

GRAMMAR ESSENTIALS

Use this sheet to help you:

- Identify some of the common grammar problems.
- Improve your ability to write with grammatical accuracy.

5 minute self test

Correct the grammar problems in the following sentences:

- Many researches have been conducted.
- KFC's profits have increased rapidly during the 1990s.
- The company must increase spending on research and have to promote its focus on innovation.
- Although she worked hard, but she had difficulty finishing her work.
- On 11am of Friday, a lecture for exam preparation by all first year undergraduates will be delivered of Dr. Jones.
- Many researches have been conducted.

Grammar: some common mistakes

1. Use of the indefinite article a/an

We use the indefinite article to refer to any (singular) member of a group.

a + singular noun beginning with a consonant

For example: a profit

an + singular noun beginning with a vowel

For example: an oligopoly

2. Countable and uncountable nouns

Countable nouns can be either singular or plural.

For example: cup/cups, apple/apples, one \$10 note/three \$10 notes

You can use a/an with singular countable nouns

For example: **a** student, **an** apple

Uncountable nouns have only one form and they are things we cannot count.

For example: we cannot say one rice, two rice.

Other examples of uncountable nouns are: information, staff, knowledge, research.

You cannot use a/an with uncountable nouns. However, in certain cases it is possible to count these things, in which case we would say a grain of sand or a piece of music or a member of staff.

3. Forming Plural Nouns

Most nouns are made plural by adding **s** or **es** if the word ends in s, ch, x or z.

For example: houses, fixes, matches, guesses

If the noun ends in y, and there is a consonant before the y, change the **y** to **i** and add **es**. If the noun ends in y, and there is a vowel before the y, simply add **s**.

For example: economy-economies, ray-rays

If the noun ends in o, and there is a vowel before the o, add s. If there is a consonant before the o, add **es**.

For example: video-videos, potato-potatoes, hero-heroes.

*Exceptions: piano-pianos, memo-memos, pro-pros, solo-solos

Some nouns that end in o, add either **s** or **es** to form the plural.

For example: mosquitoes/mosquitos, tornadoes/tornados, zeroes/zeros

For nouns that end in f or fe, change the f to v and add **es** or **s**.

For example: half-halves, life-lives

*Exceptions: belief-beliefs, roof-roofs, cliff-cliffs, chief-chiefs

Some irregular plurals that do not fit into any of these categories are:

woman-women

child-children

person-people

man-men

tooth-teeth

foot-feet

Some nouns borrowed from other languages have foreign plurals:

crisis- <i>crises</i>	medium- <i>media</i>
basis- <i>bases</i>	thesis- <i>theses</i>
diagnosis- <i>diagnoses</i>	parenthesis- <i>parentheses</i>
hypothesis- <i>hypotheses</i>	analysis- <i>analyses</i>
phenomenon- <i>phenomena</i>	appendix- <i>appendices/appendixes</i>
focus- <i>foci</i>	criterion- <i>criteria</i>
formula- <i>formulae/formulas</i>	syllabus- <i>syllabi/syllabuses</i>
stimulus- <i>stimuli</i>	

Some nouns have the same form in the singular and the plural.

For example: research, staff, personnel, literature, aircraft, means, series.

5. Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives describe the noun and adverbs describe the verb. Many adverbs are made from an adjective + **ly**

For example: careful/carefully quiet/quietly

5.1 Adjectives

Adjectives are used before nouns and after some verbs (especially **be**).

For example: He is a **quiet** person (not she is a quietly person)

Please be **quiet**.

It was only a **low** hill.

They were concerned because interest rates were so **low**.

Adjectives are also used after the verbs **look, feel and sound**.

For example: He sounds very serious.

She feels very anxious.

5.2 Adverbs

Adverbs tell us how something is done or how something happens

For example: She spoke **quietly**.

He was interested to find out why the company was doing so **badly**.

She never takes me **seriously**.

He explains indifference curves **clearly**.

Adverbs are used before adjectives and other adverbs.

For example: Dreadfully heavy (adverb + adjective)

Incredibly slowly (adverb + adverb)

Adverbs can also be used before a past participle.

For example: The plan was carefully developed.

Some words are both adverbs and adjectives.

