

COMPLETE ENGLISH GRAMMAR RULES

Examples, Exceptions, Exercises &
Everything You Need to Master Proper Grammar

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The Farlex Grammar Book: Complete English Grammar Rules

FARLEX International

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About the author

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Preface

Grammar is without a doubt one of the most daunting aspects of the English language, an area riddled with complexities, inconsistencies, and contradictions. It has also been in a state of flux for pretty much its entire existence. For native speakers of English, as well as for those learning it as a new language, grammar presents a very serious challenge to speaking and writing both accurately and effectively.

Having a single, reliable, go-to reference guide should therefore be indispensable to those trying to learn, improve, or perfect their speech or writing. This book is that guide: a clear, unambiguous, and comprehensive source of information that covers all the relevant topics of English grammar, while still being easy to understand and enjoyable to read.

Every topic in the book has been broken down into basic units. Each unit can be read and understood in its own right, but throughout the book you will find cross-references to other sections and chapters to help make it clear how all the pieces fit together. If you're having trouble understanding something, try going back (or forward) to other related topics in the book.

Finally, it must be mentioned that, because English is such a flexible, inconsistent language, the "rules" that are often bandied about are usually not rules at all, but rather guides that reflect how the language is used. Accordingly, the guidelines contained within this book are just that—guidelines. They are not intended to provide constrictive or proscriptive rules that confine everyone to a particular way of speaking or writing.

Learning how the English language works will enhance your engagement with speech and writing every day, from the books you read, to the e-mails you write, to the conversations you have with friends and strangers alike.

As such, mastering grammar is not an exercise that is confined to the classroom. While it is certainly important to learn the structures, styles, and rules that shape the language, the key to truly learning English is to read and listen to the way people write and speak every day, from the most well-known authors to the people you talk to on the bus. Take the information you find in this book and carry it with you into the world.

-P. Herring

Editor’s Note

This book is written according to the standard styles and spellings used in American English. While major differences between American and British English are usually addressed, some information in the book might not coincide with the styles, tendencies, or preferences of other English-speaking communities.

English Grammar

Grammar refers to the way words are used, classified, and structured together to form coherent written or spoken communication.

This guide takes a traditional approach to teaching English grammar, breaking the topic into three fundamental elements: **Parts of Speech**, **Inflection**, and **Syntax**. Each of these is a discrete, individual part, but they are all intrinsically linked together in meaning.

Parts of Speech

In the first part of the guide, we will look at the basic components of English—words. The **parts of speech** are the categories to which different words are assigned, based on their meaning, structure, and function in a sentence.

We'll look in great detail at the seven main parts of speech—**nouns**, **pronouns**, **verbs**, **adjectives**, **adverbs**, **prepositions**, and **conjunctions**—as well as other categories of words that don't easily fit in with the rest, such as **particles**, **determiners**, and **gerunds**.

By understanding the parts of speech, we can better understand how (and why) we structure words together to form sentences.

Inflection

Although the parts of speech provide the building blocks for English, another very important element is **inflection**, the process by which words are *changed* in form to create new, specific meanings.

There are two main categories of inflection: **conjugation** and **declension**. Conjugation refers to the inflection of verbs, while declension refers to the inflection of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Whenever we change a verb from the **present tense** to the **past tense**, for example, we are using **conjugation**. Likewise, when we make a noun **plural** to show that there is more than one of it, we are using **declension**.

Syntax

The third and final part of the guide will focus on **syntax**, the rules and patterns that govern how we **structure** sentences. The grammatical structures that constitute syntax can be thought of as a hierarchy, with sentences at the top as

the largest cohesive unit in the language and words (the parts of speech) at the bottom.

We'll begin the third part by looking at the basic structural units present in all sentences—**subjects and predicates**—and progressively move on to larger classes of structures, discussing **modifiers**, **phrases**, and **clauses**. Finally, we will end by looking at the different structures and categories of **sentences** themselves.

Using the three parts together

The best way to approach this guide is to think of it as a cross-reference of itself; when you see a term or concept in one section that you're unfamiliar with, check the other sections to find a more thorough explanation. Neither parts of speech nor inflection nor syntax exist as truly separate units; it's equally important to examine and learn about the different kinds of words, how they can **change** to create new meaning, and the guidelines by which they are **structured** into sentences.

When we learn to use all three parts together, we gain a much fuller understanding of how to make our speech and writing not only proper, but natural and effective.

Parts of Speech

Definition

The **parts of speech** are the primary categories of words according to their function in a sentence.

English has seven main parts of speech. We'll look at a brief overview of each below; continue on to their individual chapters to learn more about them.

Nouns

Nouns are words that identify or name people, places, or things. Nouns can function as **the subject** of a clause or sentence, an object of a verb, or an object of a preposition. Words like *cat, book, table, girl,* and *plane* are all nouns.

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that represent nouns (people, places, or things). Grammatically, pronouns are used in the same ways as nouns; they can function as subjects or objects. Common pronouns include *I*, *you, she, him, it, everyone*, and *somebody*.

Verbs

Verbs are words that describe the actions—or states of being—of people, animals, places, or things. Verbs function as the root of what's called **the predicate**, which is required (along with a subject) to form a complete sentence; therefore, every sentence must include at least one verb.

Verbs include action words like *run, walk, write,* or *sing*, as well as words describing states of being, such as *be, seem, feel,* or *sound*.

Adjectives

Adjectives are words that modify (add description to) nouns and (occasionally) pronouns. They can be a part of either the subject or the predicate. Common adjectives are *red, blue, fast, slow, big, tall,* and *wide*.

Adverbs

Adverbs are words that modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, or even entire clauses. Depending on what they modify (and how), adverbs can appear anywhere in the sentence. Adverbs are commonly formed from adjectives by adding "-ly" to the end, as in *slowly, quickly, widely, beautifully,* or *commonly*.

Prepositions

Prepositions are words that express a relationship between a noun or pronoun (known as the **object of the preposition**) and another part of the sentence. Together, these form **prepositional phrases**, which can function as adjectives or as adverbs in a sentence. Some examples of prepositional phrases are: ***on*** *the table,* ***in*** *the shed,* and ***across*** *the field*. (The prepositions are in **bold**.)

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that connect other words, phrases, or clauses, expressing a specific kind of relationship between the two (or more) elements. The most common conjunctions are the **coordinating conjunctions**: *and, but, or, nor, for, so,* and *yet*.

Other Parts of Speech

In addition to the seven parts of speech above, there are several other groupings of words that do not neatly fit into any one specific category—**particles**, **articles**, **determiners**, **gerunds**, and **interjections**.

Many of these share characteristics with one or more of the seven primary categories. For example, **determiners** are similar in many ways to **adjectives**, but they are not completely the same, and most **particles** are identical in appearance to **prepositions** but have different grammatical functions.

Because they are harder to classify in comparison to the seven primary categories above, they've been grouped together in this guide under the general category **Other Parts of Speech**.

Nouns

Definition

Nouns are words that indicate a person, place, or thing.

In a sentence, nouns can function as **the subject** or the **object** of a **verb** or **preposition**. Nouns can also follow **linking verbs** to rename or re-identify the subject of a sentence or clause; these are known as **predicate nouns**.

The Subject

The subject in a sentence or clause is the person or thing doing, performing, or controlling the action of the verb. For example:

• "The **dog** chased its tail." (The noun *dog* is performing the action of the verb *chase*.)

• "**Mary** reads a book every week." (The proper noun *Mary* is performing the action of the verb *read*.)

Objects

Grammatical objects have three grammatical roles: the **direct object** of a verb, the **indirect object** of a verb, or the **object of a preposition**.

Direct objects

Direct objects are what receive the action of the verb in a sentence or clause. For example:

• "The dog chased its **tail**." (The noun *tail* is receiving the action of the verb *chase*.)

• "Mary reads a **book** every week." (The noun *book* is receiving the action of the verb *read*.)

Indirect objects

An **indirect object** is the person or thing who receives the **direct object** of the verb. For instance:

• "Please pass **Jeremy** the *salt*." (The proper noun *Jeremy* is receiving the direct object *salt*, which receives the action of the verb *pass*.)

• "I sent the **company** an *application* for the job." (The noun *company* is receiving the direct object *application*, which receives the action of the verb *sent*.)

Objects of prepositions

Nouns are also used after prepositions to create **prepositional phrases**. When a noun is part of a prepositional phrase, it is known as the **object of the preposition**. For example:

• “Your backpack is under the **table**.” (The noun *table* is the object of the preposition *under*, which creates the prepositional phrase *under the table*.)

• “I am looking for **work**.” (The noun *work* is the object of the preposition *for*, which creates the prepositional phrase *for work*.)

Predicate Nouns

Nouns that follow linking verbs are known as **predicate nouns** (sometimes known as **predicative nouns**). These serve to rename or re-identify the subject. If the noun is accompanied by any direct modifiers (such as **articles**, **adjectives**, or **prepositional phrases**), the entire noun phrase acts predicatively.

For example:

• “Love is **a *virtue***.” (The noun phrase *a virtue* follows the linking verb *is* to rename the subject *love*.)

• “Tommy seems like **a real *bully***.” (The noun phrase *a real bully* follows the linking verb *seems* to rename the subject *Tommy*.)

• “Maybe this is **a *blessing* in disguise**.” (The noun phrase *a blessing in disguise* follows the linking verb *is* to rename the subject *this*.)

(Go to the section on **Subject Complements** in the part of the guide that covers **Syntax** to learn more about predicate nouns.)

Categories of Nouns

There are many different kinds of nouns, and it’s important to know the different way each type can be used in a sentence. Below, we’ll briefly look at the different categories of nouns. You can explore the individual sections to learn more about each.

Common and Proper Nouns

Nouns that identify general people, places, or things are called **common nouns**—they name or identify that which is *common* among others.

Proper nouns, on the other hand, are used to identify an absolutely **unique** person, place, or thing, and they are signified by capital letters, no matter where they appear in a sentence.

Common Nouns	Proper Nouns
“He sat on the **chair**.”	“Go find **Jeff** and tell him dinner is ready.”
“I live in a **city**.”	“I’ll have a **Pepsi**, please.”
“We met some **people**.”	“**Prince William** is adored by many.”

Nouns of Address

Nouns of address are used in **direct speech** to identify the person or group being directly spoken to, or to get that person’s attention. Like **interjections**, they are grammatically unrelated to the rest of the sentence—they don’t modify or affect any other part of it. For example:

• “**James**, I need you to help me with the dishes.”

• “Can I have some money, **Mom**?”

• “This, **class**, is the video I was telling you about.”

• “Sorry, **Mr. President**, I didn’t see you there.”

Concrete and Abstract Nouns

Concrete nouns name people, places, animals, or things that are physically tangible—that is, they can be seen or touched, or have some physical properties. **Proper nouns** are also usually concrete, as they describe unique people, places, or things that are also tangible. For example:

- table
- rocks
- lake
- countries
- people
- Africa
- MacBook

- Jonathan

Abstract nouns, as their name implies, name intangible things, such as concepts, ideas, feelings, characteristics, attributes, etc. For instance:

- love
- hate
- decency
- conversation
- emotion

Countable and Uncountable Nouns

Countable nouns (also known as **count nouns**) are nouns that can be considered as individual, separable items, which means that we are able to count them with numbers—we can have one, two, five, 15, 100, and so on. We can also use them with the indefinite **articles** *a* and *an* (which signify a single person or thing) or with the **plural form** of the noun.

Single Countable Nouns	Plural Countable Nouns
a cup	two **cups**
an ambulance	several **ambulances**
a phone	10 **phones**

Countable nouns contrast with **uncountable nouns** (also known as **non-count** or **mass nouns**), which cannot be separated and counted as individual units or elements. Uncountable nouns cannot take an indefinite article (*a/an*), nor can they be made plural.

✓ Correct	× Incorrect
“Would you like **tea**?”	“Would you like ***a*** **tea**?”
“Do you have any **information**?”	“Do you have ***an*** **information**?”
“We bought new camping **equipment**.”	“We bought new camping **equipments**.”

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are nouns that refer to a collection or group of multiple people, animals, or things. However, even though collective nouns refer to multiple individuals, they still function as singular nouns in a sentence. This is because they still are technically referring to one thing: the group as a whole. For example:

• "The **flock** of birds flew south for the winter."

• "The **organization** voted to revoke the rules that it had previously approved."

• "The **set** of tablecloths had disappeared. "

Attributive Nouns (Noun Adjuncts)

Attributive nouns, also called **noun adjuncts**, are nouns that are used to modify other nouns. The resulting phrase is called a **compound noun**. For example:

• "The boy played with his ***toy* soldier**."

In this sentence, *toy* is the noun adjunct, and it modifies the word *soldier*, creating the compound noun *toy soldier*.

To learn more about attributive nouns, go to the section on **Adjuncts** in the chapter on **The Predicate**.

Compound Nouns

A **compound noun** is a noun composed of two or more words working together as a single unit to name a person, place, or thing. Compound nouns are usually made up of two nouns or an adjective and a noun.

• water + bottle = **water bottle** (a bottle used for water)

• dining + room = **dining room** (a room used for dining)

• back + pack = **backpack** (a pack you wear on your back)

• police + man = **policeman** (a police officer who is a man)

Noun Phrases

A **noun phrase** is a group of two or more words that function together as a noun in a sentence. Noun phrases consist of a noun and other words that modify the noun. For example:

• “He brought **the <u>shovel</u> with the blue handle**.”

In this sentence, *the shovel with the blue handle* is a noun phrase. It collectively acts as a noun while providing modifying words for the head noun, *shovel*. The modifiers are *the* and *with the blue handle*.

Nominalization (Creating Nouns)

Nominalization refers to the creation of a noun from **verbs** or **adjectives**.

When nouns are created from other parts of speech, it is usually through the use of **suffixes**. For example:

• “My fiancée is an **actor**.” (The verb *act* becomes the noun *act**or***.)

• “His **acceptance** of the position was received warmly.” (The verb *accept* becomes the noun *accept**ance***.)

• “The **hardness** of diamond makes it a great material for cutting tools.” (The adjective *hard* becomes the noun *hard**ness***.)

• “This project will be fraught with **difficulty**.” (The adjective *difficult* becomes the noun *difficult**y***.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. A noun can be which of the following?

a) The subject
b) An object
c) Predicative
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

2. What category of nouns is used to identify the person or group being directly spoken to?

a) Common nouns
b) Nouns of address
c) Attributive nouns
d) Abstract nouns

3. Identify the type of noun (in **bold**) used in the following sentence:

“Your **indifference** is not acceptable.”

a) Proper noun
b) Countable noun
c) Collective noun
d) Abstract noun

4. What category of nouns is used to modify other nouns?

a) Common nouns
b) Nouns of address
c) Attributive nouns
d) Abstract nouns

5. Which of the following is commonly used to create a noun from a verb or adjective?

a) Prefix
b) Suffix
c) Attributive noun
d) Predicative noun

Common and Proper Nouns

Nouns fall into one of two broad categories: **common nouns** and **proper nouns**.

Common Nouns

All nouns serve to name a person, place, or thing.

Those that identify general people, places, or things are called **common nouns**—they name that which is *common* among others.

For example:

• “He sat on the **chair**.”

• “I live in a **city**.”

• “We met some **people**.”

• “She went into **politics**.”

• “Our **teacher** is angry.”

• “Let’s go down to the **lake**.”

Proper Nouns

Proper nouns, on the other hand, are used to identify a **unique** person, place, or thing. A proper noun names someone or something that is one of a kind, which is signified by the use of a capital letter, no matter where it appears in a sentence.

Names

The most common proper nouns are names, as of people, places, or events. For example:

• “Go find **Jeff** and tell him dinner is ready.”

• “I lived in **Cincinnati** before I moved to **New York**.”

• “My parents still talk about how great **Woodstock** was in 1969.”

Brands

Proper nouns are also used for commercial brands. In this case, the object that’s being referred to is not unique in itself, but the brand it belongs to is. For example:

• “Pass me the **Hellmann’s** mayonnaise.”

• “I’ll have a **Pepsi**, please.”

• “My new **MacBook** is incredibly fast.”

Appellations

When a person has additional words added to his or her name (known as an appellation), this becomes part of the proper noun and is also capitalized. (Some linguists distinguish these as **proper names**, rather than **proper nouns**.) For example:

• “**Prince William** is adored by many.”

• “Italy was invaded by **Attila the Hun** in 452.”

Job Titles and Familial Roles

Many times, a person may be referred to according to a professional title or familial role instead of by name. In this case, the title is being used as a **noun of address** and is considered a proper noun, even if it would be a common noun in

other circumstances. For example:

• “How are you doing, **Coach**?”

• “I need your advice, **Mr. President**.”

• "**Mom**, can you come with me to the playground?”

• “Pleased to meet you, **Doctor**.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Common nouns identify people, places, or things that are _____?

a) Especially unique or one-of-a-kind
b) Generic among other similar nouns
c) Addressed by the speaker
d) Uncountable

2. Things referred to by their brand use which kind of nouns?

a) Common nouns
b) Proper nouns

3. Nouns of address are used in the same way as which kind of nouns?

a) Common nouns
b) Proper nouns

Nouns of Address

Definition

Nouns of address (technically called **vocatives**, but also known as **nominatives of address** or **nouns of direct address**) identify the person or group being directly spoken to. Like **interjections**, they are grammatically unrelated to the rest of the sentence—that is, they don’t modify or affect any other part of it. Instead, they are used to let the listener or reader know who you are addressing, or to get that person’s attention. For example:

• “**James**, I need you to help me with the dishes.”

• “Can I have some money, **Mom**?”

• “This, **class**, is the video I was telling you about.”

• “**Mr. President**, I didn’t see you there.”

• “Hey, **guy in the red shirt**, can you help me?”

Punctuation

Nouns of address are found in the initial, middle, or final position in a sentence. No matter where they occur, they are normally set apart from the rest of the sentence by one or two commas. If they occur in the initial position, they are followed by a comma. If they occur in the middle position, they are enclosed between two commas, and if they occur in the final position, they are preceded by a comma. For example:

• “**James**, I was wondering if you could help me with the dishes.”
• “I was wondering, **James**, if you could help me with the dishes.”
• “I was wondering if you could help me with the dishes, **James**.”

• “**Class**, this is the video I was telling you about.”
• “This, **class**, is the video I was telling you about.”
• “This is the video I was telling you about, **class**.”

Capitalization

Proper nouns

Proper nouns, such as the name or title of a person, are the most frequent nouns of address. These nouns are always capitalized, no matter where they appear in a sentence. If a professional title is used with the name, it is capitalized as well. For example:

• “Can you help me, **James**?”

• “Thank you, **Mrs. Smith**, for being here.”

• “It’s so nice to meet you, **Doctor Jenner**.”

• “Hey, Coach Frank, how are you doing today?”

Common nouns in place of titles

Common nouns can also be used as nouns of address. If the common noun is the title of a job or family member *and* is used in place of a person’s name, it should always be capitalized. For example:

• “How are you doing, **Coach**?”

• “I need your advice, **Mr. President**.”

• "Can you come with me, **Mom**?”

• “Pleased to meet you, **Doctor**.”

Compare the examples above to the following cases in which the same titles of jobs and family members are not used to address the person directly, and therefore are not capitalized:

• “Give that football to the *coach*.”

• “Was the *president* at the meeting?”

• “Tell your *mom* to come with us.”

• “Did you call the *doctor* yet?”

Terms of endearment

When a term of endearment is being used in place of a person’s name, we do not capitalize the word unless it begins the sentence. For example:

• “Would you get me a glass of water, **sweetie**?”

• “Thanks, **pal**, I appreciate your help.”

• “**Love**, please put away your clothes.”

Other common nouns

If they do not act as a professional or familial title, other common nouns should generally remain in lowercase, unless they occur as the first word of the sentence. For example:

• “This, **class**, is the video I was telling you about.”

• “Can you help me, **guy in the red shirt**?”

• “Please stand up, **boys and girls**.”

• “**Ladies and gentlemen**, please remain seated for the duration of the performance.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Nouns of address occur in the _____.

a) initial position

b) middle position
c) final position
d) A & C
e) All of the above

2. Nouns of address are set apart by _____.

a) periods
b) commas
c) hyphens
d) semicolons

3. Which of the following sentences **does not** contain a noun of address?

a) “Oh, hello, Dad.”
b) “Come with me, Daniel.”
c) “Coach, I thought that was you!”
d) “Give that message to the president, please.”

4. Which of the following sentences is written **incorrectly**?

a) “I wish you were here, grandma.”
b) “I wish my grandma was here.”
c) “I wish you were here, Grandma.”
d) “Grandma, I wish you were here.”

5. Which of the following sentences is written **incorrectly**?

a) “Please help us, Doctor Green.”
b) “Doctor Green please help us.”
c) “Please, Doctor Green, help us.”
d) “Doctor Green, please help us.”

Concrete and Abstract Nouns

All **nouns** serve to name a person, place, or thing. Depending on whether they name a **tangible** or an **intangible** thing, nouns are classed as being either **concrete** or **abstract**.

Concrete Nouns

Concrete nouns name people, places, animals, or things that are or were physically tangible—that is, they can or could be seen or touched, or have some physical properties. For instance:

- rocks
- lake
- countries
- people
- child
- air
- water
- bread

Proper nouns are also usually concrete, as they describe unique people, places, or things.

- Mary
- The Queen
- Africa
- my MacBook
- a Pepsi

Abstract Nouns

Abstract nouns, as their name implies, name intangible things, such as concepts, ideas, feelings, characteristics, attributes, etc.—you cannot see or touch these kinds of things.

Here are some examples of abstract nouns:

- love
- hate
- decency
- conversation
- emotion
- aspiration
- excitement
- lethargy

Gerunds, verbs that end in "-ing" and function as nouns, are also abstract. For

example:

- running
- swimming
- jumping
- reading
- writing
- loving
- breathing

These all name actions as concepts. They cannot be seen or touched, so we know they are not concrete.

Countable Nouns vs. Uncountable Nouns

Both concrete and abstract nouns can be either **countable** or **uncountable**, depending on what they name.

Countable Nouns

Countable nouns (also known as **count nouns**) are, as the name suggests, nouns that can be counted as individual units.

Concrete countable nouns

Many concrete nouns are countable. Consider the following, for example:

- cup
- ambulance
- phone
- person
- dog
- computer
- doctor

Each of these can be considered as an individual, separable item, which means that we are able to count them with numbers—we can have one, two, five, 15, 100, and so on. We can also use them with the indefinite **articles** *a* and *an*

(which signify a single person or thing) or with the **plural form** of the noun. For example:

- **a** cup – two **cups**
- **an** ambulance – several **ambulances**
- **a** phone – 10 **phones**
- **a** person – many **people**

Abstract countable nouns

Even though abstract nouns are not tangible, many of them can still be counted as separable units. Like concrete nouns, they can take *a* or *an* or can be made plural. For example:

- **a** conversation – two **conversations**
- **an** emergency – several **emergencies**
- **a** reading – 10 **readings**
- **an** aspiration – many **aspirations**

Uncountable Nouns

Uncountable nouns, on the other hand, are nouns that cannot be considered as separate units. They are also known as **non-count** or **mass nouns**.

Concrete uncountable nouns

Concrete nouns that are uncountable tend to be substances or collective categories of things. For instance:

• wood, smoke, air, water

• furniture, homework, accommodation, luggage

Uncountable nouns **cannot** take the indefinite articles *a* or *an* in a sentence, because these words indicate a single amount of something. Likewise, they cannot take numbers or plural forms, because there cannot be multiple units of them. For example:

✖ “I see ***a*** **smoke** over there.” (incorrect)
✔ “I see (***some****) **smoke** over there.” (correct)

✖ “I don’t have **furnitures**.” (incorrect)
✔ “I don’t have (***any****) **furniture**.” (correct)

(*We often use the words *some* or *any* to indicate an unspecified quantity of uncountable nouns.)

However, uncountable nouns **can** sometimes take the definite article *the*, because it does not specify an amount:

• “They’re swimming in ***the*** **water**.”

• “***The*** **homework** this week is hard.”

Abstract uncountable nouns

A large number of abstract nouns are uncountable. These are usually ideas or attributes. For instance:

• love, hate, news*, access, knowledge

• beauty, intelligence, arrogance, permanence

(*Even though *news* ends in an “-s,” it is uncountable. We need this “-s” because without it, *news* would become *new*, which is an adjective.)

Again, these cannot take indefinite articles or be made plural.

✖ “He’s just looking for ***a*** **love**.” (incorrect)
✔ “He’s just looking for **love**.” (correct)

✖ “She’s gained a great deal of **knowledges** during college.” (incorrect)
✔ “She’s gained a great deal of **knowledge** during college.” (correct)

As with countable nouns, though, we can sometimes use the definite article *the*:

• “I can’t stand watching ***the*** **news**.”

• “Can you believe ***the*** **arrogance** he exhibits?”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a distinguishing feature of **abstract** nouns?

a) They can be seen or touched
b) They cannot be seen or touched
c) They can be counted
d) They cannot be counted

2. Proper nouns are generally _____.

a) concrete

b) abstract

3. Is the following word **concrete** or **abstract**?
amazement

a) concrete
b) abstract

4. Is the following word **concrete** or **abstract**?
sugar

a) concrete
b) abstract

5. Is the following word **concrete** or **abstract**?
Australia

a) concrete
b) abstract

6. True or False: All concrete nouns are countable.

a) True
b) False

Countable Nouns

Definition

Countable nouns (also known as **count nouns**) are nouns that can be considered as individual, separable items, which means that we are able to count them with numbers—we can have one, two, five, 15, 100, and so on. We can also use them with the indefinite **articles** *a* and *an* (which signify a single person or thing) or in their **plural forms**.

Countable nouns contrast with **uncountable nouns** (also known as **non-count** or **mass nouns**), which cannot be separated and counted as individual units or elements. Uncountable nouns cannot take an indefinite article, nor can they be made plural.

Concrete vs. Abstract Countable

Nouns

Both **concrete and abstract nouns** can be countable. Concrete nouns name people, places, or things that are tangible—they can be seen or touched. Abstract nouns, on the other hand, name intangible things, such as ideas, concepts, feelings, or attributes.

Concrete countable nouns

Concrete nouns are a bit easier to understand as being countable—after all, they are things that we can see and feel, and so we can usually count them. Consider the following, for example:

- **cup**
- **ambulance**
- **phone**
- **person**
- **eel**
- **computer**
- **doctor**

Each of these can be considered as an individual item or unit, which means that we are able to count them:

Singular	Plural
a cup	two **cups**
an ambulance	several **ambulances**
a phone	10 **phones**
a person	many **people**
an eel	three **eels**
a computer	a few **computers**
a doctor	some **doctors**

Abstract countable nouns

Even though abstract nouns are not tangible, many of them can still be counted as separable units. Like concrete nouns, they can take *a* or *an* or can be made plural.

Consider these abstract nouns:

- **conversation**
- **emergency**
- **reading**
- **aspiration**
- **emotion**
- **belief**

Now let’s see how they can be counted:

Singular	Plural
a conversation	two **conversations**
an emergency	several **emergencies**
a reading	10 **readings**
an aspiration	many **aspirations**
an emotion	hundreds of **emotions**
a belief	certain **beliefs**

Grammar with countable nouns

When we use countable nouns, certain elements in a sentence will change depending on whether the noun is singular or plural.

Third-person singular vs. third-person plural pronouns

If a countable noun is being represented by a **third-person pronoun**, we must

take care to use the correct singular or plural form.

Singular

When a noun is singular and names a person (or, sometimes, a pet) whose gender is known,* then we use the third-person singular *he, him*, or *his* (masculine) or *she, her,* or *hers* (feminine). For example:

• “The **man** left early, so I didn’t get a chance to talk to **him**.” (*Man* is singular, so it takes the third-person singular pronoun *him*.)

• “The **president** has many things that **she** wants to accomplish in office.” (*President* is singular, so it takes the third-person singular pronoun *she*.)

• “We taught our **dog** to know which bed is **his**.” (*Dog* is singular, so it takes the third-person singular pronoun *his*.)

If the noun names a singular place, thing, or non-domestic animal, then we must use the third-person neuter pronoun *it*:

• “I hate this **computer** because **it** is so slow!”

• “The **cow** lowed softly as **it** ate.”

• “Some people dislike this **town**, but I’ve always loved **it**.”

Plural

When a noun is plural, we use the same third-person pronouns for people, places, animals, and things: *they, them*, and *theirs**. For example:

• “The parade **floats** are spectacular! I love watching **them** go down the street.”

• “**Bill and Samantha** told me **they** were coming over later.”

• “Make sure the **children** know which bags are **theirs**.”

*Usage Note: “Singular *they*”

English does not have a way of identifying a single person with a pronoun if his or her gender is not known, so sometimes the third-person plural forms (*they, them*, etc.) are used as a gender-neutral alternative to the third-person feminine/masculine forms. This is sometimes called “singular *they*.”

For example:

• “You shouldn’t judge **someone** until you know what **they** are really like.”

• “If **anyone** needs extra help with **their** studies, **they** should feel free to see me after class.”

While it is still considered incorrect by some writers and writing guides, especially in American English, “singular *they*” is gradually becoming accepted as the norm, especially in instances with indefinite pronouns that sound plural but are grammatically singular (like *anyone* in the example above).

Subject-Verb Agreement

Because countable nouns can be either singular or plural, it is very important to use the correct **subject-verb agreement** when they are functioning as the subject of a clause.

Subject-verb agreement refers to using certain conjugations of verbs for singular subjects and using other conjugations for plural subjects. This happens most noticeably with the verb *to be*, which becomes *is* or *was* with singular subject nouns and *are* or *were* with plural subjects.

For example:

• “My **brother *is*** back from college.” (singular present simple tense)

• “The **company *was*** in financial trouble.” (singular past simple tense)

• “Many **people *are*** getting frustrated with the government.” (plural present simple tense)

• “The **computers *were*** rather old.” (plural past simple tense)

For any other verb, we only need to make a change if it is in the **present simple tense**. For most verbs, this is accomplished by adding an “-s” to the end if it is singular and leaving it in its base form if it is plural. For example:

• “My **father *runs*** his own business.” (singular)
• “But his **sons *run*** it when he’s away.” (plural)

• “The **dog *wags*** his tail when he is happy.” (singular)
• “**Dogs** sometimes ***wag*** their tails when they’re angry or scared.” (plural)

The verbs *have* and *do* also only conjugate for singular subjects in the present simple tense, but they have irregular forms for this: *has* and *does*. For example:

• “The **apple *has*** a mark on it.” (singular)
• “All the **apples *have*** marks on them.” (plural)
• “The **teacher *does*** not think it’s a good idea.” (singular)
• “The other **teachers *do*** not mind, though.” (plural)

Finally, the **modal auxiliary verbs** *will, would, shall, should, can, could, might,* and *must* do **not** conjugate for singular vs. plural subjects—they always remain the same. For instance:

• "This **phone *can*** also surf the Internet!" (singular)
• "Most **phones *can*** do that now." (plural)

• "The **president *will*** arrive in Malta next week." (singular)
• "The other **diplomats *will*** arrive shortly after that." (plural)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **cannot** be used with countable nouns?

a) Indefinite articles
b) Definite articles
c) Third-person singular pronouns
d) Plural forms
e) All of the above
f) None of the above

2. True or False: Countable nouns are always **concrete nouns**.

a) True
b) False

3. How do **most** verbs conjugate when they have a singular subject?

a) By adding "-d" to the end
b) By adding "-s" to the end
c) They remain in their base form
d) They take an auxiliary verb

4. Which of the following third-person pronouns is used for **plural** nouns?

a) he
b) she
c) it
d) they

5. Which of the following third-person pronouns is used for **non-gendered singular** nouns?

a) he
b) she
c) it
d) they

Uncountable Nouns

Definition

Nouns that cannot be divided or counted as individual elements or separate parts are called **uncountable nouns** (also known as **mass nouns** or **non-count nouns**). These can be tangible objects (such as substances or collective categories of things), or intangible or abstract things, such as concepts or ideas. Nouns that *can* be divided are called **countable nouns**, or simply **count nouns**.

Here are some examples of uncountable nouns:

• *wood, smoke, air, water*
• *furniture, homework, accommodation, luggage*
• *love, hate, beauty, intelligence, arrogance*
• *news*, access*

(*Even though *news* ends in an "-s," it is uncountable. We need this "-s" because without it, *news* would become *new*, which is an adjective.)

Using articles with uncountable nouns

Uncountable nouns cannot take the **indefinite articles** "a" or "an" in a sentence, because these words indicate a single amount of something. For example:

✖ "Would you like ***a*** **tea**?" (incorrect)
✔ "Would you like **tea**?" (correct)

✖ "Do you have ***an*** **information**?" (incorrect)
✔ "Do you have (***some/any***) **information**?" (correct)

(We often use the words "some" or "any" to indicate an unspecified quantity of uncountable nouns. We'll investigate this more in a later part of this section.)

However, uncountable nouns *can* sometimes take the definite article "the," as in:

• "Have you heard ***the*** **news**?"

• “***The*** **furniture** in my living room is old.”

However, this is only the case if a specific uncountable noun is being described. For example:

✖ “I am looking for ***an*** **accommodation**.” (incorrect)

✖ “I am looking for ***the*** **accommodation**.” (incorrect)

✔ “I am looking for **accommodation**.” (correct)

✔ “I am looking for ***the*** **accommodation** listed in this advertisement.” (correct —references specific accommodation)

Uncountable nouns are not plural

Third-person singular vs. third-person plural pronouns

Just as uncountable nouns cannot take the indefinite articles “a” or “an” because there is not “one” of them, it is equally incorrect to use third-person plural pronouns with them, as they are not considered a collection of single things. For example:

• Person A: “Your hair looks very nice today.”

✖ Person B: “Yes, I washed **them** last night.” (incorrect)

✔ Person B: “Yes, I washed **it** last night.” (correct)

Note that single hairs become countable. If there are two hairs on your jacket, you can say “hairs” or use the plural pronoun “they.” The hair on your head, however, is seen as an uncountable noun.

Plural forms of the noun

We also cannot make uncountable nouns plural by adding “-s” on the end. Again, they are grammatically regarded as single, collective units. For example:

✖ “We bought new camping **equipments**.” (incorrect)
✔ “We bought new camping **equipment**.” (correct)

✖ “The teacher gave us **many homeworks**.” (Incorrect. We also cannot use the quantifier “many” with uncountable nouns, because it refers to individual things.)

✔ “The teacher gave us **a lot of homework**.” (Correct. We *can* use the quantifier “a lot” to indicate a large amount of an uncountable noun.)

Subject-verb agreement

Because uncountable nouns cannot be plural, it is very important to use the correct subject-verb agreement. **Subject-verb agreement** refers to using certain conjugations of verbs with singular vs. plural subjects. This happens most noticeably with the verb *to be*, which becomes *is* or *was* with singular subject nouns and *are* or *were* with plural subjects. Because uncountable nouns are grammatically **singular**, they must take singular forms of their verbs.

Here are a few examples illustrating this distinction:

✖ “The **furnitures** in my living room ***are*** old.” (incorrect)
✖ “The **furnitures** in my living room ***is*** old.” (incorrect)
✔ “The **furniture** in my living room ***is*** old.” (correct)

✖ “Their **behaviors** ***are*** not good.” (incorrect)
✔ “Their **behavior** ***is*** not good.” (correct)

✖ “The **news** ***are*** good.” (incorrect)
✔ “The **news** ***is*** good.” (correct)

Measurements of distance, time, and amount

A notable exception to the subject-verb rule we just discussed relates to countable nouns that are describing measurements of distance, time, or amount. In this case, we consider the sum as a singular amount, and so they must take singular forms of their verbs. For example:

✖ “**$20,000** ***have been*** credited to your account.” (incorrect)
✔ “**$20,000** ***has been*** credited to your account.” (correct)

✖ “I think **50 miles** ***are*** too far to travel on foot.” (incorrect)
✔ “I think **50 miles** ***is*** too far to travel on foot.” (correct)

✖ “Wow, **two hours** ***fly*** by when you’re having fun!” (incorrect)
✔ “Wow, **two hours** ***flies*** by when you’re having fun!” (correct)

Making uncountable nouns countable

If we want to identify one or more specific “units” of an uncountable noun, then we must add more information to the sentence to make this clear.

For example, if you want to give someone advice in general, you could say:

• “Can I give you **advice**?” or;

• “Can I give you **some advice**?”

But if you wanted to emphasize that you’d like to give them a particular aspect or facet of advice, you could not say, “Can I give you **an advice**?” Instead, we have to add more information to specify what we want to give:

• “Can I give you **a piece of advice**?”

By adding “piece of” to the uncountable noun *advice*, we have now made it functionally **countable**. This means that we can also make this phrase plural, though we have to be careful to pluralize the count noun that we’ve added, and not the uncountable noun itself. For example:

• “Can I give you ***a few pieces* of advice**?”

Using quantifiers with uncountable nouns

As we’ve already seen, certain **quantifiers** (a kind of **determiner** that specifies an amount of something) can only be used with uncountable nouns, while others can only modify countable nouns. While we will examine these more in depth in the chapter on **Determiners**, here are a few examples that cause particular confusion.

Too – Too Much – Too Many

We use “too + adjective” to mean “beyond what is needed or desirable,” as in, “It is **too big**.”

Too much, on the other hand, is used to modify uncountable nouns, while *too many* is used with countable nouns—they are not used with adjectives. For example, the following sentences would both be **incorrect**:

✖ “It is **too much big**.”

✖ “It is **too many big**.”

One particular source of confusion that can arise here is the fact that *much* can be used as an adverb before *too* to give it emphasis, as in:

• “It is ***much too* big**.”

We also must be sure not to use *too much* with a countable noun, nor *too many* with an uncountable noun.

✖ “I have ***too much* pieces of furniture**.” (incorrect)
✔ “I have ***too many* pieces of furniture**.” (correct)

✖ “I have ***too many* furniture**.” (incorrect)
✔ “I have ***too much* furniture**.” (correct)

Fewer vs. Less

The conventional rule regarding *less vs. fewer* is that we use *fewer* with countable nouns and *less* with uncountable nouns. For example:

✖ “I have ***less* friends** than Jill has.” (incorrect)
✔ “I have ***fewer* friends** than Jill has.” (correct)

✖ “I have ***fewer* money** than he has.” (incorrect)
✔ “I have ***less* money** than he has.” (correct)

The rule carries over when we add words to an uncountable noun to make a countable phrase (as we looked at above). We can see this distinction in the following examples:

• “I want ***less* toast**.” (*toast* is uncountable)
• “I want ***fewer* pieces of toast**.” (*pieces of toast* is countable)

• “There is ***less* water** in the jug.” (*water* is uncountable)

• “There are ***fewer* cups of water** in the jug.” (*cups of water* is countable)

Measurements of distance, time, and amount

As we noted above, measurements of distance, time, or amount for nouns that we would normally consider countable (and thus plural) end up taking singular verbs. Likewise, these terms also take the word *less*, most often in the construction *less than*. For example:

• “**$20,000 is *less than*** we expected to pay.”

• “We walked ***less than* 50 miles** to get here.”

• “We have ***less than* two hours** to finish this project.”

• “I weigh **20 pounds *less than*** I used to.”

Note, however, that we can’t use *less* before these kinds of nouns:

✖ “We have ***less* $20,000**.” (incorrect)

✖ “I ran ***less* 10 miles**.” (incorrect)

Less is also used with countable nouns in the construction *one less* _____, as in:

• “That is ***one less* problem** to worry about.”

Fewer can also be used (albeit less commonly), but the construction usually changes to *one* _____ *fewer*, as in:

• “That is **one problem *fewer*** to worry about.”

Rule or non-rule?

It is important to note that many grammar guides dispute the necessity of this supposed “rule,” referencing that it was in fact implemented as a stylistic preference by the 1770 grammarian Robert Baker, and that *fewer* and *less* had been used interchangeably for countable and uncountable nouns for hundreds of years before that. Specifically, it is considered by some as acceptable to use *less* with countable nouns, especially in informal or colloquial writing and speech.

As long as the sentence does not sound awkward, it is probably safe to do so. However, many still regard the *fewer vs. less* rule as indisputable, so it is recommended to adhere to the rule for professional, formal, or academic writing.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which article **can** be used with uncountable nouns?

a) a
b) an
c) the
d) A & B

2. What verb form is **generally** used with uncountable nouns?

a) singular
b) plural
c) singular in the past tense only
d) plural in the past tense only

3. Which of the following is an **uncountable noun**?

a) person
b) friend
c) intelligent
d) news

4. Which of the following is **not** an uncountable noun?

a) love
b) piece
c) wood
d) water

5. Which of the following sentences is correct?

a) “We are waiting for a news.”
b) “You can never have too many love.”
c) “These homeworks are very hard.”
d) “Could I have less water, please?”

Collective Nouns

Definition

Collective nouns are nouns that refer to a collection or group of multiple people, animals, or things. However, even though collective nouns refer to multiple individuals, they still usually function as singular nouns in a sentence. This is because they still are technically referring to one thing: the group as a whole. Here are some examples of collective nouns:

- **group** – A group is a single unit that is made up of a number of individuals, whether people or things.
- **collection** – A collection is a single unit that typically consists of many similar things organized together, such as paintings.
- **tribe** – A tribe is a single unit that is made up of a group of tribe members.
- **fleet** – A fleet is a single unit that is made up of several vehicles or vessels, such as ships.

- **band** – A band is a single unit that consists of a number of different musicians.

Collective nouns are used in sentences to refer to a group of people, animals, or things. Here are some examples of collective nouns being used in sentences:

• “The **flock** of birds flew south for the winter.”

• “The **organization** voted to revoke the rules that it had previously approved.”

• “The **set** of tablecloths had disappeared. ”

Similarity to plural nouns

Collective nouns are very similar to plural nouns. Plural nouns are nouns that refer to multiple people, places, or things, and they primarily (but not always) end in “-s,” “-es,” or “-ies.” They are derived from singular nouns, and so are truly plural in form and function. For example, the following words are all plural nouns:

- **dogs**
- **cities**
- **tables**
- **oceans**
- **sleds**

Both plural nouns and collective nouns can refer to multiple things. The difference is that collective nouns refer to a group of individuals in a single unit, whereas plural nouns refer to multiple individuals. To understand the difference, consider the following sentence:

• “The **musicians** played the song beautifully.”

This sentence contains the plural noun *musicians*. This word lets the reader know that there are multiple musicians who played the song beautifully. However, consider the following sentence:

• “The **orchestra** played the song beautifully.”

This sentence contains the **collective noun** *orchestra*. This word lets the reader know that there is a group of musicians that played the song beautifully. However, it also lets the reader know that the multiple musicians are arranged into a single group. The plural noun *musicians* in the first sentence does not do that.

Here are two more examples:

• “The **soldiers** marched very swiftly.” (plural noun)

• “The **platoon** marched very swiftly.” (collective noun)

As in the previous examples, both *soldiers* and *platoon* indicate multiple people. However, only *platoon* lets the reader know that the soldiers are organized into a collective unit.

