between the ideas is unclear. In the second example, it's much easier to see that all of the ideas are of equal importance.

In this lesson, you will learn three ways to add structure to your writing:

Coordination

Subordination

Parallelism

Coordination

Coordination is used to link together two related ideas. Look at the following sentences:

Little Billy swam in the pool for the first time.
He was scared.

Because these sentences are so closely related, they can be combined to form one sentence:

Little Billy swam in the pool for the first time, but he was scared.

In this example, two sentences have been combined using a **comma** and a **coordinating conjunction**, a specific type of conjunction used to link together ideas of equal importance.

Helpful Hint

To remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, memorize the acronym FANBOYS:

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

To learn more about coordinating conjunctions, see Lesson 4.6.

Sometimes, the relationship between two ideas is so clear, you don't need to use a conjunction. Think about the following examples:

Don't worry what other people think of you, but instead worry about what *you* think of you.
 Don't worry what other people think of you; worry what *you* think of you.

If you read these sentences aloud, you may notice that the second sentence sounds better. Because the relationship between both sentences is so obvious, you can simply join them with a **semicolon**. Using a comma and a coordinating conjunction in this case is both unnecessary and awkward.

Helpful Hint

Whenever you combine two sentences, you must join them with either a semicolon or a comma with a coordinating conjunction. If you use just a comma or just a conjunction, your sentence is grammatically incorrect.

To learn more about properly combining sentences, see Lesson 10.1.

Subordination

While coordination is used to connect related ideas of *equal* importance, **subordination** is used to connect related ideas of *unequal* importance. Here's an example:

Dr. Peppercorn cannot work with any patients until he has his first cup of coffee.

In this sentence, the **subordinating conjunction** *until* is being used to combine two independent clauses.

Dr. Peppercorn cannot work with any patients.
 He has his first cup of coffee.

Using coordination to combine these sentences doesn't work because the ideas are unequal. In this case, you need to subordinate one of the sentences by adding a subordinating conjunction.

Dr. Peppercorn cannot work with any patients **until** he has his first cup of coffee.

Until he has his first cup of coffee, Dr. Peppercorn cannot work with any patients.

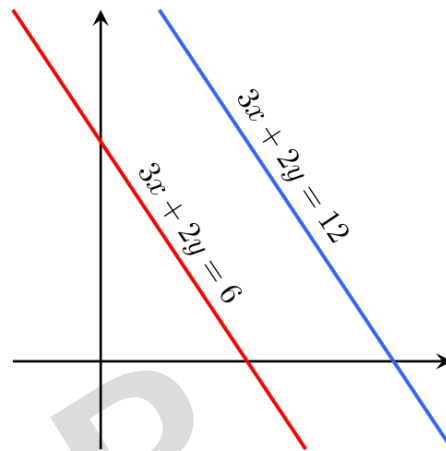
Here is a list of the most common subordinating conjunctions:

after	despite	since
although	even though	until
as	if	when
because	once	while

Parallelism

You might already be familiar with the term parallel from geometry class, where you learned that parallel lines are identical. They run side-by-side without ever intersecting.

In writing, **parallelism** is used to create balance between two or more related ideas by using similarly-structured words, **phrases**, or clauses.



Two ideas that are parallel are expressed with similar words, phrases, or clauses.

Consider this sentence:

My favorite season is the summer; the fall is what my husband prefers.

The two halves of this example are **independent clauses** that express related information. In each, the speaker describes a favorite season. However, the clauses are structured differently, making it difficult to see the connection between the two ideas.

Changing the second half of the sentence will make it easier to read.

My favorite season is the summer; my husband's favorite is the fall.

Both halves of this sentence are now parallel because they follow the same basic pattern:

Person	Topic	Season
Me	favorite season	summer
My husband	favorite season	fall

Writing Environment: Everyday

Because parallelism adds rhythm and flow to your writing, it is often used in poems or song lyrics. Can you think of any specific examples of this?

Parallelism also includes using consistent coordinating conjunctions (*either/or*, *neither/nor*). *Neither* must be followed by *nor*, and *either* must be followed by *or*. "Not only" must be used with "but also."