For example: late, fast, hard

My assignment is late. (adj)

I got up late this morning and so didn't make it to the lecture. (adv)

He owns a very fast car. (adj)
The car can go very fast. (adv)

Mei is a hard worker.
Mei works very hard.

6. Tenses

An important thing to remember in an essay is to keep your tenses consistent. However, this does not mean you need to use the same tense throughout the whole essay. A change in tense is used to mark a change in time. If you are discussing your methodology in a report, it makes sense to use the past tense, as it is something you did in the past.

Try to avoid changing tense if there is no change in the time relationship. This is awkward to read and can be confusing. For more detailed information regarding tenses, see the **Study and Research Helpsheet: Verb Tenses**.

7. Sentence clarity

Clear, concise sentences are preferable to long and confusing ones. You will not get good marks by confounding your reader or sounding pompous. If English is your second language, you are much less likely to make mistakes if your sentences are shorter and more direct.

7.1 Active voice

Sentences in the active voice are usually clear because they are more concise. In addition, they indicate to whom the verb refers. Using the passive voice too often tends to make writing sound 'flat'. However, the passive is useful if the doer is unimportant or unknown.

For example: **Active:** The government raised the level of tax for low income earners.

Passive: The level of tax for low income earners was raised.

7.2 Nominalisation

Nominalisation is the use of noun forms of verbs. While this is sometimes useful for making writing sound more formal, overuse can make your writing unclear.

For example: The submission of the paper was late (using nominalisation)
The paper was submitted late.

7.3 Using action verbs rather than the verb 'to be'

The overuse of the verb 'to be' often accompanies nominalisation. Rather than using the verb to be, use an appropriate action verb.

For example: An advantage of exploring the perceptions of the consumer is

the marketer can then plan strategies accordingly. The advantage is the company can design and promote appropriately and the product is more attractive to consumers.

By exploring consumer perceptions, marketing companies can appropriately design and promote a product, making it more attractive to consumers.

7.4 Subordinate clauses

Avoid embedding a subordinate clause in the middle of the main clause as this can make your writing confusing.

For example: *Ethics guidelines, because of the increasing use of information systems professionals in industry, are becoming more necessary.*

Because of the increasing use of information systems professionals in industry, ethics guidelines are becoming more necessary. (subordinate clause at the beginning)

Ethics guidelines are becoming more necessary because of the increasing use of information systems professionals in industry. (subordinate clause at the end)

7.5 Parallelism

If you have a list or series of words or phrases, ensure that they are parallel i.e. that they have a similar grammatical construction in order to allow the reader to see the connection.

For example: *A number of factors have been identified as significant in US workplace culture. These are the importance of individuality. The employee does not expect to work for a particular company for life and there is low power distance. (unclear)*

A number of factors have been identified as significant in US workplace culture. Firstly the importance of individuality, secondly employees do not expect to work for a particular company for life and thirdly there is low power distance. (clear)

7.6 Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences. Often they are parts of sentences that are separated from the main clause. This can be corrected by removing the full stop between the fragment and the main clause. The fragments are in bold italics

Moral hazard refers to an inefficiency created by insiders, who fail to convey accurate information to the market or outsiders. **Because of uncertainty and information asymmetry.**

This should be rewritten as:

Moral hazard refers to an inefficiency created by insiders, who fail to convey accurate information to the market or outsiders because of uncertainty and information asymmetry.

*Governments made mistakes before and during the crisis. **Such as the cronyism and inconsistent policies in dealing with the crisis.***

This should be rewritten as:

Governments made mistakes before and during the crisis, such as cronyism and inconsistent policies.

*The Williams Company exemplified this by closing down operations in Indonesia. **Leaving the area open for larger corporations.***

This should be rewritten as:

The Williams Company exemplified this by closing down operations in Indonesia, leaving the area open for larger corporations.

8 Use of prepositions

Some of the most commonly used prepositions are: about, after, as, at, before, between, by, during, for, from, in, into, like, of, on, over, than, through, to, under, with, within, without.

Prepositions can express location: **at, on, in**

at...a point/place For example: My family is at home.

on...a surface For example: There is new roof on our house

in...an area/volume For example: Our house is in Melbourne.

Prepositions can express direction: **to, on(to), in(to)**

to... a destination/goal For example: Joe returned to his car **to** get his keys.

onto... a surface For example: She fell **on(to)** the floor.

into... an area/volume For example: They dived **in(to)** the water.