Singular vs. Plural Use

Collective nouns usually function as singular nouns in a sentence, but they are occasionally used as plurals, too. Whether they are used in a singular or plural manner can impact which verbs and pronouns should be associated with the word.

The way we determine in which manner the collective noun should be used is to consider whether the members of the collective noun are being regarded as a single, whole unit, or as multiple individuals. If they are functioning as a whole, then you use singular verb tenses and pronouns; if they are acting individually, then you use plural verb tenses and pronouns.

For example, the following sentence demonstrates singular use of a collective noun:

• “The **offense** *hopes* to score a touchdown on its next play.”

Here, the collective noun *offense* refers to the members of the team’s offensive unit functioning as a whole; therefore, it acts as a singular noun in the sentence. As a result, the verb *hopes* and the pronoun *its* are also singular.

Compare this to the next sentence, which demonstrates plural use of a collective noun:

• “The **jury** *eat* their lunches before they deliberate.”

In this sentence, the collective noun, *jury*, refers to the jury members acting individually. As a result, *jury* functions as a plural noun in the sentence. This means that the plural pronouns *they* and *their* are used, as is the plural form of the verb *eat.*

Finally, it is worth noting that in **British English**, it is more common for collective nouns to function as plurals in all instances.

Plural-only collective nouns

Certain collective nouns can only be plural, such as “police.” For example:

✖ “The **police *is*** investigating the matter.” (incorrect)

✔ “The **police *are*** investigating the matter.” (correct)

However, we can make the noun countable by adding more information to the sentence. If we want to specify a single member of the police, we could say:

• “**A police officer *is*** investigating the matter.”

Here are some other examples of collective nouns that can only be plural:

- **people**
- **children**
- **poultry**
- **vermin**
- **cattle**

Collective Nouns and Animals

In the English language, there are many different types of collective nouns that refer to different groupings of animals. There are hundreds of different collective nouns used to describe animal group names, but here are a few common ones:

- **flock** of birds
- **pod** of whales
- **pack** of wolves
- **pride** of lions
- **gaggle** of geese
- **band** of coyotes
- **gatling** of woodpeckers
- **huddle** of penguins
- **mob** of kangaroos
- **school** of fish

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is a collective noun?

a) birds
b) berries
c) cake

d) team

2. Which word is the collective noun in the following sentence?
“The herd moved north over the mountains.”

a) moved
b) north
c) herd
d) mountains

3. Which of the following is not a collective noun?

a) ships
b) group
c) committee
d) government

4. A collective noun is **usually** _____ in a sentence.

a) plural
b) singular
c) Neither
d) A & B

5. Which of the following is a collective noun that refers to a group of animals?

a) book
b) snow
c) flock
d) sky

Compound Nouns

Definition

A **compound noun** is a noun consisting of two or more words working together as a single unit to name a person, place, or thing. Compound nouns are usually made up of two nouns or an adjective and a noun, but other combinations are also possible, as well.

Generally, the first word in the compound noun tells us **what kind** of person or

thing it is or what purpose he, she, or it serves, while the second word **defines** the person or object, telling us who or what it is. For example:

• water + bottle = **water bottle** (a bottle used for water)

• dining + room = **dining room** (a room used for dining)

• back + pack = **backpack** (a pack you wear on your back)

• police + man = **policeman** (a police officer who is a man)

Like other nouns, compound nouns can be modified by other adjectives. For example:

• "I need to buy a *large* **water bottle**."

• "That's a *beautiful* **dining room**."

• "My *old* **backpack** is still my favorite."

• "A *lone* **policeman** foiled the attempted robbery."

You can recognize compound nouns because the meaning of the two words put together is different than the meaning of the words separately. For example, *water* and *bottle* have their own separate meanings, but when we use them together they mean a particular type of bottle that we drink water from.

Forming compound nouns

As mentioned, compound nouns are formed by combining two or more words, with the most common combinations being *noun + noun* or *adjective + noun*. However, combinations using other parts of speech are also possible. Below are the various combinations used to create compound nouns.

Noun + noun

There are a great number of compound nouns formed using the *noun + noun* combination. For example:

• **backpack**
• **bathroom**
• **bathtub**
• **bedroom**
• **bus stop**
• **fish tank**
• **football**
• **handbag**

• **motorcycle**
• **shopkeeper**
• **tablecloth**
• **toothpaste**
• **wallpaper**
• **water bottle**
• **website**
• **wristwatch**

Adjective + noun

There are also many compound nouns that are formed using the *adjective + noun* combination. For example:

• **full moon**
• **blackberry**
• **blackbird**
• **blackboard**
• **cell(ular) phone**
• **mobile phone**
• **hardware**
• **highway**
• **greenhouse**
• **redhead**
• **six-pack**
• **small talk**
• **software**
• **whiteboard**

Other combinations

Although the *noun + noun* and *adjective + noun* combinations are the most common, there are also plenty of other possibilities for forming compound nouns. For example:

Combination	Examples
noun + verb	**haircut, rainfall, sunrise, sunset**
noun + preposition	**hanger-on, passerby**

noun + prepositional phrase	**brother-in-law, mother-in-law**
noun + adjective	**cupful, spoonful**
verb + noun	**breakfast, washing machine, runway, pickpocket, swimming pool**
preposition + noun	**bystander, influx, onlooker, underpants, upstairs**
verb + preposition	**check-in, checkout/check-out, drawback, lookout, makeup**
adjective + verb	**dry cleaning, public speaking**
preposition + verb	**input, output, overthrow, upturn**

Writing compound nouns

Compound nouns are very common, both in written and spoken English, and there are spelling, punctuation, and pronunciation norms that we must be aware of if we want to use them correctly.

The three written forms of compound nouns

Writing compound nouns is a bit complicated due to the fact that they can take three different forms.

First, **open compound nouns** (or **spaced compound nouns**) are those that are written as two separate words, such as *washing machine*, *swimming pool*, and *water bottle*.

Second, there are **hyphenated compound nouns**, as in *check-in, hanger-on,* and *mother-in-law*.

Third, there are **closed compound nouns** (or **solid compound nouns**)—those that are written as one word, such as *rainfall*, *drawback*, and *toothpaste*.

Unfortunately, there aren't any rules that tell us which of the three forms is acceptable for a particular compound noun. Some compound nouns are

commonly written in two forms, as in *website / web site* or *checkout / check-out*, while others, such as *bus stop*, are strictly used in one form. Where more than one is possible, the form that is more commonly used may depend on the variety of English (American English vs. British English, for example), the style guide of a publication, or the personal preference of the writer.

If you're not sure which of the three forms to use, it's important to check a good, up-to-date dictionary. If you are relying on the spellchecker in a word processor, remember that this has its limits. For example, spellcheck is good for checking whether a particular compound noun can be written as one word (closed); however, if we write a compound noun as two words (open) and it should be written as one word (closed), or if we write it with a hyphen and it should be written without a hyphen, spellcheck will not catch the mistakes.

Finally, remember that, no matter which way the compound noun is written, it always functions grammatically as a single unit.

Pluralizing compound nouns

We usually pluralize a compound noun by adding an "-s" or "-es" to the main word, or the defining word, of the compound noun. This is usually the second word, but not always. For example:

Singular	Plural
bedroom	bed**rooms**
football	foot**balls**
water bottle	water **bottles**
full moon	full **moons**

BUT

Singular	Plural
secretary general	**secretaries** general
mother-in-law	**mothers**-in-law
passerby / passer-by	**passers**by / **passers**-by

When it’s not obvious which of the words is the defining word, we pluralize the end of it. For example:

Singular	Plural
haircut	hair**cuts**
check-in	check-**in**
checkout / check-out	check**outs** / check-**outs**
upturn	up**turns**

Pronouncing compound nouns

In general, compound nouns are pronounced with the emphasis on the first part of the word. For example:

- BEDroom
- BLACKbird
- CHECK-in
- GREENhouse
- MAKEup
- WATER bottle

Pronouncing compound nouns in this way helps us distinguish words that form a compound noun like *blackbird* and *greenhouse* from other instances when the same words would appear together, as in: “*Look at that beautiful black bird,*” or “*I like that green house on the corner*.”

Although we normally stress the first word in a compound noun, there are certain exceptions to this pattern. For example, we disregard this rule when pronouncing compound nouns that include titles or proper nouns, as in *Secretary GENeral* and *Mount RUSHmore*.

If in doubt, you can use a good **dictionary** to determine which syllable should be emphasized.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Compound nouns are made up of _____ words.

a) two or more
b) two
c) many
d) one or two

2. **Closed** compound nouns are written _____.

a) as two words
b) as one word
c) with a hyphen
d) with a comma

3. Which of the following sentences **does not** contain a compound noun?

a) “Did you see that noisy blackbird?”
b) “Let’s go eat breakfast.”
c) “I’d love to live in a green house with a red door.”
d) “Would you like to see my new swimming pool?”

4. Which of the following compound nouns is **written incorrectly**?

a) spoonful
b) tablecloth
c) hangeron
d) passerby

5. If capital letters show emphasis in pronunciation, which word is **pronounced incorrectly**?

a) attorney GENeral
b) PASSERby
c) BACKpack
d) PRIME minister

Nominalization (Creating Nouns)

Definition

Nominalization refers to the creation of a noun from **verbs** or **adjectives**.

Most of the time, nouns are created from other parts of speech through the use of **suffixes**. In other cases, the word remains the same but is simply used a different way; this is known as **conversion** or **zero derivation**.

Suffixes

Suffixes are certain groupings of letters that can be attached to the end of words to change their meaning. Most verbs and adjectives that become nouns are changed using suffixes.

(Be aware, however, that the examples below only show some of the common ways of using suffixes to change verbs and adjectives to nouns; they are not all concrete rules, and the lists of possible suffixes are not exhaustive ones. The best way to learn the spellings of such nouns is by using a good **dictionary**, or by encountering them in everyday speech and writing.)

Verbs

There are certain patterns that we follow to decide which suffix is needed in order to create a noun from a verb.

Gerunds

The most straightforward way of turning a verb into a noun is through the use of **gerunds**. These are made by adding the suffix "-ing" to the end of the verb. For example:

• "**Walking** is very pleasant."

• "I enjoy **reading**."

• "**Listening** is an important aspect of any relationship."

• "My **sleeping** has been very disrupted lately."

• "**Baking** is my favorite pastime."

• "I hate **running**."

Note that if the gerund takes any additional information, such as an **object**, **adverb**, or **prepositional phrase**, then this entire group of words (known as a **gerund phrase**) acts as a noun. To learn more about gerunds and gerund phrases, go to the section on **Gerunds** in the chapter about **Other Parts of Speech**.

Nouns of agency and profession

When we turn a verb into a noun to represent someone (or occasionally some*thing*) who is an **agent** of that action, or who performs the action in a professional capacity, we typically use the suffixes “-or,” “-er,” or “-r.” For example:

• “My fiancée is an **actor**.” (Someone who *acts*.)

• “I’m training to be a **teacher**.” (Someone who *teaches*.)

• “The **writer** is very well known.” (Someone who *writes*.)

• “The company is a major **employer** in the area.” (Something that *employs* people.)

• “The **projector** was broken today.” (Something that *projects*.)

Nouns of recipience

For verbs that become nouns to represent someone who is the **recipient** of an action, we often use the suffix “-ee.”

Perhaps the most common example of this in modern English is *employee* (someone who others *employ*), as in:

• “The **employee** is disputing his wages.”

Other examples include:

• “The bank must approve you as the **payee**.” (Someone who is *paid*.)

• “There is one more **interviewee** waiting to be seen.” (Someone who is *interviewed*.)

Nouns of general action

We can use a variety of different suffixes to describe an action in general. The most common of these are “-tion,” “-sion,” “-ance,” “-ment,” and “-ence”; in some instances, we change the ending of the verb slightly in order to take the suffix.

For example:

• “His **acceptance** of the position was received warmly.” (The verb *accept* becomes the noun *accept**ance***.)

• “Thank you for the **invitation**!” (The verb *invite* becomes the noun *invit**ation***.)

• “In **conclusion**, we should see a spike in profits soon.” (The verb *conclude* becomes the noun *conclu**sion***.)

• “**Government** must derive from the will of the **population**.” (The verb *govern* becomes the noun *govern**ment***; the verb *populate* becomes the noun *populat**ion***.))

• “**Attendance** is at an all-time low.” (The verb *attend* becomes the noun *attend**ance***.)

• “I was surprised by my **enjoyment** of the play.” (The verb *enjoy* becomes the noun *enjoy**ment***.)

• “Use the textbook as your **reference** if you’re confused.” (The verb *refer* becomes the noun *refer**ence***.)

Some other suffixes that work in this way are “-al” and “-ure,” as in:

• “**Failure** to find a solution is not an option.” (The verb *fail* becomes the noun *fail**ure***.)

• “The review will include a quick **perusal** of your work.” (The verb *peruse* becomes the noun *perus**al***.)

Adjectives

We change adjectives into nouns when we want to speak of them as general ideas or concepts. Adjectives can take a variety of different suffixes, depending on how they are spelled.

“-ness”

We often use the suffix “-ness” for many adjectives. Most of the time, we can simply add the suffix on to the end of the adjective without making any changes to its spelling. For example:

• “The **hardness** of diamond makes it a great cutting tool.” (The adjective *hard* becomes the noun *hard**ness***.)

• “The child’s **meekness** is quite sweet.” (The adjective *meek* becomes the noun *meek**ness***.)

• “His **gruffness** is not appreciated.” (The adjective *gruff* becomes the noun *gruff**ness***.)

• “I don’t care for the **roughness** of my hands.” (The adjective *rough* becomes the noun *rough**ness***.)

• “I don’t think you understand the **seriousness** of the situation.” (The adjective *serious* becomes the noun *serious**ness***.)

• “Please don’t underestimate my **gratefulness**.” (The adjective *grateful* becomes the noun *grateful**ness***.)

However, when we use this suffix with an adjective ending in “-y,” we change “y” to “i”:

• “We’re waiting for some **steadiness** in the market.” (The adjective *steady* becomes the noun *steadi**ness***.)

• “The teacher puts her students’ **happiness** above all else.” (The adjective *happy* becomes the noun *happi**ness***.)

Some adjectives ending in a “-t” preceded by a long vowel sound can take this suffix as well:

• “Her **greatness** is without question.” (The adjective *great* becomes the noun *great**ness***.)

• “The **flatness** of the Earth was disproven long ago.” (The adjective *flat* becomes the noun *flat**ness***.)

“-y”

Other adjectives that end in a “-t” preceded by a consonant will take the suffix “-y” to become nouns. For example:

• “This project will be fraught with **difficulty**.” (The adjective *difficult* becomes the noun *difficul**ty***.)

• “That’s enough of your **modesty**.” (The adjective *modest* becomes the noun *modes**ty***.)

• “**Honesty** is a very important virtue.” (The adjective *honest* becomes the noun *hones**ty***.)

“-ity”

When adjectives end in “-e,” they often take the suffix “-ity” to become nouns. However, there is often a change to the spelling of the word. Usually, we simply drop “e” and replace it with “-ity,” as in:

• “There is a **scarcity** of food in the city.” (The adjective *scarce* becomes the noun *scarc**ity***.)

• “Kindness is a **rarity** in this world.” (The adjective *rare* becomes the noun *rar**ity***.)

When the word ends in “ble,” though, we have to change “le” to “il,” as in:

• “This project is your **responsibility**.” (The adjective *responsible* becomes the noun *responsibil**ity***.)

• “I have no question of your **ability**.” (The adjective *able* becomes the noun *abil**ity***.)

Uniquely, we also use the “-ity” suffix to change the adjective *hilarious* to *hilarity*, even though other adjectives with similar endings (such as *serious, grievous, callous,* etc.) take the suffix “-ness.”

“-ance” and “-ence”

We often use the suffix “-ance” for adjectives ending in “-ant,” as in:

• “This is of the utmost **importance**.” (The adjective *important* becomes the noun *import**ance***.)

• “Your **ignorance** is astounding.” (The adjective *ignorant* becomes the noun *ignor**ance***.)

We often use the suffix “-ence” for adjectives ending in “-ent,” as in:

• “We demand greater **independence**.” (The adjective *independent* becomes the noun *independ**ence***.)

• “**Silence** is expected during tests.” (The adjective *silent* becomes the noun *sil**ence***.)

Conversion

When we use a verb or adjective as a noun without changing its spelling in any way, it is called **conversion** or **zero derivation**.

Verbs

Conversion is especially common with verbs, and there are many instances where the same word may function as a verb or a noun, depending on the context. For example:

• “Please **answer** the phone, Tom.” (verb)
• “We’ll need an **answer** by tomorrow.” (noun)

• “I **run** each morning before breakfast.” (verb)
• “I’m going for a **run** later today.” (noun)

• “Meteorologists are **forecasting** a snowstorm overnight.” (verb)
• “The **forecast** said there would be rain in the afternoon.” (noun)

Less commonly, there are instances in which, instead of changing a word’s spelling, we change where we pronounce a stress on the word’s syllables to indicate a shift from a verb to a noun; this change is known as a **suprafix**. Let’s look at some examples (with the stressed syllable underlined):

• “You need to **con**<u>**vert**</u> pounds into kilograms.” (verb)
• “The church always welcomes recent <u>**con**</u>**verts** to its meetings.” (noun)

• “Make sure you **re**<u>**cord**</u> the meeting so we can review it later.” (verb)
• “I love listening to old <u>**re**</u>**cord**<u>**s**</u>.” (noun)

• “Please don’t **in**<u>**sult**</u> my intelligence.” (verb)
• “We will not forget this <u>**in**</u>**sult** to our company.” (noun)

The word *use* can also function as either a noun or a verb, but instead of changing the stress on a syllable, we change the actual pronunciation of the word, as in:

• “We plan to **use** a diagnostic test to evaluate the problem.” (verb—*use* is pronounced “*yooz*”)
• “There is only one **use** for this tool.” (noun—*use* is pronounced “*yuce*”)

Nominal adjectives

We can also convert adjectives into nouns without changing spelling, but we generally do so by adding the article *the* before the word. These are known as **nominal adjectives**. For example:

• “**The wealthy** have an obligation to help **the poor**.”

• “We all want **the best** for her.”

• “This law protects **the innocent**.”

To learn more about how and when these are used, go to the section about **Nominal Adjectives** in the chapter on **Adjectives**.

Infinitives

Lastly, verbs can serve the function of nouns by being used in their **infinitive form**—that is, the base form of the verb with the particle *to*. Infinitives are not

technically an example of nominalization, because they can also act as adjectives and adverbs, but it's worth looking at how they work when they function as nouns. For example:

As the subject of a clause

• "***To err*** is human; ***to forgive*** is divine."

• "***To study*** **mathematics at Harvard** was her ultimate dream."

• "***To live*** **in the city** means adjusting to a completely different lifestyle."

As the object of a verb

• "I'm not going unless you agree ***to go*** **with me**."

• "You appear ***to be*** **correct**."

• "Please be quiet; I'm trying ***to study***."

As an object complement

(An **object complement** is a word or group of words that describe, rename, or complete the direct object of the verb.)

• "I don't expect you ***to approve*** **of my decision**."

• "She's forcing me ***to work*** **through the weekend**."

• "We need you ***to make*** **a few more copies**."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is used to change the **spelling** of a verb or adjective that is made into a noun?

a) prefixes
b) suffixes
c) infixes
d) circumfixes

2. What is the name for nominalization in which the spelling of the verb or adjective does **not** change?

a) inversion

b) conscription
c) conversion
d) elision

3. Which of the following suffixes is commonly used to change a verb to a noun to reflect **agency** or **profession**?

a) “-or”
b) “-ing”
c) “-ance”
d) “-ence”

4. Which of the following nominalized verbs (in **bold**) is a **gerund**?

a) “**Adherence** to the rules is expected of all students.”
b) “We weren’t expecting her **refusal** of our offer.”
c) “**Winning** isn’t everything, you know.”
d) “We need to hire a few more **employees**.”

Pronouns

Definition

Pronouns are words that are used in place of nouns in a sentence. The noun being replaced is known as the **antecedent** of the pronoun.

Using pronouns

We commonly use pronouns in speech and writing to avoid sounding unnatural and repetitive by reusing the same noun in a sentence multiple times. Take, for example, the following sentence:

• “*John* said that *John* wants to use the computer that belongs to *John*.”

The sentence is awkward because John is repeated so many times. Instead, we can use **personal pronouns** to stand in for the name of the antecedent to make the sentence sound more natural, as in:

• “*John* said that **he** wants to use the computer that belongs to **him**.”

In addition to making the sentence sound better, the pronouns provide specific information, telling us that *John* is in the third **person**. If the sentence were in

the **first person**, it would read:

• "**I** said that **I** want to use the computer that belongs to **me**."

(We never use our own names when we talk about what we're doing in the first person, so we use the personal pronoun *I* instead of an antecedent.)

As we can see in the examples above, the pronouns are all serving the same function as nouns. They can be **the subject** of a sentence or clause, the **object** of a verb, or they can follow linking verbs to rename or re-identify the subject (known as a **subject complement**).

Categories of Pronouns

There is a wide range of different categories of pronouns that we use in everyday speech and writing. Each kind of pronoun has a unique function in a sentence; many pronouns belong to multiple categories, and can serve different purposes depending on the context. We'll briefly summarize these categories below, but you can continue on into the chapter to learn more about each.

Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns, which we looked at briefly above, are used to represent people in a sentence. Unique among pronouns, personal pronouns experience a wide range of **inflection**, meaning they change form to reflect specific meaning in different contexts.

We already saw in the example above how personal pronouns can inflect according to grammatical **person** (first person, second person, or third person), but they also change to reflect grammatical **number** (singular or plural), **gender** (masculine, feminine, or neuter), and **case** (subjective, objective, or possessive).

Go to each of the sub-sections of **personal pronouns** to learn more about all their different forms.

Reflexive Pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are very similar in style and form to **personal pronouns**—so similar, in fact, that they are listed as a sub-group of personal pronouns in this guide. (They are technically **not** personal pronouns, but their use and the way they are formed are so similar that it is useful seeing them in direct comparison to personal pronouns.)

We use reflexive pronouns when the subject of a clause is also the object of the

clause's verb. This occurs with certain **reflexive verbs**. They are formed by adding "-self" (singular) or "-selves" (plural) to the end of *my, your, our, him, her, it* or *them* (as well as the indefinite pronoun *one*). For example:

• "I *saw* **myself** in the mirror."

• "She *imagined* **herself** on a tropical beach."

• "They *consider* **themselves** to be above the law."

• "One should not *concern* **oneself** with the business of others."

Intensive Pronouns

Intensive pronouns are identical to reflexive pronouns in form, but, instead of functioning as the object of a verb, they serve to emphasize or reiterate the subject's role in the verb's action. For instance:

• "I checked over these documents **myself**."

• "The president **himself** will be in attendance."

Indefinite Pronouns

We use **indefinite pronouns** in place of a noun that is not being specified in the sentence. There are many different indefinite pronouns; which one we use depends on whether we are representing a noun that is a person or thing, and whether that noun is singular or plural. Some common examples include:

• "Is **everyone** here?"

• "I hope **all** is going well."

• "**Whatever** you decide is fine with me."

• "**Many** are coming to the show tonight."

Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are used to indicate specific people or things and indicate whether they are a) singular or plural and b) near or not near to the speaker. The most common are *this, that, these,* and *those*. For example:

• "**This** isn't mine." (singular, nearby)

• "Give me **that**." (singular, not near)

• "**These** are really gross." (plural, nearby)

• “I forgot to bring **those**.” (plural, not near)

Interrogative Pronouns

Interrogative pronouns are used to ask questions, functioning either as the subject or object of such sentences. There are five primary interrogative pronouns: *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, and *what*.

• “**Who** is coming to the party tonight?” (subject)

• “So, **which** will it be: $10,000, or a new sports car?” (object)

• “Could you tell me **whose** these are?” (subject)

• “Do you know **what** we’re doing here?” (object)

Relative Pronouns

Relative pronouns are used to connect **relative clauses** (also known as **adjective clauses**) to the main clause in a sentence. Relative clauses either help clarify the antecedent with essential information (in which case they are known as **restrictive clauses**), or else give extra, nonessential information about it (in which case they are known as **non-restrictive clauses**).

In a relative clause, the relative pronoun functions in one of three ways: as the **subject** of the clause, as the **object** of the clause’s verb, or as a **possessive determiner**. For example:

• “There’s the woman ***who*** *always sits next to me on the bus*.” (restrictive clause; *who* functions as the subject)

• “The book ***that*** *I wrote* is being published in January.” (restrictive clause; *that* functions as the object of *wrote*)

• “The escaped giraffe, ***which*** *had been on the loose for weeks*, was finally captured.” (non-restrictive clause; *which* functions as the subject)

• “The person, ***whose*** *name can’t be revealed*, appeared in court today.” (non-restrictive clause; *whose* functions as a possessive determiner, modifying *name*)

Reciprocal pronouns

We use **reciprocal pronouns** when two or more people both act as the subject of a verb, and both (or all) individually and equally receive the verb’s action. They can be the object of either the verb itself or a preposition used to complete the verb’s meaning.

There are two reciprocal pronouns—*each other* (traditionally used for two people) and *one another* (traditionally used for more than two people). For example:

• “Jake and I call **each other** every day.”

• “My neighbors and I spent a lot of time at each other’s houses when we were kids.”

Dummy Pronouns

“**Dummy**” **pronouns** (more technically known as **expletive pronouns**) are words that function grammatically as pronouns but do not have antecedents—that is, they do not replace a noun, phrase, or clause. They refer to nothing in particular, instead helping the sentence to function properly in a grammatical context. There are two dummy pronouns, *there* and *it*.

• “**There** is a ship in the harbor.”

• “**There** were flowers in the meadow.”

• “**It** looks like it may snow tonight.”

• “Could you tell me what time **it** is?”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the term for a noun that is replaced by a pronoun?

a) Remnant
b) Descendent
c) Antecedent
d) Precedent

2. Which of the following pronouns are used when a subject is also the object of the same verb?

a) Reflexive pronouns
b) Relative pronouns
c) Personal pronouns
d) Demonstrative pronouns

3. Which of the following pronouns are used to indicate the nearness and number of a specific noun?

a) Reflexive pronouns
b) Relative pronouns
c) Personal pronouns
d) Demonstrative pronouns

4. Pronouns have the same grammatical function as _____ in a sentence.

a) Nouns
b) Adjectives
c) Adverbs
d) Prepositions

5. Identify the type of pronoun (in **bold**) used in the following sentence:
"Let me know if you need **anything**."

a) Reciprocal pronoun
b) Interrogative pronoun
c) Indefinite pronoun
d) Dummy pronoun

Personal pronouns

Definition

A personal pronoun is a pronoun (a word that functions as and acts as a substitute for a noun or nouns) that represents a grammatical person within a sentence. While personal pronouns often do indicate an actual person, they can also refer to animals, inanimate objects, or even intangible concepts. For instance, the word *they* in the previous sentence is a plural third-person neuter (gender neutral) pronoun representing the words "personal pronouns" as a grammatical person. Here are some other examples:

• "As soon as John comes home, **I** am going to give **him** back **his** hat."

• "**My** team lost again. **We** really stink this year!"

• "**He** spoke to the boss yesterday and already got **her** approval."

Which personal pronoun is used in each instance varies depending on four grammatical elements: **number** (singular or plural), **person** (first, second, or third person), **gender** (male, female, or neuter/neutral), and **case** (subjective, objective, or possessive). This shifting of form is called **inflection**. Quite often,

the inflection of a personal pronoun will change within the same sentence.

There is also a different kind of pronoun called a **reflexive pronoun**, which is used when the subject of a verb is also the object (receiving the action) of the same verb. For example:

• “He looked at **himself** in the mirror before he left.”

• “I hurt **myself** on the playground today.”

Although not technically considered personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns are so similar in form and use that they have been included in this section.

We will examine each of these grammatical elements in relation to personal pronouns more in-depth in the sub-sections of this chapter, but here is a quick breakdown of all the personal pronouns and ***their*** different inflections.

Person	**Number**	**Gender**	**Subjective Case**	**Objective Case**	**Posse Deter**
First Person	Singular	Masculine/feminine	I	Me	My
First Person	Plural	Masculine/feminine	We	Us	Our
Second Person	Singular/Plural	Masculine/feminine	You	You	Your
Third Person	Singular	Feminine	She	Her	Her
Third Person	Singular	Masculine	He	Him	His
Third person	Singular	Neuter	It	It	Its
Third person	Plural*	Neuter (Gender Neutral)	They	Them	Their

(*See the usage note under “**Gender**” for information about using *they* as a singular pronoun.)

Personal Pronouns - Number

Definition

Grammatical number in English simply means whether something or someone is **singular** or **plural**—that is, is there one of something or someone (singular), or are there more than one (plural)? This is answered by the pronoun's **antecedent** (the word, phrase, clause, etc., that indicates what pronoun should be used, and in what form).

For nouns, we usually just add an "-s" to the end of the word to signify that it is plural (though there are many exceptions to this). Personal pronouns, however, have specific **inflections** (different forms of the word) depending on whether they are singular or plural. For the most part, only the **first-person** and **third-person** personal pronouns have plural forms. The only plural **second-person** pronoun is the reflexive pronoun *yourselves*.

For second-person pronouns that don't inflect for number, you sometimes have to use information from another part of the sentence or paragraph to determine if it is plural or singular. (See the examples below.)

Unfortunately, there is no rule to how personal pronouns change when they become plural; you simply have to memorize them. Refer to the table in the **chapter overview** to learn them.

Examples:

• "**I** *(first-person singular)* am meeting **my** *(first-person singular)* writing club this afternoon. **We** *(first-person plural)*always meet on Wednesdays after class."

• "**I** *(first-person singular)* really envy **you** *(second-person singular)*!"

• "**They** *(third-person plural)* can't tell **you** *(second-person plural)* what it will be like; **you** *(second-person plural)* will just have to find out for **yourselves** *(second-person plural reflexive)*."

• "The main reason Martha is so beautiful is because **she** *(third-person feminine singular)* is so tall."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which personal pronouns can be inflected for **number**? (Choose the answer

that is **most** correct.)

a) All of them
b) First-person and third-person pronouns
c) Reflexive pronouns
d) Second-person pronouns
e) B & C

2. Which of the following sentences has at least **one** pronoun that is **plural**? (Choose the answer that is **most** correct.)

a) “I told you that I needed it done by yesterday, Jeff.”
b) “She went for a walk by herself.”
c) “Don’t take your sister’s toys, or you will make her cry.”
d) “I asked all of you here so we could discuss the state of the business.”

3. Which of the following is the plural form of the **second-person reflexive pronoun**?

a) yourselves
b) itselves
c) themselves
d) ourselves

4. What is the plural form of the first-person possessive pronoun **mine**?

a) our
b) my
c) ours
d) theirs

Personal Pronouns - Person (First person, Second person, Third person)

Definition

Grammatical person refers to the perspectives of the personal pronouns used to identify a person in speech and text—that is, it distinguishes between a speaker (first person), an addressee (second person), and others beyond that (third person).

First person

• **Singular**: ***I, me, my, mine, myself***

• **Plural**: ***we, us, our, ours, ourselves***

First-person pronouns are used to express an autobiographical point of view—they tell what is directly happening to the speaker, writer, or fictional character. For example:

• "**I** don't know where **my** hat is!"

• "Janet is meeting **me** in town later."

• "Hey, that book is **mine**! **I** bought it!"

When the speaker is part of a group, the first-person pronouns inflect to the plural form:

• "**We** brought **our** own car."

• "They told **us** to help **ourselves**."

Second person

• **Singular/Plural**: ***you, you, your, yours, yourself (singular), yourselves (plural)***

We use the second-person pronouns to indicate those who are being addressed directly by the speaker. Unlike first-person pronouns, there is not a distinction between singular and plural second-person pronouns (except in the reflexive form). Here are some examples:

• "Bill, I was wondering if **you** could help me with the dishes?" (*second person*

singular)

• “Children, where are **your** manners?” (*second person plural*)

• “**You** really must learn to help **yourself**.” (*second person singular*)

• “I’m sick of cleaning up after all of **you**; from now on, **you** can clean up after **yourselves**!” (*second person plural*)

Usage note: Generic “you”

The second-person pronouns are also often used to indicate an unspecified person. This is sometimes referred to as **generic *you***, **impersonal *you***, or **indefinite *you***. This is less formal than its counterpart, the pronoun *one*, but it is sometimes preferred because it does not sound as snobbish or unnecessarily formal.

If *one* is writing something very formal or professional, then *one* might be better off using the generic pronoun *one*. If *you’re* writing something a bit less formal, then *you* are probably just fine using the generic pronoun *you*.

Third person

Third person is used to talk about someone or something that is not the speaker and is not being directly addressed. This is most widely used in fiction writing. When the person or thing is **singular**, the pronouns used in the third person are the different forms of *she*, *he*, and *it*:

• **Feminine singular**: ***she, her, hers, herself***

• **Masculine singular**: ***he, him, his, himself***

• **Neuter singular**: ***it, its, its own, itself***

However, when there are multiple people or things, we use the ungendered forms of *they*:

• **Third person plural**: ***they, them, their, theirs, themselves***

Sometimes, when a single person of an unknown gender is being discussed, the third-person plural forms (*they, them*, etc.) are used as a gender-neutral alternative to the third-person feminine/masculine forms. To learn more about this, please see the **Usage Note** about “Singular they” under the chapter section explaining **gender in personal pronouns**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which perspective of **grammatical person** is used for someone being addressed directly by the speaker?

a) First person
b) Second person
c) Third person
d) Third-person plural

2. Which of the following sentences uses a **first-person *plural*** pronoun?

a) “John said that I should be more careful with my writing.”
b) “They are not happy with your sales this quarter.”
c) “I’m not sure that he knows what they’re doing.”
d) “She doesn’t think that we should be paying that much.”

3. Who or what would be represented by **third-person pronouns** in a sentence?

a) A person or thing who is not being directly addressed by someone
b) A person or thing who is being directly addressed by someone
c) A person who is directly addressing someone or something
d) A person who is speaking about someone or something who is not present

4. Which perspective (or perspectives) of **grammatical person** are being used in the following sentence?
“When we were young, my father often told us that he didn’t have as many luxuries growing up.”

a) First person
b) Second person
c) Third person
d) Both first and third person
e) Both second and third person
f) First, second, and third person

Personal Pronouns - Gender

Definition

Modern English is largely an **ungendered** language. Whereas other languages might have masculine and feminine forms for nouns depending on the verbs,

articles, or adjectives they are used with, English nouns by and large remain neutral. However, a personal pronoun *can* be inflected for gender to correspond to the gender of the person (and, in some cases, an animal) it represents.

Personal pronouns are only inflected for gender when they are in the third person and singular—first-person and second-person pronouns (singular or plural) and third-person plural pronouns* remain gender neutral. Here are the gendered pronouns in English:

• **Third-person feminine singular**: ***she, her, hers, herself***

• **Third-person masculine singular**: ***he, him, his, himself***

The third-person singular can also be **neuter**. This is used when a personal pronoun represents a thing or an animal. Animals can sometimes take gendered personal pronouns if they are pets or domesticated animals; otherwise, they take the third-person neuter form:

• **Third-person neuter singular**: ***it, its, its own, itself***

Remember, when there are multiple people or things, we use the ungendered forms of *they**:

• **Third person plural**: ***they, them, their, theirs, themselves***

Examples

• “I really love Jenny. **She** is my best friend.”

• “Danny said that **he** would lend me **his** jacket for tonight.”

• “Look at that cute dog wagging **his** tail!”

• “Bill and Samantha told me **they** were coming over later.”

• “You should not try to control love, but rather be guided by **it**.”

• “I’ve got the report for you. I’ll just set **it** on your desk.”

• “The horse galloped by, **its** hooves pounding the ground violently.”

• “The parade floats are spectacular! I love watching **them** go down the street.”

Countries and ships

Countries and vehicles, especially ships or boats, will sometimes be given a feminine form when spoken of in the third person. For example:

• “The *SS Freedom* is a good ship. **She** has certainly seen **her** fair share of

adventure."

• "The Prime Minister promised that the United Kingdom would be returned to **her** former glory during his term."

This is a more traditional usage; it is less common these days, and by no means necessary. Some style guides go so far as to discourage its use.

*Usage Note: "Singular they"

English does not have a way of identifying a single person with a pronoun if his or her gender is not known, so sometimes the third-person plural forms (*they, them*, etc.) are used as a gender-neutral alternative to the third-person feminine/masculine forms. This is sometimes called "**singular they**."

For example:

• "You shouldn't judge someone until you know what **they** are really like."

• "If anyone needs extra help with **their** studies, **they** should feel free to see me after class."

"Singular they" is gradually becoming accepted as the norm, especially in instances with indefinite pronouns that sound plural but are grammatically singular (like *anyone* in the example above). However, it is still considered incorrect by many writers and writing guides, especially in American English.

Previously, it was standard practice to simply use the masculine third-person singular forms (*he*, *him*, *his*, *himself*), but this is now seen as being potentially sexist. Likewise, using only the feminine third-person singular would be exclusionary, and mixing *him* and *her* throughout a piece of writing would be confusing.

Therefore, in formal or professional writing, the best form to use is "*he or she*" or "*him or her*," or else simply to rewrite the sentence to avoid sounding cluttered or awkward. In informal writing or speech, though, using "singular they" is generally OK.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is an appropriate **third-person plural pronoun** to use when talking about more than one girl or woman?

a) Hers
b) Herselves

c) They
d) We

2. With what non-human things is it sometimes considered acceptable to use a gendered pronoun?

a) A ship or boat
b) A country
c) A pet or domestic animal
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

3. Which of the following sentences uses the informal "**singular they**"?

a) "I asked them if they would like to join us for lunch."
b) "When a child asks you a question, you should always strive to answer them truthfully."
c) "Don't pay any attention to them; that group is always bullying freshmen."
d) "John and Daniel said they would look after the kids tonight."

4. When is an animal most commonly given a gendered pronoun? (Select the answer that is **most** correct.)

a) Never
b) If it is a wild animal
c) If there is only one
d) If it is a pet or domestic animal
e) C & D

5. In what instance can a **third-person neuter singular** pronoun be used with a person?

a) If his or her gender is not known or specified
b) If there is more than one person
c) Never
d) A & B
e) Always

Personal Pronouns - Case

Definition

The English language has largely discarded its case system, which is the manner by which a noun is inflected depending on its grammatical function as a subject or object in a sentence. English largely uses prepositions to accomplish this now, but personal pronouns are one part of English in which the case system is still active, being inflected depending on whether they function as a **subject**, **object**, **possessive determiner**, or **possessive pronoun**.

Subjective Case

When a personal pronoun is acting as the **subject** of a verb (that is, it is the person or thing doing the action), it is said to be in the subjective case. For instance:

• "**I** know that **she** said that." (*Both pronouns are subjective, as both are agents of their respective actions*.)

• "**He** told **her** to be quiet." (*Here, only **he** is in the subjective case; **her**, the recipient or "object" of his action, is in the **objective** case*.)

Objective Case

A personal pronoun is in the **objective case** when it is a **direct** or **indirect object** of a verb, or else if it is the **object or a preposition**.

A direct object directly receives the action of a verb. For example:

• "Please send **them** in straight away."

• "Take **him** away!"

An indirect object, on the other hand, is the recipient of the direct object—it therefore **indirectly** receives the action of the verb via the direct object. For example:

• "Please tell **me** any news immediately!"

Here, *any news* is acting as the direct object of the verb *tell*—it is the thing being told. *Me*, on the other hand, is looking to receive *any news* by means of the action of *tell*, making it the **indirect object**.

• "I can't believe he brought **you** flowers. How sweet!"

Again, *you* is receiving the flowers, which is the direct object of *brought*. Be careful with the personal pronouns *you* and *it*, however—their subjective and

objective forms are the same. Take the following sentence, for example:

• "*You* said to give **you** the money as soon as *I* had **it**."

The pronouns *you* and *I* in *italics* are in the subjective case because they are each performing the action of their verbs. The pronouns **you** and **it** in **bold** are in the objective case because they are functioning as indirect and direct objects of their verbs (respectively).

After Linking Verbs (Subject Complements)

One confusing area is when a pronoun is a **subject complement** to a linking verb. For personal pronouns, this is almost always with forms of the verb *be*. In this situation, the personal pronoun should be in the **subjective case**. For example, "It was **I** who did this" is more correct than "It was **me** who did this."

It is easy to mistake it as the direct object because it seems like it is receiving the action of the verb, but linking verbs behave differently from **action verbs**. One way to be sure you are using the correct pronoun is to reverse the order of the verb and pronoun and see if the statement still makes sense.

Let's look again at the examples above:

✖ "It was **me** who did this." (incorrect)
✔ "It was **I** who did this." (correct)

If you reverse the order of the verb and pronoun, you can see why the first sentence is incorrect:

✖ "**Me** was the one* who did this." (incorrect)
✔ "**I** was the one* who did this." (correct)

(*Because in most instances we don't refer to a person as being *it* in a subject complement (except maybe in a game of tag), the indefinite pronoun phrase *the one* is used instead to identify the speaker as the person who did something.)

Here are some more examples:

• "Her husband took all the credit, but it was **she** who did all the work."

• "It was **they** who assured us that there would be no problems."

In many cases, it might be better to simply reword the sentence to sound less awkward. For example, "it was he who won the race" would sound better simply as "he won the race."

In conversational English, this distinction is much less frequently observed for simple sentences like our first examples, and you will often hear people using phrases such as “it’s me” or “that was her” in response to questions. But in writing (especially formal or professional writing), always use the **subjective case** for a personal pronoun if it is functioning as a **subject complement** after a linking verb.

Possessive Case (Genitive Case)

As the name implies, the possessive case changes the inflection of a personal pronoun to mark possession. There are two forms of personal pronouns in the possessive case: **possessive determiners**, and **possessive pronouns**.

Possessive determiners function grammatically like adjectives, modifying a noun or nouns. However, they cannot function as nouns in a sentence. For example:

✔ “**My** dad’s glasses went missing.” (**My** is correctly used as a possessive determiner, modifying *dad* to show his relation to the speaker.)
✖ “Hey, those glasses are **my**!” (**My** is incorrectly used as a possessive pronoun; it should read “Hey, those are **my** glasses!” or “Hey, those glasses are **mine**!”)

Possessive pronouns are personal pronouns in the possessive case which have the grammatical function of nouns. For example:

• “I can see **mine** through the window!”

• “You said you bought **yours** for $50?”

• “Jenny seems pretty sure that the book is **hers**.”

Be aware that the possessive determiners and possessive pronouns for the third-person masculine and third-person neuter are the same (***his*** and ***his***, ***its*** and ***its***), although *its* is more often used as a possessive determiner in the phrase *its own*. For example:

• “He said it was **his** computer, but I don’t think it is actually **his**.”