Not only did the company change its hiring policy, **but also** adjusted its pay scale accordingly.

Either we will meet next week **or** we will have to reschedule.

Neither our marketing department **nor** our advertising agency has approved the changes.

You should also use parallelism for lists.

Not Parallel Before she could go to the beach, Beth had to eat breakfast, pass a math test, and running errands.

Parallel Before she could go to the beach, Beth had to eat breakfast, pass a math test, and run errands.

Not Parallel My neighbor's parakeet, the cat belonging to my grandmother, and my best friend's hamster came to my dog's birthday party.

Parallel My neighbor's parakeet, my grandmother's cat, and my best friend's hamster came to my dog's birthday party.

These sentences are easier to read when each item in the list follows the same structure.

Writing Environment: Academic

For class assignments and research papers, your professors will expect strong organization in your ideas and your arguments. It's essential for them to quickly find your thesis and follow it throughout your paper. Parallelism can be a great tool for organization at the paragraph level, with regard to transitions, style, and length. Keeping paragraphs similar in structure helps the reader to focus on your convincing argument and compelling information.

On Your Own

Use the items below to write a complete sentence with a parallel list. You may need to change the wording.

Getting a haircut
Going shopping
Picking up dog food

On Your Own

Take a look at the following examples and underline or highlight the list item in each sentence that doesn't seem to fit with the others.

My favorite hobbies include playing the guitar, watching action movies, and anything with basketball.

The committee resolved to cut funding for after-school programs, decided to hold nominations for a new chairperson, and interviewing the recently hired police chief.

Learning Style Tip

If you're a visual learner, try highlighting or underlining each item in a list. This will help you decide if you have used parallel language to show how the items are related.

Writing Environment: Professional

Because business writing involves sales and promotion, persuasion is key. Parallelism is a great tool for persuasion. The repetition involved in parallelism makes your points compelling and easy to remember. Building consistency through repetition is also a useful organization strategy. Parallelism is a great strategy for organizing your resume and cover letter.

Examples of Parallel Sentence Structure

During my internship, I analyzed data, managed client portfolios, and verified background information.

During my internship, I learned about analyzing data, managing client portfolios, and verifying background information.

I'm excited for the opportunity to learn, to grow, and to meet new people.
The company retained accountants, lawyers, and other outside contractors.

Each of the following sentences is *missing* parallel structure. This is jarring for the reader and upsets the rhythm of communication.

According to my mentor, my greatest strengths are negotiating, delegation and the way I solve problems.

For relaxation, I like skiing, golf, sailing, and to drink wine with my friends.

Each candidate had to demonstrate her talent, be poised and have a competitive strategy.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Comma: a punctuation mark used to separate items in a list; join compound sentences; mark introductory words, phrases, and clauses; add extra or unnecessary details to a sentence; and separate similar adjectives

Coordinating Conjunction: a conjunction that joins similar words or groups of words together

Coordination: a method for combining similar ideas

Conjunction: a word that makes a connection between other words or a group of words

Independent Clause: a group of words, with a subject and a verb, which expresses a complete thought

Paragraph: a short piece of writing that focuses on one main idea

Parallelism: a method for showing a relationship between ideas by using similarly structured words, phrases, or clauses

Phrase: a word group that does not form a complete thought

Semicolon: a punctuation mark used to combine two independent clauses and separate long list items

Subordinating Conjunction: a conjunction that introduces a dependent clause

Subordination: a method for combining unequal ideas

Writing Sample

Stress is a state of tension or worry, often related to ongoing problems at home, at work, or at school. Stressors can cause not only physical and emotional responses, but also mental and psychological ones. These may include crankiness, insomnia, nervous disorders and even depression. Prolonged stress can be very unhealthy and even contribute to serious conditions such as heart disease, cardiac arrest, and stomach ulcers.