Prepositions can express spatial relationship:

Higher than a point: **over, above** For example: Write your name above the line.

Lower than a point: **under, underneath, beneath, below** For example: He sat beneath the tree.

Close to a point: **near, by, next to, against, among, beside** For example: Her place is next to mine.

Others: **opposite, within, around, across, through, inside, along, off**

Prepositions can express notions of time:

On is used with days and dates For example: I will see you on Monday on the 7th of June.

At is used with the time of day and with noon, night and midnight For example: My plane leaves at night at 8 p.m.

In is used other parts of the day, with months, years and with seasons. For example: In the summer, the sun sets late in the evenings.

Prepositions can be used to introduce objects of verbs:

At: look, smile, stare, jump, yell For example: You didn't laugh at my jokes.

Of: approve, consist, afraid, think, smell For example: I didn't approve of his work.

For: call, watch, wish, responsible, apply For example: Did you call for a taxi?

Many nouns, verbs and adjectives are used with particular prepositions although it is not

not always easy to know which preposition to use. Here are some common combinations that you may have come across:

agree with	increase/decrease in
reason for	answer to
apply to, for	relationship with
example of	limited to
difficulties with	similar to
insist on	compare to, with
opposed to	need for
care about, for	specialise in
cause of	depend on
known for	take advantage of
certain of, about	different from

9. Use of for, since, still etc

9.1 For and since

We use **for** for a period of time (five minutes, two weeks, ten years)

For example: *She has been studying in Australia for six months*

We use **since** to refer to the start of a period

For example: *I have been studying at the University of Melbourne since 2009*

The company has been operating in Australia since June

9.2 Still

We use **still** if something has not changed or stopped and is continuing. Still is usually used in the middle of the sentence, with the verb.

For example: *The unemployment rate is still under 10%.*

My sister is still doing her PhD.

9.3 Any more/ No longer

Any more/any longer can be used when a situation has changed. They go at the end of a sentence.

For example: *I don't live in Melbourne any more. I moved to Brisbane last year.*

The company used to be very successful but it isn't any longer.

No longer can be used for a similar purpose, except that it goes in the middle of the sentence.
For example: *The company is no longer trading in China.*

9.4 Yet

Yet is used to mean 'until now' and is used mostly in negative sentences and questions. It tells the reader that there is a possibility that something will happen. Yet usually goes at the end of a sentence.

For example: *The company has not evaluated the effectiveness of the new accounting procedures yet.*

9.5 And and But

Avoid beginning a sentence with **and** or **but**. If you want to begin a sentence with and, use a connective such as 'in addition' or 'furthermore'. Instead of but, use 'however' 'on the other hand' 'in contrast'.

For example: *There are some industries in which a monopoly is more efficient than a large number of perfectly competitive firms. In addition, there are also situations in which monopoly may be more innovative than competition.*

To produce more output in the short run, a firm must employ more labour. However, if the firm employs more labour, its costs increase.

9.6 Whereas and While

We use **while** and **whereas** to show direct opposition; that is something is exactly the opposite of something else.

For example: *The company prospered, whereas others failed.
While some students know only their native language, others are multilingual.*

10. Rules about Numbers

Spell out as words:

Numbers that begin a sentence.

For example: *Three years ago he started the company.*

Numbers that can be spelled out in one or two words.

For example: *ten, twenty, eighty, thirty-six*

Numbers that are used as compound adjectives.

For example: *A twenty-million dollar contract.*

Express as numerals:

Numbers that cannot be written in one or two words.

For example: 153, 2001

Numbers representing dates, although the day of month may be written out if the year is not included.

For example: July 4, 1776, and December Seventh (or December 7th).

Numbers expressing exact amounts: percentages, fractions, decimals, statistics, scores, or specific sums of money.

Numbers expressing time (except when followed by "o'clock").

Exceptional and Additional Rules

It is acceptable to express a decade by spelling it out or writing it as a figure.

For example: *1960s or sixties*

If a passage includes numbers that follow one another, one is spelled and the other is represented with a figure.

For example: *I used ten 2-gallon cans of paint on the garage.*

Be consistent! If you begin by expressing your percentages with figures, or spelling out your references to decades, make sure you continue to do the same thing all the way through your paper!