• “As the campaign reached the peak of **its** success, it seemed to take on a life of **its own**.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What determines if a personal pronoun is in the **subjective** case?

a) If it is the person or thing performing the action of a verb
b) If it is the person or thing receiving the indirect action of a verb
c) If it is the person or thing receiving the direct action of a verb
d) If the person or thing demonstrates possession of the object of a verb

2. How does a **possessive determiner** function grammatically?

a) As a verb
b) As an adjective
c) As an adverb
d) As a noun

3. Which of the following **possessive determiners** is the **same** when it is functions as a **possessive pronoun**?

a) Her
b) His
c) Its
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) None of the above

4. In the following sentence, which personal pronoun is in the **objective case**?
“I have told him a thousand times that he shouldn’t act that way!”

a) he
b) I
c) him
d) that

5. Which of the following sentences has a **possessive determiner**?

a) “I told you that my recipe was good!”
b) “She still claims that the bag isn’t hers.”
c) “He’s had his since he was a kid.”
d) “Donald said they bought theirs during a sale.”

Personal Pronouns - Reflexive Pronouns

Definition

Reflexive pronouns are used when someone or something is both the subject and the object of the same verb—that is, both that which is *performing* the action of the verb and that which is *receiving the action*. When this happens, the reflexive verb is used as the object of the verb to represent the person or thing.

For example, in the sentence “I heard **you** speaking,” “I” is the subject, and “you” is the object—they are not the same person, so a reflexive noun is not used.

Likewise, “I’ll be sure to thank himself” is not correct: “him” should be the object of “thank,” while “I” is the subject.

But in the sentence “I heard **myself** speaking,” the speaker (“I”) is both the subject of the verb “heard” and its object (what was heard), and thus is represented by the reflexive noun “myself.”

The reflexive pronouns are *myself*, *ourselves*, *yourself*, *yourselves*, *herself*, *himself*, *itself*, *themselves*, and *oneself*. The last of these is formed from the gender-neutral indefinite pronoun *one* (which also has the possessive form *one’s*); however, the pronoun *one* is **not** a personal pronoun.

Here are some more examples:

• I wish you could hear **yourselves** right now!

• She admitted to **herself** that she was wrong.

• The vole hides **itself** beneath the ground for safety.

• The players have really outdone **themselves** today!

• One should strive to better **oneself** every day.

On a final note, a reflexive pronoun can never be used as the subject of a verb—it can only act as the object, and only when the person or thing it represents is already being used as the subject.

For example, “myself taught me to read” is very clearly wrong, because *myself* should be used as the object of “taught,” while the personal pronoun **I** should be used as the subject. “John and myself will be in attendance” is also incorrect because the speaker (and John) is the subject of the verb “be,” without an object—it should read “John and **I** will be in attendance.”

For more information on the **subjective** and **objective cases**, please see the chapter section on **grammatical case in personal pronouns**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following sentences uses reflexive pronouns **correctly**?

a) “I couldn’t believe the pictures of myself after the party!”
b) “And how is himself these days?”
c) “I really haven’t felt like myself lately.”
d) “Please send the relevant information to Bob, Jane, and myself.”

2. Which of the following sentences uses a reflexive pronoun **incorrectly**?

a) “Myself and a few others are going to see a movie later.”
b) “I can see myself taking up golf when I retire.”
c) “Tom saw himself in the reflection of the water.”
d) “Students who have not done the work themselves will be penalized.”

3. Which is the correct **singular first-person reflexive pronoun**?

a) Ourselves
b) Yourself
c) Themselves
d) Myself

4. When do you use a reflexive pronoun?

a) When a personal pronoun is the object of a preposition.
b) When a person or thing is the subject and the object of the same verb.
c) When a person or thing is the subject of one verb and the object of another verb in the same sentence.
d) When a personal pronoun and another noun are both subjects of a verb.

Intensive Pronouns

Definition

Intensive pronouns are identical to **reflexive pronouns**—*myself, yourself, ourselves, himself, herself, itself,* and *themselves*. However, intensive pronouns do not serve a grammatical function in a sentence; instead, they add emphasis by reiterating the subject of the sentence (known as the pronoun’s **antecedent**).

Using intensive pronouns in a sentence

When we use an intensive pronoun to add emphasis to a sentence, we generally place it after either its antecedent or the direct object of the verb. For instance:

• “The surgeon general **himself** will oversee the operation.”

• “They **themselves** indicated that the transactions might be illegal.”

• “He did it **himself**, much to his father’s surprise.”

• “We designed the album artwork **ourselves**.”

If we use an intensive pronoun to add a pointed or argumentative emphasis to the sentence, it comes after the direct object, as in:

• “I can operate the TV remote **myself**, thank you very much.”

• “Our son can do the project **himself**, Hank.”

Distinguishing between intensive and reflexive pronouns

Although intensive and reflexive pronouns are identical in appearance, there is a clear distinction between them. Reflexive pronouns are used when the subject of a sentence also receives the action of the sentence—that is, the subject of the verb is also the object the same verb. For example:

• “I saw **myself** in the mirror.”

• “She asked **herself** if it was worth the hassle.”

• “The actor played **himself** in the film about his life.”

In all of these sentences, we use reflexive pronouns to indicate that the subject of the verb is also the recipient of its actions.

However, we use an intensive pronoun if we want to place special emphasis on **who** is performing the action of the subject on a separate object. Because of this, the intensive pronoun is not grammatically integral to the meaning of the sentence. Take, for example, these three sentences:

• “John played the tuba.”

• “John played the tuba **himself**.”

As we can see, the addition of *himself* has no bearing on the logical meaning of the sentence—in both cases, it is John who played the tuba. However, by adding the intensive pronoun *himself* in the second sentence, we let the reader or listener know that it is somehow remarkable or noteworthy that it was John who played the tuba, as opposed to someone else.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Intensive pronouns are identical to what other kind of pronoun?

a) indefinite pronouns
b) relative pronouns
c) reflexive pronouns
d) reciprocal pronouns

2. What is the function of intensive pronouns in a sentence?

a) To add emphasis to the role of the subject
b) To add emphasis to the role of the direct object
c) To indicate that the subject is also the object of the verb
d) To indicate that the object of the verb is also the object complement

3. Where does an intensive pronoun typically occur in a sentence?

a) Immediately after the subject of the sentence
b) Immediately after the main verb of the sentence
c) Immediately after the direct object of the verb
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) A & C
g) All of the above

4. Which of the following sentences uses an intensive pronoun?

a) “I could really see myself competing in a triathlon someday.”
b) “After much consideration, he decided to write himself out of the will.”
c) “She did herself a disservice by not renegotiating her contract.”
d) “He wrote the music himself to avoid extra copyright costs.”

Indefinite Pronouns

Definition

An **indefinite pronoun** is used in place of a noun without specifying a particular person or thing that is being represented. There are quite a few indefinite pronouns, which you can see listed in the table below. Look them over, and then read on to learn about their usage.

Table of Indefinite Pronouns

People vs. Things	Singular	Plural	Singular or Plural
Either People or Things	another one (quantifier) each either other	both few fewer many others several	all any more most neither none plenty some
People only	anybody/anyone everybody/everyone one ("impersonal" pronoun) nobody/no one/no-one somebody/someone whoever/whosoever whomever/whomsoever you (see usage note)	they (see usage note)	
Things only	anything enough everything less little much nothing something		such

	such this whatever whichever		

Singular vs. Plural

Many pronouns that refer to more than one—e.g., *everything*, *everyone*, *much*, etc.—are considered singular. This is because, grammatically, they function as a single unit (like the **collective nouns** *team*, *group*, *collection*, etc., which are made up of multiple people or things). As a result, they must take a singular verb and have agreement with the rest of the text. For example:

• "**Everyone** *is* invited."

• "I hope **everything** *is* alright; I would hate if *it* wasn't."

Likewise, the plural pronouns must have plural agreement with their verbs and other parts of the text:

• "**Many** *are* in agreement with *their* peers."

Some pronouns can function either as singular or plural, depending on context and usage; thus, their verb agreement changes accordingly. For example:

• "**All** *are* welcome should *they* wish to attend." (plural)

• "**All** *is* right with the world." (singular)

People vs. Things

Both people and things can be identified in a sentence by an indefinite pronoun. Many pronouns are only used to refer to people or to things; as we'll see later on, though, there are also many which can be used for either.

People

Take the following sentence, for example:

• "Would **anyone** like a drink?"

Here, *anyone* is standing in for any person, but it doesn't specify who that person is or might be—it could be *anyone*!

(If we wanted to use a pronoun that specified a person, we would use a **personal**

pronoun, as in “Would *you* like a drink?”)

However, we wouldn’t use *anyone* to refer to a thing. Any indefinite pronoun with “one” or “body” in it is reserved for identifying people. Incidentally, “one” and “body,” when used as *part* of an indefinite pronoun, can be used interchangeably. Although some people feel that using “body” sounds a bit less formal, it is up to the discretion of the writer.

Let’s look at examples for each indefinite pronoun that relates to people:

• “I don’t think **anybody/anyone** wants to dance.”

• “**Everybody/everyone** is leaving early.”

• “**One*** would hope that this sort of behavior wouldn’t be tolerated.”

• “**You*** would think that the government would have thought of that already.”

• “I can’t believe **nobody/no one/no-one** came to my play!”

• “She’s hoping **somebody/someone** will help her with her work.”

• “**Whoever/whosoever** would like to join us is more than welcome.”

• “Hire **whomever/whomsoever** you think would be the most appropriate for the job.”

• “**They*** say you should always wear a helmet on a bicycle.”

(Note that *whosoever* and *whomsoever*, while perfectly acceptable, have come to sound a bit antiquated compared to *whoever* and *whomever*.)

Usage note: Generic “you” and “they”

The second-person pronouns (you, your, yours, yourself, yourselves) are also often used as indefinite pronouns to indicate an unspecified person. This is sometimes referred to as generic you, impersonal you, or indefinite you.

***You* is far less formal than its counterpart, the indefinite pronoun *one*, but it is sometimes preferred because it does not sound as snobbish or because such formality is unnecessary. Because *one* is used to refer to people, but without specifying who it represents, it is sometimes called an impersonal pronoun.**

If *one* is writing something very formal or professional, then *one* might be better off using the indefinite pronoun *one*. If *you’re* writing something a

bit less formal, then *you* are probably just fine using the generic pronoun *you*.

(Also note that *one* has a second function as an indefinite pronoun that is used as a quantifier, as in "I think I'll get the red one" or "Most of our group is here, but one is running late.")

Similarly, the third-person plural pronoun *they* can be used as an indefinite pronoun to refer to people in general. It is usually used in the form "They say…," as in "They say that drinking too often is bad for your health." However, this is considered very informal, and would be frowned upon in formal, professional, or academic writing.

Things

We can also use indefinite pronouns to represent things in the same manner:

• "Is there **something** you'd like to say?"

Any indefinite pronoun that is formed with "-thing" is, understandably, only used to refer to things. (*One* can also refer to things, but only as a **quantifier**, which functions differently in a sentence than the impersonal pronoun *one*.)

Let's look at examples of the indefinite pronouns that only apply to things:

• "I don't care what I eat, so just order me **anything**."

• "I think she has had **enough**."

• "He wanted to buy **everything** in the shop."

• "The **less** you know, the better."

• "As I've gotten older, I've realized that I know very **little**."

• "There was **nothing** she felt like doing."

• "There is still **much** to be done."

• "I'm sure that I'm forgetting **something**."

• "She finds tourists very irritating, and she hates being treated as **such** when she travels."

• "He had **this** to say in his defense."

• "I'll just have **whatever** you're having."

• “It’s your money, so buy **whichever** you like.”

People *and* Things

Quite a few indefinite pronouns can be used to refer to either people or things. In such cases, we rely on context or other elements of the sentence to know which:

• “**One** was short and stout; the **other** was long and skinny.”

In the above sentence, we don’t know whether *one* and *other* refer to people or to things; we have to rely on comes before or after the sentence to know which. Now let’s look at another example:

• “**Each** to his own—that’s what I always say!”

Because it is used in conjunction with the personal pronoun *his*, we can infer that the indefinite pronoun *each* is referring to a person. Likewise:

• “Get **both** if you like them so much.”

You don’t “get” (as in “acquire”) people, so we can safely assume that *both* is referring to things.

Let’s look at examples of the indefinite pronouns that can refer to both things and people. Try to see if you can figure out which each is referring to by the information in the sentence, or whether you would need more information to know for sure.

• “Come on, let’s get **another**!”

• “**Each** will get a turn to speak.”

• “I think **either** will do for now.”

• “**Few** came to the service, in the end.”

• “There are **fewer** than I remember.”

• “**Many** are voicing their concerns.”

• “**One** likes to play the banjo, while the **other** prefers the piano.”

• “There are a few **others** that still need to be collected.”

• “**Most** have left, but **several** are still here.”

• “There were **plenty** there.”

• “**All** are accounted for.”

• “I don’t think there are **any** left.”

• “There’s a bit **more** to be done still.”

• “**Neither** seem willing to negotiate.”

• “There are **none** left.”

• “Save **some** for me!”

Indefinite Adjectives vs. Indefinite Pronouns

Some indefinite pronouns can also function as indefinite adjectives if they come immediately before a noun. For example:

• “There is **more** to be done.” (indefinite pronoun)
• “There is **more work** to be done.” (indefinite adjective)

• “There is **another** who can fill in, if necessary.” (indefinite pronoun)
• “There is **another student** who can fill in, if necessary.” (indefinite adjective)

If you’re trying to determine whether a word is an indefinite pronoun, just see if it’s on its own; if it is paired with a noun, then it is an indefinite adjective.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following indefinite pronouns can **only** be used to refer to **things**?

a) All
b) Many
c) Much
d) Several

2. Identify the indefinite pronoun used in the following sentence:
“People are saying all sorts of things, but little is worth listening to.”

a) People
b) All
c) Little
d) B & C

3. What is the difference between an **indefinite pronoun** and an **indefinite**

adjective?

a) An indefinite pronoun stands alone; and indefinite adjective precedes a noun.
b) An indefinite adjective stands alone; and indefinite pronoun precedes a noun.
c) An indefinite adjective always modifies an indefinite pronoun.
d) They are the same thing.

4. How do you tell if an indefinite pronoun represents a person or a thing, if it is capable of both?

a) Other information within the sentence
b) Context around (before or after) the sentence
c) Determine if it could be replaced by a noun
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) A & C

Demonstrative Pronouns

Definition

Demonstrative pronouns are *pronouns* used to replace *nouns* or *noun phrases* in a sentence, representing that which is nearby or far away in space or time.

Because demonstrative pronouns are less specific than the nouns or noun phrases they replace, you must use *context* to clarify what is being referred to. In spoken English, this can mean having to gesture toward, point to, or look at the thing or things indicated by the demonstrative pronoun. In written English, demonstrative pronouns are usually used to refer to previously mentioned nouns, ideas, or topics.

Here is a complete list of demonstrative pronouns:

- this
- that
- these
- those
- none
- such
- neither

Functions of major demonstrative pronouns

The most common demonstrative pronouns are *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*. Their functions are explained in the following table:

Demonstrative Pronoun	Singular/Plural	Nearby/Far Away
this	singular	nearby
that	singular	far away
these	plural	nearby
those	plural	far away

Each of the four major demonstrative pronouns describes something that is either singular or plural and either near or not near to the speaker. For example:

• "**This** isn't mine." (singular, nearby)

• "Give me **that**." (singular, not near)

• "**These** are really gross." (plural, nearby)

• "I forgot to bring **those**." (plural, not near)

Demonstrative pronouns can also be used to indicate more abstract things, such as chronological events or ideas:

• "I really love **this**!" (*This* can possibly represent a physically close thing, a current event, or a recently developed idea.)

• "**That** was so cool." (*That* can possibly represent a physically distant thing, a past event, or an old idea.)

• "**These** are the times I remember to stay calm." (*These* represents recently occurring events in this sentence, made clear by the word *times*.)

• "**Those** were some fantastic days, right?" (*Those* in this case represents past events, made clear by the word *days*.)

Though the demonstrative pronouns in the above cases do not refer specifically to physical things, the rules of singular and plural still apply. In other words, you cannot replace *this* with *these* or *that* with *those* unless the number of things

indicated has increased to more than one.

Functions of other demonstrative pronouns

The less commonly used demonstrative pronouns are *none, such,* and *neither*. *None* and *such* can be used as both singular and plural demonstrative pronouns. For example:

• “**None** of *this* makes sense.” (*None* is singular because *this* is singular.)

• “**None** of *the people* here seem to like the cake I made.” (*None* is plural because *the people* is plural.*)

• “**Such** is *the way of life*.” (*Such* is singular because *the way of life* is singular.)

• “**Such** are *the rules*.” (*Such* is plural because *the rules* is plural.)

(*There is debate as to whether *none* can denote plurality. Some sources argue that *none* can only represent the singular *not one*, whereas others claim it can also represent the plural *not any*. Since *none* has a long history of being used as both a singular and plural demonstrative pronoun, there is little historical or grammatical basis to support the claim that it can only be treated as singular.)

On the other hand, *neither* is always treated as a singular demonstrative pronoun, regardless of the presence of any plural nouns:

✔ “**Neither** *sounds* good to me.” (correct)

✔ “I think **neither** of the twins *wants* a babysitter.” (correct)

✖ “**Neither** of his parents *work* at the firm.” (incorrect)

Describing people with demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns always represent *nouns*, typically things, places, events, ideas, and animals. In certain cases, however, some of these pronouns may also be used to describe *people*. This can only be done when the person is identified by the pronoun’s antecedent within the same sentence. For example:

• “**That** is *Amy* standing by the door.”

• “**This** must be *Jake*.”

• “**That** appears to be *the woman* I saw earlier.”

• “*Who* is **that**?”

✖ “Go talk to **that**.” (incorrect; no antecedent)

✔ “Go talk to that woman.” (correct)

✖ “**That** is quite handsome.” (incorrect; no antecedent)

✔ “That man is quite handsome.” (correct)

Demonstrative pronouns vs. demonstrative adjectives and determiners

Some demonstrative pronouns may also be used as **demonstrative adjectives** or **determiners**, but their usage is quite different. As demonstrative pronouns, *this, that, these, those, such,* and *neither* represent nouns. As demonstrative adjectives and determiners, however, these same words instead *modify nouns*, appearing immediately before them in a sentence. We can see this in the examples below:

• “She wants to photograph **this**.” (demonstrative pronoun)
• “She wants to photograph ***this*** **painting**.” (demonstrative adjective)

• “**That** is one of my favorites.” (demonstrative pronoun)
• “***That*** **book** is one of my favorites.” (demonstrative adjective)

• “**These** taste the best.” (demonstrative pronoun)
• “***These*** **chocolates** taste the best.” (demonstrative adjective)

• “He wanted to try **those**.” (demonstrative pronoun)
• “He wanted to try ***those*** **recipes**.” (demonstrative adjective)

• “**Such** is the man’s poor choice.” (demonstrative pronoun)
• “***Such*** **men** make poor choices.” (determiner)

• “**Neither** is mine.” (demonstrative pronoun)
• “***Neither*** **locket** is mine.” (determiner)

None is the only demonstrative pronoun that does not also function as a demonstrative adjective:

✔ “I’ll eat **none**.” (correct)

✖ “I’ll eat ***none*** **sandwiches**.” (incorrect)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a demonstrative pronoun?

a) those
b) that
c) there
d) this

2. Which sentence uses a demonstrative pronoun **correctly**?

a) Those was an interesting movie.
b) This aren’t something to cry about.
c) These isn’t the worst restaurants in town.
d) I want to do that right now.

3. Which sentence uses a demonstrative pronoun **incorrectly**?

a) Neither of my dreams are too grand.
b) Such are the habits of teenagers.
c) Billy said he wanted to use those.
d) None of this matters to me.

4. Which sentence contains a **demonstrative adjective**, as opposed to a demonstrative pronoun?

a) I wouldn’t mind giving those a try.
b) I am pretty sure that’s Nina walking by the bookstore.
c) They’d love to take a stroll through this park.
d) Neither is interested in attending the concert.

Interrogative Pronouns

Definition

Interrogative pronouns are used in **interrogative sentences** to ask questions, functioning either as **the subject** or object of such sentences. There are five primary interrogative pronouns: *who, whom, whose, which,* and *what*.

There are other interrogative pronouns as well that are used for emphatic purposes, which we'll cover later in this section.

Using interrogative pronouns

Direct Questions

Most often, interrogative pronouns are used in direct questions, representing the person or thing that is being asked about. In direct questions, the interrogative pronoun usually comes at or near the beginning of the interrogative clause, acting as either the subject or object of the sentence. For example:

• "**Who** is coming to the party tonight?" (subject)

• "**Whom** did you ask to fill in for Mr. Smith?" (object)*

• "**Whose** is this computer?" (subject)

• "So, **which** will it be: $10,000 or a new sports car?" (object)

• "**What** do you expect me to do, exactly?" (object)

An interrogative pronoun is easy to identify because it can stand on its own in a sentence and takes the grammatical function of a noun. Other question words, on the other hand, act as adverbs when they stand alone, as in:

• "**How** did you find me?" (*How* modifies the verb *find*.)

• "**When** are we leaving?" (*When* modifies the verb *leaving*.)

• "**Why** did we stay?" (*Why* modifies the verb *stay*.)

(*Usage Note: *Whom* is becoming increasingly rare in modern English. Although it is technically correct to use *whom* when it functions as the object of a verb and *who* when it functions as the subject, it is much more common to use *who* in both cases.)

Indirect Questions

Interrogative pronouns can also appear within **indirect questions**. When this happens, they appear in the middle of the sentence. Indirect questions are sometimes used to ask something in a more polite way, as in:

• “Could you tell me **whose** these are?”

• “Would you mind telling me **which** I’m supposed to bring?”

• “Do you know **what** we’re doing here?”

Other times, indirect questions are used for emphasis to convey surprise:

• “She wants **who** to come to the party?”

• “You’re going to do **what** in New York City?”

• “He’s going to ask **whom** out on a date?”*

In such cases, emphasis is put on the interrogative pronoun—we can hear the stress on the words when we say the sentences aloud.

Reported Questions

Interrogative pronouns also appear in the middle of **reported questions**. Reported questions are actually a form of declarative sentences using **reported speech** (also called **indirect speech**): they tell us *about* something someone else asked, but do not ask a question themselves. As such, they do not end in a question mark. For example:

• “She wants to know **whose** these are.”

• “He wondered **which** is correct.”

• “I asked you **what** we were supposed to do today.”

• “She was wondering **who** would be coming tomorrow.”

• “They asked **whom** to consult in the matter.”

The speaker in each of the examples isn’t asking an actual question, but rather is reporting or clarifying a question that has already been asked.

Other interrogative pronouns

There are technically seven other interrogative pronouns—*whoever, whomever, whichever, whatever, whatsoever, whosoever,* and *whomsoever*—that are used for

emphatic purposes, but they are typically used in more formal or old-fashioned English. For example:

• "**Whoever** would believe such a story?"

• "**Whatever** could I have done to make you so angry?"

• "**Whomever** did you ask to accompany you to the gala on such short notice?"

• "**Whichever** will the gentleman choose, I wonder?

The last three, *whatsoever, whosoever,* and *whomsoever*, are synonymous with *whatever, whoever*, and *whomever*. However, they are considered even more antiquated in modern English, bordering on archaic. It is uncommon to come across them even in more formal speech or writing.

Other grammatical roles

Many of the interrogative pronouns we've examined above often serve other grammatical functions in different contexts. It's important to know the difference between them.

Interrogative Adjectives

Three of the interrogative pronouns—*whose*, *which*, and *what*—can also function as **interrogative adjectives**, meaning they come before and modify another noun. An easy way to be sure whether you are dealing with an interrogative adjective or an interrogative pronoun is to check whether the question word is immediately followed by a noun it modifies. For example:

• "**What *book*** is your favorite?"

In this example, *what* is immediately followed by the noun *book*, which it is modifying. We can be sure that, in this case, *what* is a possessive adjective.

• "**What** are you reading?"

In this sentence, *what* is not immediately followed by a noun that it modifies, which means that it is an interrogative pronoun.

Here are some other examples:

• "**Which *shirt*** should I wear?" (interrogative adjective)
• "**Which** would you choose if you were me?" (interrogative pronoun)

• "**Whose *book*** is this on the table?" (interrogative adjective)
• "**Whose** is this that I'm holding?" (interrogative pronoun)

Relative Pronouns

Who, *whom*, *which*, and *whose* can also be used as **relative pronouns** in declarative sentences. They are not considered interrogative in this form, because they are no longer associated with a question; rather, they are used to help clarify whom or what a sentence is talking about, or else give extra information about it. For example:

• “I helped the old man **who** lives down the road with his groceries.”

• “The computer, **which** belonged to my brother, is very slow.”

• “Could the person **whose** car is parked outside please move it?”

• “A man **who/whom** I had never met before greeted me in the street.”

In addition, the pronouns *whoever, whichever,* and *whatever* are also used as *indefinite* relative pronouns. They are much more commonly used in this way in modern English than they are as interrogative pronouns. For example:

• “Do **whatever** you please; I don’t care.”

• “**Whoever** decides to join us is more than welcome.”

• “Take **whichever** route is fastest.”

Whomever can also be used in this way when the pronoun functions as an object, as in:

• “Be with *whomever* makes you happy.”

However, this is becoming increasingly uncommon, with *whoever* more often being used instead.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a function of interrogative pronouns?

a) To help clarify who or what a sentence is talking about
b) To ask or report a question
c) To modify a noun that is being asked about
d) To provide additional information to a sentence

2. Which of the following is **not** one of the primary interrogative pronouns?

a) which
b) who

c) whose
d) whatever

3. Identify the interrogative pronoun that completes the following sentence correctly:
"_____ shall I ask to come to dinner tonight?"
a) who
b) which
c) whom
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) A & C
g) All of the above

4. Which of the following interrogative pronouns is used for **emphasis**?
a) whichever
b) which
c) whose
d) whom

Relative Pronouns

Definition

A **relative pronoun** is a type of pronoun used to connect a **relative clause** (also known as an **adjective clause**) to the main clause in a sentence. Relative clauses either help clarify who or what a sentence is talking about (known as the **antecedent**), or else give extra information about it.

Here are the five most commonly used relative pronouns:

- that
- which
- who
- whom
- whose

Less commonly used relative pronouns include the following:

- where

- when
- whoever
- whosoever
- whomever
- whichever
- wherever
- whatever
- whatsoever

Functions of the relative pronoun

Subjects, objects, and possession

In a relative clause, the relative pronoun functions in one of three ways: as the **subject**, the **object**, or a **possessive pronoun** (though *whose* is the only possessive relative pronoun). The usage of a relative pronoun ultimately depends on its antecedent and the relative clause it introduces.

We can use this table as a quick guide:

Type of Antecedent	Subject	Object	Possessive
People	Who	Who / Whom	Whose
Things	Which	Which	Whose
People or Things	That	That	

Let’s look at how each of these can be used in a sentence:

Subject

• “The woman ***who*** *came to my house* was a salesperson.” (*Who* is the **subject** of the relative clause *who came to my house*, which describes the antecedent *the woman*.)

• “The male birds danced and sang, ***which*** *attracted nearby females*.” (*Which* is the subject of the non-restrictive relative clause *which attracted nearby females* that describes the antecedent *danced and sang*.)

• “I have to go mend the fence ***that*** *is broken*.” (*That* is the subject of the restrictive relative clause *that is broken*, describing the antecedent *the fence*.)

• “I want a computer ***which*** *can download a lot of games*.” (*Which* is the subject of the relative clause *which can download a lot of games* and describes the antecedent *a computer*.)

Object

• “I don’t know if I passed the test ***that*** *I took yesterday*.” (*That* is the object of relative clause *that I took yesterday* and describes the antecedent *the test*.)

• “The new employee ***whom*** *I hired* is a dedicated worker.” (*Whom* is the object of the relative clause *whom I hired* and describes the antecedent *the new employee*.)

Possession

The relative pronoun *whose* is unique in that it is the only one that can describe possession. It comes before a noun in a sentence, modifying it like an adjective to indicate that it belongs to the antecedent.

• “She tried to help the student ***whose*** *lunch money had been stolen*.” (*Whose* modifies *lunch money* and introduces the relative clause *whose lunch money had been stolen*, which describes the antecedent *the student*.)

Substituting relative pronouns

Most relative pronouns are capable of multiple functions and usages, meaning they can be used in place of one another in certain circumstances. The table below gives a quick breakdown of when it is acceptable to use each relative pronoun:

Can be used...	as a subject?	as an object?	as a possessive?	to describe things?	to describe people?
who	✔	✔ (informal)	✖	✖	✔
whom	✖	✔ (formal)	✖	✖	✔
whose	✖	✖	✔	✔	✔

which	✔	✔	✖	✔	✖
that	✔	✔	✖	✔	✔

Relative pronouns that can be replaced

• “The woman **who/that** came to my house was a salesperson.” (*Who* and *that* are interchangeable when describing people.)

• “The new employee **whom/who/that*** I hired is a dedicated worker.” (In addition to *whom*, *who* and *that* can also be used as an object in informal English when describing a person in a **restrictive** relative clause.)

• “The mailman, **whom/who*** my father knew in high school, is running for the state senate.” (When **whom** is the object of a **non-restrictive** relative clause, it can only be replaced by *who*)

• “I want a computer **that/which**** can download a lot of games.” (*Which* and *that* can both describe things.)

(***Usage note 1**: Traditionally, *whom* is considered the only correct relative pronoun when functioning as the object of a relative clause, but nowadays *who* is also acceptable (as is *that* in restrictive relative clauses). In fact, most people these days only use *who*, while *whom* tends to be reserved for formal English.)

(****Usage note 2**: In general, the relative pronoun *that* is preferable to *which* in restrictive relative clauses; however, *which* is largely considered acceptable, especially in informal writing. We will discuss the differences between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses in more detail later.)

Relative pronouns that cannot be replaced

• “The male birds danced and sang, ***which** attracted nearby females*.” (Since *which* is the subject of a **non-restrictive** relative clause describing a thing (the act of dancing and singing), it cannot be replaced by any other relative pronoun.)

• “She tried to help the student **whose** lunch money had been stolen.” (Only

whose can be used as a possessive relative pronoun, whether it describes a person or a thing.)

Restrictive vs. non-restrictive relative clauses

Restrictive (defining) relative clauses

Restrictive relative clauses (also known as **defining relative clauses**) are clauses carrying essential information. Without its restrictive relative clause, a main clause will lack a vital description and fail to convey the full or appropriate meaning. Because of the necessity of their information, restrictive relative clauses are not set apart by commas:

• “I’ve never understood people ***who*** *hate sports*.”

• “That book ***that*** *I read when I was young* is being made into a movie.”

• “Here is the website ***which*** *my sister created*.”

• “Did you hear about the sailor ***whose*** *ship was haunted by a headless ghost*?”

• “I think a man ***whom*** *my father hired* has been stealing from the company.”

If you were to remove each example’s relative clause, the corresponding main clause would change in meaning and appear to be lacking necessary information out of context. For example:

• “I’ve never understood people ***who*** *hate sports*.”
• “I’ve never understood people.” (The speaker doesn’t understand people or their intentions.)

• “That book ***that*** *I read when I was young* is being made into a movie.”
• “That book is being made into a movie.” (Some unspecified book is being made into a movie.)

• “Here is the website ***which*** *my sister created*.”
• “Here is the website.” (The speaker is indicating some unidentified website.)

• “Did you hear about the sailor ***whose*** *ship was haunted by a headless ghost*?”
• “Did you hear about the sailor?” (The speaker is asking the listener whether he or she has heard about some unidentified sailor.)

• “I think a man ***whom*** *my father hired* has been stealing from the company.”
• “I think a man has been stealing from the company.” (Some unspecified man is

thought to have been stealing.)

That vs. *which* in restrictive clauses

As discussed earlier, *that* is preferable to *which* in restrictive relative clauses, though many writers tend to use both, especially in less formal writing. As a general rule, though, *which* is normally reserved for non-restrictive relative clauses, which we will learn about in the following section.

Non-restrictive (non-defining) relative clauses

Unlike restrictive relative clauses, **non-restrictive relative clauses** (or **non-defining relative clauses**) contain non-essential or additional information to the main clause that, when taken away, does **not** affect or dramatically change the overall intent and meaning of the sentence.

Non-restrictive clauses require the use of commas to distinguish the non-essential information from the rest of the sentence.

Which is used to introduce non-restrictive clauses that describe things or non-domestic animals:

• "The large park, ***which*** *she used to visit when she was young*, had been around for many years and was a popular gathering spot for children."

• "I had to search extensively for the missing cookbook, ***which*** *took me many hours to find*."

• "The song, ***which*** *was his favorite*, could be heard from miles away."

• "The cattle, ***which*** *always wander away from the ranch*, didn't return until nightfall."

Who and *whom* may also be used in non-restrictive clauses that describe people or domestic animals:

• "The woman, ***who*** *volunteers at a local homeless shelter*, won the lottery."

• "My friend, Tom, ***whom*** *I haven't seen in years*, is coming to stay with us tomorrow."

• "Our dog, ***who*** *is missing one of his hind legs*, ran away yesterday."

Whose can be used with both people and things in non-restrictive clauses:

• “Jane, ***whose*** *primary goal is to become a doctor*, sent out her medical school applications last month.”

• “The old bank, ***whose*** *exterior is falling apart*, is remarkably beautiful on the inside.”

It is important to remember that *that*, as a relative pronoun, can **only** be used in **restrictive** relative clauses. On the contrary, *who*, *whom*, *whose*, and *which* are all capable of introducing both restrictive *and* non-restrictive relative clauses (although, in restrictive relative clauses, *that* is preferable to *which*).

Omitting relative pronouns

Sometimes, especially in informal writing, relative pronouns can be omitted altogether. This can only be done when the relative pronoun is the object of a restrictive relative clause.

For example, if a relative pronoun is the object of a clause, there are several ways you can phrase the sentence, depending on how formal or informal you want it to sound:

• “The girl *to* ***whom*** *I gave my ice cream* looked up and smiled at me.” (very formal)

• “The girl ***whom*** *I gave my ice cream to* looked up and smiled at me.” (formal)

• “The girl ***who*** *I gave my ice cream to* looked up and smiled at me.” (casual)

• “The girl ***that*** *I gave my ice cream to* looked up and smiled at me.” (very casual)

• “The girl *I gave my ice cream to* looked up and smiled at me.” (most casual)

Unlike *whom*, which can only act as an object of a relative clause, *who* and *that* can function as both objects **and** subjects when describing people; therefore, in relative clauses, it is acceptable to replace the rather formal-sounding *whom* with either *who* or *that*, or omit the relative pronoun entirely.

When describing things instead of people, the relative pronouns *that* and *which* may be omitted as long as they are used, like *whom*, as an object of a restrictive relative clause:

• “The house ***that*** *I want to buy* is going on sale today.”

• “The house ***which*** *I want to buy* is going on sale today.”

• “The house *I want to buy* is going on sale today.”

Similarly, if a relative clause uses an **auxiliary verb** (such as *to be*) + a present

or past **participle** after the relative pronoun, it can be worded like this:

• “The girl ***who is*** *jumping into the lake* is a world-famous diver.”

• “The girl ***that is*** *jumping into the lake* is a world-famous diver.”

• “The girl *jumping into the lake* is a world-famous diver.”

Relative pronouns as objects of prepositions

In certain cases, relative pronouns can be used as objects of prepositions, meaning the relative pronoun works in conjunction with a **preposition** to modify the subject or verb of the relative clause. Only *whose*, *which*, and *whom* can function as objects of prepositions.

In more formal English, we place a preposition before the pronoun. Here are some of the combinations you might see:

- with whom
- to whom
- for whom
- through which
- of which
- about which
- from which
- at whose
- in whose
- with whose

In modern English, positioning prepositions in front of relative pronouns often sounds overly formal, in particular when it comes to the relative pronoun *whom*. As a result, it is generally acceptable for a preposition to come after a relative clause instead of before a relative pronoun. For example:

• “The teacher ***with whom*** *I spoke* had many interesting things to say.” (Very formal)

• “The teacher ***whom/who/that*** *I spoke* ***with*** had many interesting things to say.” (Less formal. **Whom** is most often replaced by either **who** or **that**, and the preposition **with** is moved to the end of the relative clause.)

• “The teacher *I spoke* ***with*** had many interesting things to say.” (Most casual. The relative pronoun is omitted, and the preposition is kept at the end of the relative clause.)

It is also acceptable to place a preposition at the end of a relative clause when using the pronoun *which*:

• “The home ***in which*** *I grew up* holds many dear memories for me.” (Very formal. In this case, you cannot replace **which** with **that**, as **that** cannot be used as an object of a preposition in a relative clause.)

• “The home ***that/which*** *I grew up* ***in*** holds many dear memories for me.” (less formal)

• “The home *I grew up* ***in*** holds many dear memories for me.” (most casual)

The pronoun *whose* follows this same pattern of prepositional placement, except that it cannot be substituted with another pronoun and it cannot be omitted:

• “My friend, ***in whose*** *house I’m staying*, invited me to see a movie with him.” (very formal)

• “My friend, ***whose*** *house I’m staying* ***in***, invited me to see a movie with him.” (less formal)

When and Where

When and *where* are also used as relative pronouns, especially in less formal writing and conversation. They are always used in **restrictive** relative clauses.

We use *when* to describe antecedents that have to do with time, as in:

• “That’s the day ***when*** *we met*.”

• “I’m looking forward to a time ***when*** *the world will be at peace*.”

We use *where* to describe antecedents that have to do with location, as in:

• “The café ***where*** *we went on Sunday* was very nice.”

• “The town ***where*** *she lives* is only an hour away.”

Using prepositions for formal English

In more formal English, *where* and *when* are often replaced with a preposition + *which* to mark precise locations or points in time. For example:

• “We preferred a part of the country ***where*** *we could live in peace and quiet*.”
• “We preferred a part of the country ***in which*** *we could live in peace and quiet*

.”

• “Ben is looking forward to the day ***when*** *he can finally join the army*.”
• “Ben is looking forward to the day ***on which*** *he can finally join the army*.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** one of the five most commonly used relative pronouns?

a) whom
b) where
c) whose
d) which

2. Which of the following sentences uses a relative pronoun **incorrectly**?

a) “She tried to fix the mirror whom had broken many years earlier.”
b) “I watched a dog that was chasing its tail.”
c) “He decided to take the mysterious motorcycle, whose owner had seemingly disappeared.”
d) “The bartender took the day off, which gave her some time to relax.”

3. Choose the sentence that contains a **non-restrictive** relative clause.

a) “Mrs. Anderson reread the book she’d loved as a child.”
b) “I can’t help but wonder where they’re going.”
c) “I sit right beneath a light that constantly flickers.”
d) “They moved to Florida, which they hoped would lead to better job prospects.”

4. Which of the following sentences is the **least formal**?

a) “The box I’d returned appeared on my doorstep again.”
b) “The box which I’d returned appeared on my doorstep again.”
c) “The box that I’d returned appeared on my doorstep again.”
d) “The box whom I’d returned appeared on my doorstep again.”

5. Select the relative pronoun that correctly completes the following sentence: “The pizza, ____ was pepperoni, was left in the oven too long.”

a) which

b) that
c) who
d) whom

6. Select the relative pronoun that correctly completes the following sentence: “The male candidate, ____ I hadn’t voted for, won the election anyway.”

a) which
b) whose
c) that
d) who/whom

Reciprocal Pronouns

Definition

Reciprocal pronouns are used to refer to two or more people who are or were the subject of the same verb, with both or all parties mutually receiving or benefiting from that action in the same way. Reciprocal pronouns always function as the objects of verbs, referring back to the two or more people who are or were the subject(s).

The two reciprocal pronouns in English are *each other* and *one another*. In more traditional grammar, *each other* is used to identify **only two** people who are engaged in the mutual action, while *one another* describes **more than two** people. However, this supposed “rule” is less commonly applied in modern English, with *each other* and *one another* often being used interchangeably.

Reciprocal Pronouns vs. Reflexive Pronouns

Because the subjects of the sentence are also the objects of the same verb, it might seem logical to use one of the **reflexive pronouns** to represent them instead, as in:

✖ “We call **ourselves** every day.”

However, this is incorrect. Reflexive pronouns are used with “one-way” actions, so saying “we call ourselves” means each person is calling **him-** or **herself** individually—i.e., person A calls person A every day, person B calls person B

every day, and so on.

Because we are describing a reciprocal action of the verb (meaning the action is mutually given and received *between* the parties involved), we must therefore use a reciprocal pronoun. The correct expression would thus be:

• “We call **each other** every day.”

or

• “We call **one another** every day.”

Now the sentence means that person A calls person B every day, and person B calls person A every day.

Using each other vs. one another

As we said already, we can use both *each other* and *one another* to refer to reciprocal action between two individuals or between multiple people in larger groups—it depends entirely on the context. If we have already been talking about Mary and Susan before we say “they love one another,” then it is obvious that the action is limited to those two. Likewise, if we had been talking about the various members of a large family and then say “they love each other,” then it is clear that the action is reciprocal among *all* of the individuals in the group.

Again, while traditional and prescriptive grammarians sometimes insist that *each other* can only be used between two people and *one another* can only be used between more than two people, this guideline is not based on historical or linguistic evidence. The two are interchangeable.

Each other’s and One another’s

When we wish to make reciprocal pronouns possessive, we always treat them as singular and add “-’s” to the end. Because both *each other* and *one another* refer to the individuals within a pair or group, they cannot take the plural possessive form (i.e., *each others’* or *one anothers’*).

However, because we are talking about things belonging to two or more people, the nouns that follow their possessive form are usually pluralized. For example:

• “My neighbor and I spent a lot of time at each other’s houses when we were kids.”

• “The students were sent off in pairs to correct one another’s assignments.”

• “Everyone at the rally was bolstered by each other’s energy.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which reciprocal pronoun is used when talking about **two people**?

a) each other
b) one another
c) themselves
d) A & B
e) B & C

2. What grammatical role do reciprocal pronouns take in a sentence?

a) the subject
b) the object
c) the object complement
d) the subject complement

3. Which of the following do we add to reciprocal pronouns to indicate possession?

a) -’s
b) -s’
c) -’s’
d) -’

4. When do we use a **reciprocal pronoun** instead of a **reflexive pronoun**?

a) When the subject of the sentence receives the action of the same verb
b) When the object of the sentence receives the action of the same verb
c) When the subjects of the sentence receive the action of the same verb individually and separately
d) When the subjects of the sentence receive the action of the same verb mutually and equally

Dummy Pronouns

Definition

Dummy pronouns are words that function grammatically as pronouns, but which do not have antecedents like normal pronouns do. This means that, unlike

normal pronouns, dummy pronouns do not replace a noun, phrase, or clause. They refer to nothing in particular, but instead help the sentence to function properly in a grammatical context. Dummy pronouns are also commonly referred to as **expletive pronouns**.

There are two dummy pronouns, *there* and *it*.

There as a dummy pronoun

There is primarily used as a dummy pronoun in circumstances where the sentence is explaining that a person, place, or thing exists. When the word *there* is being used in this manner, it is often referred to as the *existential there*. For example, the following sentences contain the dummy pronoun *there* to explain the existence of people, places, or things:

• "**There** is a ship in the harbor."

• "**There** is a bowl on the table."