Stress is actually a natural and involuntary impulse; it's the body's instinct to avoid danger. When we sense trouble, our sympathetic nervous system warns the body to react. This is the reaction known as "fight or flight"; this is triggered by cortisol and adrenaline entering the bloodstream. It increases our heart rate, quickens our pulse, and causes muscle tension. People respond differently; some sweat profusely, some clench their jaws or breathe harder, and some notice that their pupils dilate.

But while high stress is uncomfortable and negative, a little burst of stress now and then can actually help motivate us to get things done and take positive action.

Lesson 10.9

Proofreading Sentences for Grammar

Once you are comfortable with the rules of grammar and spelling, you must start applying this knowledge to your writing. Being able to correct your own writing errors will help you present yourself and your ideas in a more professional and academic way.

Reflection Questions

Have you ever noticed grammar or spelling errors in a book, article, or document? How did this affect your opinion of the text?

Keep in mind that proofreading skills don't happen overnight. As you continue to practice, you will find yourself becoming more comfortable with identifying and fixing grammar and spelling mistakes. And, the more you write, the more you will learn from these mistakes, shaping you into a strong and more effective writer.

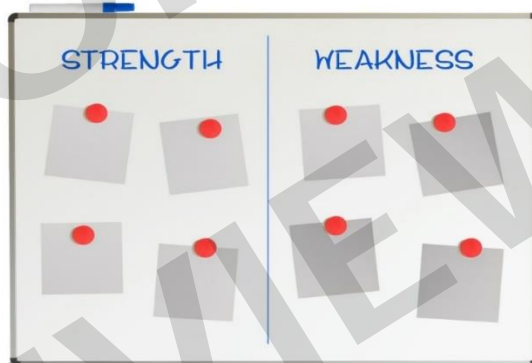
In this lesson, you will learn strategies for proofreading a text for grammar and spelling errors.

Further Resources

Missing even small grammar and spelling errors can lead to big problems. In one case, a man was sentenced to forty-two extra months in jail because of a typo in his paperwork. You can read more about the case here: (<http://www.vox.com/2014/4/15/5617676/weird-federal-math-typo-3-and-a-half-extra-years-in-prison>).

Proofreading Strategies

Proofreading a text for grammar and spelling can be a time-consuming task. There are a lot of rules and guidelines to keep straight. If you don't have a strategy for proofreading, you may find yourself feeling bored or overwhelmed. To become more effective in proofreading, follow these steps:



Making a list of common mistakes along with your strengths can be helpful when proofreading.

Make a list of your common mistakes.

Everyone struggles with certain types of grammar and spelling mistakes. Think back to the papers that you've written in previous classes. What errors did your teachers mark over and over again? Once you've identified where you struggle, you can use this information to make your proofreading time more effective.

If you're not sure what grammar and spelling mistakes you commonly make, ask a friend or a Writing Center tutor to review your work and share three to five areas of weakness.

Helpful Hint

Keep a copy of your common grammar mistakes saved on your computer or in a folder. Review this list anytime you proofread your writing. Update this list every time you receive grammar feedback from an instructor.

Proofread in stages.

Trying to catch all of your grammar and spelling errors in just one reading is impossible. Instead, you should proofread your text in stages. During each stage, focus on correcting one type of grammar error.

To make the best use of your time, start with your most common grammar and spelling mistakes. For example, you might first proofread for **comma splices**, then **subject-verb agreement**. Once you've worked through your list of common errors, proofread these four general areas:

Sentence Structure Comma splices, fragments, run-on sentences

Agreement	Subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement
Punctuation	Commas, semicolons, colons, quotation marks
Spelling	Spelling, capitalization, numbers

Proofreading Checklist

- Are all sentences complete?
- Have you avoided fragments and run-ons?
- Are names spelled correctly and consistency?
- Is capitalization used properly?
- Do subjects and verbs agree?
- Are plurals consistent?
- Do pronouns reflect clear antecedent nouns?
- Have you avoided passive voice?
- Have you avoided vague referential pronouns?
- Have you used parallel structure?
- Is punctuation appropriate?