• "**There** were flowers in the meadow."

• "**There** is a river that passes through the mountain."

• "**There** are many reasons to go to Jamaica."

Singular vs. Plural use of *there*

The dummy pronoun *there* can be used in either a singular or plural context. When it is used in a singular context, the correlating nouns and verbs have singular endings; when it is used in a plural context, the corresponding nouns and verbs have plural endings.

Singular

• "**There** *is* a *fence* around the yard."

In this case, the existence of only one thing, *a fence*, is being discussed. Therefore, the singular verb *is* and the singular noun *fence* are used. Here is another example of *there* being used in a singular context:

• "**There** *is* a *canoe* on the lake.

Again, the existence of only one canoe is being discussed, so the singular verb *is* and the singular noun *canoe* are used.

Plural

• “**There** *are* two *fences* around the yard.”

This sentence discusses the existence of two fences, and thus the plural form is used. This is demonstrated by the use of the plural verb *are* and the plural noun *fences*. Here is another example:

• “**There** *are* many *canoes* on the lake.”

This sentence discusses the existence of two or more canoes. Because of this fact, the plural verb *are* and the plural noun *canoes* are used.

Difference from adverbial *there*

Although the word *there* can be used as a dummy pronoun, it can also be used as an adverb. Because of this fact, it is important to know the difference between the two.

When *there* is being used as an adverb, it is taking the place of an adverbial phrase, oftentimes an adverbial prepositional phrase. For example, consider the following sentences:

• “They swam *in the water*.”

• “I’m going to hide the cookies up *above the fridge*.”

In this sentence, *in the water* is a prepositional phrase that functions as an adverb. However, this adverbial can be replaced by the word *there*:

• “They swam *there*.”

• “I’m going to hide the cookies up *there*.”

In these cases, the word *there* acts as an adverbial that gives further information about where the action takes place. But, if the word *there* was used differently in a similar sentence, it *could* function as a dummy pronoun. For example:

• “**There** were fish where they swam.”

• “**There** are cookies up above the fridge.”

Both of these sentences use the *existential there* to explain that certain things—namely, the *fish* and the *cookies*—exist. *There* also does not have any antecedents in these sentences, so it is clearly functioning as a dummy pronoun in both.

It as a dummy pronoun

Just like the dummy pronoun *there*, *it* is also used as a pronoun without an antecedent in sentences. *It* is commonly used in situations when weather, distance, or time is being discussed.

Weather

The following are examples of sentences that use *it* as a dummy pronoun related to weather.

• "**It** looks like it may snow tonight."

• "Is **it** raining?"

• "**It** was very sunny at the beach last weekend."

• "**It** always seems to sleet when he drives on the highway."

Distance

The following examples use **it** as a dummy pronoun in sentences involving distance.

• "**It** is very far from North America to Europe."

• "Is **it** a long drive to get to the mountain?"

• "**It** is a short walk once you get out of the forest."

• "**It** is farther than you think to drive to California."

Time

The following examples use **it** as a dummy pronoun in sentences involving time.

• "**It** is 4:30.

• "**It** was earlier than he expected."

• "Could you tell me what time **it** is?"

• "She told him to come back when **It** was later in the day."

Other uses

There are a number of other situations where *it* can be used as a dummy pronoun, without pertaining to weather, distance, or time.

When *it* functions as an empty subject to introduce or "anticipate" something that appears later in the sentence, it is sometimes referred to as ***anticipatory it***:

• "**It** was assumed that the tour guide knew exactly how to get there."

• "**It** seems that four people showed up instead of the expected two."

It can also function as an object when it is a dummy pronoun:

• "The teacher seemed a bit out of **it** yesterday.

• "Watch **it**, pal!"

Singular vs. Plural

Notice that in all of the examples above, *it* is only functioning as a singular dummy pronoun. This is because *it* can't be plural. This means that the verbs and objects in sentences with the dummy pronoun *it* have to be singular as well.

Subject vs. object

A subject is a noun or pronoun that performs the action of the verb. An object is a noun or pronoun that receives the action of the verb,

The dummy pronoun *it* can either function as the subject of a sentence or as the object, although it is more commonly used as the subject. Existential *there*, on the other hand, can only be a subject.

(The word *there* can function as the object of a preposition, as in "We left from there." However, it is considered a noun in this case, not a pronoun.)

Here are some examples of sentences where dummy pronouns are used as subjects:

• "**There** are many ducks in the pond."

• "**There** is a tree in the middle of the field."

• "**It** is 12:30."

• "**It** is sunny outside today."

Here are some examples of sentences where dummy pronouns are used as objects:

• "Will he make **it** to the game?"

• "Cool **it** down."

• "Watch **it**!"

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is a dummy pronoun?

a) and
b) the
b) it
d) when

2. Which dummy pronoun could be used to complete the following sentence?
"_____ were 12 colors in the painting."

a) It
b) There
c) Both A & B
d) None of the above

3. Dummy pronouns are also referred to as what?

a) Roundabout pronouns
b) Concrete pronouns
c) Ghost pronouns
d) Expletive pronouns

4. The following sentence includes what type of dummy pronoun?
"It was warm outside when they went to the pool."

a) Subject
b) Object
c) Hyphenated
d) None of the above

5. Dummy pronouns are different from regular pronouns because they don't have which of the following?

a) Clauses
b) Periods
c) Antecedents
d) Adverbs

Verbs

Definition

Verbs are used to indicate the actions, processes, conditions, or states of beings of people or things.

Verbs play an integral role to the structure of a sentence. They constitute the root of **the predicate**, which, along with **the subject** (the "doer" of the verb's action), forms a full clause or sentence—we cannot have a sentence without a verb.

When we discuss verbs' role in the predicate, we usually divide them into two fundamental categories: **finite and non-finite verbs**.

Finite and Non-Finite Verbs

The predicate requires at least one **finite verb** to be considered complete. A finite verb has a direct relationship to the subject of a sentence or clause, and does not require another verb in the sentence in order to be grammatically correct. For example:

• "I **swim** every day."

• "She **reads** many books."

• "He **talked** for several hours."

Each of the above is a finite verb, expressing an action that is directly related to the subject of the sentence. **Non-finite verbs**, on the other hand, do not express that relationship directly.

The only verbs that can be considered finite are those in their base form (the infinitive form without the particle *to*), their **past tense** form, or their **third-person singular** form. Verb forms that are never considered finite are **gerunds**, **infinitives**, and **participles** (both past and present).

Let's look at an example containing both a finite and non-finite verb:

• "We **are learning** about the American Revolution in school."

This sentence uses the present continuous verb *are learning*. This functions as a single unit, with *learning* expressing most of the meaning.

However, *learning* is a present participle, which is considered a **non-finite verb**; the finite verb of the sentence is actually just the **auxiliary verb** *are*. It is an inflection of the verb *be* used for a **first person plural** subject (*we*).

We can see the difference if we use each verb in isolation with the subject:

• "*We* **are**"

• "*We* **learning**"

We can see that the first verb is finite because it expresses a direct relationship with the subject, and it can go on to form any number of complete sentences. For example:

✔ "*We* **are** tired."

✔ "*We* **are** almost there."

✔ "*We* **are** a large group."

The second verb, the present participle *learning*, cannot make such sentences, and so is not finite. The following examples all require a finite verb to be correct:

✖ "*We* **learning** math."

✖ "*We* **learning** a lot."

✖ "*We* **learning** in school."

To learn more about the differences between these two classes of verbs, go to the section **Finite and Non-finite Verbs** in this chapter.

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Every verb is classed as being either **transitive** or **intransitive**.

Transitive verbs describe an action that is happening to someone or something. This person or thing is known as the **direct object** of the verb. For example:

• "He's **reading** *a book*." (The action of *reading* is happening to *the book*.)

• "The people **watched** *the game* from the bleachers." (The action of *watched* is happening to *the game*.)

• "I was **eating** *a delicious steak* for dinner last night." (The action of *eating* is happening to *a delicious steak*.)

Transitive verbs can also take **indirect objects**, which are the people or things receiving the direct object. For instance:

• "I **sent** my brother *a letter*." (*My brother* receives *the letter* through the action of *sent*.)

Conversely, **intransitive** verbs do **not** have objects—their action is not

happening to anyone or anything. For example:

• “I can’t believe our dog **ran away**.” (There is no object receiving the action of *ran away*.)

• “There was a lot of dust in the air, which made me **sneeze**.” (There is no object receiving the action of *sneeze*.)

• “Don’t be too loud while the baby **sleeps**.” (There is no object receiving the action of *sleeps*.)

Regular and Irregular Verbs

Just as every verb is either transitive or intransitive, each one is considered to be either **regular** or **irregular**

Most verbs are **regular verbs**, which means that “-d” or “-ed” can be added to their base form (the infinitive of the verb without *to*) to **conjugate** both the **past simple tense** and **past participle** forms. For example:

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
“I **play** violin.” “I **bake** cakes.” “I **listen** to my teacher.” “I **gather** firewood.” “I **climb** trees.”	“I **played** violin.” “I **baked** cakes.” “I **listened** to my teacher.” “I **gathered** firewood.” “I **climbed** trees.”	“I had **played** violin.” “I had **baked** cakes.” “I had **listened** to my teacher.” “I had **gathered** firewood.” “I had **climbed** trees.”

Irregular verbs, on the other hand, have past tense and past participle forms that do not (or do not seem to) adhere to a distinct or predictable pattern, and they are usually completely different from one another.

Unfortunately, this means that there is generally no way of determining *how* to conjugate irregular verbs—we just have to learn each one individually. There are many irregular verbs, but here are a few common ones:

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
“I **see** the horizon.” “I **grow** bigger every day.” “I **give** to charity.”	“I **saw** the horizon.” “I **grew** bigger every day.” “I **gave** to charity.”	“I had **seen** the horizon.” “I had **grown** bigger every day.” “I had **given** to charity.”

“I **sing** on Tuesday.” “I **swim** often.” “I **drive** to work.”	“I **sang** on Tuesday.” “I **swam** often.” “I **drove** to work.”	“I had **sung** on Tuesday.” “I had **swum** often.” “I had **driven** to work.”

Uniquely, the verb *be* is considered **highly irregular**, having three different present tense forms (*is, am, are*) and two past tense forms (*was, were*), in addition to its base form and its past and present participles (*been, being*).

Forms and categories

All verbs are either finite or non-finite and transitive or intransitive in a given sentence, depending on their form and function. There are many different forms and categories of verbs that we’ll be looking at in this chapter, and we’ll give a brief summary of the different kinds of verbs below. You can continue on to their individual sections to learn more.

Verb forms

Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary or “**helping**” **verbs** are verbs that are used to complete the meaning of other primary or “main” verbs in a sentence. In the example we looked at above, *are* is an auxiliary to the main verb, *learning*.

The three **primary auxiliary verbs**—*be*, *have*, and *do*—are used to create different **tenses**, to form negatives, or to ask questions. For example:

• “I ***am*** **working** on my project.” (**present continuous tense**)

• “She ***does*** **not work** here anymore.” (negative sentence)

• “***Have*** you **seen** my keys?” (question)

There are also **modal auxiliary verbs** (often just called **modal verbs**), which are used to express **modality**—that is, possibility, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation, or future intention. These are *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*, *shall*, *should*, *must*, *may*, and *might*. They are distinguished by the fact that they are **unable** to conjugate into different forms, and they are only followed by a verb in its base form. For example:

• “I ***will*** **be** there tonight.” (future intention)

• “She ***can*** **write** very well.” (ability)

• “***May*** I **be excused** from the table?” (permission)

• “We ***must*** **finish** this today.” (obligation)

Infinitives

Infinitives are the most basic construction of a verb. When we talk of a verb as a general concept, we usually use the infinitive form, which is the uninflected base form of the verb plus the **particle** *to*. For instance:

- **to run**
- **to walk**
- **to read**
- **to be**
- **to learn**
- **to act**

Infinitives can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs in a sentence, but they do not actually function as verbs—they are used to express an action as a concept, rather than what is being done or performed by the subject of a clause. For example:

• “I love **to run**.” (functions as a noun)

• “I wish I had something **to do**.” (functions as an adjective)

• “I run a lot **to stay healthy**.” (functions as an adverb)

Participles

Participles are forms of verbs that either function with auxiliary verbs to create the **continuous** and **perfect** verb tenses, or as adjectives to modify nouns. Every verb (except the **modal auxiliary verbs**) has two participle forms: a **present participle** and a **past participle**.

The **present participle** is always the base form of the verb + “-ing.” Although the spelling of some verbs changes very slightly to accommodate this suffix, every verb takes “-ing” for the present participle.

We use present participles with the auxiliary *be* to form **continuous tenses**, as in:

• “Can’t you see that I **am *reading***?” (**present continuous tense**)

• “I **was *watching*** that.” (**past continuous tense**)

• “They **will be *arriving*** soon.” (**future continuous tense**)

The **past participle** is usually the same as a verb’s simple past tense form, which is made by adding “-d” or “-ed” to the end of the verb. However, many verbs are **irregular**, meaning they do not follow this spelling pattern, and they have different past tense and past participle forms. (We’ll look at **regular and irregular verbs** later on.)

The past participle is used with the auxiliary *have* to form the **perfect tenses**:

• “You **have *worked*** long enough.” (**present perfect tense**)

• “We **had *seen*** too much.” (**past perfect tense**)

• “They**’ll have *arrived*** before we get there.” (**future perfect tense**)

We can also use participles as adjectives to add description to nouns. Though they still relate to action, they are **not** functioning as verbs when used this way. For example:

• “The mother looked down at her **smiling** child.”

• “I could tell by the **exhausted** look on his face that he needed sleep.”

Categories of verbs

There are many different categories of verbs that describe different kinds of actions or states of being.

Action (Dynamic) Verbs

Action verbs (also known as **dynamic verbs**) describe an active process that results in an effect. For example:

• “I **ran** to school.”

• “She **read** a book.”

• “They **talked** during lunch.”

• “We **swam** for over an hour.”

Stative Verbs

In contrast to action verbs, **stative verbs** describe states of being of a subject. These include **linking verbs**, such as *be* and verbs of the senses, which are used to describe or rename a subject using a **predicative adjective** or **noun**. For example:

• “I **am** hungry.”

• “You **sound** tired.”

• “He **seems** like a bully.”

Other stative verbs are those that express emotions, possession, cognition, and states or qualities. For example:

• “She **likes** old movies.”

• “They **own** three cars.”

• “I **understand** the issue.”

• “Your happiness **depends** on doing something you enjoy.”

Light Verbs

Light verbs do not carry unique meaning on their own, but instead rely on another word or words that follow them to become meaningful. Common examples include *do, have*, and *take*, as in:

• “***Do*** your **homework**!”

• “Why don’t we ***have*** **something** to eat?”

• “I ***took*** a **shower** before breakfast.”

In many cases, the same light verb will have different meanings, depending on the word or words it is paired with. For instance:

• “Please don’t ***make*** a **mess**.”

• “Please ***make*** your **bed**.”

Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are verbs that pair with **prepositions** or **particles** to create unique, specific meanings. These are largely idiomatic, which means that they don’t make literal sense according to their individual parts. For example:

• “I can’t believe that you’re **giving up**!”

• “The plane **took off** an hour late.”

• “He has been **looking after** his mother.”

• “Stop **picking on** your brother!”

Conditional Verbs

The term **conditional verbs** refers to verb constructions that are used in **conditional sentences**, which describe a hypothetical outcome that is reliant upon another conditional situation being true. These sentences most often use the conjunction *if* with one of the verbs to express the conditional situation, and often use **modal auxiliary verbs** to describe the hypothetical outcome. For example:

• "The leaves **will fall** if the wind **blows**."

• "If you **had done** your chores, you **could have had** an ice cream cone."

• "You **would get** better grades if you **studied** harder."

Causative Verbs

Causative verbs are used to indicate that a person or thing is causing another action or an event to happen. They are generally followed by a noun or pronouns and an infinitive verb that is **not** causative, which describes the action that was caused to happen. For example:

• "He **let** *his dog run* through the field."

• "The bigger house **enabled** *the family to have* more room for their belongings."

• "The new dress code **forced** *the students to wear* different shoes."

• "The law **requires** *a person to obtain* a permit before hunting on public land."

Factitive Verbs

Factitive verbs are used to indicate a condition or state of a person, place, or thing that results from the action of the verb. For example:

• "She was **appointed** *commissioner* by the mayor."

• "The committee **elected** Mr. Fuller *chairman of the board*."

• "The jury **judged** the defendant *not guilty*."

Reflexive Verbs

Reflexive verbs have subjects that are also their direct objects—that is, the action of the verb is both committed and received by the same person or thing. The **objects** of transitive reflexive verbs are usually **reflexive pronouns**. For

example:

• “I accidentally **burned** *myself* with the hairdryer.”

• “The problem seems to have **worked** *itself* **out** in the end.”

• “*This car* **doesn’t drive** properly anymore.” (intransitive—no direct object)

Conjugation

When we discuss verbs, we usually must touch upon **conjugation**. This is the **inflection** (changing of form) of verbs to create new meaning in specific contexts. We generally refer to **tense** (which we looked at briefly above) when we talk about conjugation, but verbs experience a large amount of inflection depending on how they are being used in a sentence. For more information, go to the chapter on **Conjugation** in the part of this guide called **Inflection (Accidence)**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the function of verbs in a sentence?

a) To identify the person or thing performing or controlling an action
b) To describe an action, state of being, or condition performed or experienced by someone or something
c) To identify the person or thing directly receiving the effect of an action
d) To add descriptive information about another part of the sentence

2. The predicate of a sentence **always** contains what kind of verbs?

a) Regular verbs
b) Transitive verbs
c) Finite verbs
d) Non-finite verbs

3. **Unlike** regular verbs, irregular verbs usually have **different**:

a) Past tense and past participle forms
b) Present tense and present participle forms
c) Past tense and present tense forms
d) Present tense and past participle forms

4. **Unlike** transitive verbs, intransitive verbs are **not** able to take which of the following?

a) Subjects
b) Direct objects
c) Indirect objects
d) Modifiers
e) A & C
f) B & C
g) All of the above

5. Identify the **form** of the verb in **bold** in the following sentence:
"We **were** looking for a place to eat."

a) Transitive verb
b) Auxiliary verb
c) Infinitive verb
d) Participle

5. What is the term for changing a verb's form to reflect things like **tense**?

a) Conscription
b) Transformation
c) Conjugation
d) Declension

Finite and Non-finite Verbs

Definition

Finite verbs are verbs that have subjects and indicate grammatical tense, person, and number. These verbs describe the action of a person, place, or thing in the sentence. Unlike other types of verbs, finite verbs do not require another verb in the sentence in order to be grammatically correct.

Here are some examples of finite verbs:

• "They **went** to the mall today."

• "The outfielder **leaped** for the baseball."

• "Many people **travel** to the ocean in the summer."

• "The sailboat **glides** over the water."

• “The lion **is** the king of the jungle.”

Difference from non-finite verbs

Non-finite verbs are verbs that do not have tenses or subjects that they correspond to. Instead, these verbs are usually infinitives, gerunds, or participles. Gerunds and present participles end in “-ing,” while past participles usually end in “-ed,” “-d,” or “-t.”

Let’s have a look at how infinitives, gerunds, and participles function in a sentence in contrast to finite verbs.

Infinitives

If an **infinitive** is used in its full form (*to* + base form of the verb), it can function as a noun, adjective, or adverb in the sentence. Bare infinitives (base form of the verb without *to*) of non-finite verbs are used in conjunction with **modal auxiliary verbs**, which are considered the finite verb(s) of the sentence. For example:

• “*To run* **is** often tiresome.” (The infinitive *to run* functions as a noun, while *is* functions as the finite verb.)

• “It **takes** a while *to learn to ride a bicycle*.” (The infinitive phrase *to learn to ride a bicycle* functions as an adjective, modifying “a while.”)

• “I **can**’t *swim* yet.” (The bare infinitive *swim* relies on the finite auxiliary verb *can* to be complete.)

Gerunds

Gerunds are “-ing” forms of a verb that function as nouns in a sentence. Because they do not have the grammatical function of a verb, gerunds are always non-finite.

• “*Seeing* the ocean for the first time **is** incredible.”

• “*Reading* books **is** often very enjoyable.”

Participles

Present Participles

Present participles have the same form as gerunds, ending in "-ing." However, they function in a sentence as either part of a continuous tense, relying on an auxiliary verb to be complete; as an adjunct to a finite verb, indicating a secondary action; or as an **attributive** or **predicative adjective**, modifying a noun.

• "My daughter **is** *watching* me work." (*Watching* is used with *is* to form the **present continuous tense**.)

• "The car **sat** *rusting* in the driveway for over a year." (*Rusting* is used in conjunction with the finite verb *sat* to indicate a parallel activity.)

• "I **read** a very *engaging* book last week." (*Engaging* functions as an attributive adjective of *book*.)

• "This book **is** *engaging*." (*Engaging* functions as a predicative adjective, following the finite linking verb *is* and modifying *book*.)

Past Participles

Past participles of verbs are used to create non-continuous perfect verb tenses (**past perfect**, **present perfect**, and **future perfect**), or else function as adjectives modifying nouns (again, either attributively or predicatively). They are also used when forming the **passive voice**.

It is important to note that non-finite past participles and finite past tense verbs often both end in "-d" or "-ed." If the word directly describes the action of a subject, then it is a finite verb. However, if the word is being used as an adjective or requires another verb to be complete, then it is a non-finite verb.

• "I **had** already *walked* for many miles." (*Walked* is a past participle that depends on the auxiliary verb *have* to create the past perfect tense.)

• "Those clothes **are** *washed*." (*Washed* is a past participle acting as an predicative adjective to the noun *clothes*, following the finite linking verb *are*.)

• "She **carried** the *washed* clothes upstairs." (*Carried* is a past tense verb describing the action of the subject, *she*; *washed* is a past participle acting as an attributive adjective to the noun *clothes*.)

Importance to sentence structure

Sentences need a finite verb in order to be complete. Without a finite verb, a sentence would simply be a subject, or a subject and other parts of speech that do not express action and are not linked together properly. In other words, sentences

do not function correctly without finite verbs.

To illustrate this point, consider the following examples:

• “The car.”

• “The car on the road.“

• “The car on the road through the mountains.”

In the above examples, *car* is the subject. In order to make complete sentences, a finite verb must be used to describe the action of the *car*, as well as show how the other parts of the sentence relate to it. In the following examples, a finite verb is used to form complete sentences:

• “The car **drove**.”

• “The car **drove** on the road.”

• “The car **drove** on the road through the mountains.”

Simply adding the finite verb *drove* makes all three of these sentences complete. This is because it lets the reader know what the car is doing, and it connects the subject to the other parts of the sentence.

We can also see how a using a non-finite verb instead of a finite one would render the sentence incomplete again. For example:

• “The car *driving* on the road through the mountains.”

Because we used the present participle *driving*, the sentence is now disjointed—the action is not fully expressed by the sentence. We would need to add a finite verb to complete it, as in:

• “The car **was** *driving* on the road through the mountains.”

Identifying finite verbs

Due to the fact that multiple types of verbs can often exist in the same sentence, it is helpful to know some common instances of finite verbs that can help you identify them.

Third person singular present verbs ending in “-s”

Any verb that has an “-s” ending for the third person singular present form is a finite verb. Non-finite verbs do not have tense, and thus never switch their

endings to “-s” in the third person singular present form.

(The exceptions to this are **modal auxiliary verbs**: *can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might,* and *must*. Modal verbs also cannot take an “-s” ending for third person singular present; however, they are always finite. They come directly after the subject and before main verbs, and help to determine aspect, tense, and mood.)

Here are some examples of finite verbs in the third person singular present form with “-s” endings:

• “He **runs** to the store every morning.”

• “The woman **swims** in the ocean.”

• “The boy **kicks** the soccer ball at the goal.”

• “She **has** three cars in her driveway.”

Past tense irregular verbs

Verbs that are functioning in the past tense (not past participles) are inherently finite. As we noted above, the majority of verbs have the same form for both past tense and past participle. These are known as **regular verbs**. To determine if a regular verb is in the past tense or is a past participle (and thus finite or non-finite), we have to examine how it is functioning in the sentence.

However, some verbs are **irregular**, and they have a past tense form that is separate from their past participle form. Here are a few examples of sentences using irregular verbs:

Be

• “She **was** feeling unwell.” (past tense – finite)
• “She has *been* feeling unwell.” (past participle – non-finite)

Go

• “I **went** to the store.” (past tense – finite)
• “I had *gone* to the store.” (past participle – non-finite)

Fly

• “They **flew** to San Diego already.” (past tense – finite)
• “They have *flown* to San Diego already.” (past participle – non-finite)

There are quite a few irregular verbs, and there is no rule to how they are conjugated (which is why they are irregular). To learn more, go to the section about **Regular and Irregular Verbs**.

Verbs that immediately follow subjects

Finite verbs often directly follow the subjects whose actions they are describing. This location allows for a clear connection between the subject and the verb—it makes it easy for the reader or listener to understand that the verb is describing the action of the subject and not another word in the sentence. Here are some examples of finite verbs appearing directly after subjects in sentences:

• "*Everyone* **listened** to the music."

• "*Elephants* **travel** together in herds to find water."

• "Across the field, *the trees* **swayed** in the wind."

Non-finite verbs however, generally do not appear directly after the subject. This is because they are often not directly describing the action of the subject, but are instead serving another grammatical purpose in the sentence.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a finite verb?

a) to jump
b) swimming
c) is
d) gone

2. Identify the finite verb in the following sentence.
"Running late, the family quickly drove to their relative's house."

a) Running
b) to their
c) relative
d) drove

3. Finite verbs correspond to a specific subject and _____.

a) a tense
b) an infinitive
c) a past participle

d) a present participle

4. Which of the following verbs in the sentence is **not** a finite verb?
“Jumping into the ocean can be very refreshing after a long day.”

a) can
b) Jumping
c) be
d) A & B
e) B & C

5. In the past tense, finite verbs commonly end in:

a) “-ing”
b) “-s”
b) “-ed”
d) “-er”

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Definition

English verbs are split into two major categories depending on how they function in a sentence: **transitive** and **intransitive**. Transitive verbs take one or more objects in a sentence, while intransitive verbs take **no** objects in a sentence.

Distinguishing between the two

Transitive Verbs

Put simply, a transitive verb describes an action that is happening **to** something or someone, which is known as the verb’s **direct object**. For instance, in the sentence “I am reading a book,” *book* is the direct object, which the action *reading* is happening to.

To put it another way, the verb is transitive if a word or words in the sentence answer the question “**Who** or **what** did the action of the verb happen to?”

Examples

• “The people **watched *the game*** from the bleachers.” (*The game* is what the people *watched*.)

• “I was **eating *a delicious steak*** for dinner last night.” (*A delicious steak* is what I *was eating*.)

• “They **met *your brother*** at the airport in Dubai.” (*Your brother* is who they *met*.)

Intransitive Verbs

An intransitive verb, on the other hand, describes an action that does **not** happen to something or someone. For example, in the sentence “I arrived late,” *arrived* is describing an action, but there is nothing and no one for that action to happen **to**—the action is complete on its own. The verb is intransitive if we **cannot** answer the question “**Who** or **what** did the action of the verb happen to?”

Examples

• “I can’t believe our dog **ran away**.” (What did the dog *run away*? Nothing, there is no object receiving the action of *ran away*.)

• “There was a lot of dust in the air, which made me **sneeze**.” (What did I *sneeze*? Nothing, there is no object receiving the action of *sneeze*.)

• “Don’t be too loud while the baby **sleeps**.” (What did the baby *sleep*? Nothing, there is no object receiving the action of *sleeps*.)

Intransitive verbs with prepositional phrases

When intransitive verbs are modified by prepositional phrases, they can often look like they are transitive because the preposition has its own object; however, this is not the case. Take, for example, the following sentences:

• “I can’t believe our dog **ran away** *from home*.”

• “I **sneezed** *from the dust*.”

• “The baby is **sleeping** *in our room*.”

It may seem like *home, dust* and *our room* are all objects of the verbs in these sentences, but they’re actually objects of the prepositions, which together form **prepositional phrases** that modify the verbs. The verbs remain intransitive,

regardless of the objects in prepositional phrases.

Mnemonic device

One way to remember the difference between the two is to think about their names:

Trans*itive* verbs ***trans****ition* or ***trans****fer* an action to a person or thing that receives it.

In- means **not** in this case, so ***in****trans****itive*** verbs do ***not trans****ition/****trans****fer* an action to a person or thing that receives it.

“Ambitransitive Verbs”

Some action verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, depending on the context of the sentence or what information the speaker wishes to include. These are sometimes known as **ambitransitive** or **ergative verbs**.

For example:

• “She **eats** before going to work.” (Intransitive—no direct object receiving the action of the verb *eats*.)

• “She **eats *breakfast*** before going to work.” (Transitive—has a direct object (*breakfast*) receiving the action of the verb *eats*.)

Here are some other examples of verbs that function both transitively and intransitively.

• “I’ve been trying to **read** more.” (intransitive)
• “I’ve been trying to **read *more novels***.” (transitive)

• “I’m still **cooking**, so I’m going to be a little late.” (intransitive)
• “I’m still **cooking *dinner***, so I’m going to be a little late.” (transitive)

• “I’ve been **exercising** every day this month.” (intransitive)
• “I’ve been **exercising *my arms*** every day this month.” (transitive)

Monotransitive, Ditransitive, and “Tritransitive” Verbs

As we’ve seen, a transitive verb is by definition a verb that takes an object. Most verbs are **monotransitive**, meaning they only take one object. However, some verbs, known as **ditransitive verbs**, can take two objects in a sentence, while

others, known as **tritransitive verbs**, can take (or seem to take) three objects.

Monotransitive Verbs

A verb that acts upon a single object in a sentence is referred to as **monotransitive** (*mono* meaning *one*). This single object is called its **direct object**. All of the examples we've seen so far have been monotransitive verbs; here's a few more:

• "I **rode *my bike*** to get here."

• "Jim just **told *a funny joke***."

• "I'm **making *lasagna*** for dinner."

• "I heard she's **writing *a novel***."

Ditransitive Verbs

There are some verbs in English that take <u>two</u> objects: a **direct object** and an **indirect object**. These are known as **ditransitive verbs**. The direct object relates to the person or thing that <u>directly</u> receives the action of the verb, while the indirect object relates to the person or thing that <u>indirectly</u> receives or benefits from the action as a result.

The indirect object in a ditransitive verb can either come immediately before the direct object in a sentence, or it can form the object of a prepositional phrase using *to* or *for* that follows and modifies the direct object.

For example:

• "He **gave *Mary*** **a <u>pen</u>**." (The indirect object, *Mary* immediately follows the direct object, *pen*.)

or

• "He **gave <u>a pen</u> *to Mary***." (The indirect object, *Mary*, forms the object of the prepositional phrase *to Mary*, which follows and modifies the direct object, *pen*.)

Here are some other examples:

• "She **teaches *the students*** **<u>mathematics</u>**."
• "She **teaches <u>mathematics</u> *to the students***."

• "I **sent *my brother*** **<u>a letter</u>**."
• "I **sent <u>a letter</u> *to my brother***."

• "My father **baked *our class*** **<u>a batch of cupcakes</u>**."

• “My father **baked** **a batch of cupcakes** ***for our class***.”

Factitive Verbs

Factitive verbs are or appear to be ditransitive as well. Instead of having a direct object that impacts on an indirect object, factitive verbs describe a status, category, quality, or result that the direct object is becoming due to the action of the verb. This secondary element can be either an object or object complement of the verb. For example:

• “The American people **elected** **her** ***the president of the United States***.”

• “He was **appointed** ***Supreme Court justice***.”

• “The committee **selected** **Mrs. Fuller** ***chairman of the board***.”

• “The group **designated** **Marshall** ***the leader*** from then on.”

• “The coach **made** **Linda** ***point guard***.”

• “We **painted** **the ceiling** ***white***.”

See the section on **factitive verbs** to learn more.

“Tritransitive” verbs

An unofficial third type of transitive verb is what’s sometimes known as a **tritransitive verb**, meaning that it takes three objects. This third “object” is formed from a prepositional phrase or clause that appears to receive the action of the verb by way of the indirect object. For example:

• “We will **make** ***you*** **CEO** *for $300,000*.”

• “I’d **trade** ***you*** **that sandwich** *for an ice cream cone*.”

• “I **bet** ***you*** **50 bucks** *(that) our team will win the championship*.”

There is some dispute among linguists, however, as to whether these kinds of verbs truly have three objects, or whether the third piece of information is merely considered an **adjunct**, as the sentence would be grammatically sound without it.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What do all transitive verbs have that intransitive verbs do **not**?

a) a preposition

b) a subject
c) an object
d) an adverbial clause

2. What kind of verb can be **both** transitive and intransitive?
a) monotransitive
b) ditransitive
c) tritransitive
d) ambitransitive

3. What kind of verb is in the following sentence?
“I played my grandmother a song.”
a) intransitive
b) monotransitive
c) ditransitive
d) tritransitive

4. What kind of verb is in the following sentence?
“I swam for half an hour before my meeting.”
a) intransitive
b) monotransitive
c) ditransitive
d) tritransitive

5. What kind of verb **only** has a direct object?
a) intransitive
b) monotransitive
c) ditransitive
d) tritransitive

Regular and Irregular Verbs

Definition

All English verbs are either **regular or irregular**, depending on how they are **conjugated**. The majority are regular verbs, which means that “-d” or “-ed” is added to their base form (the infinitive of the verb without *to*) to create **both** the **past simple tense** and **past participle**.

The past simple tense and past participles of irregular verbs, on the other hand, have many different forms that do not adhere to a distinct or predictable pattern. Much of the time, their past tense and past participle forms are completely different from one another. Unfortunately, this means that there is no way of determining *how* to conjugate irregular verbs—we just have to learn each one individually.

Conjugating Regular and Irregular Verbs

In the following sections, we’ll look at various examples of regular and irregular verbs and how the past simple tense and past participle are formed for each one.

We’ll also look at a few examples of how each of these different forms functions in a sentence.

Regular verbs

As we saw above, regular verbs are defined as having both their past simple tense and past participle forms constructed by adding “-d” or “-ed” to the end of the word. For most regular verbs, this is the only change to the word.

Here are some examples of common regular verbs.

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
play	played	played
bake	baked	baked
listen	listened	listened
approach	approached	approached
gather	gathered	gathered

climb	climbed	climbed
walk	walked	walked
arrive	arrived	arrived
bolt	bolted	bolted

In all of the above examples, the only alteration to the verb has been the addition of “-d” or “-ed.” Notice, too, that the past tense and past participle forms are identical in each case—this is a defining feature of regular verbs.

Changing spelling

In some cases, though, we have to modify the verb slightly further in order to be able to add “-d” or “-ed.”

For instance, with verbs that end in a “short” vowel followed by a consonant, we double the final consonant *in addition* to adding “-ed”;* when a verb ends in a consonant + “y,” we replace the “y” with “i” and add “-ied”; and when a verb ends in “-ic,” we add the letter “k” in addition to “-ed.”

For example:

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
chop	cho**pped**	cho**pped**
copy	cop**ied**	cop**ied**
panic	panic**ked**	panic**ked**

*(*Usage Note: An exception to this rule occurs for words that end in a soft vowel and the consonant “l” (as in travel, cancel, fuel, label, etc.). In this case, we merely add “-ed” to form the past simple and the past participle (as in traveled, canceled, fueled, labeled, etc.)—we do **not** double the consonant. Note, however, that this exception only occurs in American English; in other varieties of English, such as British or Australian English, the consonant is still doubled.)*

See the chapter on **Suffixes** to learn more about how words change when we add to their endings.

Example sentences

• “I **walk** around the park each evening.” (base form)

• “I **walked** around the park in the afternoon.” (past simple tense)
• “I have **walked** around the park a few times this morning.” (past participle)

• “I’m going to **chop** some vegetables for the salad.” (base form)
• “He **chopped** some vegetables for the salad before dinner.” (past simple tense)
• “He had already **chopped** some vegetables for the salad.” (past participle)

• “Don’t **copy** other students’ answers or you will get an F.” (base form)
• “I think he **copied** my answers.” (past simple tense)
• “The only answers he got right were the ones he had **copied**.” (past participle)

• “Your father’s fine, don’t **panic**!” (base form)
• “I **panicked** when I heard he was in the hospital.” (past simple tense)
• “I wish hadn’t **panicked** like that.” (past participle)

Irregular verbs

Irregular verbs, by their very definition, do not have spelling rules that we can follow to create the past simple tense and past participles. This means that the only way of knowing how to spell these forms is to memorize them for each irregular verb individually. Below are just a few examples of some common irregular verbs.

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
be	was/were	been
see	saw	seen
grow	grew	grown
give	gave	given
think	thought	thought
throw	threw	thrown
drive	drove	driven
ride	rode	ridden
run	ran	run
swim	swam	swum
sit	sat	sat

As you can see, irregular verbs can have endings that are dramatically different from their base forms; often, their past simple tense and past participles forms are completely different, too. Again, the only way to learn these variations is to memorize them.

Examples

Let’s look at some sentences that use irregular verbs in their various forms:

• “I **am** excited that college is starting.” (base form)
• “I **was** sad to leave home, though.” (past simple tense)
• “I have **been** making a lot of new friends already.” (past participle)

• “I **drive** to work every morning.” (base form)
• “I **drove** for nearly an hour yesterday.” (past simple tense)
• “I had already **driven** halfway to the office when I realized I forgot my briefcase.” (past participle)

• “I would love to **grow** vegetables in my garden.” (base form)
• “I **grew** some juicy tomatoes last summer.” (past simple tense)
• “He has **grown** a lot of different vegetables already.” (past participle)

• “I **think** I would like to get a dog.” (base form)
• “She **thought** a dog would provide some good company.” (past simple tense)
• “She hadn’t **thought** about how much work they are.” (past participle)

Conjugating present tense and the present participle

Although there are stark differences between regular and irregular verbs when it comes to conjugating their past simple tense and past participles, both kinds of verbs **do** follow the same conventions when creating present participles and present tense in the third person singular (the other two elements of **verb conjugation**).

For example:

Regular Verbs

Regular Verb	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle	Third Person Singular Present Tense	Present Participle
bake	baked	baked	bakes	baking
tap	tapped	tapped	taps	tapping
tidy	tidied	tidied	tidies	tidying

mimic	mimicked	mimicked	mimics	mimicking

Irregular Verbs

Irregular Verb	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle	Third Person Singular Present Tense	Present Participle
ride	rode	ridden	rides	riding
see	saw	seen	sees	seeing
give	gave	given	gives	giving
swim	swam	swum	swims	swimming

The exception to this is the verb *be*, which conjugates the present tense irregularly for first, second, and third person, as well as for singular and plural:

Verb	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle	Present Tense	Present Participle
be	was/were	been	is/am/are	being

For this reason, *be* is known as a **highly irregular** verb. Note, however, that it still forms the present participle following the same conventions as all other verbs.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a **regular** verb?

a) think
b) find
b) listen
d) ran

2. Which of the following is an **irregular** verb?

a) happen
b) talk
c) walk
d) swim

3. Identify whether the verb in the following sentence is regular or irregular:
“The family hiked over the mountain.”

a) regular
b) irregular

4. Identify the **irregular** verb in the following sentence:
“She gave me a bunch of potatoes, which she harvested herself, to cook for dinner later.”

a) cook
b) gave
c) picked
d) bunch

5. In which of the following ways do regular and irregular verbs conjugate **differently**?

a) When forming the past simple tense
b) When forming the past participle
c) When forming the present participle
d) A & B
e) B & C
d) None of the above

6. In which of the following ways do regular and irregular verbs conjugate **in the same way**?

a) When forming the past simple tense
b) When forming the past participle
c) When forming the present participle
d) A & B
e) B & C
d) None of the above

Auxiliary Verbs

Definition

Auxiliary verbs (also called **helping verbs**) are verbs that add functional meaning to other “main” or “full” verbs in a clause. They are used to create different **tenses** or **aspects**, to form negatives and interrogatives, or to add emphasis to a sentence. However, they do not have semantic meaning unto themselves.

Types of Auxiliary Verbs

Here is the complete list of auxiliary verbs:

- **be**
- **do**
- **have**
- **can**
- **could**
- **will**
- **would**
- **shall**
- **should**
- **must**
- **may**
- **might**
- **ought to**
- **used to**
- **need**
- **dare**

The **primary auxiliary verbs** are ***be, do***, and ***have***, and they are the most commonly occurring auxiliaries in English. Each can also be used as a main verb in a clause, and each is able to conjugate to reflect plurality, tense, or aspect.

The verbs ***can, could, will, would, shall, should, must, may***, and ***might*** are known as **modal auxiliary verbs**. These are distinguished by the fact that they

are **unable** to conjugate into different forms, and they are only followed by a verb in its base form.

The remaining verbs—***ought to, used to, need***, and ***dare***—are known as **semi-modal verbs**, since they do not share all the characteristics of the modal verbs above and only function as auxiliary verbs in certain ways.

Creating verb tenses

One of the most common uses of auxiliary verbs is to create the continuous and perfect continuous verb tenses (as well as the **future simple tense**).

Future Simple Tense

The future tense is structured as *will* + the main verb, ***or*** *is/am/are + going to* + the main verb:

• "I ***will*** **arrive** in New York at 10 PM."

or:

• "I ***am*** **going to arrive** in New York at 10 PM."

Present Continuous Tense

The present continuous tense is structured as *am/is/are* + the present participle of the main verb:

• "I ***am*** **working** tomorrow."

• "She ***is*** **living** in New York."

• "They ***are*** **trying** to save some money."

Past Continuous Tense

The past continuous tense is structured as *was/were* + the present participle of the main verb:

• "I ***was*** **cooking** breakfast when she called."

• "We ***were*** **talking** on the phone at the time."

Future Continuous Tense

The future continuous tense is structured as *will be* + the present participle of the

main verb, ***or*** *am/is/are + going to be* + the present participle of the verb:

• “I ***will be*** **leaving** in the morning.”

or:

• “I ***am*** **going to** ***be*** **leaving** in the morning.”

Present Perfect Tense

The present perfect tense is structured as *have/has* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I ***have*** **lived** here all my life.”

• “She ***has*** **studied** for this exam for weeks.”

• “They ***have*** **tried** to find a solution to the problem.”

Past Perfect Tense

The past perfect tense is structured as *had* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I ***had*** **already made** my fortune when I was your age.”

• “We ***had*** **seen** that the results were constant.”

Future Perfect Tense

The future perfect tense is usually structured as *will have* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I ***will have*** **finished** by that time.”

• “She ***will have*** **sung** with a professional orchestra before the tour begins.”

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

The present perfect continuous tense is structured as *have been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “I ***have been*** **trying** to reach you for over an hour.”

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

The past perfect continuous tense is structured as *had been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “We ***had been*** **working** through the night.”

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

The future perfect continuous tense is structured as *will have been* + the present participle of the main verb, ***or*** *am/is/are + going to + have been* + the present participle of the verb:

• “She **will *have been* living** here for most of her life.”