Writing Environment: Academic

Proofreading improves your grade. You may not like that some professors take off points for things like spelling, grammar, and sentence errors. After all, isn't it more important to know the material and possibly to discover something that could change the world? Probably. But it's also important to express those life-changing ideas clearly and meaningfully. Taking the time to proofread shows respect for your audience and for the important content you're covering. A missed word here or there often changes the meaning of a sentence, and your message may be compromised.

On Your Own

Read each sentence below and circle any proofreading mistakes you find. As you're working, consider how you would fix these mistake(s).

In November of 1963, President Kennedy was shot in Dallas, Texas by a assassin. He was riding in a car with Texas Governor John Connally, that was also hit by a bullet. The motorcade was plan to travel downtown through Dealey Plaza, where the shots were fired. The Warren Commission conclude this was the work of a lone gunman and announced this to the public. Many details were unexplained, and they thought there were other shooters involved. Top secret investigations into it continued for many years. In 1979 it was announced that the assassination was probably the result of a conspiracy by the House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations.

Try multiple reading techniques.

When you proofread a text, starting at the beginning and reading all the way to the end isn't always the best strategy. It's easy to rush through your sentences without even realizing you made grammar or spelling mistakes.

Reading Techniques Checklist

- To help yourself slow down and focus, try reading your text aloud to yourself. Your brain often supplies missing words or fixes mistakes automatically when you read silently. Actually saying the words can reveal errors you would have missed otherwise.
- Another way to keep yourself focused on spelling and grammar is to read your text backwards. Read the last sentence first. Then, read the second-to-last sentence. Keep moving through your sentences in this order, looking for errors in each once. This strategy helps you focus on the contents of the sentence without getting distracted by the overall ideas in the **paragraph** or essay.
- Finally, try printing out a paper copy of your text to proofread. Sometimes, seeing the words in a different location can help you find mistakes you previously missed. Mark any errors so that you can go back and fix them later.

Group Activity

Read the excerpt below. Practice using some of the strategies mentioned above. Did you catch any mistakes? For a specific focus, look back to the suggested topics for proofreading in stages. When you're done, compare your findings with a partner.

So, why don't we, as a society, continue to volunteer past adolescence and into adulthood. Many argue that lack of time is the biggest factor preventing college students and young workers from giving to others. However, when a person gives of his time. He learns to see the world through the eyes of those who benefit from his volunteering. For example, a woman who helps distribute food at a food pantry sees the need in her community. She sees the value of sacrificing a couple of hours a month; to give to others who may need some temporary help in order to survive. Because she can put a face to that need, they are willing to give up some of her down time. the activities that used to take up her off-work hours, such as television, become less engaging than the satisfaction of improving another's life.

Take advantage of technology tools.

Most writing programs, like Microsoft Word, offer useful proofreading features. Spell-check scans your writing and identifies problems with spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Keep in mind that a computer will not notice if you use a correctly spelled word in the wrong place. You should never rely on spell-check to do your proofreading for you.

On Your Own

Read the sentence below and underline or highlight the misspelled words.

Some doctors will tell you two avoid fruit in the morning, since it contans a high amount of sugar.

Most programs also offer a handy feature that allows you to find specific words or punctuation marks in a text. If you know that you always mix up *their* and *there*, use this feature to search for these words. You can then proofread each sentence to decide if you used the words correctly. This feature is also useful for proofreading less common punctuation marks like **brackets** or quotation marks.

Take frequent breaks.

As you proofread your paper, don't be afraid to take frequent breaks. Five to ten minutes should be plenty of time for you to stretch your legs or get a drink. Don't allow yourself to take too much time, however, as you might become distracted.

You should also consider breaking your proofreading across multiple days. Getting a good night's sleep will give you fresh eyes and a clear head.

Now, let's take a look at a sample excerpt from an essay on the brain's role in processing depression. This is a good model for proofreading mistakes for spelling and grammar. Although the paragraph is focused and developed, the author has quite a few grammar issues to work through.

Many **self help** gurus turn to notions of self-empowerment and willfulness to encourage depressed individuals to engage the world. However, this sort of instruction **ignore** what many current scientists and philosophers know: a person's ability to control his or her own thoughts is extremely limited. In his essay, Jack Burton explains that "lower-level brain modules can profoundly affect not only our ordinary sensory perceptions but also how we experience abstract symbols (65). He goes on to explain that these lower-level processes actually precede feelings of certainty when people make decisions, so unconscious thinking actually underwrites human actions. Thus, it is not at all clear that positive thinking is within a person's control. **While many people don't believe this to be true.**

Considering the number of mistakes made in the paragraph above, let's now look at another excerpt from an essay on the prison system. Practice using multiple strategies to find and adjust any spelling and grammar mistakes.

On Your Own

Underline or highlight all the sentences in this passage that contain spelling and/or grammar mistakes.

Most citizen do not think about the men and women behind the walls of prison systems, and they think much less about what is hapening in the prisons. Because of the lack of interest in prison policies. The system in effect in many penitentiaries today is not as effective as it could be. There are many ideas for how prisons should function, but a process needs to be enforced that is productive not only for prisoners but also society. The high rate of relapses, that results in overpopulated prisons has the potential to be lower. Rehabilitating prisoners is the key to a more productive change in the prison systems because it takes into account the prisoner's background and individuality and benefits both society and prisoners. When compared with other alternatives for prisons, the rehabilitation process actually changes the lives of prisoners, thus making it the best choice.

When a prisoner is released back into society, they must learn how to thrive without reverting back to old behaviors. Violators can either change in the prison systm or remain in a career of crime. Because of the unlikelihood of changing themselves without help, inmates will most likely be put back into an overcrowded prison system in which they learn even more about breaking the law. Offenders need to be put into a situation where the ability to change is present. The best way to help prisoners change; is to make change a possibility.

Writing Environment: Professional

Sometimes it's puzzling to see grammatical or spelling errors published in blogs, websites, and brochures. "Doesn't the writer have a spellchecker?" you might ask. "Why didn't he or she check for errors?" The truth is, they probably did. Last minute changes may have been added after the initial proofreading, and with a deadline, details may go uncorrected. Errors diminish credibility. Carelessness with words suggests carelessness on the job. Misprinted or misquoted material in professional publications may necessitate formal apologies or retractions. In some cases, this may lose clients or readership. Errors with numbers can lead to insufficient funds, and errors with names may violate confidentiality.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Brackets: a pair of punctuation marks commonly used inside parentheses or quotation marks to add minor details to a sentence or insert missing text inside a quotation

Colon: a punctuation mark used to introduce a list or quotation, end a salutation, and join related numbers

Comma: a punctuation mark used to separate items in a list; join compound sentences; mark introductory words, phrases, and clauses; add extra or unnecessary details to a sentence; and separate similar adjectives

Comma Splice: a sentence error made when two independent clauses are combined with a comma but no conjunction

Paragraph: a short piece of writing that focuses on one main idea

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: when a pronoun and its antecedent in a sentence are the same in gender and number

Quotation Marks: a pair of punctuation marks used to repeat someone else's words

Run-on Sentence: a sentence error made when two independent clauses are combined without punctuation

Semicolon: a punctuation mark used to combine two independent clauses and separate long list items

Subject-Verb Agreement: when a subject and verb used in a sentence are both singular or both plural

Writing Sample

Those who say they don't like Indian food probably haven't sampled many dishes. The reputation of intense flavors may be intimidating. Why must it be so hot? The truth is, cooking varies by region and includes a wide range of styles, flavors, and textures; it's not always hot or spicy. Some of the most popular dishes include braised meats in creamy sauces made with yogurt and fruits, while others are strictly vegetarian. Indian cooks know the power of "layering" flavors and the potent impact

of combining spices. *Garam masala* is a blend of dark spices used to flavor many dishes. Cayenne pepper and chili pepper are also used in many dishes, but surprisingly these are usually not the source of the high-level heat. The single most potent factor in Indian cuisine is actually mustard, which brings out the heat in the other ingredients. Combining mustard with other spices like cayenne and ginger makes a fiery combination. One uniquely spicy dish is called *Koftas*, which are meatballs served with rice or *naan*, which may help to tame the heat.

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