• “I ***am*** **going to *have been* working** here for 10 years next week.”

Identifying auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs can be identified by two main criteria: whether the verb is capable of **inversion** with the subject, and whether it can take the negating adverb *not* as a **postdependent modifier**.

(An exception to the first two rules is the **linking verb** *be*, which can both invert and take *not*, despite having the function of a main verb.)

Subject-auxiliary inversion

Inversion refers to the reversal of the normal position of the subject and the auxiliary verb of a clause. While it is technically possible for a main verb to invert with its subject, it is much less likely than having an auxiliary verb cause an inversion, due to the fact that **subject-auxiliary inversion** is commonly used to create **interrogative sentences**. Additionally, subject-auxiliary inversion can be used to create **conditional sentences**, as well as for emphasis in negative sentences when negating phrases are used.

Interrogative sentences

When a sentence is in the **present simple tense** or **past simple tense**, we use the auxiliary verb *do* to form it into a question word. *Do* is inverted with the subject, coming before it in the sentence. For example:

• “John works across town.” (declarative sentence)
• “**Does** John work across town?” (interrogative sentence)

If the verb is in a continuous tense (present, past, or future) or the **future simple tense**, then the auxiliary verb used to create the tense is inverted with the subject; if the verb is in a perfect continuous tense (present, past, or future), then

the first of the two auxiliary verbs is inverted. For example:

Present continuous tense:

• “John **is** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Is** John working across town?” (interrogative)

Past continuous tense:

• “John **was** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Was** John working across town?” (interrogative)

Present perfect continuous tense:

• “John **has been** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Has** John **been** working across town?” (interrogative)

Past perfect continuous tense:

• “John **had been** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Had** John **been** working across town?” (interrogative)

Future simple tense:

• “John **will** work across town.” (declarative)
• “**Will** John work across town?” (interrogative)

or:

• “John **is going to** work across town.” (declarative)
• “**Is** John **going to** work across town?” (interrogative)

Future continuous tense:

• “John **will be** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Will** John **be** working across town?” (interrogative)

or:

• “John **is going to be** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Is** John **going to be** working across town?” (interrogative)

Future perfect continuous tense:

• “John **will have been** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Will** John **have been** working across town?” (interrogative)

or:

• “John **is going to have been** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Is** John **going to have been** working across town?” (interrogative)

Question words and modal verbs

This inversion holds true even when a question word is used, as in:

• “Where **will** John **be** working across town?”

• “Why **had** John **been** working across town?”

• “When **was** John working across town?”

Modal auxiliary verbs can also be used to create questions with specific meanings, as in:

• “**Can** you work a forklift?” (question of ability)

• “**May** I watch television for an hour?” (question of permission)

• “**Must** we sit through another boring play?” (question of obligation)

Inversion of *be*

Finally, as we mentioned earlier, *be* is able to invert when it functions as a **linking verb** (meaning it is a **main verb**) as well as when it functions as an auxiliary. For example:

• “I **am** cold.”
• “**Are** you cold?”

• “They **were** all present.”
• “**Were** they all present?”

Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences are most often formed using the conjunction *if* to create a **condition clause**. For example:

• “**If** I were to move to Florida, I would be warm all year round.”

• “**If** they had trained a little harder, they would have won.”

We can also achieve conditional clauses by using subject-auxiliary inversion, although the sentence sounds a bit more formal as a result:

• “**Were** I to move to Florida, I would be warm all year round.”

• “**Had** they trained a little harder, they would have won.”

Negative phrases

Negative phrases are sometimes used to provide extra emphasis in a negative sentence. Because the main verb remains affirmative, the negative phrase appears ahead of the subject and the main verb, which means that an auxiliary verb must come between it and the subject.

If the negative phrase were to come after the main verb of the sentence (as adverbial phrases often do), the sentence would become unclear because the verb would shift from an affirmative position to a negative one. For example:

✖ "You **are** spending the night there under no circumstances." (No inversion—the sentence is unclear and/or lacks emphasis.)
✔ "Under no circumstances **are** you spending the night there." (Subject-auxiliary inversion—the sentence is now clear with proper emphasis on the negative phrase.)

✖ "They told us what the problem was at no point." (no inversion)
✔ "At no point **did** they tell us what the problem was." (subject-auxiliary inversion)

Forming negative sentences with *not*

The most common way to make a verb negative is to use the adverb *not*. However, main verbs usually do not take *not* on their own—they require an auxiliary verb to accomplish this. For example:

• "I work in a law firm downtown." (affirmative sentence)
✖ "I work **not** in a law firm downtown." (incorrect negative sentence)
✔ "I **do not** work in a law firm downtown." (correct negative sentence)

As with subject-verb inversion, *be* as a main verb is an exception to this rule. For instance:

✔ "He **is** very warm." (affirmative)

✔ "He **is not** very warm." (negative)

Finally, it must be noted that in older, formal, and more literary English, main verbs were able to take *not* without an auxiliary. For example:

• "I know **not** where the problems lie."

• "Betray **not** your kin."

However, this type of negative formation is rarely used in modern speech or writing.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a **modal** auxiliary verb?

a) be
b) do
c) must
d) have

2. What can the **primary** auxiliary verbs do that modal verbs **cannot**?

a) Take the adverb *not* to become negative
b) Invert with the subject in an interrogative sentence
c) Form a verb tense
d) Conjugate to reflect plurality

3. Which of the following can perform subject-verb inversion as a **main verb** in the same way as auxiliary verbs?

a) be
b) do
c) have
d) will

4. Identify the auxiliary verb in the following sentence:
"I have to tell you that you are being ridiculous."

a) have
b) tell
c) are
d) being

5. Select the auxiliary verb that will put the following sentence in the **future perfect continuous tense**:
"James will ____ been studying for three years come this September."

a) be
b) do
c) have
d) will

Primary Auxiliary Verbs

Definition

The "**primary**" **auxiliary verbs** are *be, have*, and *do*—they occur most commonly in English. They are also some of the trickiest to master, because each can also be used as a main verb in a clause, and each is able to conjugate to reflect plurality and tense as a result.

Be and *have* are used as auxiliaries to conjugate the continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous tenses. *Do* is used to make main verbs negative or to form **interrogative sentences**; it can also be used to add emphasis to a sentence.

We will begin by examining these different conjugations, and then we'll look more closely at how these verbs function as auxiliaries.

Conjugating *be, have*, and *do*

Because *be, have*, and *do* are able to function as main verbs, they must also be able to inflect for plurality and tense; it is important to know these conjugations, as they must be used correctly when the verbs function as auxiliaries.

Do conjugates as *did* (past tense), *does* (third-person singular present tense), *done* (past participle), and *doing* (present participle); ***have*** conjugates as *had* (past tense/participle), *has* (third-person singular present tense), and *having* (present participle).

Be, meanwhile, has seven conjugations: *am* (first-person singular present tense); *are* (first-person plural present tense, second-person singular/plural present tense, third-person plural present tense); *is* (third-person singular present tense); *was* (first-person singular past tense, third-person singular past tense); *were* (first-person plural past tense, second-person singular/plural past tense, third-person plural past tense); *been* (past participle); and *being* (present participle).

The following tables will help illustrate these different conjugations. Note that only conjugations used in an **auxiliary** capacity have been included:

Be **Conjugations**	**Form**	**Auxiliary example sentence**
be	base form	"You must **be** joking."

am	first-person singular present tense	"I **am** moving to Germany next month."
are	first-person plural present tense second-person singular/plural present tense third-person plural present tense	"We **are** leaving tomorrow morning." "**Are** you working later?" "Where **are** they going?"
is	third-person singular present tense	"She **is** wondering where we're going."
was	first-person singular past tense third-person singular past tense	"I **was** talking to my brother yesterday." "It **was** raining quite hard last night."
were	first-person plural past tense second-person singular/plural past tense third-person plural past tense	"We **were** looking for a new place to live." "You **were** thinking of running away?" "When **were** they planning on electing a new president?"
been	past participle	"Everyone has **been** worrying about their jobs."

Have **Conjugations**	**Form**	**Auxiliary Example sentence**
have	base form	"I **have** been to this part of town before."
	third-person	

has	singular present tense	"It **has** been raining for over an hour now."
had	past tense	"They **had** been confident in the project's success."
having	present participle	"**Having** worked his whole life, Larry relished the thought of retirement."

Do **Conjugations**	**Form**	**Auxiliary Example sentence**
do	base form	"**Do** be careful."
does	third-person singular present tense	"**Does** he know what he's talking about?"
did	past tense	"We **did**n't know any better."

Auxiliary Functions

Forming Tenses

The verbs *be* and *have* are used as auxiliary verbs to form different tenses of main verbs. *Be* is used on its own to form the **continuous tenses**, while *have* is used to form the **perfect tenses**. Both *have* and *been* (the past participle of *be*) are used together to form the perfect continuous tenses.

As we saw above, *be* and *have* both have multiple conjugations, all of which must be used correctly when they function as auxiliaries.

Present Continuous Tense (Progressive)

The present continuous tense is structured as *am/is/are* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “I ***am*** **working** tomorrow.”

• “She ***is*** **living** in New York.”

• “They ***are*** **trying** to save some money.”

Past Continuous Tense

The past continuous tense is structured as *was/were* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “I ***was*** **cooking** breakfast when she called.”

• “We ***were*** **talking** on the phone at the time.”

Future Continuous Tense

The future continuous tense is structured as *will be* + the present participle of the main verb OR *am/is/are + going to be* + the present participle of the verb:

• “I **will *be* leaving** in the morning.”

• “I ***am*** **going to *be* meeting** with my professor later.”

• “He ***is*** **going to *be* studying** abroad next year.”

Present Perfect Tense

The present continuous tense is structured as *have/has* + the past participle of main verb:

• “I ***have*** **lived** here all my life.”

• “She ***has*** **studied** for this exam for weeks.”

• “They ***have*** **tried** to find a solution to the problem.”

Past Perfect Tense

The past continuous tense is structured as *had* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I ***had*** **already made** my fortune when I was your age.”

• “We ***had*** **seen** that the results were constant.”

Future Perfect Tense

The future continuous tense is usually structured as *will have* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I **will *have* finished** by that time.”

• “She **will *have* sung** with a professional orchestra before the tour begins.”

(Notice that *have* does not conjugate for the third-person singular in this tense.)

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

The present perfect continuous tense is structured as *have been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “I ***have been* trying** to reach you for over an hour.”

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

The past perfect continuous tense is structured as *had been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “We **had *been* working** through the night.”

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

The future perfect continuous tense is structured as *will have been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “I **will *have been* working** here for 10 years next week.”

(Notice that *have* does not conjugate for the third-person singular in this tense.)

You may have noticed that the future tenses also use the auxiliary verb *will*. This is one of the **modal auxiliary verbs**, which will be covered in a separate section.

Forming negative sentences with *not*

The most common way to make a verb negative is to use the adverb *not*. However, main verbs cannot take *not* on their own—they require an auxiliary verb to do this.

Using *do*

If a verb does not already use an auxiliary verb (i.e., to form one of the tenses above), we use the auxiliary verb *do/does* to accomplish this.

For example:

• “I work on the weekends.” (affirmative sentence)

✖ “I work **not** on the weekends.” (incorrect negative sentence)
✔ “I ***do* not** work on the weekends.” (correct negative sentence)

• “She lives in the city.” (affirmative)
✖ “She lives **not** in the city.” (incorrect negative sentence)
✔ “She **does not** live in the city.” (correct negative sentence)

Notice that because the auxiliary verb *do* conjugates to reflect the third-person singular, the main verb of the sentence reverts back to its base form.

Likewise, if a sentence is in the **past simple tense**, *do* conjugates to *did*, and the main verb remains in the present-tense base form. For instance:

• “He studied in Europe.” (affirmative simple past tense)
✖ “He studied **not** in Europe.” (incorrect negative past tense)
✔ “He **did not** study in Europe.” (correct negative past tense)

Using *not* with other tenses

If a verb is already using one or more auxiliary verbs to create a perfect, continuous, or perfect continuous tense, then it is the auxiliary closest to the subject that takes the word *not*. For example:

• “I **am working** later.” (affirmative present continuous tense)
• “I ***am not* working** later.” (negative present continuous tense)

• “She **had been living** there for a month.” (affirmative past perfect continuous tense)
• “She ***hadn’t* been living** there for a month.” (negative past perfect continuous tense)

• “They **will have been writing** their dissertations for almost a year.” (affirmative future perfect continuous tense)
• “They ***will not* have been writing** their dissertations for almost a year.” (negative future perfect continuous tense)

Errors with *have not*

A frequent error is to make the verb *have* negative in the present simple tense. We need to always remember that the present simple negative is *do not* (contracted as *don’t*) or, in third person singular, *does not* (contracted as *doesn’t*). For example:

✖ “I haven’t a dog.” (incorrect)
✔ “I don’t have a dog.” (correct)

✖ “She hasn’t a cat.” (incorrect)
✔ “She **doesn’t** have a cat.” (correct)

If we say “I haven’t a dog,” we are using *have* as an auxiliary rather than as a main verb meaning “to possess”—in doing so, the main verb is now missing.

And just as in the present simple negative, we need an auxiliary verb when using the past simple negative:

✖ “I hadn’t a car.” (incorrect)
✔ “I didn’t have a car.” (correct)

Have and have got

Have, when used as a main verb meaning “to possess,” means the same thing as the less formal *have got*. They can usually be used interchangeably, though not in every case.

In *have got*, *have* is acting as an auxiliary verb for *got*. Because of this, *have* is now able to take *not* in the negative present simple tense, usually contracted as *haven’t* (or *hasn’t* in the third-person singular):

• “He **has got** an idea about what happened.” (affirmative present simple tense)
• “He **hasn’t got** an idea about what happened.” (negative present simple tense)

• “They**’ve got** a plan to increase sales.” (affirmative present simple tense)
• “They **haven’t got** a plan to increase sales.” (negative present simple tense)

Forming interrogative sentences with subject-verb inversion

Inversion refers to the reversal of the normal position of the subject and the auxiliary verb of a clause. We cannot use subject-verb inversion with main verbs to create interrogative sentences—we have to either add the auxiliary verb *do*, or else invert an existing auxiliary verb.

Inversion with auxiliary *do*

When a sentence is in the **present simple tense** or **past simple tense**, we use the auxiliary verb *do* to form it into a question word. This is *inverted* with the subject, coming before it in the sentence. For example:

• “John works across town.” (present simple tense declarative sentence)

• “**Does** John work across town?” (present simple tense interrogative sentence)
• “They lived in an apartment.” (past simple tense declarative sentence)
• “**Did** they live in an apartment?” (past simple tense interrogative sentence)

Inversion with other auxiliary verbs

As we saw already, *be* and *have* are used to create the continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous verb tenses. In these cases, the auxiliary verb used to create the tense is inverted with the subject to create a question; if the verb is in a perfect continuous tense (and thus has two auxiliaries), then the first of the two auxiliary verbs is inverted. For example:

Present continuous tense:

• “John **is** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Is** John working across town?” (interrogative)

Past continuous tense:

• “John **was** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Was** John working across town?” (interrogative)

Present perfect tense:

• “John **has** worked across town for a long time.” (declarative)
• “**Has** John worked across town for a long time?” (interrogative)

Past perfect tense:

• “John **had** worked across town for a long time.” (declarative)
• “**Had** John worked across town for a long time?” (interrogative)

Present perfect continuous tense:

• “John **has been** working across town for a long time.” (declarative)
• “**Has** John **been** working across town for a long time?” (interrogative)

Past perfect continuous tense:

• “John **had been** working across town for a long time.” (declarative)
• “**Had** John **been** working across town for a long time?” (interrogative)

Errors with *have*

As we saw when forming the negative with *not*, we often run into errors when *have* is functioning as a **main verb** and the sentence is made into a question.

Just like any other main verb (with the exception of *be*), *have* **cannot** invert with

the subject to form a question—it must take the auxiliary verb *do* to accomplish this, like we saw above. For example:

• “You had a car when you lived in London.” (declarative)

✖ “Had you a car when you lived in London?” (incorrect interrogative)

✔ “Did you have a car when you lived in London?” (correct interrogative)

Question words

The rules of inversion that we’ve seen above hold true even when a question word is used. For example:

• “Where **is** John working?”

• “Why **has** John **been** working across town?”

• “When **did** John work across town?”

Inversion of *be*

It is important to remember that we do not use *do, does* or *did* when *be* is a main verb. As we mentioned earlier, *be* is able to invert when it is functioning as a **linking verb** (meaning it is a **main verb**) as well as an auxiliary. For example:

• “I **am** cold.” (declarative)
✖ “Do you be cold?” (incorrect interrogative)
✔ “**Are** you cold?” (correct interrogative)

• “They **were** all present.” (declarative)
✖ “Did they be all present?” (incorrect interrogative)
✔ “**Were** they all present?” (correct interrogative)

The inversion of *be* also holds true when there is a question word, as in:

• “Why **are** you cold?”

• “When **were** they all present?”

• “Who **is** attending the party?”

Emphatic *do*

In addition to making interrogative sentences, *do* is also used as an auxiliary to create **emphatic** sentences. This is sometimes referred to as the **emphatic mood**, one of the grammatical **moods** in English. Its purpose in this case is not to add any new meaning to the sentence, but rather to emphasize the fact that something

happened or someone did something.

Emphatic *do* comes before the main verb in a sentence. As is the case when *do* is used to create interrogative sentences, it takes the conjugation for tense or plurality, leaving the main verb in the base form. For example:

• “I washed the dishes.” (no emphasis)
• “I **did** wash the dishes.” (emphasizes the fact that the speaker washed the dishes)

• “He looks like an honest man.” (no emphasis)
• “He **does** look like an honest man.” (emphasizes the way the man looks)

As with interrogative sentences, however, we cannot use *do* when *be* is the main verb of the sentence:

• “I am cold.” (no emphasis)
✖ “I **do** be cold.” (incorrect emphasis)

In imperative sentences

We can also use emphatic *do* in **imperative sentences** to add emphasis to a command, instruction, or request, though this usually adds a more formal or old-fashioned tone to the sentence. Unlike in declarative sentences, we can use emphatic *do* when *be* is a main verb of an imperative sentence. For example:

• “**Do** be careful!”

• “**Do** try to be quiet.”

• “Please **do** avoid walking on the grass.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** one of the “primary” auxiliary verbs?

a) be
b) will
c) do
d) have

2. Which of the following is the correct conjugation of the verb *be* in the **third-person present singular** ?

a) am

b) are
c) is
d) was

3. Which auxiliary verb is added to a make a verb **negative** in the present or past simple tense?

a) be
b) will
c) do
d) have

4. Identify the auxiliary verb used in the following sentence:
“Have you been working on this project for long?”

a) have
b) been
c) working
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) None of the above

5. Which of the following is a function of *do* as an auxiliary verb?

a) To form negatives with verbs in the present or past simple tense
b) To form the continuous, perfect, or perfect continuous tenses
c) To express the subject’s ability to perform the function of the main verb
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) None of the above

Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Definition

A **modal auxiliary verb**, often simply called a **modal verb** or even just a **modal**, is used to change the meaning of other verbs (commonly known as **main verbs**) by expressing **modality**—that is, asserting (or denying) possibility, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation, or future intention.

Modal verbs are defined by their inability to conjugate for tense and the third

person singular (i.e., they do not take an “-s” at the end when *he*, *she*, or *it* is the subject), and they cannot form infinitives, past participles, or present participles. All modal auxiliary verbs are followed by a main verb in its base form (the infinitive without *to*); they can never be followed by other modal verbs, lone auxiliary verbs, or nouns.

As with the **primary auxiliary verbs**, modal verbs can be used with *not* to create negative sentences, and they can all invert with the subject to create **interrogative sentences**.

The Modal Verbs

There are nine “true” modal auxiliary verbs: *will, shall, would, should, can, could, may, might,* and *must*. The verbs *dare, need, used to,* and *ought to* can also be used in the same way as modal verbs, but they do not share all the same characteristics; for this reason, they are referred to as **semi-modal auxiliary verbs**, which are discussed in a separate section.

Will

As a modal auxiliary verb, *will* is particularly versatile, having several different functions and meanings. It is used to form future tenses, to express willingness or ability, to make requests or offers, to complete conditional sentences, to express likelihood in the immediate present, or to issue commands.

Shall

The modal auxiliary verb *shall* is used in many of the same ways as ***will***: to form future tenses, to make requests or offers, to complete conditional sentences, or to issue maxims or commands. Although *will* is generally preferred in modern English, using *shall* adds an additional degree of politeness or formality to the sentence that *will* sometimes lacks.

Generally, *shall* is only used when *I* or *we* is the subject, though this is not a strict rule (and does not apply at all when issuing commands, as we’ll see).

Would

The modal auxiliary verb *would* has a variety of functions and uses. It is used in place of ***will*** for things that happened or began in the past, and, like ***shall***, it is sometimes used in place of *will* to create more formal or polite sentences. It is

also used to express requests and preferences, to describe hypothetical situations, and to politely offer or ask for advice or an opinion.

Should

The modal verb *should* is used to politely express obligations or duties; to ask for or issue advice, suggestions, and recommendations; to describe an expectation; to create **conditional sentences**; and to express surprise. There are also a number of uses that occur in British English, but that are not common in American English.

Can

As a modal auxiliary verb, *can* is most often used to express a person or thing's ability to do something. It is also used to express or ask for permission to do something, to describe the possibility that something can happen, and to issue requests and offers.

Could

The modal verb *could* is most often used as a past-tense version of ***can***, indicating what someone or something was able to do in the past; it can also be used instead of *can* as a more polite way of making a request or asking for permission. *Could* is also used to express a slight or uncertain possibility, as well as for making a suggestion or offer.

May

The modal verb *may* is used to request, grant, or describe permission; to politely offer to do something for someone; to express the possibility of something happening or occurring; or to express a wish or desire that something will be the case in the future. We can also use *may* as a rhetorical device to express or introduce an opinion or sentiment about something.

Might

The modal verb *might* is most often used to express an unlikely or uncertain possibility. *Might* also acts as a very formal and polite way to ask for permission, and it is used as the past-tense form of ***may*** when asking permission in **reported speech**. It can also be used to suggest an action, or to introduce two differing

possibilities.

Must

The modal verb *must* is most often used to express **necessity**—i.e., that something *has to* happen or be the case. We also use this sense of the word to indicate a strong intention to do something in the future, to emphasize something positive that you believe someone should do, and to rhetorically introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment. In addition to indicating necessity, *must* can be used to indicate that something is certain or very likely to happen or be true.

Using Modal Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs are used to uniquely shift the meaning of the main verb they modify, expressing things such as possibility, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation, or intention. As we will see, how and when we use modal verbs greatly affects the meaning of our writing and speech.

Subtleties in meaning

Modal verbs attach differing shades of meaning to the main verbs they modify. It is often the case that this difference in meaning is or seems to be very slight. To get a better sense of these differences in meaning, let's look at two sets of examples that use each of the modal verbs we discussed above in the same sentence, accompanied by a brief explanation of the unique meaning each one creates.

- "I ***will*** **go** to college in the fall." (It is decided that I **am going to** attend college in the fall.)
- "I ***shall*** **go** to college in the fall." (A more **formal** way of saying "I will go to college in the fall," possibly emphasizing one's determination to do so.)
- "I ***would*** **go** to college in the fall." (I **was planning** to attend college in the fall (but something not stated is preventing or dissuading me from doing so).)
- "I ***should*** **go** to college in the fall." (It is **correct, proper, or right** that I attend college in the all.)
- "I ***can*** **go** to college in the fall." (I am **able** to attend college in the fall.)

- “I ***could*** **go** to college in the fall.” (I **have the ability** to attend college in the fall, but it is not decided.)
- “I ***may*** **go** to college in the fall.” (I **will possibly** attend college in the fall, but it is not decided.)
- “I ***might*** **go** to college in the fall.” (I **will possibly** attend college in the fall, but it is not decided.)
- “I ***must*** **go** to college in the fall.” (I **have to** attend college in the fall, but it is not decided.)
- “***Will*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (Is it the future plan that we **are going to** spend the summer in Florida?)
- “***Shall*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (A more **formal** way of asking “Will we spend the summer in Florida?”)
- “***Would*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (Has the plan been made that we spend the summer in Florida?)
- “***Should*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (Is it **correct or preferable** that we spend the summer in Florida?)
- “***Can*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (Can we have **permission** to spend the summer in Florida? ***Or:*** Are we **able** to spend the summer in Florida?)
- “***Could*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (Slightly more polite way of asking for **permission** to spend the summer in Florida.)
- “***May*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (**More formal or polite** way of asking for **permission** to spend the summer in Florida.)
- “***Might*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (**Overly formal** way of asking for **permission** to spend the summer in Florida.)
- “***Must*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?” (**Very formal** way of asking if it is **necessary or required** that we spend the summer in Florida.)

Substituting Modal Verbs

As we can see from the above sets of examples, the different modal verbs often have very similar meanings, and it’s sometimes unclear when it is appropriate to use one instead of another. To explore the subtle differences in meaning that occur when we substitute certain modal verbs, go to the section on **Substituting Modal Verbs**.

Omitting main verbs

A modal verb must always be used with a main verb—they cannot stand completely on their own.

However, it is possible to use a modal verb on its own by omitting the main verb, so long as it is implied by the context in or around the sentence in which the modal is used. This can occur when a sentence is in response to another one, or when the clause with the modal verb occurs later in a sentence in which the main verb was already stated. For example:

• Speaker A: “I’m thinking about taking up scuba diving.”
• Speaker B: “I think you ***should***!” (The verb *taking up* is omitted in the second sentence because it is implied by the first.)

• “I’d like to switch my major to mathematics, but I’m not sure I ***can***.” (The verb *switch* is omitted in the final clause because it appears earlier in the same sentence.)

Using adverbs

Generally speaking, we use adverbs after a modal verb and either before or after the main verb in a clause. Sometimes putting an adverb before a modal is not **incorrect**, but it will sound better if placed after it. For example:

✖ “You only ***must*** **read** this chapter.” (incorrect)
✔ “You ***must*** **only read** this chapter.” (correct)

✔ “You easily ***could*** **win** the race.” (correct but not preferable)
✔ “You ***could*** **easily win** the race.” (correct)
✔ “You ***could*** **win** the race easily.” (correct)

However, this is not a strict rule, and certain adverbs are able to go before the modal verb without an issue. For example:

✔ “You really ***should*** **see** the new movie.” (correct)
✔ “You ***should*** **really see** the new movie.” (correct)

✔ “I definitely ***will*** **try** to make it to the party.” (correct)
✔ “I ***will*** **definitely try** to make it to the party.” (correct)

When a modal verb is made **negative**, though, it is sometimes the case that an adverb must go before the modal verb. For example:

✖ “I ***can’t*** **definitely go** out tonight.” (incorrect)

✔ “I **definitely** ***can’t*** **go** out tonight.” (correct)

✖ “He ***must not*** **absolutely travel** alone.” (incorrect)
✔ “He absolutely ***must not*** **travel** alone.” (correct)

Unfortunately, there is no rule that will explain exactly when one can or cannot use an adverb before a modal verb—we just have to learn the correct usage by seeing how they are used in day-to-day speech and writing.

Common errors

Mixing modal verbs

Remember, a modal verb is only used before a main verb, or sometimes before *be* or *have* when they are used to create a verb **tense**. We do **not** use a modal verb before **auxiliary *do***, or in front of other modal verbs. For example:

✔ “We ***might*** **move** to Spain.” (correct—indicates future possibility)
✔ “We ***might*** **be moving** to Spain.” (correct—indicates future possibility using the **present continuous tense**)

✖ “Do you ***can*** **go**?” (incorrect)
✔ “***Can*** you **go**?” (correct)

✖ “I ***must will*** **finish** this before lunch.” (incorrect)
✔ “I ***must*** **finish** this before lunch.” (correct—indicates that it is necessary)
✔ “I ***will*** **finish** this before lunch.” (correct—indicates a future action)

Conjugating the third-person singular

When main verbs function on their own, we conjugate them to reflect the third-person singular (usually accomplished by adding “-s” to the end of the verb).

However, we do **not** conjugate modal verbs in this way, **nor** do we conjugate a main verb when it is being used with a modal.

For example:

✔ “He **swims** well.” (**present simple tense**)
✖ “He ***cans*** **swim** well.” (incorrect)
✖ “He ***can*** **swims** well.” (incorrect)
✔ “He ***can*** **swim** well.” (correct—indicates ability)

Conjugating past tense

Similarly, we cannot use modal verbs with main verbs that are in a past-tense form; the verb that follows a modal must always be in its **base form** (the **infinitive** without the word *to*). Instead, we either use certain modal verbs that have past-tense meanings of their own, or **auxiliary *have*** to create a construction that has a specific past-tense meaning. For example:

✔ "I **guessed** what her response would be." (**past simple tense**)
✖ "I ***can* guessed** what her response would be." (incorrect)
✖ "I ***could* guessed** what her response would be." (incorrect)
✔ "I ***could* guess** what her response would be." (correct—indicates past ability)
✔ "I ***could* have guessed** what her response would be." (correct—indicates potential past ability)

✔ "I **tried** harder." (**past simple tense**)
✖ "I ***should* tried** harder." (incorrect)
✔ "I ***should* try** harder." (correct, but indicates a correct or proper future action)
✔ "I ***should* have tried** harder." (correct—indicates a correct or proper past action)

Following modal verbs with infinitives

As we saw above, all modal auxiliary verbs must be followed by the **base form** of a the main verb. Just as we cannot use a modal verb with a main verb in its past-tense form, we also cannot use a modal verb with an **infinitive**.

✖ "She ***could* to speak** five languages." (incorrect)
✔ "She ***could* speak** five languages." (correct—indicates past ability)

✖ "I ***must* to see** the boss." (incorrect)
✔ "I ***must* see** the boss." (correct—indicates necessity)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a **not** a function of a modal auxiliary verb?

a) To indicate frequency
b) To indicate possibility or likelihood

c) To indicate ability
d) To indicate future intention

2. Which of the following modal verbs indicates **necessity**?

a) may
b) can
c) would
d) must

3. Which of the following modal verbs is used to request **permission**?

a) may
b) should
c) would
d) must

4. Which of the following is something that a modal verb **cannot** do?

a) Indicate a future action
b) Express a possible action or outcome
c) Conjugate for the third-person singular
d) Become negative with the word *not*

5. When can a modal verb stand **on its own**?

a) When an adverb is used before the modal verb
b) When the main verb is implied elsewhere
c) When it is used in an interrogative sentence
d) Anytime
e) Never

6. Which of the following is **not** one of the “true” modal verbs?

a) must
b) need
c) will
d) should

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Will

Definition

As a modal auxiliary verb, *will* is particularly versatile, having several different functions and meanings. It is used to form future tenses, to express willingness or ability, to make requests or offers, to complete conditional sentences, to express likelihood in the immediate present, or to issue commands.

Creating the future tense

One of *will*'s most common uses as a modal verb is to talk about things that are certain, very likely, or planned to happen in the future. In this way, it is used to create an approximation of the **future simple tense** and the **future continuous tense**. For example:

• "I ***will*** **turn** 40 tomorrow." (**future simple tense**)

• "She ***will*** **be singing** at the concert as well." (**future continuous tense**)

Will can also used to make the **future perfect tense** and the **future perfect continuous tense**. These tenses both describe a scenario that began in the past and will either finish in or continue into the future. For example:

• "It's hard to believe that by next month we ***will*** **have been married** for 10 years." (**future perfect tense**)

• "By the time I get there, she***'ll*** **have been waiting** for over an hour." (**future perfect continuous tense**)

If we want to make any of the future tenses negative, we use *not* between *will* and the main verb or the next occurring auxiliary verb. We often contract *will* and *not* into *won't*. For example:

• "I ***won't*** **be seeing** the movie with you tonight."

• "At this pace, she ***won't*** **finish** in first place."

If we want to make a question (an **interrogative sentence**), we invert *will* with the subject, as in:

• "What ***will*** they **do** with the money?"

• "***Won't*** you **be coming** with us?"

Ability and willingness

We also sometimes use *will* to express or inquire about a person or thing's ability

or willingness to do something. It is very similar to the future tense, but is used for more immediate actions. For example:

• “You wash the dishes; I***’ll*** **take** out the trash.”

• “This darn washing machine ***won’t*** **turn** on.”

• “***Won’t*** Mary **come** out of her room?”

Requests and offers

We often create interrogative sentences using *will* to make requests or polite offers. They are usually addressed to someone in the second person, as in:

• “***Will*** you walk the dog, Jim?”

• “***Will*** you have a cup of tea, Sam?”

However, we can use subjects in the first and third person as well. For instance:

• “***Will*** Jonathan bring his truck around here tomorrow?”

• “***Will*** your friend join us for some lunch?”

Conditional sentences

In present-tense conditional sentences formed using *if*, we often use *will* to express an expected hypothetical outcome. This is known as the **first conditional**. For example:

• “**If** I see him, I ***will*** **tell** him the news.”

• “I ***won’t*** **have to say** goodbye **if** I don’t go to the airport.”

Likelihood and certainty

In addition to expressing actions or intentions of the future, we can also use *will* to express the likelihood or certainty that something is the case in the immediate present. For instance:

• (in response to the phone ringing) “That ***will*** **be** Jane—I’m expecting her call.”

• Speaker A: “Who is that with Jeff?”
• Speaker B: “That***’ll*** **be** his new husband. They were just married in May.”

Commands

Finally, we can use *will* to issue commands, orders, or maxims. These have an

added forcefulness in comparison to **imperative sentences**, as they express a certainty that the command will be obeyed. For example:

• “You ***will*** **finish** your homework this instant!”

• “This house ***will not*** **be used** as a hotel for your friends, do you understand me?”

Substituting Modal Verbs

In many cases, modal auxiliary verbs can be used in place of others to create slightly different meanings. For example, we can use the word ***shall*** in place of *will* in to express polite invitations. Similarly, ***would*** can also be substituted for *will* in requests to make them more polite.

Explore the section on **Substituting Modal Verbs** to see how and when other modal auxiliary verbs overlap.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *will* as a modal verb?

a) To form the future tense
b) To issue a command or maxim
c) To express what someone is allowed to do
d) To make a request or an offer

2. Which of the following sentences is a **conditional sentence**?

a) “I will be going to Europe in August.”
b) “She’ll be moving to Alaska if she can save up enough money.”
c) “That will be your father at the door.”
d) “You will not put off doing your chores any longer!”

3. Where does the modal verb *will* appear in an **interrogative sentence**?

a) Before the subject of the sentence
b) After the subject of the sentence
c) Before the main verb of the sentence
d) After the main verb of the sentence

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Would

Definition

The modal auxiliary verb *would* has a variety of functions and uses. It is used in place of ***will*** for things that happened or began in the past, and, like ***shall***, it is sometimes used in place of *will* to create more formal or polite sentences. It is also used to express requests and preferences, to describe hypothetical situations, and to politely offer or ask for advice or an opinion.

Creating the future tense in the past

When a sentence expresses a future possibility, expectation, intention, or inevitability that began in the past, we use *would* instead of *will*. For example:

• “I thought he ***would*** **be** here by now.”

• “She knew they ***wouldn’t*** **make** it to the show in time.”

• “I thought John ***would*** **be mowing** lawn by this point.”

Past ability and willingness

We also use *would* for certain expressions of a person or thing’s ability or willingness to do something in the past, though they are usually negative. For example:

• “This darn washing machine ***wouldn’t*** **turn** on this morning.”

• “Mary ***wouldn’t*** **come** out of her room all weekend.”

Likelihood and certainty

Like we saw with ***will***, we can also use *would* to express the likelihood or certainty that something was the case in the immediate past. For instance:

• Speaker A: “There was a man here just now asking about renting the spare room.”
• Speaker B: “That ***would*** **be** Kenneth. He just moved here from Iowa.”

Polite requests

We can use *would* in the same way as *will* to form requests, except that *would* adds a level of politeness to the question, as in:

• “***Would*** you please **take out** the garbage for me?”

• “***Would*** John **mind** helping me clean out the garage?”

Expressing desires

We use *would* with the main verb *like* to express or inquire about a person’s desire to do something. (We can also use the main verb *care* for more formal or polite sentences.) For example:

• “I ***would*** **like** to go to the movies later.”

• “Where ***would*** you **like** to go for your birthday?”

• “I ***would*** **not** care to live in a hot climate.”

• “***Would*** you **care** to have dinner with me later?”

We can use this same construction to express or ask about a desire to <u>have</u> something. If we are using *like* as the main verb, it can simply be followed by a noun or noun phrase; if we are using *care*, it must be followed by the preposition *for*, as in:

• “***Would*** you **like** a cup of tea?”

• “He ***would*** **like** the steak, and I will have the lobster.”

• “Ask your friends if they ***would*** **care** <u>for</u> some snacks.”

Would that

Would can also be used to introduce a *that* clause to indicate some hypothetical or hopeful situation that one wishes were true. For example:

• “***Would*** **that** we **lived** near the sea.”

• Speaker A: “Life would be so much easier if we won the lottery.”
• Speaker B: “***Would*** **that** it **were** so!”

This is an example of the **subjunctive mood**, which is used to express hypotheticals and desires. While we still use *would* in the subjunctive mood to express preference or create conditional sentences (like Speaker A’s sentence above), the *would that* construction is generally only found in very formal, literary, old-fashioned, or highly stylized speech or writing in modern English.

Preference

We use *would* with the adverbs *rather* and *sooner* to express or inquire about a person’s preference for something. For instance:

• “There are a lot of fancy meals on the menu, but I ***would*** **rather have** a hamburger.”

• “They ***would*** **sooner go** bankrupt than sell the family home.”

• “***Would*** you **rather go biking** or **go** for a hike?”

Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences in the past tense are called **second conditionals**. Unlike the first conditional, we use the second conditional to talk about things that cannot or are unlikely to happen.

To create the second conditional, we use the **past simple tense** after the *if* clause, followed by *would* + the bare infinitive for the result of the condition. For example:

• “If I went to London, I ***would*** **visit** Trafalgar Square.”

• “I ***would*** **buy** a yacht **if** I ever won the lottery.”

Hypothetical situations

We can also use *would* to discuss hypothetical or possible situations that we can imagine happening, but that aren’t dependent on a conditional *if* clause.

For example:

• “They ***would*** **be** an amazing band to see in concert!”

• “Don’t worry about not getting in—it ***wouldn’t*** **have been** a very interesting class, anyway.”

• “She ***would*** **join** your study group, but she doesn’t have any free time after school.”

• “I normally ***wouldn’t*** **mind**, except that today is my birthday!”

Polite opinions

We can use *would* with opinion verbs (such as *think* or *expect*) to dampen the forcefulness of an assertion, making it sound more formal and polite:

• “I ***would*** **expect** that the board of directors will be pleased with this offer.”

• “One ***would*** **have thought** that the situation would be improved by now.”

We can also ask for someone else’s opinion with *would* by pairing it with a

question word in an interrogative sentence, as in:

• “What ***would*** you **suggest** we do instead?”

• “Where ***would*** **be** a good place to travel this summer?”

Asking the reason *why*

When we use the question word *why*, we often follow it with *would* to ask the reason something happened or is true. For instance:

• “Why ***would*** my brother **lie** to me?”

• “Why ***would*** they **expect** you to know that?”

If we use *I* or *we* as the subject of the question, it is often used rhetorically to suggest that a question or accusation is groundless or false, as in:

• “Why ***would*** I **try** to hide anything from you?”

• “Why ***would*** we **give up** now, when we’ve come so close to succeeding?”

Polite advice

We can use *would* in the first person to politely offer advice about something. (It is common to add the phrase “if I were you” at the end, thus creating a conditional sentence.) For example:

• “I ***would*** **apologize** to the boss if I were you.”

• “I ***would*** **talk** to her tonight; there’s no point in waiting until tomorrow.”

We can also use *would* in the second and third person to offer advice, usually in the construction “you would be wise/smart to do something,” as in:

• “I think you ***would*** **be wise** to be more careful with your money.”

• “Recent graduates ***would*** **be smart** to set up a savings account as early as possible.”

Substituting Modal Verbs

In many cases, modal auxiliary verbs can be replaced with others to create slightly different meanings.

For example, in addition to using *would* to form the **second conditional** (which we use to describe something we would definitely do), we can also use ***could*** for what we would be able to do, as well as ***might*** for what it is possible (but

unlikely) we would do.

For example:

• “If I won the lottery, I **could buy** a new house.”

• “If I were older, I **might stay up** all night long.”

In British English, ***should*** is often used in place of *would* in many constructions to add politeness or formality. For instance:

• “I ***should*** **apologize** to the boss if I were you.” (polite advice)

• “I ***should*** **like** a poached egg for breakfast.” (desire)

Explore the section **Substituting Modal Verbs** to see how and when other modal verbs overlap.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *would* as a modal verb?

a) To form the future tense
b) To issue a command or maxim
c) To express a wish or desire
d) To politely offer advice

2. Which of the following sentences uses *would* to express **preference**?

a) “We would have won the game if you hadn’t missed that shot.”
b) “She’d be wise to start her assignments earlier.”
c) “I think this would be a great city to live in.”
d) “I’d rather have a salad for lunch.”

3. What kind of **conditional sentence** is formed using *would*?

a) Zero conditional
b) First conditional
c) Second conditional
d) Third conditional

4. Which of the following sentences uses a **very formal, old-fashioned** construction with *would* to express a wish or desire?

a) “Would that I’d made contact with him before his departure.”

b) “He would pay for college himself if he could afford it.”
c) “I think they’d rather go to the beach today.”
d) “Would you care for some lunch?”

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Shall

Definition

The modal auxiliary verb *shall* is used in many of the same ways as ***will***: to form future tenses, to make requests or offers, to complete conditional sentences, or to issue maxims or commands. Although *will* is generally preferred in modern English (especially American English), using *shall* adds an additional degree of politeness or formality to the sentence that *will* sometimes lacks.

Generally, *shall* is only used when *I* or *we* is the subject, though this is not a strict rule (and does not apply at all when issuing commands, as we’ll see).

Creating the future tense

The future tenses are most often formed using *will* or *be going to*.

We can also use *shall* to add formality or politeness to these constructions, especially the **future simple tense** and the **future continuous tense**. For example:

• “I ***shall*** **call** from the airport.” (**future simple tense**)

• “We ***shall*** **be staying** in private accommodation.”

• “Our company ***shall not*** **be held** accountable for this.”

• “I ***shan’t**** **be participating** in these discussions.”

(*Contracting *shall* and *not* into *shan’t*, while not incorrect, sounds overly formal and stuffy in modern speech and writing; for the most part, it is not used anymore.)

It is also possible, though far less common, to use *shall* in the **future perfect** and **future perfect continuous** tenses as well:

• “As of next week, I ***shall*** **have worked** here for 50 years.”

• “By the time the opera begins, we ***shall*** **have been waiting** for over an hour.”

Offers, suggestions, and advice

When we create interrogative sentences using *shall* and without question words, it is usually to make polite offers, invitations, or suggestions, as in:

• "***Shall*** we walk along the beach?"

• "***Shall*** I wash the dishes?"

When we form an interrogative sentence with a question word (*who, what, where, when,* or *how*), *shall* is used to politely seek the advice or opinion of the listener about a future decision, as in:

• "What ***shall*** I **do** with this spare part?"

• "Where ***shall*** we **begin**?"

• "Who ***shall*** I **invite** to the meal?"

Conditional sentences

Like *will*, we can use *shall* in conditional sentences using *if* to express a likely hypothetical outcome. This is known as the **first conditional**. For example:

• "**If** my flight is delayed, I ***shall not*** **have** time to make my connection."

• "I ***shall*** **contact** the post office **if** my package has not arrived by tomorrow."

Formal commands

While *will* is often used to form commands, we use *shall* when issuing more formal directives or maxims, as might be seen in public notices or in a formal situation, or to express a reprimand in a formal way. When used in this way, *shall* no longer has to be used solely with *I* or *we* as the subject. For example:

• "This establishment ***shall not*** **be held** liable for lost or stolen property."

• "Students ***shall*** **remain** silent throughout the exam."

• "The new law dictates that no citizen ***shall*** **be** out on the streets after 11 PM."

• "You ***shall*** **cease** this foolishness at once!"

Substituting Modal Verbs

In many cases, modal auxiliary verbs can be used in place of others to create slightly different meanings. For example, we can use the word ***should*** in place of *shall* when issuing a command that is not mandatory, but rather is a guideline or recommendation. If, however, we want to express that the command or maxim is an absolute requirement, we can use ***must*** instead of *shall* in this context.

Explore the section **Substituting Modal Verbs** to see how and when other modal auxiliary verbs overlap.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *shall* as a modal verb?

a) To express what someone is allowed to do
b) To issue a command or maxim
c) To form the future tense
d) To create conditional sentences

2. Which of the following sentences is a **conditional sentence**?

a) “I shall be attending Harvard this fall.”
c) “What shall we do this weekend?”
d) “Employees shall clock in at the beginning and end of every shift.”
d) “They shall begin research immediately if funds are available.”

3. Which of the following is a reason *shall* might be used instead of *will* in a sentence?

a) To add intensity to a command
b) To express an opinion about what is proper or correct
c) To add politeness or formality
d) To describe a habitual action in the past

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Should

Definition

The modal verb *should* is used to politely express obligations or duties; to ask for or issue advice, suggestions, and recommendations; to describe an expectation; to create **conditional sentences**; and to express surprise. There are also a number of uses that occur in British English that are not common in American English.

Polite obligations

Should is used in the same construction as other modal verbs (such as ***will***, ***shall***, and ***must***) to express an obligation or duty.

However, whereas *must* or *will* (and even *shall*) make the sentence into a strict command, which might appear to be too forceful and could be seen as offensive, *should* is used to create a more polite form that is more like a guideline than a rule. For example:

• “Guests ***should*** **vacate** their hotel rooms by 10 AM on the morning of their departure.”

• “I think she ***should*** **pay** for half the meal.”

• “You ***shouldn’t*** **play** loud music in your room at night.”

• “I think healthcare ***should*** **be** free for everyone.”

• “She ***should not*** **be** here; it’s for employees only.”

Asking the reason *why*

We can follow the question word *why* with *should* to ask the reason for a certain obligation or duty. For instance:

• “Why ***should*** I **have** to pay for my brother?”

• “Why ***shouldn’t*** we **be allowed** to talk during class?”

Advice and recommendations

Should can also be used to issue advice or recommendations in much the same way. For instance:

• “You ***should*** **get** a good map of London before you go there.” (recommendation)

• “You ***shouldn’t*** **eat** so much junk food—it’s not good for you.” (advice)

We can also use *should* in **interrogative sentences** to ask for someone’s advice, opinion, or suggestion, as in:

• “What ***should*** I **see** while I’m in New York?”

• “***Should*** she **tell** her boss about the missing equipment?”

• “Is there anything we ***should*** **be** concerned about?”

Expectations

Using *should* in **affirmative** (non-negative) sentences can be used to express an expected outcome, especially when it is followed by the verb *be*. For example:

• “She ***should*** **be** here by now.”

• “They ***should*** **be** arriving at any minute.”

• “I think this book ***should*** **be** interesting.”

We can also follow *should* with other verbs to express expectation, but this is less common. For instance:

• “They ***should*** **find** this report useful.”

• “We ***should*** **see** the results shortly.”

If we use the negative of *should* (*should not* or *shouldn’t*), it implies a mistake or error, especially when we use it with a future time expression. For example:

• “She ***shouldn’t*** **be** here yet.”

• “He ***shouldn’t*** **be** arriving for another hour.”

We normally do not use *should not* to refer to expected future actions like we do in the affirmative; it generally refers to something that just happened (in the present or immediate past).

Should vs. be supposed to vs. be meant to

In many instances, *should* can be replaced by *be supposed to* or *be meant to* with little to no change in meaning. For instance, we can use *be supposed to* or *be*

meant to in place of *should* for something that is expected or required to happen.

For example:

• “He ***should*** **be** here at 10 AM.”

• “He ***is meant to*** **be** here at 10 AM.”

• “He ***is supposed to*** **be** here at 10 AM.”

We can also use these three variations interchangeably when asking the reason *why* something is the case. For instance:

• “Why ***should*** I **have** to pay for my brother?”

• “Why ***am*** I **meant to pay** for my brother?”

• “Why ***am*** I **supposed to pay** for my brother?”

However, when we are expressing an obligation or duty, we can only replace *should* with *be supposed to* or *be meant to* when it is in the negative. For instance:

• “You ***shouldn’t*** **play** loud music in your room at night.”

• “You ***aren’t meant to*** **play** loud music in your room at night.”

• “You ***aren’t supposed to*** **play** loud music in your room at night.”

In affirmative sentences in which *should* expresses an obligation or duty (as opposed to an expectation), these verbs are **not** interchangeable. For instance:

• “I think she ***should*** **pay** for half the meal.” (obligation)

• “I think she ***is supposed to*** **pay** for half the meal.” (expectation)

• “I think she ***is meant to*** **pay** for half the meal.” (expectation)

Be supposed to and *be meant to* are also used to express general beliefs, which is not a way we can use the modal verb *should*.

For example:

• “He ***is supposed to*** **be** one of the best lawyers in town.” (general belief)

• “He ***is meant to*** **be** one of the best lawyers in town.” (general belief)

• “He ***should*** **be** one of the best lawyers in town.” (obligation)

We can see how the meaning changes significantly when *should* is used instead.

Conditional Sentences

Should can be used in conditional sentences to express an outcome to a possible

or hypothetical conditional situation.

Sometimes we use *should* alongside *if* to create the **conditional** clause, as in:

• “If anyone ***should*** **ask**, I will be at the bar.”

• “If your father ***should*** **call**, tell him I will speak to him later.”

We can also use *should* on its own to set up this condition, in which case we invert it with the subject. For example:

• “***Should*** you **need** help on your thesis, please ask your supervisor.”

• “The bank is more than happy to discuss financing options ***should*** you **wish** to take out a loan.”

Expressing surprise

Occasionally, *should* is used to emphasize surprise at an unexpected situation, outcome, or turn of events.

We do so by phrasing the surprising information as a question, using a question word like *who* or *what* and often inverting *should* with the subject. (However, the sentence is spoken as a statement, so we punctuate it with a period or exclamation point, rather than a question mark.)

The “question” part of the sentence is introduced by the word *when*, with the “answer” introduced by the word *but*. For example:

• “I was minding my own business, when who ***should*** I **encounter** but my brother Tom.”

• “The festival was going well when what ***should*** **happen** but the power goes out!”

Uses of *should* in British English

There are a number of functions that *should* can perform that are more commonly used in British English than in American English. Several of these are substitutions of *would*, while other uses are unique unto themselves.

Should vs. *would* in British English

There are several modal constructions that can either take *would* or *should*. American English tends to favor the modal verb *would* in most cases, but, in British English, it is also common to use *should*, especially to add formality.

Polite advice

We can use *should/would* in the first person to politely offer advice about something. (It is common to add the phrase “if I were you” at the end, thus creating a conditional sentence.) For example:

• “I ***should/would*** **apologize** to the boss if I were you.”

• “I ***shouldn’t/wouldn’t*** **worry** about that right now.”

Expressing desires

We can use either *should* or *would* with the main verb *like* in the first person to express or inquire about a person’s desire to do something. (We can also use the main verb *care* for more formal or polite sentences.) For example:

• “I ***should/would*** **like** to go to the movies later.”

• “We ***shouldn’t/wouldn’t*** **care** to live in a hot climate.”

• “I ***should/would*** **like** a cup of tea, if you don’t mind.”

• “I don’t know that I ***should/would*** **care** for such an expensive house.”

Asking the reason *why*

In addition to asking the reason *why* a certain obligation or requirement is the case, we can also use *should* in the same way as *would* to ask the reason something happened or is true. For instance:

• “Why ***should/would*** my brother **lie** to me?”

• “Why ***should/would*** they **expect** you to know that?”

If we use *I* or *we* as the subject of the question, it is often used rhetorically to suggest that a question or accusation is groundless or false, as in:

• “Why ***should/would*** I **try** to hide anything from you?”

• “Why ***should/would*** we **give up** now, when we’ve come so close to succeeding?”

To show purpose

Should and *would* can also be used after the phrase “so that” and “in order that” to add a sense of purpose to the main verb, as in:

• “I brought a book so that I ***shouldn’t/wouldn’t*** **be** bored on the train ride home.”

• “He bought new boots in order that his feet ***should/would*** **remain** dry on the way to work.”

After other words and phrases

There are several instances in British English in which *should* is used after the relative pronoun *that* or certain other phrases to create specific meanings, especially in more formal language.

To express an opinion or feeling

When we use a **noun clause** beginning with *that* as an **adjective complement**, we can use *should* in it to express an opinion or sentiment about what is said. For example:

• “It’s very sad that she ***should*** **be forced** to leave her house.”

• “Isn’t it strange that we ***should*** **meet** each other again after all these years?”

Conditional circumstances

Similarly, *should* can be used after the phrases *for fear (that), in case (that),* and (less commonly) *lest (that)* to demonstrate the possible conditional circumstances that are the reason behind a certain action. For example:

• “I always pack my rain jacket when I cycle for fear (that) it ***should*** **start** raining midway.”

• “You should pack a toothbrush in case (that) you ***should*** **be** delayed at the airport overnight.”

• “She makes sure to set the alarm before leaving lest (that) someone ***should*** **try** to break in.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *should* as a modal verb?

a) To form the future tense
b) To express an obligation or duty
c) To express surprise

d) To politely offer advice

2. Which of the following sentences uses *should* to express an **expectation**?
a) “I will be just around the corner should I be needed.”
b) “We really shouldn’t lie to your parents like this.”
c) “Don’t forget a spare pencil lest yours should break.”
d) “The movie should finish around 5 PM.”

3. Which of the following is a situation in which *should* can be used instead of *would* in **British English**?
a) To express past ability or willingness
b) To politely offer advice
c) To form a polite request
d) To express surprise

4. True or False: *Should* is able to form conditional sentences **without** the word *if*.
a) True
b) False

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Can

Definition

As a modal auxiliary verb, *can* is most often used to express a person or thing’s ability to do something. It is also used to express or ask for permission to do something, to describe the possibility that something can happen, and to issue requests and offers.

Expressing ability

Can is used most often and most literally to express when a person or thing is physically, mentally, or functionally able to do something. When it is used with *not* to become negative, it forms a single word, *cannot* (contracted as *can’t*). For example:

• “John ***can*** **run** faster than anyone I know.”

• “It’s rare to find a phone that ***cannot*** **connect** to the Internet these days.”

• “We don’t have to stay—we ***can*** **leave** if you want to.”

• “***Can*** your brother **swim**?”

• “I don’t think he ***can*** **read**.”

• “Just **do** the best you ***can***.”

• “***Can’t*** you just **restart** the computer?”

• “When ***can*** you **start**?”

“Can do”

In response to a request or an instruction, it is common (especially in American English) to use the idiomatic phrase “**can do**.” This usually stands on its own as a **minor sentence**. For example:

• Speaker A: “I need you to fix this tire when you have a chance.”
• Speaker B: “**Can do**!”

• Speaker A: “Would you mind making dinner tonight?”
• Speaker B: “Can do, darling!”

The phrase has become so prolific that it is also often used as a modifier before a noun to denote an optimistic, confident, and enthusiastic characteristic, as in:

• “His **can-do** spirit is infectious in the office.”

• “We’re always looking for **can-do** individuals who will bring great energy to our team.”

We can also make this phrase negative, but we use the word *no* at the beginning of the phrase rather than using the adverb *not* after *can*, as we normally would with a modal verb. For example:

• Speaker A: “Is it all right if I get a ride home with you again tonight?”
• Speaker B: “Sorry, **no can do**. I need to head to the airport after work.”

Permission

We often use *can* to express permission* to do something, especially in questions (**interrogative sentences**).

For example:

• “***Can*** I **go** to the bathroom, Ms. Smith?”

• “***Can*** Jenny **come** to the party with us?”

• “You ***can*** **leave** the classroom once you are finished with the test.”

• “You ***can’t*** **have** any dessert until you’ve finished your dinner.”

(*Usage note: Although it is sometimes considered grammatically incorrect to use *can* instead of ***may*** to express permission, it is acceptable in modern English to use either one. *Can* is very common in informal settings; in more formal English, though, *may* is still the preferred modal verb.)

As a rhetorical device

Sometimes, we use *can* in this way as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something, in which case we invert *can* with the subject. For instance:

• “***Can*** I just **say**, this has been the most wonderful experience of my life.”

• “***Can*** we **be** clear that our firm will not be involved in such a dubious a plan.”

• “And, ***can*** I **add**, profits are expected to stabilize within a month.”

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• “***Let*** me **be** clear: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work.”

• “***Allow*** us **to say**, we were greatly impressed by your performance.”

Adding angry emphasis

Can is sometimes used to give permission (sometimes ironically) as a means of adding emphasis to an angry command, especially in **conditional sentences**. For example:

• “You ***can*** just **walk** home if you’re going to be so ungrateful!”

• “If he continues being so insufferable, he ***can*** **have** his party all alone!”

• “You ***can*** **go** to your room and stay there, young man! I’m sick of listening to your backtalk.”

Possibility and likelihood

Similar to using *can* to express ability, we also use *can* to describe actions that are possible. It may appear to be nearly the same in certain cases, but the usage

relates less to physical or mental ability than to the possibility or likelihood of accomplishing something or of something occurring. For instance:

• “You ***can*** **get** help on your papers from your teaching assistant.”

• “My mother-in-law ***can*** **be** a bit overbearing at times.”

• “People forget that you ***can*** **get** skin cancer from tanning beds.”

• “It ***can*** **seem** impossible to overcome the debt from student loans.”

Negative certainty and disbelief

We use the modal verb ***must*** to express certainty or high probability, but we generally use *can’t* (or, less commonly, *cannot*) to express **negative** certainty, extremely low likelihood, or a disbelief that something might be true. For example:

• “You ***can’t*** **be** tired—you’ve been sleeping all day!”

• “I ***can’t*** **have** left my phone at home, because I remember packing it in my bag.”

• “After three years of college, she wants to drop out? She ***cannot*** **be** serious.”

Making requests

It is common to use *can* to make a request of someone. For example:

• “***Can*** you **get** that book down from the shelf for me?”

• “Your sister is a lawyer, right? ***Can*** she **give** me some legal advice?”

• “***Can*** you kids **turn** your music down, please?”

However, this usage can sometimes be seen as being too direct or forceful, and sometimes comes across as impolite as a result. In more formal or polite circumstances, we can use other modal verbs such as ***could*** or ***would*** to create more polite constructions, as in:

• “***Would*** you please **be** quiet?”

• “***Could*** you **help** me with this assignment?”

Making offers

While it might be seen as impolite to use *can* to make a request, it is perfectly polite to use it to make an offer. For example:

• “***Can*** I **do** anything to help get dinner ready?”

• “***Can*** I **help** you find what you need?”

• “***Can*** I **give** you a ride home?”

If we want to be even more polite or add formality to the offer, we can use *may* instead, as in:

• “***May*** I **be** of some assistance?”

• “***May*** we **help** you in any way?”

• “How ***may*** our staff **be** of service to you?”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *can* as a modal verb?

a) To ask for permission
b) To request something
c) To offer to do something
d) To express an opinion or feeling

2. Which of the following sentences uses *can* to express **ability**?

a) “Can I watch TV later?”
b) “It can get a bit too hot here in the summer.”
c) “I’m sure glad I can drive.”
d) “You can have some ice cream if you behave yourselves.”

3. Which of the following is an **informal** use of the modal verb *can*?

a) “You can just go without your dinner if you’re going to behave that way!”
b) “When can we expect the package to arrive?”
c) “Can I spend the night at my friend’s house?”
d) “Can we carry those groceries for you?”

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Could Definition

The modal verb *could* is most often used as a past-tense version of ***can***, indicating what someone or something was able to do in the past; it can also be

used instead of *can* as a more polite way of making a request or asking for permission. *Could* is also used to express a slight or uncertain possibility, as well as to make a suggestion or offer.

Past ability

When describing what a person or thing was physically, mentally, or functionally able to do in the past, we use *could* instead of *can*. For example:

• “When I was younger, I ***could*** **run** for 10 miles without breaking a sweat!”

• “Our TV growing up ***could*** only **get** about four channels.”

• “She ***couldn’t*** **read** until she was nearly 12 years old.”

• “***Could*** your family **afford** any food during the Great Depression, Grandma?”

We also use *could* instead of *can* when describing an ability that is desired or wished for. (This is known as the **subjunctive mood**, which is used for describing hypothetical or unreal situations.) For example:

• “I wish I ***could*** **swim**; it looks like so much fun.”

Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences in the past tense are called **second conditionals**. Unlike the first conditional, we use the second conditional to talk about things that cannot or are unlikely to actually happen.

To create the second conditional, we usually use the **past simple tense** after the *if* clause, followed by ***would*** + a bare infinitive to describe what would be the expected (if unreal) result of the condition.

However, if we want to describe what we would be **able** to do under a certain condition, we can use *could* instead. For example:

• “If I got that promotion at work, I ***could*** finally **afford** a new car!”

• “If we moved to California, I ***could*** **surf** every day!”

We often use *could* in what’s known as a **mixed conditional**, which occurs when the tense in one part of a conditional sentence does not match the other half. This often occurs with *could* when a present-tense verb is being used in an *if* conditional clause to express a hypothetical scenario that is likely to or possibly could happen. For example:

• “If I get some money from my parents, we ***could*** **go** to the movies.”

• “We ***could*** **visit** our friends at the beach if you ask your boss for Friday off.”

Asking for permission

When we ask someone for permission to do something, it is often considered more polite to use *could* instead of *can*. However, we can only make this substitution when asking for permission—when stating or granting permission, we can only use *can* (or, more politely, ***may***).

For example:

• “Dad, ***could*** I **spend** the night at my friend’s house?”

• “***Could*** we **invite** Sarah to come with us?”

• “I was wondering if I ***could*** **take** a bit of time off work.”

Making a request

Just as we use *could* instead of *can* to be more polite when asking for permission, it is also considered more polite to substitute *could* when making a general request. For example:

• “***Could*** you please **be** quiet?”

• “***Could*** you **help** me with this assignment?”

Note that we can also do this with the modal verb ***would***:

• “***Would*** you **ask** Jeff to come over here?”

• “***Would*** Tina **help** me paint this fence?”

As a rhetorical device

Sometimes, we use *could* as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something, in which case we invert *could* with the subject. For instance:

• “***Could*** I just **say**, this has been a most wonderful evening.”

• “And ***could*** I **clarify** that I have always acted solely with the company’s interests in mind.”

• “***Could*** I **add** that your time with us has been greatly appreciated.”

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• “***Let*** me **clarify**: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work.”

• “***Allow*** me **to add**, we were greatly impressed by your performance.”

Possibility and likelihood

Like *can*, we can also use *could* to describe actions or outcomes that are possible or likely. Unlike using *could* to talk about an ability, this usage is not restricted to the past tense. For instance:

• “I think it ***could*** **rain** any minute.”

• “She ***could*** **be** in big trouble over this.”

• “Due to this news, the company ***could*** **see** a sharp drop in profits next quarter.”

• “Be careful, you ***could*** **hurt** someone with that thing!”

• “Answer the phone! It ***could*** **be** your father calling.”

Making a suggestion

Similar to expressing a possible outcome, we can also use *could* to suggest a possible course of action. For instance:

• “We ***could*** **go** out for pizza after work on Friday.”

• “You ***could*** **see** if your boss would let you extend your vacation.”

• “I know it will be tricky to convince your parents, but you ***could*** **try**.”

Adding angry emphasis

We also use *could* to add emphasis to an angry or frustrated remark. For example:

• “My mother has traveled a long way to be here—you ***could*** **try** to look a little more pleased to see her!”

• “You ***could*** **have told** me that you didn’t want a party before I spent all this time and effort organizing one!”

Making offers

In addition to using *could* to make a suggestion, we can also use it to make an offer to do something for someone. For example:

• “***Could*** I **give** you a hand with dinner?”

• “***Could*** we **help** you find what you need?”

• “***Could*** I **give** you a ride home?”

Rhetorical questions

Could is sometimes used informally in sarcastic or rhetorical questions that highlight a behavior someone finds irritating, unacceptable, or inappropriate. It is often (but not always) used with *be* as a main verb. For example:

• “***Could*** you **be** any louder? I can barely hear myself think!”

• “Oh my God, Dad, ***could*** you **be** any more embarrassing?”

• “Danny, we’re going to be late! ***Could*** you **walk** any slower?”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of the modal verb *could*?

a) To ask for permission
b) To create a future tense
c) To request something
d) To offer to do something

2. Which of the following sentences uses *could* to express **possibility or likelihood**?

a) “Could I please have a second helping of dessert?”
b) “I wish I could drive.”
c) “I have a feeling it could snow tonight.”
d) “I could move out of this dump if I get a role in that big movie.”

3. Which of the following sentences uses *could* **incorrectly**?

a) “You and your friends could go to the movies later, if you’re looking for something to do.”
b) “I thought Jonathan could be here by now.”
c) “Could I spend Thanksgiving with Grandpa this year?”
d) “Could you be any more insulting?”

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - May

Definition

The modal verb *may* is used to ask, grant, or describe permission; to politely offer to do something for someone; to express the possibility of something happening or occurring; or to express a wish or desire that something will be the case in the future. We can also use *may* as a rhetorical device to express or introduce an opinion about something.

Asking or granting permission

May is very commonly used to express or ask for permission to do something. There are other ways to do this (by using the modals ***can*** or ***could***, for instance), but *may* is considered the most polite and formally correct way to do so. For example:

• "***May*** I **borrow** your pen, please?"

• "***May*** we **ask** you some questions about your experience?"

• "General, you ***may*** **fire** when ready."

• "She ***may*** **invite** one or two friends, but no more than that."

• "***May*** we **be** frank with you, Tom?"

• "Students ***may not*** **leave** the class once their exams are complete."

Making a polite offer

Like *can*, we can use *may* to offer do something for someone else, though it is generally a more polite, formal way of doing so. For example:

• "***May*** I **help** you set the table?"

• "***May*** we **be** of assistance in any way?"

Expressing possibility

Another common use of *may* is to express the possibility that something will happen or occur in the near future, especially when that possibility is uncertain. For instance:

• "I'm worried that it ***may*** **start** raining soon."

• “We ***may*** **run into** some problems down the line that we didn’t expect.”

• “I ***may*** **be coming** home for the winter break, depending on the cost of a plane ticket.”

• “Although we ***may*** **see** things improve in the future, there’s no guarantee at the moment.”

• “There ***may*** **not be** any issues at all; we’ll just have to see.”

Expressing wishes for the future

May is also used in more formal language to express a wish or desire that something will be the case in the future. When used in this way, *may* is inverted with the subject, as in:

• “***May*** you both **have** a long, happy life together.”

• “***May*** you **be** safe in your journey home.”

• “We’ve had great success this year; ***may*** we **continue** to do so for years to come.”

• “***May*** this newfound peace **remain** forever between our two countries.”

As a rhetorical device

Sometimes, we use *may* in this way as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something, in which case we invert *may* with the subject. For instance:

• “***May*** I just **say**, this has been the most wonderful experience of my life.”

• “***May*** we **be** clear that our firm will not be involved in such a dubious plan.”

• “***May*** I **be** frank: this is not what I was hoping for.”

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• “***Let*** me **be** clear: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work.”

• “***Allow*** us **to say**, we were greatly impressed by your performance.”

May not vs. Mayn’t (vs. Can’t)

Grammatically, it is not technically incorrect to contract *may not* into the single-

word *mayn't*. For instance:

• "You ***mayn't* wish** to share these details with others."

• "No, you ***mayn't* go** to the dinner unaccompanied."

However, this has become very rare in modern English, and generally only occurs in colloquial usage. In **declarative sentences**, it is much more common to use the two words separately, as in:

• "Employees ***may not* use** company computers for recreational purposes."

• "There ***may not* be** much we can do to prevent such problems from occurring."

It is also uncommon, though, to use *may not* in questions, in which *may* is inverted with the subject. The resulting construction (e.g., "may I not" or "may we not") sounds overly formal in day-to-day speech and writing. Because of this, it is much more common to use the contraction *can't* instead, as in:

• "***Can't*** we **stay** for a little while longer?"

• "***Can't*** I **bring** a friend along with me?"

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of the modal verb *may*?

a) To ask for permission
b) To express a wish for the future
c) To request something from someone
d) To offer to do something

2. Which of the following sentences uses *may* to express **possibility or likelihood**?

a) "You may not watch television until your homework is done."
b) "May you always live life in the way you see fit."
c) "We may not have a choice in the matter."
d) "They may stay for dinner if they'd like to."

3. Which of the following sentences is considered the **most correct** in modern English?

a) "The two companies mayn't have any option but to abandon the proposed merger."

b) “Can’t we come with you to the movie later?”
c) “May I not stay up a little later tonight?”
d) “Mayn’t we watch some TV before starting our homework?”

4. Identify the function of *may* in the following sentence:
“May I state for the record, I’ve always supported the governor’s decisions.”

a) To express permission
b) To make a polite offer
c) To express possibility
d) As a rhetorical device

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Might

Definition

The modal verb *might* is most often used to express an unlikely or uncertain possibility. *Might* is also used to very formally or politely ask for permission, and it is used as the past-tense form of ***may*** when asking permission in **reported speech**. It can also be used to suggest an action, or to introduce two differing possibilities.

Expressing possibility

When we use *might* to indicate possibility, it implies a very weak certainty or likelihood that something will happen, occur, or be the case. For instance:

• “I’m hoping that she ***might*** **call** me later.”

• “We ***might*** **go** to a party later, if you want to come.”

• “You should pack an umbrella—it looks like it ***might*** **rain**.”

• “There ***might*** **be** some dinner left over for you in the fridge.”

In conditional sentences

We also often use *might* to express a possibility as a hypothetical outcome in a **conditional sentence**. For example:

• “If we don’t arrive early enough, we ***might not*** **be** able to get in to the show.”

• “We still ***might*** **make** our flight if we leave right now!”

• “If we’re lucky, we ***might*** **have** a chance of reversing the damage.”

Politely asking for permission

Although *may* is the “standard” modal verb used to politely ask for permission, we can also use *might* if we want to add even more politeness or formality to the question. For example:

• “***Might*** we **go** to the park this afternoon, father?”

• “***Might*** I **ask** you a few questions?”

• “I’m finished with my dinner. ***Might*** I **be** excused from the table?”

However, even in formal speech and writing, this construction can come across as rather old-fashioned, especially in American English. It more commonly occurs in indirect questions—i.e., **declarative sentences** that are worded in such a way as to express an inquiry (though these are technically not questions). For example:

• “I was hoping I ***might*** **borrow** the car this evening.”

• “I wonder if we ***might*** **invite** Samantha to come with us.”

Past tense of *may*

When we use **reported speech**, we traditionally conjugate verbs one degree into the past. When *may* has been used, especially to ask for permission, in a sentence that is now being reported, we use *might* in its place, as in:

• “He asked if he ***might*** **use** the car for his date tonight.”

• “She wondered if she ***might*** **bring** a friend to the show.”

However, this rule of conjugating into the past tense is largely falling out of use in modern English, and it is increasingly common to see verbs remain in their original tense even when being reported.

Making suggestions

Might can also be used to make polite suggestions to someone. This is much less direct and forceful than using ***should***: it expresses a suggestion of a possible course of action rather than asserting what is correct or right to do. For example:

• “You ***might*** **ask** your brother about repaying that loan the next time you see him.”

• “It tastes very good, though you ***might*** **add** a bit more salt.”

• “You ***might*** **try** rebooting the computer; that should fix the problem for you.”

Suggesting a possibility

In a similar way, we can use *might* to suggest a possible action or situation to another person. For example:

• “I was wondering if you ***might*** **be** interested in seeing a play with me later.”

• “I thought you ***might*** **like** this book, so I bought you a copy.”

Adding angry emphasis

Just as we can with the modal verb ***could***, we can use *might* to make a suggestion as a means of adding emphasis to an angry or frustrated remark. For example:

• “My mother has traveled a long way to be here—you ***might*** **try** to look a little more pleased to see her!”

• “You ***might*** **have told** me that you didn’t want a party before I spent all this time and effort organizing one!”

Introducing differing information

Another use of *might* is to introduce a statement that is contrary to or different from a second statement later in the sentence. This can be used as a means of highlighting two different possible outcomes, scenarios, or courses of action. For example:

• “Sure, you ***might*** **be** able to make money quickly like that, but you’re inevitably going to run into difficulties down the line.”

• “I ***might not*** **have** much free time, but I find great satisfaction in my work.”

• “Our organization ***might*** **be** very small, but we provide a unique, tailored service to our clientele.”

As a rhetorical device

Sometimes, we use *might* as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something, in which case we invert *might* with the subject. For instance:

• “***Might*** I just **say**, this has been a most wonderful evening.”

• “And ***might*** I **clarify** that I have always acted solely with the company’s interests in mind.”

• “***Might*** I **add** that your time with us has been greatly appreciated.”

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• “***Let*** me **clarify**: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work.”

• “***Allow*** me **to add**, we were greatly impressed by your performance.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of the modal verb *might*?

a) To ask for permission
b) To express a possibility
c) To request something from someone
d) To suggest something

2. In which of the following situations do we use *might* as the past tense of *may*?

a) In conditional sentences
b) When making a suggestion
c) When a request for permission is being reported
d) To express a possibility

3. Which of the following sentences would occur **least commonly** in modern English?

a) “Might I inquire about your stake in this claim?”
b) “I’m worried that we might not make the train.”
c) “I was hoping I might go out with my friends after school.”
d) “You might have warned me that the boss was going to be here!”

4. Identify the function of *might* in the following sentence:
“Jonathan, you might see about securing the loan before committing to anything else.”

a) To express permission

b) To introduce differing information
c) To express possibility
d) To make a suggestion

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Must

Definition

The modal verb *must* is most often used to express **necessity**—i.e., that something *has to* happen or be the case. We also use this sense of the word to indicate a strong intention to do something in the future, to emphasize something positive that we believe someone should do, and to rhetorically introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment. In addition to indicating necessity, *must* can be used to indicate that something is certain or very likely to happen or be true.

Necessity

When *must* indicates that an action, circumstance, or situation is necessary, we usually use it in a **declarative sentence**. For example:

• “This door ***must*** **be** left shut at all times!”

• “We absolutely ***must*** **get** approval for that funding.”

• “You ***must not*** **tell** anyone about what we saw.”

• “Now, you ***mustn’t*** **be** alarmed, but we’ve had a bit of an accident in here.”

We can also use *must* in **interrogative sentences** to inquire whether something is necessary, usually as a criticism of some objectionable or undesirable action or behavior. For instance:

• “***Must*** we **go** to dinner with them? They are dreadfully boring.”

• “***Must*** you **be** so rude to my parents?”

• “***Must*** I **spend** my entire weekend studying?”

However, this usage is generally reserved for more formal speech and writing, and isn’t very common in everyday English.

Indicating strong intention

We use the same meaning of *must* to indicate something we have a very strong intention of doing in the future. For example:

• “I ***must*** **file** my taxes this weekend.”

• “I ***must*** **get** around to calling my brother.”

• “We ***must*** **have** the car checked out soon.”

Emphasizing a suggestion

We also use this meaning to make suggestions to others of something positive we believe they should do, as in:

• “You simply ***must*** **try** the new Ethiopian restaurant on 4th Avenue—it’s fantastic!”

• “It was so lovely to see you. We ***must*** **get** together again soon!”

• “You ***must*** **come** stay with us at the lake sometime.”

As a rhetorical device

Finally, we can also use this meaning of *must* as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something:

• “I ***must*** **say**, this has been a most wonderful evening.”

• “And I ***must*** **add** that Mr. Jones has been an absolute delight to work with.”

• “I ***must*** **be** clear: we will disavow any knowledge of this incident.”

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• “***Let*** me **be** clear: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work.”

• “***Allow*** us **to say**, we were greatly impressed by your performance.”

Certainty and likelihood

In addition to being used to indicate a necessary action or situation, *must* is also often used to describe that which is certain or extremely likely or probable to happen, occur, or be the case. For example:

• “You ***must*** **be** absolutely exhausted after your flight.”

• “Surely they ***must*** **know** that we can’t pay the money back yet.”

• “There ***must*** **be** some way we can convince the board of directors.”

• “I ***must*** **have** left my keys on my desk at work.”

• Speaker A: “I just got back from a 12-week trip around Europe.”

• Speaker B: “Wow, that ***must*** **have been** an amazing experience!”

Generally speaking, we do not use the negative of *must* (*must not* or *mustn’t*) to express a negative certainty or strong disbelief. Instead, we use *cannot* (often contracted as *can’t*), as in:

• “You ***can’t*** **be** tired—you’ve been sleeping all day!”

• “I ***can’t*** **have** left my phone at home, because I remember packing it in my bag.”

• “After three years of college, she wants to drop out? She ***cannot*** **be** serious.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of the modal verb *must*?

a) To ask for permission
b) To express a certainty
c) To indicate an intention
d) To suggest something

2. In which of the following situations do we generally use *can* instead of *must*?

a) When expressing a necessity
b) When making a suggestion
c) When expressing disbelief or a negative certainty
d) When indicating a strong intention

3. Which of the following sentences uses *must* to indicate a **strong intention**?

a) “Employees must sign in before and after every shift.”
b) “We mustn’t let this setback deter us.”
c) “I must see about getting a refund on this software.”
d) “You must come over and see the new house sometime!”

4. Identify the function of *must* in the following sentence:
“Jonathan, you must have driven through the night to have arrived so early!”

a) To introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment
b) To indicate a strong intention
c) To express necessity

d) To express a certainty or high probability

Substituting Modal Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs express different shades of meaning; very often, they can be quite similar in how they are used, and it is sometimes unclear when it is appropriate to use one instead of another. Below, we'll look at some comparisons between commonly confused modal verbs.

Indicating the future – Will / Shall

Will is the most common modal verb used to indicate one of the **future tenses**, as in:

• "I ***will*** **walk** to work tomorrow." (**future simple tense**)

• "I ***will*** **be walking** to work this week." (**future continuous tense**)

• "I ***will*** **have walked** to work each day this week." (**future perfect tense**)

• "By December, I ***will*** **have been walking** to work each week for a year." (**future perfect continuous tense**)

We can also use *shall* in place of *will* to form the future tense, but only when the subject is in the first person (*I* or *we*). However, this makes the sentence very formal, and it is more commonly found in British English or in polite invitations. For instance:

• "I ***shall*** **be** attending a dinner with the prime minister in April."

• "***Shall*** we **dance**, my dear?"

Requesting permission – Can / Could / May / Might

Each of these four modal verbs can be used to ask for permission, and each changes how formal the sentence is.

• "***Can*** I **open** the window, please?"

• "***Could*** I **open** the window, please?"

• "***May*** I **open** the window, please?"

• "***Might*** I **open** the window, please?"

In the above examples, *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* are all used to request to permission do something.

Can is the least formal of the four, and some sticklers for grammatical etiquette will claim that it should not be used in this way at all; however, it is perfectly acceptable in informal conversation.

Could is more polite and a bit more formal than *can*. We can use this in most situations, except perhaps in very formal conversation.

May is more formal than either *can* or *could*, and it is commonly used as the standard modal verb to express or request permission.

Might is the most formal of them all; however, it can only be used to request permission (not to state that someone **has** permission), and it is not commonly used except in extremely formal circumstances.

Indicating ability – Can / Could

We often use *can* to indicate physical, mental, or functional ability in doing something. For example:

• "I ***can*** **speak** three languages." (I have the mental ability to do this.)

• "He ***can*** **swim** very well." (He has the physical ability to do this.)

Could is also used to indicate ability but as the past tense of *can*. For example:

• "He ***could*** **speak** three languages when he was four years old. (He had this ability by the time he was four years old.)

• "She ***couldn't*** **ski** until she was a teenager. (She did not have this ability until she was a teenager.)

Indicating possibility – May / Might

We use *may* and *might* to express a possibility. When describing a possible action, they generally indicate the same 50 percent chance of likelihood. For example:

• "I ***might*** **go** to the cinema today."

• "I ***may*** **go** to bed early this evening."

May is regarded as being more formal in this use.

Both *may* and *might* are also used to indicate a possible outcome or set of circumstances. In this case, *might* tends to express **less** certainty or a **lower**

likelihood than *may*, although the difference is slight. For example:

• “We’ve tested thoroughly, but there ***might*** **be** some issues we’ve yet to discover.”

• “He ***may*** **have** a chance of making a comeback in the polls.”

Making an offer – Can / May / Shall

Shall, *may*, and *can* can all be used to offer to do something for someone. For example:

• “***Can*** I **get** the door for you?”

• “***May*** I **get** the door for you?”

• “***Shall*** I **get** the door for you?”

May is considered more formal and polite than *can*, although *can* is perfectly acceptable. *Can* and *may*, however, are both a little less direct than *shall*, which is used as more of a polite suggestion.

Making a request – Will / Can / Could / Would

All four of these modals can be used to make a request of someone, with differing degrees of politeness:

• “***Will*** you **get** the door for me, please?” (most direct – least polite)

• “***Can*** you **get** the door for me, please?” (slightly less direct – slightly more polite)

• “***Could*** you **get** the door for me, please?” (less direct – more polite)

• “***Would*** you **get** the door for me, please?” (least direct – most polite)

Could and *would* are the most polite modals to use for requests; however, the accompanying language we use (saying “please,” “if you don’t mind,” “if you could be so kind,” etc.) makes a bigger difference on the politeness of the request, no matter which modal verb is used.

Indicating an obligation – Must / Shall / Should / Will

When expressing an obligation to do something, we often use *must*, which is particularly direct and forceful. This might be found in a public notice, as in:

• "Employees ***must* wash** their hands before returning to work."

• "Owners ***must* clean** up after their pets."

Must can also be used in direct commands or directives, such as:

• "You ***must* finish** your homework before you can go outside to play."

• "Students ***must* put** their names on their assignments, or they won't be graded."

We usually only find *shall* being used to express obligations in contracts or legal documents; it is used as a more polite and formal construction than *must*. For instance:

• "The defendant ***shall* pay** the plaintiff $5,000 in damages."

• "The purchaser agrees that he or she ***shall* forego** any right to a refund after 90 days."

When indicating obligation in more conversational English, we tend to use *should* instead, which is less formal than either *shall* or *must*. It is also less forceful than either, and it is used as more of a strong suggestion of what is best or most proper to do. For example:

• "Students ***should* hand in** their assignments before Friday."

• "She ***should* apologize** for her behavior!"

• "You ***should* always pay** your bills on time."

We can technically use *will* in the same way as *must*, *shall* and *should*, but it is even more forceful than *must* and is less commonly used; it is generally reserved for strong commands or directives, as in:

• "You ***will* eat** your vegetables or you won't get any dessert!"

• "They ***will* agree** to the terms of the lease or face eviction."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In American English, when can we use *shall* instead of *will* to form the **future tense**?

a) In informal speech or writing
b) When the subject is *I* or *we*

c) To express a polite invitation
d) All of the above
e) A & B only
f) B & C only

2. Which of the following modal verbs is considered the **most** polite when requesting **permission**?

a) can
b) could
c) may
d) might

3. Which of the following is **most commonly** used to indicate **obligation**?

a) must
b) shall
c) should
d) will

4. Which of the following modal verbs can be substituted for the <u>underlined</u> word in the following sentence?
“Excuse me, <u>can</u> you tell me where the nearest gas station is?”

a) will
b) could
c) would
d) All of the above
e) A & B only
f) B & C only

Semi-Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Definition

Semi-modal auxiliary verbs, often simply called **semi-modal verbs**, are verbs that *sometimes* behave like **modal auxiliary verbs**. (They are also sometimes known as **marginal modal verbs**.) Like the "proper" modal verbs, they are used with the base form of verbs (the infinitive without *to*) to create a unique meaning.

Dare, need, used to, and ought to

Not all sources agree on the complete list of semi-modal verbs, but there are four that are widely considered as the standard set: *dare*, *need*, *used to*, and *ought to*.

Dare and *need* are considered semi-modal because they can also function as main verbs, able to take nouns and **infinitives** as objects and to conjugate for person, tense, and number. *Ought to* and *used to*, while unable to be main verbs, are considered semi-modal because they are always followed by **infinitives** (compared to "true" modals, which can never be followed by infinitives).

As semi-modal verbs, these verbs are used in conjunction with "main" verbs to create a complete verb expression; they do not conjugate for third-person singular subjects; they do not have a simple past tense; and they cannot form infinitives, present participles, or past participles.

We'll look at each of these verbs individually, examining when and how they function as semi-modal verbs.

Dare

When *dare* is used as a semi-modal verb, it means "to be brave, reckless, or rude enough to do or try something." Remember, when functioning modally, it does not conjugate for person or tense. For example:

• "If he **dare** cross me again, I'll make sure he pays dearly for it."

As a semi-modal verb, *dare* more often takes *not* to form a negative statement (very rarely contracted as *daren't*), or is inverted with the subject to form an **interrogative sentence**. For example:

• "I **dare not** press the issue any further."

• “How **dare** she talk to me like that?”

• “**Dare** he meddle with the laws of nature?”

• “They **daren’t** give him a reason to be angry.”

However, with the exception of the now idiomatic phrase “How *dare* (someone),” the use of *dare* as a modal verb has become rare in modern English.

As a main verb

Dare can also be used as an intransitive main verb with the same meaning as the modal version. When it functions as a main verb, however, it is able to conjugate for person and tense, and it can be followed by a verb in either its base or infinitive form (the *to* becomes optional). For example:

• “I can’t believe he **dared** (***to***) stand up to the boss.”

• “No one **dares** (***to***) question my authority!”

When *dare* is used as a main verb, it must take the **auxiliary verb** *do* to form questions or be made negative. As we saw in the section on **primary auxiliary verbs**, it is *do*, rather than the main verb, that conjugates for tense, person, and number in this case. For example:

• “***Did*** they **dare** (***to***) go through with it?”

• “He ***doesn’t*** **dare** (***to***) argue with the principal.”

Dare can also mean “to challenge someone to (do) something that require courage, boldness, or recklessness,” in which case it must take a noun, pronoun, or infinitive as a direct object. It cannot be used modally with this meaning. For example:

• “I **dare** ***you*** to ask Suzy on a date.”

• “I’ve never been **dared** to race someone before.”

Need

Need as a semi-modal verb is almost always used in negative sentences to express a lack of obligation or necessity, either taking the adverb *not* (usually contracted as *needn’t*) or paired with a negative word or phrase, such as *never, no one, nothing,* etc. For example:

• “No one **need** know about this.”

• “He **needn’t** have called; I told him I would be late.”

• “You **needn’t** worry about my grades.”

• “Nothing **need** change simply because my father is no longer here.”

It can also be used to form interrogative sentences by inverting with the subject, as in:

• “**Need** we be concerned?”

• “**Need** I go to the market later?”

Like *dare*, though, the modal use of *need* has become quite uncommon in modern English, except in very formal speech or writing.

As a main verb

Need is much more common as a main verb. This means it conjugates for person (becoming *needs* in the third-person singular) or tense (becoming *needed*), and it uses auxiliary *did* to form negatives and questions. As a main verb, *need* can be followed by nouns, noun phrases, pronouns, **gerunds**, or infinitives. For example:

• “He **needs** that report by tomorrow.”

• “***Does*** she **need** to know where the house is?”

• “You have plenty of time, so you ***don’t*** **need** to rush.”

• “He **needed** a place to stay, so I offered him one.”

Used to

When we speak about a past habit, condition, or fact that is no longer the case, we can use the semi-modal *used to* with the base form of the verb. For example:

• “I **used to** get up early when I lived in New York.”

• “She **used to** live in Ireland.”

• “We **used to** be in a band together.”

• “This watch **used to** belong to my father.”

Uniquely among the modal and semi-modal verbs, we form the question and negative of *used to* the same way as for main verbs in the past tense—that is, by using the auxiliary *did* for the question and *did not* for the negative.

Example:

• “***Did*** you **use to** live in Manchester?”

• “I ***didn’t*** **use to** like coffee.”

• “She ***didn’t*** **use to** go to the gym every day.”

(Technically speaking, we should remove the “-d” from *used to* when forming questions and negatives, as the auxiliary verb *did* takes the past tense. Because of *to* immediately following *use*, however, the pronunciation stays the same, and many writers include the “-d” regardless. It is common to see it written both ways in modern English.)

As a main verb

A large source of confusion arises around the difference between the semi-modal verb *used to* and two similarly structured main verbs — *be used to* and *get used to*.

Be used to

When we use *be used to* with a noun, noun phrase, or the gerund of a verb, it means “to be accustomed to something.” For example:

• “I **am used to** getting up at 7 AM every morning.”

• “She **was used to** the stress by that point.”

To form the negative of *be used to*, we add *not* after the auxiliary verb *be*, which can be contracted to *isn’t*, *aren’t*, *wasn’t*, or *weren’t*. To form interrogative sentences, we invert *be* with the subject. For example:

• “I **am *not* used to living** in the city.”

• “He **was*n’t* used to** so much work.”

• “***Are*** you **used to living** with roommates?”

Get used to

Get used to has a slightly different meaning from *be used to*; *get* here means *become*. In fact, in more formal English, it is considered preferable to say *become used to* instead. In everyday speech and writing, however, *get used to* is perfectly acceptable.

We often use *get used to* in the **present continuous tense**. For example:

• “I **am getting used to** living in the city.” (I am *becoming* accustomed to living in the city.)

• “He **is getting used to** public speaking. (He is *becoming* accustomed to the act of public speaking.)

We can also use *get used to* in the **past simple tense**, but usually in negative constructions with the word *never*, as in:

• “She ***never* got used to** the silence of the countryside.”

Often, we use *get used to* with the modal verbs *could*, *will*, and *cannot* (or *can’t*). *Could* is used to create a hypothetical scenario, *will* creates the future tense (often paired with *never*), and *cannot* is used to mean “unable.” For example:

• “I ***can’t* get used to** working so many hours. I am so tired.” (I am unable to become accustomed to this.)

• “I ***could* get used to** doing nothing all day.” (This is something that I could find easy to do.)

• “I ***will* never get used to** these cramped conditions.” (At no point in the future will I become accustomed to this.)

Ought to

Ought to is considered semi-modal because, like *used to*, it ends in *to* and so makes verbs infinitive. It is commonly compared to *should* because it expresses that something is viewed as correct, preferable, or necessary—or as probable, likely, or expected. It can also be used to ask for or offer advice about something.

For example:

• “With the cost of airfare so high, in-flight meals **ought to** be free.” (It is correct or preferable that the meals be free.)

• “We **ought to** arrive in the evening.” (It is probable or expected that we’ll arrive in the evening.)

• “I think we **ought to** turn back.” (Turning back is the necessary or best course of action—worded as advice.)

• “You **ought to** see the Grand Canyon some day.” (It is my advice or recommendation for you to visit the Grand Canyon.)

When *ought to* is made negative, *not* comes between *ought* (sometimes contracted as *oughtn’t*) and *to*; it is common to omit *to* when **ought to** is used with *not*. For example:

• “You **ought *not* to** read in such dim light.”

• “We **ought*n’t*** leave the house; it isn’t safe.”

We can also form questions by inverting *ought* with the subject; this is not very common, though. Again, *to* is sometimes omitted in this form. For example:

• “**Ought** we find someplace to eat?”

• “**Ought*n’t*** she study for her exam?”

• “**Ought** they **to** be more worried about the storm?”

• “**Ought *not*** he **to** finish his homework first?”

Ought to is becoming far less common than *should* in modern English, especially in American English.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** one of the semi-modal verbs?

a) dare
b) should
c) ought to
d) need

2. Which of the following is something that semi-modal verbs **cannot** do?

a) Conjugate for third-person singular subjects
b) Come before main verbs to create unique meanings
c) Form the past tense
d) Become negative with the word *not*
e) A & B
f) A & C
g) B & C

3. In which of the following sentences is *need* used as a semi-modal verb?

a) “Nobody need hear about this disaster.”
b) “He needs to learn some respect.”
c) “I think you need a haircut.”
d) “Does she need to study more?”

4. Which is the only semi-modal verb that takes the auxiliary verb *do* to become negative?

a) dare
b) need
c) used to
d) ought to

5. Which of the following sentences does **not** use a semi-modal verb?

a) “Need I ask why this report is late?”
b) “We’d all like some more, but who dares ask?”
c) “We all used to live here when we were younger.”
d) “You oughtn’t concern yourself with this matter.”

Infinitives

Definition

An **infinitive** is the most basic form of a verb. It is “unmarked” (which means that it is not conjugated for tense or person), and it is preceded by the **particle** *to*.

Infinitives are known as **non-finite verbs**, meaning they do not express actions being performed by the subjects of clauses. Instead, infinitives function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs to describe actions as ideas.

Infinitives are distinct from a similar construction known as **bare infinitives** or the **base forms** of verbs, which are simply infinitives without the particle *to*. Although nearly identical, we use them in different ways than “full” infinitives, which we’ll look at later in this section.

Using infinitives

Infinitives are used to express an action as a concept, rather than what is being done or performed by the subject of a clause. In this way, they can function as **nouns, adjectives**, or **adverbs**—that is, nearly any role in a sentence except that of a main verb.

Infinitives can stand on their own to complete these functions, or they can work together with their own **predicates** (any additional information that modifies or completes them) to form **infinitive phrases**. Infinitive phrases function as a nouns, adjectives, or adverbs as a single, holistic unit.

(In the examples in this section, infinitive phrases have been put in **bold**, while the infinitive verbs that begin them are in *italics*.)

Making infinitives negative

To make an infinitive or infinitive phrase negative, we use the word *not* before the infinitive. We can also put greater emphasis on *not* by placing it after *to*.*

(*This creates what is known as a **split infinitive**—an infinitive that has an adverb between *to* and the base form of the verb. While some traditional grammar guides state that this should never be done, in reality there is no such "rule" in English; it is perfectly grammatical to split an infinitive, and in many cases it sounds more natural to do so.)

Infinitives as nouns

Because infinitives and infinitive phrases can function as nouns, it means that they can be **the subject** of a clause, the **direct object** of a verb, or a **predicate noun**.

Subjects

The **subject** performs, occupies, or controls the action of the verb.

• "***To err*** is human; ***to forgive*** is divine."

• "***To study* mathematics at Harvard** was her ultimate dream."

• "***To live* in the city** means adjusting to a completely different lifestyle."

Objects

As direct objects

A **direct object** is a person or thing that directly receives the action of the verb in a clause. An infinitive that acts as the object of another verb is sometimes known as a **verb complement**.

Remember that **intransitive verbs** do **not** take direct objects, so you will only find infinitives used as the objects of **transitive verbs**.

• "I'm not going unless you agree ***to go* with me**."

• "You appear ***to be* correct**."

• "Please be quiet; I'm trying ***to study***."

• "They're attempting ***to solve* the equation**."

• “Let me know if you decide **to leave early**.”

• “We hope ***to go*** **in the near future**.”

• “We rarely manage ***to get*** **out of the house for the night**.”

As objects in reported speech

When we use **reported speech**, we often use infinitives as the direct object of a “reporting verb” to express what was said or asked in the past. For example:

• “He asked ***to help*** **us fix the car**.”

• “She said **not** ***to answer*** **the phone**.”

• “He demanded ***to speak*** **to the manager**.”

• “They offered ***to take*** **me to the airport**.”

• “I promised ***to buy*** **her a diamond ring**.”

• “He threatened ***to report*** **me to the police** if I didn’t give him back the money.”

As object complements

Certain verbs do not make sense with only a direct object, especially when that direct object is a person. More information is required about the object’s relationship with the verb to form a complete thought. This extra information is known as the **object complement**.

An infinitive can also act as an **object complement**, which is word or group of words that describe, rename, or complete the direct object of the verb. For example:

• “I don’t expect you ***to approve*** **of my decision**.”

• “She’s forcing me ***to work*** **through the weekend**.”

• “We need you ***to make*** **a few more copies**.”

• “Janet’s father wants her ***to go*** **to Harvard**.”

• “I would like the boss ***to see*** **these reports**.”

• “He persuaded me ***to marry*** **him**.”

• “They taught me (how) ***to work*** **the photocopier**.”

We often use infinitives as object complements in **reported speech** to express what someone said **to** or asked **of** someone. For example:

• “He asked me ***to help*** **him**.”

• “She told me **not *to answer* the phone**.”

Gerunds vs. Infinitives

Certain verbs can take either **gerunds** or infinitives as direct objects. In some cases, this results in no difference in meaning. For example:

Infinitive	Gerund
“I like ***to hike* on the weekend**.”	“I like ***hiking* on the weekend**.”
“She loves ***to read***.”	“She loves ***reading***.”
“They hate ***to get* bad news**.”	“They hate ***getting* bad news**.”
“I prefer ***to go out* on a Friday** than ***to stay* at home**.”	“I prefer ***going out* on a Friday** than ***staying* at home**.”

In other instances, however, the meaning of the clause is significantly changed as a result. For instance, the verbs *remember, forget, try,* and *stop* can have both infinitives and gerunds as direct objects, but the meaning changes depending on which is used. For example

Infinitive	Gerund
“I remembered ***to close* the window**.” (I didn’t forget to do it.)	“I remember ***closing* the window**.” (I clearly recall it.)
“I forgot ***to meet* John earlier**.” (I didn’t remember to do it.)	“I forget ***meeting* John earlier**.” (I don’t remember this fact even though it happened.)
“Try ***to get* some rest**.” (Attempt to do this.)	“Try ***getting* some rest**.” (Try this as a possible solution to the problem.)
“I stopped ***to drink* water** before bed.” (I interrupted what I was doing to drink water.)	“I stopped ***drinking* water** before bed.” (I don’t drink water before bed anymore.)

Predicate nouns

Predicate nouns are a subset of a larger category known as **subject complements** (including **predicate pronouns** and **predicative adjectives**), which rename or re-identify the subject after a **linking verb** (usually a form of the verb *be*). For example:

• “All I want is ***to be*** **left alone**.”

• “The best thing in life is ***to spend*** **time with those you love**.”

• “The best we can hope for is ***to break*** **even**.”

Infinitives as adjectives

When infinitives are used as adjectives, they function in a similar way to **relative clauses** (also known as **adjective clauses**), providing more information about a noun or pronoun that they appear directly after. For example:

• “This is a good place ***to start*** **reading**.” (*To start reading* modifies the noun *place*.)

• “Give your brother something ***to play*** **with**.” (*To play with* modifies the pronoun *something*.)

• “Find a friend ***to help*** **you study**.” (*To help you study* modifies the noun *friend*.)

Infinitives as adverbs

We can also use infinitives as adverbs to modify the main verb in a sentence, describing a reason why an action is, was, or will be done. Infinitives used in this way are often known as **infinitives of purpose**. For example:

• “I started running ***to improve*** **my health**.”

We can also use the phrases *in order* and *so as* to add formal emphasis to an infinitive of purpose, as in:

• “We must leave now *in order* ***to catch*** **our train**.”

• “He’s been studying all week *so as* ***to improve*** **his grades**.”

Note that we do not use the preposition *for* before the infinitive; we only use *for* with a noun or noun phrase to create a **prepositional phrase** that modifies the verb to describe its purpose. Consider, for example, these three sentences:

✔ “I went to the supermarket ***to buy*** **some bread**.” (correct—infinitive phrase)

✔ “I went to the supermarket <u>for some bread</u>.” (correct—prepositional phrase)

✖ I went to the supermarket **<u>for</u>** ***to buy*** **some bread**.” (incorrect—preposition used with infinitive phrase)

Lone infinitives

We can also use infinitives in this way as isolated responses to questions asking *why* something is done or is the case. For example:

• Speaker A: “Why are you going to New York?”
• Speaker B: “***To see*** **the Empire State Building**.”

• Speaker A: “Why did you turn on the TV?”
• Speaker B: “***To watch*** **the news**.”

These responses are known as **elliptical sentences**, meaning that part of the sentence has been omitted because it is implied. In this case, the implied section is “because I wanted… .” As this element is implicitly understood, we often leave it out entirely and simply use the infinitive on its own.

Infinitives vs. Base Forms (Bare Infinitives)

The **base form** of a verb is simply the infinitive <u>without</u> the particle *to*—like an infinitive, it is uninflected for tense and person. Because of this similarity, the base form of a verb is often known as a **bare infinitive**, and some grammar guides and writers make little distinction between the two forms.

However, infinitives and base-form verbs function differently, so it is important to distinguish between them. An infinitive can be used in a sentence as a noun, an adverb, or an adjective, but it cannot act as a true verb that expresses the action of a subject.

The base form of a verb, on the other hand, can be used in conjunction with the **auxiliary verb** *do* to become negative or to form questions. They are also used with **modal auxiliary verbs** to express things like possibility, necessity, obligation and permission, as well as to create the simple **future tense**.

Verbs that take bare infinitives

The base form is also used after the direct object of certain action verbs, such as *let, help,* and *make*, as well as after **verbs of the senses**, such as *hear, see*, and *feel*.

Let's look at some examples of these below. The bare infinitives (base forms) are in **bold**, while the main verbs are underlined and the direct objects are *italicized*:

• "Please let *me* **go** to the party, mom." (Please give me permission to go.)

• "His father makes *him* **study**." (His father forces him to study.)

• "Jack is helping *me* **clean** the garage." (Jack is cleaning the garage with me.)

• "He heard *me* **shout**." (He could that I was shouting.)

• "I saw *her* **look** in my direction." (I could see that she was looking in my direction.)

• "I felt *him* **touch** my arm." (I could feel that he touched my arm.)

(Note that these are not the only verbs that can be followed by bare infinitives.)

After had better

The base forms of verbs are also used after the phrase *had better*, which acts like the modal verb ***should*** to suggest a required or desirable action. For example:

• "You had better **clean** this up before your father gets home."

• "I think we'd better **go** home soon."

After *why*

Bare infinitives can also follow the word *why* to form questions, as in:

• "Why **study** when I already know the material by heart?"

• "Why **watch** TV when we could play outside?"

These types of questions are called **elliptical**, which, as we saw above, means that part of the sentence has been left out because it is implied. The full questions might read:

• "Why ***should I*** **study** when I already know the material by heart?"

• "Why ***would we*** **watch** TV when we could play outside?"

Since the italicized parts of these sentences can be implied, they are sometimes left out entirely.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a distinguishing feature of **infinitives**?

a) They cannot conjugate for tense or person
b) They can function as a noun, adjective, or adverb
c) They are preceded by the word *to*
d) A & C
e) B & C
f) All of the above

2. Which of the following is **not** something an infinitive can function as?

a) The subject of a clause
b) The main verb of a clause
c) The direct object of a verb
d) An adverb modifying a verb

3. True or False: Infinitives and gerunds are always interchangeable as direct objects of verbs.

a) True
b) False

4. Identify the grammatical function of the infinitive phrase (in **bold**) in the following sentence:
"I need the employees **to work a little harder**."

a) Object complement
b) Predicate noun
c) Adjective
d) Adverb

5. Which of the following distinguishes the **base form** of a verb from the **infinitive form**?

a) It conjugates for tense or person
b) It can function as a direct object of a main verb
c) It is not preceded by the word *to*
d) A & C

e) B & C
f) All of the above

Participles

Definition

Participles are words formed from verbs that can function as adjectives or gerunds or can be used to form the **continuous** tenses and the **perfect** tenses of verbs. There are two participle forms: the **present participle** and the **past participle**.

Form

The present participle

The present participle is the “-ing” form of a verb. This verb form is always the same, whether the verb is **regular** or **irregular**. For example:

Regular verbs

Regular verb	Present Participle
apologize	**apologizing**
close	**closing**
follow	**following**
look	**looking**
remember	**remembering**

Irregular verbs

Irregular verb	Present Participle
eat	**eating**
run	**running**

sing	**singing**
think	**thinking**
write	**writing**
be	**being**

The past participle

Unlike the present participle, the past participle form changes depending on the verb. The past participle of regular verbs ends in “-ed,” and is generally the same as the simple past tense of the verb. For example:

Regular verb	Past Simple	Past Participle
apologize	apologized	**apologized**
close	closed	**closed**
follow	followed	**followed**
look	looked	**looked**
remember	remembered	**remembered**

The past participle form of irregular verbs has a variety of endings that must be memorized. Note that the past participle is usually (but not always) different from the past simple form for irregular verbs. For example:

Irregular verb	Past Simple	Past Participle
eat	ate	**eaten**
run	ran	**run**
sing	sang	**sung**
think	thought	**thought**
write	wrote	**written**

be	was/were	**been**

Using participles as adjectives and in participle phrases

Present and past participles can be used as adjectives or as part of a **participle phrase**. Participles allow us to condense two sentences into one, expressing ideas that would otherwise require relative clauses, subordinating conjunctions, etc., in a more economical way. For example:

Longer Form	Using a participle
“She soothed the baby, who was crying.”	“She soothed the **crying** baby.”
“I was oblivious to the doorbell ringing because I was singing in the shower.”	“**Singing in the shower**, I was oblivious to the doorbell ringing.”
“We finally found James, who was hiding under the bed, after hours of searching.”	“After hours of searching, we finally found James **hiding under the bed**.”

As adjectives

When we form an adjective using the *present participle*, we imply *action* on the part of the noun being modified. For example:

• “She soothed the **crying** *baby*.” (The baby is crying).

• “The **speeding** *car* crashed into the tree.” (The car was speeding.)

• “**Hugging**, *the two sisters* said goodbye to each other.” (The sisters were hugging.)

When we form an adjective using the *past participle*, on the other hand, we don’t imply action on the part of noun that it modifies. Instead, we describe a characteristic of that noun. For example:

• “I picked up the **broken** *bottle*.” (The bottle is broken.)

• “The **jumbled** *puzzle pieces* were all over the floor.” (The puzzle pieces are jumbled.)

• “Please get me a bag of **frozen** *vegetables*.” (The vegetables are frozen.)

As participle phrases

Participial phrases (sometimes known as **participial clauses**) are groups of words that contain a participle and function as adjective phrases.

Present participle phrase

If we use the present participle in a phrase, we give the clause an **active** meaning. In other words, the noun being modified is the **agent** of the action. For example:

• “**Singing in the shower**, *I* was oblivious to the doorbell ringing.” (I was singing.)

• “*James*, **hiding under the bed**, was completely silent.” (James was hiding.)

Past participle phrase

If we use the past participle, the noun being modified is either given a **passive** role in the action, or else is being described. For example:

• “*The turkey*, **burnt to a crisp**, was thrown in the garbage.”

• “*My sister*, **exhausted after a long day’s work**, has fallen asleep on the sofa.”

In the first example, *the turkey* is not the agent of the action, but is being *acted upon*; it has been burnt by the oven or by the person cooking, and so it has a passive role. In the second example, *my sister* is also not the agent of the verb *exhaust*. Instead, *exhausted* is used to describe how she feels.

Perfect participle phrase (*Having + past participle*)

When we want to emphasize that one event happened before another, we can use the structure *having + past participle*, also known as the **perfect participle**. For example:

• “**Having seen** the movie before, I wouldn’t want to see it again.”

• “**Having done** a lot of exercise this morning, we should eat a big lunch.”

• “She was exhausted, **having stayed up** all night watching TV.”

Sentence Placement

Initial position

When a participle or participle phrase occurs in the initial position, it is usually separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma. For example:

• “**Running to the car**, the boy welcomed his father home after three months away.”

• “**Singing in the shower**, I was oblivious to the doorbell ringing.”

• “**Scared**, my sister slept with the light on.”

Middle position

When the participle or phrase occurs in the middle position, and is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should be set apart from the rest of the sentence by two commas. For example:

• “My sister, **exhausted**, has fallen asleep on the sofa.”

• “James, **hiding under the bed**, was completely silent.”

• “The turkey, **burnt to a crisp**, was thrown in the garbage.”

However, if it occurs in the middle position and is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should **not** be set apart by commas. For example:

• “The students **finished with their work** may have a break.”

• “Jackets **left behind** will be donated.”

• “Participants **breaking the rules** will be removed from the competition.”

Final position

If the participle or phrase occurs in the final position immediately after the noun that it modifies, it doesn’t need a comma. For example:

• “We looked for hours and finally found *James* **hiding**.”

• “The cat had no interest in *the poor dog* **wagging its tail**.”

• “I was in such a hurry I didn’t notice *my jacket* **left on the table**.”

However, when it occurs in final position but **not** immediately after the noun that it modifies, it **does** need a comma. For example:

• "It was obvious *he* really enjoyed dinner, **having had a second helping of dessert**."

• "*My sister* cried as she packed up her belongings, **saddened at the idea of moving out of her childhood home**."

• "*Most of the puzzle pieces* have disappeared, **misplaced after so many years**."

Common mistakes

When we use participles as adjectives, it's important that the noun modified is clearly stated and that the participle appears as close to it as possible. Otherwise, we run the risk of errors known as **misplaced modifiers** and **dangling modifiers**.

Misplaced modifier

A misplaced modifier can occur when there is more than one noun in the sentence. If we don't place the participle close enough to the noun that it modifies, it may seem that it modifies another noun. For example:

• "**Terrified after watching a scary movie**, *my father* had to comfort *my little sister*."

In the above sentence, the participle phrase *terrified after watching a scary movie* is supposed to modify *my little sister*. However, since *my father* appears closer to the participle phrase, it seems it is the father that is terrified. The sentence should be rewritten to correct the misplaced modifier. For example:

• "My father had to comfort my sister, terrified after watching a scary movie."

or

• "**Terrified after watching a scary movie**, *my sister* had to be comforted by *my father*."

or

• "*My sister*, **terrified after watching a scary movie**, had to be comforted by *my father*."

Dangling modifier

A dangling modifier occurs when we don’t clearly state the noun that is supposed to be modified by the participle. For example:

• “**Walking down the road**, the birds were singing.”

Because the sentence does not state who was walking down the road, is seems that it was *the birds*, which probably is not the intended meaning. The sentence needs to be rewritten to correct the dangling modifier. For example:

• “**Walking down the road**, *I* heard the birds singing.”

Using participles as gerunds

The present participle is also used to create **gerunds**. A gerund is a form of a verb that can be used as a noun, functioning as a **subject**, **complement**, or **object** of a sentence. For example:

• “**Swimming** is my favorite sport.” (subject)

• “My brother’s favorite sport is **cycling**.” (complement)

• “Do you enjoy **running**?” (object)

Using participles in verb tenses

Both present and past participles are used along with auxiliary verbs to form multi-part verb tenses.

The present participle in verb tenses

The present participle is used to form the past, present, and future **continuous tenses**.

Present Continuous

The **present continuous tense** is mainly used for stating an action that is taking place at the moment of speaking, or an action that will take place in the near future. It is formed using the present tense of the auxiliary verb *be* + the present participle of the main verb. For example:

• “I**’m singing**.”

• “He**’s running**.”

• “We**’re hiding**.”

Past Continuous

The **past continuous tense** is primarily used to describe an action that took place over a period of time in the past, especially if interrupted by another action. It is formed using *was* (the past tense of the auxiliary verb *be*) + the present participle of the main verb. For example:

• “I **was singing** in the shower when the doorbell rang.”

• “She **was eating** dinner when I called.”

• “They **were helping** their mom clean the house all day.”

Present perfect continuous

The **present perfect continuous tense** is mainly used to describe an action that has recently taken place and still has an effect on the present. It places the emphasis on the duration of the action rather than the result. It is formed using *have/has* + *been* + the present participle form of the main verb. For example:

• “I **have been singing** loudly, so my throat’s sore.”

• “I think she**’s been crying**—her eyes are really red.”

• “They**’ve been running** for 20 minutes already.”

Past perfect continuous

The **past perfect continuous tense** is used to describe an action that began in the past, and continued until another point in the past. It is formed using *had* + *been* + the present participle form of the main verb. For example:

• “They **had been singing** for two hours when the concert finished.”

• “She **had been waiting** for a bus for a long time when I saw her.”

• “I **had been reading** my book for about 20 minutes when I realized it was time to leave.”

Future Continuous

The **future continuous tense** is used to describe an action that will be in progress at a certain point in the future. It is formed using *will* + *be* + the present participle form of the main verb. For example:

• “Tomorrow at eight o’clock I **will be waiting** for my flight.”

• “Don’t call at six o’clock because they**’ll be having dinner**.”

• “She**’ll be driving** all afternoon tomorrow.”

Future Perfect Continuous

The **future perfect continuous tense** is used to describe an action that will continue up until a certain point in the future. It emphasizes the duration of the action, and is formed using *will* + *have* + *been* + the present participle form of the main verb. For example:

• “At eight o'clock I**’ll have been waiting** here for an hour.”

• “She**’ll have been living** in New York City for 10 years next month.”

• “We **will have been working** on this project for three weeks as of tomorrow.”

The past participle in verb tenses

The past participle is used in forming the present, past, and future **simple perfect tenses**.

Present Perfect

The **present perfect tense** is used to describe an action or experience in the recent past that still has an effect on the present. It is similar to the present perfect continuous, but instead of placing the emphasis on the duration of the action, it subtly emphasizes the result. It is formed using *have/has* + the past participle form of the main verb. For example:

• “I **have eaten** already.”

• “I**’ve** spent all my money.”

• “She **hasn’t been** here before.”

Past Perfect

The **past perfect tense** is used to describe an action that was completed in the past, prior to another past action. It is formed using *had* + the past participle form of the main verb. For example:

• “I **had eaten** when she called.”

• “Why did you visit Las Vegas again when you **had been** there before?”

• “She **had cooked** dinner and had it waiting on the table when we got home.”

Future perfect

The **future perfect tense** is used to describe an action that will be completed at a certain point in the future. It is formed using *will* + *have* + the past participle form of the main verb. For example:

• "When you get here, we**'ll have eaten** already."

• "They**'ll have finished** by late tonight."

• "The baby **will have woken up** by six o'clock tomorrow morning."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Participles are used to form _____.

a) adjectives
b) gerunds
c) verb tenses
d) A & B
e) all of the above

2. The present participle ends in _____.

a) "-ed"
b) "-ing"
c) A & B
d) none of the above

3. Which of the following words is **not** a past participle?

a) been
b) eaten
c) ran
d) sung

4. Complete the following sentence:
"_____ under the bed, the dog was terrified of the thunder."

a) Having hiding
b) Have hidden
c) Hid

d) Hiding

5. Which of the following sentences is punctuated **correctly**?

a) “James, scared he was going to fail the test, stayed up all night studying.”
b) “James scared he was going to fail the test, stayed up all night studying.”
c) “James, scared he was going to fail the test stayed up all night studying.”
d) “James scared he was going to fail, the test stayed up all night studying.”

Action Verbs

Definition

Action verbs (also known as **dynamic verbs**) are verbs that are used to explain what the subject of a sentence is actively doing. For example, *ran*, *swim*, *jump*, *move*, *look*, and *catch* are all action verbs. Here are some examples of action verbs being used in sentences:

• “The man **stretched** his arm before he **threw** the baseball.”

• “The kittens **leaped** from the table to the chair.”

• “After she **dove** into the water, the swimmer **raced** to the other side of the pool as fast as she could.”

• “A boy **rolled** down the hill on a skateboard.”

• “Before it **stopped** for a break, the horse **ran** for five miles.”

Importance to sentences

Consider the following sentences:

• “The train **is** on the track.”

• “The gazelles **are** in the field.”

Neither of these sentences contains a verb that describes an *action* the subject is taking. Instead, they use the **stative verb** *be* to describe the conditions or states of being of the subjects. However, adding action verbs helps to identify what the subject of the sentence is actively doing:

• “The train **raced** along the track.”

• “The gazelles **are galloping** in the field.”

Action verbs can also dramatically impact the meaning of the sentence. They not

only say what the subject is doing, but can also demonstrate the manner in which the subject is doing it. For example, consider the following sentence:

• “Susie **sat** on the couch at the end of her work day.”

The action verb *sat* lets the reader know that Susie moved from a standing position to a sitting position on her couch. The following sentence also tells the reader this information, but the different choice of action verb provides more meaning to the sentence:

• “Susie **collapsed** onto her couch at the end of the work day.”

In this sentence, the action verb *collapsed* not only indicates that Susie moved from a standing position to a resting position, but that the transition was much more dramatic. This could be used to illustrate that Susie was very tired or perhaps not feeling well. In any case, it provides a more descriptive action than *sat*.

Here is another example of similar action verbs providing different information:

• “The man **tossed** the stone to the side of the path.”

• “The man ***heaved*** the stone to the side of the path.”

In both of the above sentences, the man is moving the stone off the path. However, the action verb *tossed* implies that the stone was light enough to throw, while *heaved* indicates that the stone was very heavy. As you can see, by changing the action verb, we have significantly changed the sentence’s meaning.

Difference from other verb types

All sentences require a verb to be complete, but it does not have to be an action verb: there are also stative verbs, linking verbs, and auxiliary verbs.

Stative verbs

Unlike action verbs, **stative verbs** indicate the state or condition of the subject, such as **thoughts or opinions** (*agree, recognize, doubt*), **possession** (*own, possess, belong, have*), **emotion** (*love, hate, like, fear, enjoy*), or **senses** (*seem, look, hear, taste, feel*).

We can see how no action is being described by these verbs in the following examples:

• “I **own** 10 cars.”

• “The kids **love** to play outside in the summer.”

• “Janet **feels** that we should go home.”

You may have noticed that some of the stative verbs can function as action verbs in certain contexts. In this case, a simplified rule for identifying if a verb is stative or active is to conjugate the verb into one of the continuous tenses (by using its **present participle**) and see if the sentence still makes sense.

For example:

✔ “I **own** 10 cars.”
✖ “I **am owning** 10 cars.” (incorrect—stative verb)

✔ “I **see** your point.”
✖ “I **am seeing** your point.” (incorrect—stative verb)

However:

✔ “I **am seeing** a movie later.” (correct—action verb)

(There are some exceptions and peculiarities in English around this rule, but it is a good starting point for differentiating stative and action verbs. Go to the section on **Stative Verbs** to learn more.)

Linking verbs

Linking verbs are a subset of the stative verbs we looked at above—they also describe condition or state as opposed to an action. Linking verbs are used to connect a subject to an adjective or phrase that describes it. For example:

• “She **is** smart.”

• “They **seem** very strong.”

• “This soup **tastes** funny.”

Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs are verbs that precede stative, linking, or action verbs to help complete their meaning. For example:

• “They **should** *run* faster.”

• “You **can** *see* the lake from the porch on the lake house.”

• “I **have been** *thinking* about a new method for the project.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is an action verb?

a) is
b) can
b) jump
d) shall

2. Identify the action verb in the following sentence.
“I think the man who delivers our mail is cute.”

a) think
b) is
c) who
d) delivers

3. Which of the following sentences does **not** contain an action verb?

a) “I hope to possess my own company some day.”
b) “He jumped from the rooftop into the pool.”
c) “She has been smiling at me from across the classroom.”
d) “Let’s drive to the mountains for the weekend.”

4. Action verbs are also known as which of the following?

a) stylistic verbs
b) state verbs
c) dynamic verbs
d) holding verbs

Stative Verbs

Definition

Stative verbs (also known as **state verbs**) are verbs that describe a static condition, situation, or state of being. They are contrasted with **action verbs** (also called **dynamic verbs**), which describe an active, dynamic action that can be performed by a person or thing.

Stative verbs can be in the present, past, or future tense; however, because they describe static conditions, they are usually unable to progress through time, and they therefore cannot be used when forming the **continuous** or **progressive**

forms of verb tenses. For this reason, they are sometimes referred to as **non-continuous verbs** or **non-progressive verbs**.

However, some stative verbs *can* be used in a continuous tense in certain situations, as when describing a temporary state that has begun and will end. This is becoming more common in modern English, and the prescriptive rule that stative verbs can never be continuous is becoming less strict. We'll look at some of these exceptions in the sections below.

Types of stative verbs

Linking verbs are usually used as stative verbs; these include the verb *be* and the **verbs of the senses**. Other verbs that are considered stative are those that express emotions, possession, cognition, and states or qualities.

Below, we'll look at common examples of different types of stative verbs. As we will see, certain verbs can be either dynamic or stative, depending on their use and context in a sentence.

(It's important to note that the sections below do not contain exhaustive lists of stative verbs; they are only meant to provide illustrative examples.)

To be

The verb *be* is the most common linking verb. It is used for describing general characterizations, sensations, measurements, location, or to rename the subject.

For example:

- "You **are *wrong***."
- "It **was *hot*** yesterday."
- "I **am not *hungry***."
- "They **were *confused***."
- "I can tell that you **are *upset***."
- "Our daughter **is *one week old***."
- "She **is *five feet tall***."
- "John **is *in the other room***."
- "This **is** *a lost cause*."

Using the continuous form

However, the linking verb *be* can function as an action verb when it is used to mean “to behave.” We can test whether *be* is acting as a stative or action verb by putting it into one of the continuous tenses. For example:

✔ “The children **are being *too noisy***.” (Correct—it is an **action verb**.)

✖ “The children **are being *outside***.” (Incorrect—it is a **stative verb**.)

Sense verbs

Verbs of the senses, or “**sense verbs**” for short, are used to indicate perceptions based on physical or mental sensations. The sense verbs are:

- taste
- smell
- sound
- seem
- feel
- look
- appear

When sense verbs are used as linking verbs, they merely relate the means by which the speaker has arrived at such a sensation about the subject. We pair them with **predicative adjectives**.

For example:

- “I **feel *terrible*** today.”
- “You **sound *tired***.”
- “She didn’t **sound *Irish***.”
- “You **look *fabulous*** today.”
- “He doesn’t **look *very happy***.”
- “This doesn’t **seem *right***.”
- “The car **appears *OK***, but I’ll have to drive it to be sure.”
- “That **smells *nice***.”
- “This milk **tastes *strange***.”

Using the continuous form

Note, however, that some of the sense verbs can take the continuous tense to describe a temporary state in some contexts; they are more common in more

casual speech and writing. For example:

• “You **are looking** great, Suzy!”

• “It **is seeming** less likely by the day that we will succeed.”

The sense verb *feel* is unique, though, in that it is very often used in the continuous form when talking about one’s or someone else’s health, as in:

• “I**’m not feeling** well at all.”

• “**Are** you **feeling** OK, John?”

Certain sense verbs also function as **action verbs** in other contexts, and these can take the continuous form. For example:

• “I **was feeling** gently around the table in the dark.”

• “The guards **are sounding** the alarm!”

• “What’s that delicious food I **am smelling**?”

• “He **was looking** across the table at me.”

• “Birds **have been appearing** out of nowhere.”

• “He **is tasting** the soup to decide whether it need salt.”

Verbs of emotion

Verbs that describe our emotions about something are also considered stative. These **transitive verbs** take nouns, noun phrases, **gerunds**, and sometimes **infinitives** as their objects. Here are some common examples using stative verbs of emotion:

- “She **likes** old movies.”
- “My son **loves** to read.”
- “I **enjoy** walking along the beach.”
- “I **hate** to eat dinner alone.”
- “The kids **dislike** sharing their toys.”
- “I **prefer** salad to French fries.”
- “I **don’t mind** eating vegetables.”

Most of the time, a verb of emotion can take either a gerund or an infinitive with little to no difference in meaning. However, an infinitive sometimes refers to a potential activity, while a gerund refers to an activity in general.

Other verbs of emotion, such as *enjoy* or *don’t mind,* **can’t** take the infinitive at

all:

✖ “I **enjoy to play** tennis.” (incorrect)
✔ “I **enjoy playing** tennis.” (correct)

✖ “I **don’t mind to work** on my own.” (incorrect)
✔ “I **don’t mind working** on my own.” (correct)

Using the continuous form

As with the sense verbs, we can sometimes use verbs of emotion in the continuous form to describe an ongoing but temporary sensation. However, such uses are generally quite informal. For example:

• “We **are loving** this neighborhood.”

• “I**’m liking** our chances of winning the championship.”

• “I**’m hating** the second season of this show.”

Although *enjoy* is a verb of emotion, it is often used in the continuous form and is not considered informal. For instance:

• “He **is enjoying** his newfound wealth.”

• “**Are** you **enjoying** your meal?”

However, there are still some verbs of emotion that generally **do not** take a continuous form, as in:

✖ “She **is preferring** her old school.” (incorrect)

Verbs of possession and attribution

Possession and attribution are static actions, not dynamic ones. Verbs that refer to ownership are considered stative and do not take the continuous form. For example:

- “I **have** a large house.”
- “She **owns** three cars.”
- “That stereo **belongs** to me.”
- “They **have** a large family.”
- “He **holds** several postgraduate degrees.”
- “She **possesses** a great wealth of knowledge.”

Using the continuous form

We often find some of these verbs used in the continuous forms, but their meanings are different and they are functioning as action verbs instead, as in:

• “You**’re not holding** on to the hammer tight enough!” (*Hold* means “to grip with one’s hands” in this context.)

• “He thinks that a ghost **is possessing** him.” (*Possess* means “to gain control or power over” in this context.)

• “She**’s having** a baby in a few months.” (*Have* means “to give birth to” in this context.)

• “They**’re having** a party next door.” (*Have* means “to arrange or carry out” in this context.)

However, if the verb is indicating possession or attribution, we cannot use it in a continuous form:

- ✖ “I **am having** a large house.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “She **is owning** three cars.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “That stereo **is belonging** to me.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “They **are having** a large family.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “He **is holding** several postgraduate degrees.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “She **is possessing** a great wealth of knowledge.” (incorrect)

Verbs of cognition

Verbs of mental cognition, such as *understand*, *know*, *recognize*,, or *think*, are generally used as stative verbs and do not take continuous forms. For example:

✔ “I **understand** the issue.” (correct)
✖ “I **am understanding** the issue.” (incorrect)

✔ “She **knows** Janet very well.” (correct)
✖ “She **is knowing** Janet very well.” (incorrect)

Using the continuous form

Some verbs of cognition can be stative or dynamic, depending on the context. If they can correctly be used in a continuous form, they are expressing a dynamic

action. For example:

• “I **consider** my options before I make a decision.”
✔ “I **am considering** my options before I make a decision.” (correct—action verb)

• “I **consider** myself a rational person.”
✖ “I **am considering** myself a rational person.” (incorrect—stative verb)

• “They **thought** of an answer.”
✔ “They **were thinking** of an answer.” (correct—action verb)

The stative verb *understand*, however, has some informal uses in which the continuous form is often considered acceptable, as in:

• “I’m sorry, I**’m not understanding** your question.”

• **Am** I **understanding** you correctly?”

Verbs of states or qualities

Besides the linking verb *be* and the verbs of the senses, we can use other verbs, such as *weigh*, *depend*, *involve*, *owe*, or *consist*, to describe the state or qualities of something. For example:

✔ “He **weighs** 160 pounds.” (correct)
✖ “He **is weighing** 160 pounds.” (incorrect)

✖ “This report **involves** multiple sites across the world.” (correct)
✖ “This report **is involving** multiple sites across the world.” (incorrect)

✔ “Your happiness **depends** on doing something you enjoy.” (correct)
✖ “Your happiness **is depending** on doing something you enjoy.” (incorrect)

✔ “John **owes** me 20 dollars!” (correct)
✖ “John **is owing** me 20 dollars!” (incorrect)

✔ “The book **consists** of research from several prominent scientists.” (correct)
✖ “The book **is consisting** of research from several prominent scientists.” (incorrect)

Using the continuous form

Some of these verbs can be dynamic or stative, depending on the context and the way they are used. When the verb is describing an attribute of the subject, it functions as stative verb (as we saw above). When the verb describes an action taken by the subject, though, it is functioning as an action verb, as in:

• “He **is weighing** each bag before delivery.”

• “I **am involving** a number of people in this project.”

The **phrasal verb** *depend on*, however, is always stative, but we often find it being used in the continuous form, especially when its subject is a person. For instance:

• “We **are depending** on you to get this done in time.”

Continuous Forms vs. Gerunds

With so much emphasis placed on whether or not a stative verb is able to use one of the continuous forms, it is important to distinguish between **continuous forms** and **gerunds**.

The continuous (or progressive) forms refer to six specific verb tenses: **present continuous tense**, **present perfect continuous tense**, **past continuous tense**, **past perfect continuous tense**, **future continuous tense**, and **future perfect continuous tense**. These all use the **present participles** of verbs to express an action that is continuously (or **progressively**) happening. Generally speaking, only **action verbs** can take the continuous forms. (Although, as we’ve seen above, there are many exceptions to and interpretations of this rule.)

Gerunds, on the other hand, refer to the “-ing” form of the verb when it is used as a noun. When a gerund takes additional information as part of its **predicate**, the entire phrase (known as a **gerund phrase**) functions as a noun. Any verb, even a stative one, can be used as a gerund. For example:

• “**Knowing your own weaknesses** will help you become stronger.”

• “I enjoy **being in Paris**.”

• “What I like most is **reading in a quiet room**.”

• “**Loving one’s work** is a rare but wonderful accomplishment.”

Because the gerund and present participle of a verb look identical, it can often be confusing to determine how a verb is behaving. However, just remember that if the verb and its constituent parts are functioning as a noun would in a sentence, then it is a gerund; if it is describing an action that the subject is performing, then it is a present participle used to create a continuous tense.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the function of a stative verb?

a) To describe a dynamic action taken by the subject
b) To describe a condition that must be met for something to happen
c) To describe the subject's state of being
d) To modify the meaning of other verbs

2. **In general**, which of the following is something a stative verb **cannot** do?

a) Be used as a gerund
b) Be used in a continuous form
c) Be used in the future tense
d) Take a direct object

3. Which of the following **cannot** be used as a stative verb?

a) think
b) seem
c) exercise
d) have

4. Which of the following is **not** another name for stative verbs?

a) State verbs
b) Non-continuous verbs
c) Non-progressive verbs
d) Non-finite verbs

5. True or False: The linking verb *be* is **always** considered a stative verb?

a) True
b) False

Linking Verbs

Definition

Linking verbs (also known as **copulas** or **copular verbs**) are used to describe the state of being of the subject of a clause. Unlike **action verbs** (also called **dynamic verbs**), they connect the subject to the predicate of the clause <u>without</u> expressing any action.

To be

The verb *to be* is the most common linking verb. Unique among English verbs, *be* has eight different conjugations: *be, am, is, are, was, were, been,* and *being*. It can link the subject to an adjective (known as a **predicative adjective**) that describes it, or to a noun, noun phrase, or pronoun that renames it. These are collectively known as **subject complements**.

General descriptions

We can use nearly any adjective after *be* to describe the subject. For example:

• "You **are *wrong***."

• "It **is *cold*** today."

• "It **was *hot*** yesterday."

• "The team **is *terrible*** this year."

• "They **were *fortunate*** to have won."

• "She has **been *so stubborn***."

• "He **is *really annoying***."

Physical or emotional sensations

Be is very often used to describe a sensation belonging to the subject. These can be physical, as in:

• "I **am *cold***."

• "We **are *thirsty***."

• "They **were *tired***."

Be can also describe emotional sensations:

• "He **is *sad***."

• "He has **been *anxious*** lately."

• "I can tell that you **are *upset***."

Precise physical descriptions

Be is also used for specific physical descriptions of the subject, such as exact age, weight, or height.

Age

When we describe a subject's age, we can express it simply as a number, as in:

• "I **am *32***."

• "Our daughter **is *one***."

We can also use a unit of time between the number and the adjective *old*, as in:

• "I **am *32 years old***."

• "Our daughter **is *one week old***."

(However, we cannot use only the number and *years* or the number and *old*—"I am 32 years" and "Our daughter is one old" are both incorrect.)

Height

For height, we usually use the number, the unit, and the adjective *tall* all together, as in:

• "They **are *five feet tall***."

• "He **is *two meters tall***."

If we are using feet and inches as our units, there are a number of ways that we can write the sentence without using the adjective *tall*. These are especially prevalent in informal English. For example:

• "He **is *six foot***."

• "She **is *five foot three***."

• "I **am *five feet, three inches***."

Weight

When describing the subject's weight with *be*, we only use the number + the unit of measurement, as in:

• "I **am *185 pounds***."

• "This brick **is *four kilograms***."

With prepositional phrases

A linking verb can also be followed by a **prepositional phrase** that acts as an adjective to describe the subject. These usually describe the subject's location,

though they can be used to provide other descriptions as well. For example:

• “John **is *in the other room***.” (John is physically located in the other room.)

• “I will **be *away from the office*** this week.” (I will not be present in the office this week.)

• “They **are *against this plan***.” (They do not agree with or support this plan.)

Renaming the subject

We can also follow the linking verb *be* with a predicate noun, noun phrase, or pronoun that renames or re-identifies the subject. These add a descriptive element, without directly functioning as adjectives. For example:

• “She **is** *a bully*.”

• “That**’s** *him*; that**’s** *the man we were looking for*.”

• “They **are** *a lost cause*.”

• “I have **been** *a mess* lately.”

Be as an auxiliary verb

We must be careful not to confuse how *be* functions as a linking verb with how it functions as an **auxiliary verb**. When it is used as an auxiliary, *be* is no longer an independent verb describing the subject of the sentence. Instead, it helps other verbs to create the continuous tenses or to change the voice of the writing.

Creating verb tenses

Be frequently functions as an auxiliary verb by combining with the **present participle** of a verb to form one of the continuous tenses. For example:

• “I ***am* listening** to you.” (**present continuous tense**)

• “She ***was* working** very hard.” (**past continuous tense**)

• “They **will *be* waiting** for you at the airport.” (**future continuous tense**)

Passive voice

We can also use *be* as an auxiliary to create the **passive voice**. For example:

• “The book ***was* written** by an anonymous author.”

• “The victory **will *be* savored** for years.”

• “The hospitals ***were*** **built** in 1805.”

Sense verbs

Certain verbs are used to indicate perceptions, opinions, or bodily sensations. These are known as **verbs of the senses**, or “**sense verbs**” for short. The sense verbs are:

• **taste**
• **smell**
• **sound**
• **seem**
• **feel**
• **look**
• **appear**

Sense verbs merely relate the means by which the speaker has arrived at such a sensation about the subject. When we use them like this, they are functioning as linking verbs (rather than **action verbs**) and we pair them with predicative adjectives. (However, unlike *be*, we do not follow sense verbs with predicative nouns, noun phrases, or pronouns.)

For example:

• “I **feel *terrible*** today.” (A feeling inside of being very unwell.)

• “You **sound *tired***.” (A perception of tiredness in your voice.)

• “She didn’t **sound *Italian***.” (An opinion based on the way her voice sounds.)

• “You **look *fabulous*** today.” (This is my opinion when I look at you.)

• “He doesn’t **look *very happy***.” (This is my opinion based on what he looks like. Note that the adverb *very* is modifying the adjective *happy*, not the verb *look*.)

• “This doesn’t **feel *right***.” (An opinion or perception of something not being as it should.)

• “The car **appears *OK***, but I’ll have to drive it to be sure.” (From what I can see, the car looks like it’s in good condition.)

• “That **smells *nice***.” (Sensation of a pleasant aroma.)

• “This milk **tastes *funny****.” (Sensation of an odd or unpleasant taste.)

(**The adjective funny has two meanings. It can describe something that makes you laugh, or something that is strange, unpleasant, dubious, or not as it should*

be. It carries the latter meaning in the above example.)

If any of these verbs were used as action verbs, they could no longer be followed by an adjective—they would instead be modified by an adverb. For example:

• "I **felt *gently*** around the table in the dark." (Describes the action of feeling with one's hand.)

• "He **looked *quickly*** to the right." (Describes the action of looking in a certain direction.)

• "The car **appeared *out of nowhere***." (Describes the action of coming into sight, using a **prepositional phrase** as an adverb.)

• "Yes, you **heard *right***!" (*Right* in this case is an adverb meaning "accurately or correctly.")

Verbs of progression

Verbs that show progression, growth, or development are also often used as linking verbs. *Become* is a prime example of this kind of verb—it links an adjective that describes a development or progression by the subject. Here are some other verbs that can function as linking verbs in a similar way:

• **get**
• **grow**
• **prove**
• **remain**
• **turn**

As with the sense verbs, these can be followed by an adjective that describes the subject. For example:

• "The crowd **grew *quiet***."

• "The kids are **becoming *restless***."

• "I hope you **get *well*** soon."

• "Try to **remain *upbeat***."

• "Hopefully things don't **turn *ugly***."

These verbs can sometimes be followed by nouns, noun phrases, or pronouns that rename or re-identify the subject, as in:

• "The leader **became *a dictator*** after so many years in power."

• "He'll always **remain *my friend***."

• “They have **proven *valuable allies***.”

Linking verbs vs. action verbs

The verbs *be*, *seem*, and *become* are always used as linking verbs (except when *be* is an **auxiliary verb**, as we looked at already). However, the other linking verbs all have the capacity to behave as action verbs in a sentence. Sometimes it is tricky to know whether a verb is functioning as a linking verb or as an action verb, but there are ways that we can be sure.

Checking the predicate

The predicate of a linking verb is, by definition, an adjective, noun, noun phrase, or pronoun that directly describes, renames, or re-identifies the subject of the clause.

If we want to see if a verb is functioning as a linking verb, we can simply check whether the predicate that follows is describing the subject. If it is, then it is a linking verb; if it is not, then it is functioning as an action verb. For example:

• “He **looked** *unwell yesterday*.” (Linking verb—the predicate *unwell yesterday* describes the subject of the clause, *he*.)
• “He **looked** *quickly to the right*.” (Action verb—the predicate *quickly to the right* describes the action of the verb.)

• “I hope you **get** *better soon*.” (Linking verb—the predicate *better soon* describes the subject of the clause, *you*.)
• “Would you please **get** *a glass of water* for me?” (Action verb—the predicate *a glass of water* is the direct object of the verb.)

Replacing the verb with *be*

If we are still not certain about the kind of verb we’re dealing with, we can also try replacing the verb in question with *be*. Because *be* is only a linking verb when it functions on its own, the resulting sentence will only make sense if the original verb was also a linking verb.

Let’s look at the two sets of examples above, this time replacing the verb in each case with *be*:

• “He **looked** unwell yesterday.”
• “He **was** unwell yesterday.” (The sentence makes sense, so the verb *looked* was a linking verb.)

• “He **looked** *quickly to the right*.”
• “He **was** *quickly to the right*.” (The sentence no longer makes sense, so the verb *looked* was an action verb.)

• “I hope you **get** *better soon*.”
• “I hope you **are** *better soon*.” (The sentence makes sense, so the verb *get* was a linking verb.)

• “Would you please **get** *a glass of water* for me?”
• “Would you please **are** *a glass of water* for me?” (The sentence no longer makes sense, so the verb *get* was an action verb.)

Sources of confusion – Good vs. Well

A common stumbling block for native speakers and learners of English alike is the correct usage of *good* versus *well*.

In most instances, *good* is an attributive adjective directly describing a noun, while *well* is an adverb describing a verb, adjective, or other adverb. For example:

• “He is a *good driver*.”

• “She *writes well*.”

We cannot use *good* and *well* interchangeably in these instances, and we can see immediately that the following would be incorrect:

✖ “He is a **well** driver.”

✖ “She writes **good**.”

However, *well* can also function as a predicative adjective, where it usually means “healthy” or “not ill.” We use it in this sense after linking verbs such as *be, get,* or the sense verbs we looked above:

• “Jenny **looks *well*** lately.”
• “**Get *well*** soon!”

In these examples, *well* does not modify the verbs, but rather describes the subjects of the clauses (implied in the second example).

Good can be used as a predicative adjective as well, meaning “of a high or satisfactory quality.” This can be used after linking verbs to talk about an opinion of something, an emotional state, or general well-being (as opposed to physical health, specifically). For example:

• “The movie **was *good***.” (opinion of the quality of the movie)

• “I’m **feeling *good*** about my chances!” (emotional state)

• “Janet **looks *good*** lately.” (opinion of Janet’s appearance)

• A: “How are you, Bob?” B: “I**’m *good***, thanks!” (general well-being)

The last example is perfectly correct, and it is very frequently used as a stock response to the question “How are you?” You could also say “I’m well,” and no one is likely to take issue with it. However, if someone asks how you are after an illness or injury, for instance, it would be better to respond with “I’m well.”

If saying “I’m good” still does not sound quite right to you, you could also say “I am *doing well*,” in which case *well* is used adverbially once more.

You can learn more about such adjective/adverb oddities in the **irregular adverbs** section of the chapter on **Adverbs**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is described or modified by the predicate of a linking verb?

a) The verb
b) The direct object of the verb
c) The subject of the verb
d) The clause

2. A prepositional phrase that follows a linking verb does which of the following?

a) Acts as an adverb modifying the verb
b) Acts as an adjective modifying the subject
c) Acts as an adjective modifying the direct object of the verb
d) Acts as an adverb modifying the entire clause

3. Which of the following can be the predicate of a linking verb of the **senses**?

a) A predicative adjective
b) A predicate noun
c) An adverb
d) A prepositional phrase

4. Which of the following can be the predicate of a linking verb of **progression**?

a) A predicative adjective
b) A predicate noun
c) An adverb
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) B & C

5. What **kind** of linking verb is used in the following sentence?
“I’m not sure why, but David seems a bit unhappy today.”

a) *To be*
b) Sense verb
c) Verb of progression
d) None of the above

6. If we are unsure whether a verb is an action verb or a linking verb, which **kind** of verb can we use as a subsitute to check?

a) *To be*
b) Sense verb
c) Verb of progression
d) None of the above

Light Verbs

Definition

Light verbs (also known as **delexical verbs, thin verbs, semantically weak verbs**, or **empty verbs**) are verbs that do not carry unique meaning on their own, but instead rely on another word or words that follow them to become meaningful.

Because of this, light verbs can have a great variety of meanings, depending on the word(s) with which they are paired. Sometimes, the meaning of different light verbs can overlap if they share a common **predicate**.

Common examples of light verbs include *do*, *have*, *make*, *get*, *take*, and *give*, though there are others that can work the same way.

Using Light Verbs

Light verbs function by pairing with a word or words (usually, but not always, a noun or noun phrase) to achieve their meaning. The verb itself does not contribute very much meaning to the sentence; rather, we know what is meant by the word it's paired with. For example:

• "***Do*** your **homework**!"

• "We ***did*** some **jumping jacks** to warm up."

• "I hope you ***do*** **well** on your exam."

• "Why don't we ***have*** **something** to eat?"

• "I ***took*** a **shower** before breakfast."

• "She's ***taking*** a **nap** right now."

• "Do you ***take*** **sugar** in your coffee?"

• "***Give*** me a **break**!"

• "***Give*** your father a **kiss** before you go to bed."

• "I ***get*** so many **emails** every day."

• "Let's try to ***get warm*** by the fire."

• "Stop ***making*** such a **fuss**!"

• "Be sure to ***make*** your **bed** after you get up in the morning."

In each of these examples, the verb itself does not describe a specific, unique action. We only know what's happening because of the word or words that are collocated with the verb.

Shared meaning

In some cases, we can even use different light verbs to achieve the same or very similar meaning; this is particularly true for the verbs *have* and *take*. For example:

• "I'm going to ***have*** a **shower**."
• "I'm going to ***take*** a **shower**."

• "OK, everyone, let's ***have*** **lunch**!"
• "OK, everyone, let's ***take*** **lunch**!"

• "She's ***having*** a **nap** right now."
• "She's ***taking*** a **nap** right now."

However, this can also occur with other light verbs. For instance:

• “Be sure to ***take*** a **bow** at the end of the performance.”
• “Be sure to ***make*** a **bow** at the end of the performance.”

• “Will you ***get*** a **photo** of all of us together?”
• “Will you ***take*** a **photo** of all of us together?”

• “Did you ***get*** some **breakfast**?”
• “Did you ***have*** some **breakfast**?”

Full Verbs and Auxiliary Verbs

Most verbs carry a unique semantic meaning of their own, and they do not rely on any additional predicate information to make sense. When contrasted with **light verbs**, these are sometimes known as **full verbs** or **heavy** verbs.

Auxiliary verbs, meanwhile, are similar to light verbs in that they do not carry meaning on their own; however, unlike light verbs, these work with other verbs to create a complete, unique meaning. Auxiliary verbs are used to create different verb **tenses**, to make a verb negative, or to express **modality**—that is, to assert (or deny) possibility, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation, or future intention.

Certain **light verbs** function as full verbs depending on how they are used; likewise, *do* and *have* can function as either auxiliary verbs or light verbs. For example:

• “Let’s ***take*** some lunch to a park.” (full verb, meaning “bring to a place”)
• “Let’s all ***take*** a **break**.” (light verb, reliant on *break* for meaning)

• “I like to ***make*** toy figurines in my spare time.” (full verb, meaning “to create or assemble”)
• “I’m afraid I ***made*** a terrible **mistake** in hiring him.” (light verb, reliant on *mistake* for meaning)

• “***Did*** you see the game last night?” (auxiliary verb, serves to modify the verb *see* to create an interrogative sentence)
• “John ***did*** a few **jobs** for me this summer.” (light verb, dependent on the noun *jobs* for meaning)

• “She ***had*** heard the rumors already.” (auxiliary verb, serves to modify the verb *heard* to create the **past perfect tense**)
• “She ***had*** a **snooze** after lunch.” (light verb, dependent on the noun *snooze* for meaning)

Common Light Verbs

Unfortunately, the only way to become familiar with the various meanings and uses of light verbs is to study them in a dictionary or to come across them in day-to-day speech and writing.

Below, we'll look at some examples using four particularly common light verbs that have a variety of different meanings—*do*, *make*, *get*, and *take*. Each sentence will be accompanied by an explanation of the light verb's meaning.

Do

Do is used for general actions; these actions are dictated by the word or words that follow *do*.

• "You can play if you ***do*** your **homework**." (**finish or complete** your homework)

• "Will you please ***do*** the **dishes**?" (**wash** the dishes)

• "Will you please ***do*** the **washing up**?" (This is a British English expression with the same meaning as "do the dishes.")

• "I hope you ***do*** **well** on your exam." (**perform** well; in this context, **do** relies on an adverb for its meaning)

• "He was always willing to ***do*** someone a **favor**." (**give or perform** a favor)

• "My husband always ***does*** the **cooking**." (**prepare and cook food**)

• "I'm trying to avoid ***doing*** the **ironing**." (**iron** clothes)

• "John, will you ***do*** the **dusting**?" (**clean the dust** from the furniture and around the house)

• "It always falls on me to ***do*** the **housework**." (**clean and tidy up** around the house)

• "She has to ***do*** her **hair** before we go." (**style** her hair)

• "I hope you can continue to ***do*** **business** together." (**engage in or perform** business activities)

Make

As a light verb, *make* carries the general meaning of "create" or "assemble"; the specific meaning comes from what accompanies the verb.

• “I ***made*** many **mistakes** in my exam.” (**commit** errors)

• “Be sure to ***make*** your **bed** after you get up in the morning.” (**put in order or neaten** the sheets, covers, and pillows on one’s bed)

• “After years of fighting, they decided to ***make*** **peace**.” (**achieve, arrange, produce, or attain** a state of peace)

• “My mother is going to ***make*** a **chocolate cake** tonight.” (**prepare and/or bake** a cake)

• “I just need to ***make*** **dinner**.” (**prepare and cook** dinner)

• “I ***made*** **friends** with my new neighbors.” (**earn or acquire** the friendship of the neighbors)

• “You need to ***make*** a **decision**.” (**form or arrive at** a decision)

• “The neighbors ***make*** so much **noise**.” (**create** a lot of noise)

• “He ***made*** an excellent **speech** at his brother’s wedding.” (**orally perform or deliver** a speech)

• “Have you ***made*** any **plans** for the summer yet?” (**form or establish** plans)

• “He called the restaurant and ***made*** a **reservation** for four.” (**arrange or establish** a reservation)

• “You would ***make*** a great **teacher**!” (**be suited for the role of** a teacher)

• “He really ***made*** a good **impression** at the job interview yesterday.” (**achieve or produce** a good impression)

• “I will ***make*** an **exception** this time.” (**allow** an exception)

• “This doesn’t ***make*** any **sense** to me.” (**to be coherent or intelligible**)

• “***Make*** **it** a priority to turn off the gas before you go out.” (**establish** it as a priority)

• “I’m ***making*** a **fortune** in my new job.” (**earn** a large amount of money)

• “It will ***make*** a big **difference** to the house if we paint all the rooms white.” (**create or amount to** a significant difference)

Get

Get is a particularly versatile verb. For example, it can mean any of the following depending on the context: *fetch, obtain, understand, answer, receive, hit, be, become, hear, understand, earn, buy, win, secure, reach/arrive at, cause, convince, open,* or *succeed*.

We are entirely dependent upon what is collocated with *get* to know which meaning it carries:

• “I ***get*** so many **emails** every day.” (**receive** emails)

• “I ***got*** **good grades** on my exams.” (**obtain/earn** good grades)

• “How do you ***get*** to the **station** from here?” (**reach/arrive at** the station)

• “I ***got*** a really **good price** for the car I sold.” (**obtain** a good price)

• “We managed to ***get*** an **excellent deal**.” (**secure** an excellent deal)

• “He didn’t laugh at the joke because he didn’t ***get*** **it**.” (**understand** it (the joke))

• “I didn’t ***get*** the **job** because I didn’t have the right qualifications.” (**succeed in obtaining** the job)

• “**How much** do you ***get*** per month in your new job?” (**earn** what amount?)

• “Did you ***get*** these **shoes** at the new mall?” (**buy** the shoes)

• “She ***got*** a **medal** for coming in first.” (**win/be awarded** a medal)

• “I can’t ***get*** the **children** to go to bed early.” (**convince or force** the children)

• “I finally ***got*** the **computer** to work again after it had crashed.” (**cause** the computer to work)

• “Can you ***get*** the **phone**, please?” (**answer** the phone)

• “My hands are full; could you ***get*** the **door** for me?” (**open** the door)

• “Sorry, I didn’t ***get*** your **name**.” (**hear/understand** your name)

• “I ***got*** really **sick** while I was on vacation, but I’m feeling a lot better now.” (**became** sick)

• “He ***got*** **arrested** for robbing a bank.” (**was** arrested)

• “The bullet ***got*** **him** in the head.” (**hit** him)

Take

As a light verb, *take* broadly means *have, obtain*, or *use*, but it has some other specific meanings in certain circumstances:

• “Let’s all ***take*** a **break**.” (**have** a brief rest)

• “Would you like to ***take*** a **walk**?” (**engage in** a walk)

• “We’ll ***take*** a **taxi** home.” (**use** a taxi to travel)

• “I have to ***take*** the **bus** into town.” (**use** the bus to travel)

• “Don’t forget to ***take*** your **medicine**.” (**ingest** your medicine)

• “He’s ***taking*** an **exam** in the morning.” (**complete** an exam)

• “Will you ***take*** **notes** for me in class today?” (**write** notes)

• “He’s been so sick that we’ve had to ***take*** his **temperature** every hour.” (**obtain** (through measurement) his temperature)

• “It might not work, but I’m willing to ***take*** that **chance**.” (**behave or act** in a risky way)

• “Hey, come here and ***take*** a **look** at this!” (**examine or view** this)

• “We’ll just have to ***take*** your **word** for it.” (**trust in** what you say)

• “She ***took*** a seat near the back.” (**assume occupancy** of a seat)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following do light verbs rely on for their meaning?

a) The subject
b) The predicate
c) The full verb
d) The auxiliary verb

2. Identify the light verb in the following sentence:
“I’m hoping to train with the Olympic squad this summer, but I am not sure they will take me.”

a) hoping
b) train
c) am
d) will
e) take

3. Which of the following is **not** another name for light verbs?

a) delexical verbs
b) hollow verbs
c) empty verbs
d) thin verbs

4. True or False: Sometimes different light verbs can have the same meaning if they have the same predicate.

a) True
b) False

5. Which of the following can be both a **light verb** and an **auxiliary verb**?

a) have
b) get
c) make
d) take

Phrasal Verbs

Definition

Phrasal verbs are verb phrases that have idiomatic meanings—that is, their meaning is not obvious from the individual words that make up the phrase. Because of this, we have to learn what they mean by understanding them in context.

In this section, we'll look at how phrasal verbs are formed and how they are distinct from prepositional verbs, and then look at a list of common phrasal verb examples.

Constructing Phrasal Verbs – Particles vs. Prepositions

Phrasal verbs are made up of a verb + a **preposition** or an adverbial **particle**, and their meaning is uniquely tied to each particular combination.

A particle is very similar to a preposition—in fact, they are almost always identical in appearance. (There are a few words that will only function as particles in verb phrases: *away, back, out, backward, forward, upward,* and *downward*.)

However, particles are used more like adverbs, modifying and uniquely expanding the meaning of the verbs they are paired with. For this reason, particles are sometimes referred to as adverbial particles, or even just adverbs. The key difference between particles and prepositions, however, is that particles do not (and cannot) introduce a **prepositional phrase**, while the preposition in a phrasal verb always will.

Below, we'll look at some examples of phrasal verbs that use particles, prepositions, and combinations of both.

Particle Phrasal Verbs

• "My table *takes up* too much room." (The table occupies too much space.)

Takes up is made up of the verb *take* + *up*. *Up* changes the meaning of the verb, but it does not introduce a prepositional phrase expressing direction, location,

time, or possession—therefore, it is functioning as a particle.

• “Please **look over** the proposal and let me know what you think.” (Please quickly examine the proposal.)

Again, the particle *over* is changing the meaning of the verb *look*, but it is not introducing a prepositional phrase.

Here are some other examples of phrasal verbs formed with particles:

• “I can’t believe that you’re **giving up**!” (I’m surprised that you’re going to stop trying.)

• “There will always be setbacks that we have to **allow for**.” (We always have to consider and be ready for possible setbacks.)

• “We have to wait for the fire to **die down** before we can enter the building.” (We have to wait for the fire to become less intense.)

• “The plane **took off** an hour late.” (The plane rose into the air and began to fly later than scheduled.)

• “She is always **making up** excuses.” (She is always inventing excuses that are not true.)

• “When I am on the bus, I always **give up** my seat to the elderly.” (I vacate my seat and give it to an older passenger.)

Preposition Phrasal Verbs

As we’ve seen, a phrasal verb can be formed from a preposition when that preposition acts as the head of a prepositional phrase, followed immediately by its object. For example:

• “He has been **looking *after*** *his mother*.” (He has been caring for his mother.)

• “I **came *across*** *that old watch* of mine when I was cleaning out the drawers.” (I found my old watch unexpectedly.)

• “Stop **picking *on*** *your brother* like that!” (Stop teasing or harassing your brother in that way.)

We can see that, in each of the above, the phrasal verb is comprised of a verb + a preposition—the preposition always forms a prepositional phrase with the object of the phrasal verb.

Particle-prepositional phrasal verbs

Some phrasal verbs have both a particle and a preposition. These are sometimes known as particle-prepositional phrasal verbs. All three elements—verb, particle, and preposition—act together to form a unique meaning.

For example:

• “She **comes <u>across</u> *as*** *a really confident person*.” (She gives the impression of being confident by the way she acts.)

In this context, *across* functions as a particle, while *as* functions as a preposition, introducing the prepositional phrase *as a really confident person*.

• “You’re going too fast, so I can’t **keep <u>up</u> *with*** *you*.”

The phrasal verb here is made up of the verb *keep* + the particle *up* + the preposition *with*. *Up* changes the meaning of the verb *keep*, while *with* introduces the prepositional phrase *with you*.

Let’s look at some other examples.

• “I’ll make sure that she doesn’t **get <u>away</u> *with*** *her plan*.” (I’ll make sure she is caught and/or punished.)

• “A substitute teacher has been **filling <u>in</u> *for*** *Mr. Davis* all week.” (The substitute teacher is taking the place of Mr. Davis.)

• “I’ve been trying to **cut <u>back</u> *on*** *junk food* lately.” (I’m trying not to eat as much junk food as I had been before.)

Differentiating prepositional and particle verb phrases

Intransitive verbs

Because a preposition in a phrasal verb must always form a prepositional phrase, the phrasal verb must be transitive because it requires a direct object. Therefore, if a phrasal verb is **intransitive**, we can assume that it is formed from a verb and a **particle**. For example:

• “Please don’t **give up**.”

• “I know you want me to lie, but I just wasn’t **brought up** that way.”

• “I hope that my idea **came across** well.”

None of the above phrasal verbs has a direct object, and so each one is

intransitive and a particle phrasal verb.

Transitive verbs

When phrasal verbs are **transitive**, they always take direct objects. This can make it difficult to tell whether a particle or prepositional phrasal verb is being used. However, there is a quick test that we can perform to be sure. First, we substitute a **personal pronoun** for the object of the phrasal verb. If it can be arranged *before* the particle/preposition and still make sense, then a particle is being used; if it has to come after to make sense, then a preposition is being used. Phrasal verbs that can be divided by objects are commonly referred to as being **separable**; those that cannot be divided are known as being **inseparable**.

Let's look at this in one of our previous examples:

• "Please **look over** *the proposal* and let me know what you think."

It might seem as though *over* does in fact introduce a prepositional phrase: *over the proposal*. However, if we substitute the personal pronoun *it* for *the proposal*, we can see that the object can come immediately after the verb:

• "Please **look *it* over** and let me know what you think."

Therefore, *look over* is a particle phrasal verb and is considered separable.

Let's look at another example to see when this **can't** be done:

• "He has been **looking after** *his mother*."

Using the personal pronoun *her* instead of *his mother*, the sentence now reads:

• "He has been **looking after** *her*."

Now let's try rearranging it in the sentence:

✖ "He has been **looking *her* after**." (incorrect)

We can see that the sentence no longer makes sense: the object, *her*, must follow the phrasal verb and form a prepositional phrase to be logically complete. Therefore, *look after* is a prepositional phrasal verb and is inseparable.

Transitive and Intransitive Phrasal Verbs

Finally, some phrasal verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, depending on which idiomatic meaning is being used.

Consider these sets of examples that use the same phrasal verb:

• “I was a bit of a skinny kid, but I **filled out** nicely during high school.” (**Intransitive**, meaning “to become larger or fuller in one’s figure.”)
• “Make sure that you **fill out** the form correctly.” (**Transitive**, meaning “to complete (a document) by providing the required information.”)

• “The two friends **made up** after their bitter argument.” (**Intransitive**, meaning “to reconcile or resolve a quarrel.”)
• “Please stop **making up** excuses.” (**Transitive**, meaning “to fabricate or invent.”)

Prepositional verbs vs. phrasal verbs

Sometimes, a **prepositional verb** may be mistaken for a phrasal verb. Although both combinations appear to be very similar, you can differentiate them by examining their meaning. Prepositional verbs use the literal meanings of verbs, whereas phrasal verbs tend to be idiomatic.

For example, the meaning of the verb *ask* doesn’t change when combined with the preposition *for*; however, it changes dramatically when combined with the particle *out*:

• “Kelly **asked *for*** a raise.” (The literal meaning of *to ask* is *to inquire*. Kelly *inquired* about a raise, making it a prepositional verb.)

• “Kelly **asked *out*** Chad.” (*Ask out* means *to invite someone on a date*, making it an idiomatic phrasal verb.)

We can see this difference even more clearly with a set of examples that use the same verb-preposition pairing:

• “They **sailed *through*** *the waters* with plenty of time to spare.”

• “They **sailed *through*** *their exams* with plenty of time to spare.”

Both examples use the verb *sail* + the preposition *through*. However, because the first sentence uses the **literal** meaning of *sail*, we know it is a prepositional verb —the preposition is merely describing the movement of the verb, without changing the meaning of the verb itself. If, for instance, we change the sentence to “They **sailed *along*** *the coast*,” the meaning of *sail* does not change.

The verb phrase of the second sentence, however, has the **idiomatic** meaning of “to complete with ease and speed.” It can only have this meaning if *sail* and *through* are paired together. Changing the preposition would also completely change the meaning of the verb phrase; therefore, it is functioning as a phrasal

verb in this context.

Recognizing Common Phrasal Verbs

The only way to truly feel comfortable with phrasal verbs is to recognize them in everyday writing and speech, understand their unique meanings, and then begin to use them in the same way in your own writing and speech.

With that in mind, head to the section on **Common Phrasal Verbs** to see an extensive list of examples of common phrasal verbs as they are used in both spoken and written English.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a component of a phrasal verb?

a) verb
b) particle
c) participle
d) preposition

2. What is the primary difference between prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs?

a) Prepositional verbs have a literal meaning; phrasal verbs have an idiomatic meaning.
b) Prepositional verbs have an idiomatic meaning; phrasal verbs have a literal meaning.
c) Prepositional verbs are always transitive; phrasal verbs are always intransitive.
d) Prepositional verbs are always separable; phrasal verbs are always inseparable.

3. What do *prepositions* do that *particles* **cannot** do in phrasal verbs?

a) Come after the object of the verb
b) Create a unique meaning of the verb
c) Make the phrasal verb transitive
d) Introduce a prepositional phrase

4. Identify the **phrasal verb** in the following sentence.
“It appears to me that you have thoroughly mucked up the case again.”

a) appears to
b) have thoroughly
c) mucked up
d) case again

5. Which of the following **can** be separable in a sentence?

a) intransitive phrasal verbs
b) transitive particle phrasal verbs
c) transitive prepositional phrasal verbs
d) particle-prepositional phrasal verbs

Common Phrasal Verbs

Learning common phrasal verbs

As we saw when we looked at how **phrasal verbs** are formed, their meanings tend to be completely idiomatic—you cannot guess what they mean simply by looking at their individual components.

Unfortunately, the only way to learn phrasal verbs is by encountering them in speech and writing, until you become familiar enough with them that you are able to use them yourself.

Below, we'll look at an extensive list of example sentences that use common verbs to create various **phrasal verbs**. The meaning of each phrasal verb will be beside each sentence, but remember: phrasal verbs often have several completely unrelated meanings. It's best to check a reliable dictionary to learn their other meanings.

This is also not by any means an **exhaustive** list—there are several hundred different phrasal verbs in English. For one of the largest dictionaries of idioms and phrasal verbs, go to The Free Dictionary's **Collection of Idioms and Phrases** at idioms.thefreedictionary.com.

Phrasal verbs with *be*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
	To intend to do or be near to	"Hi Johnny, I **was about to**

be about to	doing something in the immediate future	call you.”
be after (someone)	To be hunting, looking for, and/or chasing after (someone)	“The police **are after** a man who robbed a bank yesterday.”
be after (something)	To want (something) from someone	“He’s being so nice to me these days. He **is after** something, for sure.”
be down to	To have an amount of something reduced to a lower or minimal number	“After months of dieting, I **am down to** 190 pounds.” “I **am down to** my last dollar.”
be down to	To be the result of or primarily caused by something	“A large number of diseases **are down to** genetic traits.”
be down with	To be suffering from, as a disease or illness	“I can’t go to work today because I **am down with** the flu.”
be in	To be present in a given location	“I’m afraid Molly **is not in** at the moment.” “I will let you know as soon as the doctor **is in**.”
be into	To like something very much; to be particularly enthusiastic about something	“I**’m really into** this band right now.”
be over	To be finished, ended, or complete	“The worst **is over**. He should start to recover in a few days.” “It**’s over** between us; we can’t see each other anymore.”

be out of	To no longer have something	“Sorry, but we **are out of** coffee at the moment.”
be up	To be at a higher level	“The price of gas **is up** again.”
be up	To be occurring, especially in reference to strange or noteworthy events	“Something **is up**; the staff are all acting strange.”
be up	To be awake and out of bed	“John**’s not up** yet. He’s still sleeping.”
be up against	To meet or contend with difficulties or impediments	“I**’m up against** a lot of competition these days.”
be up to	To be someone’s decision or responsibility	“For now, the planning stage **is up to** you.”
be up to	To be in the midst of doing or planning	“I am going to see what the children **are up to**.”
be up to	To be capable of doing (something) competently	“We’ll have to fire him. He **isn’t up to** the job.”

Phrasal Verbs with *come*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
come across	To find unexpectedly	“I **came across** that old watch of mine when I was cleaning out the drawers.”
come across	To give a certain impression through the way one acts	“She **comes across** as a really confident person.”
	To acquire, especially	“John has been buying some flashy

come into	through inheritance or chance	cars lately. He must have **come into** a bit of money.”
come up with	To think of, develop, or invent	“I’m finding it difficult to **come up with** new ideas.”
come up against	To meet and be forced to deal with some impediment, obstacle, or difficulty	“We’ve **come up against** several political and legal problems.”
come down with	To catch or become infected with, as a virus or disease	“I don’t feel very well today. I think I’ve **come down with** the flu.”
come (a)round	To change one’s mind about and agree to something after some persuasion or time	“Your father doesn’t want you to have a dog, but give him a day or two and I’m sure he’ll **come (a)round**.”
come back to	To be recalled in one’s memory	“I couldn’t remember her name, but after a few minutes it **came back to** me.”

Phrasal Verbs with *get*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
get over	To recover from or feel better about some sad or traumatic event	“I can’t seem to **get over** the death of my cat. I feel sadder as the days go by.”
get over	To believe, understand, or no longer be surprised by something	“I can’t **get over** the way she spoke to me. She has no manners whatsoever.”
get on	To have an easy, friendly relationship with someone; to	“My husband and I **get on** so

	be on good terms with someone	well together.”
get away	To escape, as from trouble, danger, or pursuit	“The police tried to catch the bank robbers but they managed to **get away**.”
get away with	To avoid blame, responsibility, or conviction for some wrongdoing	“The criminal **got away with** the crime. There wasn’t enough evidence to convict him.”
get out of	To find a way of avoiding having to do, confront, or deal with something	“How can I **get out of** this mess I'm in.”
get (a)round to	To find the time to do or complete something that one has been meaning to do	“I still haven’t **gotten (a)round to** fixing the broken shutter.”
get back	To return, usually home	“What time did you **get back** last night?”
get rid of	To dispose of something that is no longer needed or wanted	“I want to **get rid of** that old mattress.”
get through to	To make contact with someone, especially by phone	“I can’t **get through to** Sally. Her phone has been busy all morning.”
get through to	To make someone understand or comprehend something	“It is difficult to **get through to** him—he never listens to a word you say.”
get through to	To advance to a higher stage in a competition	“We won in overtime and managed to **get through to** the finals.”

Phrasal Verbs with *give*

Phrasal		

Verb	Definition	Example sentence
give away	To donate something; to bestow something upon someone	“He’s a generous man. He **gives away** half of his salary to charity each month.”
give away	To present the bride to the groom, traditionally by the bride’s father	“In some countries, it is the custom for the father of the bride to **give** his daughter **away** at the wedding.”
give back	To return something to someone	“Can you **give back** that book I lent you?”
give in (to something)	To surrender (to) or stop resisting (something)	“No matter how much they try to get you to accept a lower offer, don’t **give in**.” “If you are on a diet, it's hard not to **give in to** temptation.”
give in	To collapse	“The floor **gave in** after the flood.”
give out	To distribute to others	“Can you **give out** these books to the rest of the class please?”
give up	To relinquish one’s position to someone else	“When I am on the bus, I rarely see anyone **give up** their seat to the elderly.”
give up	To stop doing something, often permanently	“The doctor has told me to **give up** smoking.”
give up	To abandon	“After searching for hours on end, the mountain rescue team finally **gave up** all hope of finding the missing hikers.

Phrasal Verbs with *look*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
look into	To investigate	“The police are **looking into** reports of a robbery last night.”
look up	To find or seek information, as from a list or some reference source	“Can you **look up** John’s phone number for me please?”
look forward to	To anticipate with pleasure or excitement	“I am **looking forward to** seeing my family again after six months of living abroad.”
look out	To pay attention to or be careful of something, especially danger	“**Look out**, there’s a car coming!”
look after	To take care of or be responsible for someone or something	“Can you **look after** my cat while I’m away?”
look down on	To regard as inferior	“My neighbors **look down on** us because we have less money.”
look on	To observe as a spectator	“The crowd **looked on** as the firemen tried to put out the fire.”
look over	To examine or inspect	“He carefully **looked over** the contract before signing it.”
look up to	To admire and respect	“She really **looks up to** her boss. He has taught her many things.”

Phrasal Verbs with *break*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
break down	To stop functioning	“My car **broke down** on the highway today.”
break down	To become very emotionally upset; to begin crying	“She **broke down** when she was told her cat had died.”
break up	To end a romantic relationship	“Have you heard the news? Sally and John **broke up**.”
break into	To force entry	“Burglars **broke into** my house last night.”
break away from	To become free from some restriction or restraint	“The police caught one of the burglars, but he managed to **break away from** them.”
break out	To escape from some confinement or imprisonment	“The other burglar was put in prison, but he managed to **break out**.”
break out	To appear or begin suddenly and spread quickly	“An epidemic of flu has **broken out**.”
break out in	To have a large amount of something, usually a skin condition, appear suddenly and spread quickly	“My face has **broken out in** pimples, and I look terrible.”
break even	To achieve a result with no loss or gain in profit	“The company **broke even** this year.”

Phrasal Verbs with *pick*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
	To go and collect someone or	“Can you **pick up** the children

pick up	something, especially by car	after school?”
pick up	To receive, as a radio signal	“My cell phone never **picks up** a signal when I’m in the house.”
pick up	To attempt to find or become acquainted with someone for romantic or sexual purposes	“He always wants to go **pick up** girls at bars.”
pick on	To deliberately harass or tease someone	“You’re always **picking on** me, and I wish you would stop.”
pick on	To select or choose someone	“The teacher always **picks on** Jane. She never gives the other students a chance to answer.”

Phrasal Verbs with *put*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
put out	To extinguish something, such as a flame	“We have to **put out** the fire before it spreads to the rest of the house.”
put out	To put an animal outside the house	“Would you **put** the cat **out** for a while?”
put (someone/oneself) out	To inconvenience someone or oneself on someone else’s behalf	“It would be great if you could do this for me, but don’t **put** yourself **out**.”
put (someone) up	To host (someone) in one’s house	“I can **put** you **up** for the weekend, but no longer than that.”
put up with	To tolerate	“He couldn’t **put up with** her any longer.”
put up with	To make something	“They’ve **put up** their house for

	available to be sold	sale.”
put in	To spend or invest, especially time	“He **puts in** 12 hours at work every day.”
put off	To delay doing or commencing something	“See if you can **put** the meeting **off** for an hour. We still need more time.”
put (someone) off	To make someone uninterested in or disinclined to do something	“The sight of the octopus really **put** me **off** my food.”
put aside/away	To save for future use	“I’ve **put away/aside** enough money to retire early.”
put aside for	To reserve something for someone until a later time	“Could you **put** this blouse **aside for** me.”
put through to	To connect someone with another person, usually via telephone	“Could you **put** me **through to** the manager please?”
put through	To subject someone to something unpleasant or undesirable	“This job has **put** me **through** so much already.”
put away	To store in or return to the proper location	“Can you please **put away** all those books lying around?”
put down	To mock, belittle, or make to appear foolish	“She’s always **putting** her boyfriend **down**.”
put down	To euthanize an animal	“Our poor cat is so old that we have to have him **put down**.”
put on	To add to or increase the amount of	“I’ve **put on** a lot of weight recently.”

put on	To pretend or act	“He seems angry, but I know he’s just **putting** it **on**.”
put (someone) on	To deceive or tease someone	“I really thought I had won the prize. I can’t believe he was **putting** me **on** the whole time!”
put down	To pass a telephone to someone	“Give me one second, and I’ll **put** him **on**.”

Phrasal Verbs with *run*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
run into	To encounter someone by chance	“I **ran into** an old friend of mine yesterday while I was out shopping.”
run out of	To exhaust the supply of something	“We’ve **run out of** coffee again. Could you get some on your way home?”
run up	To accrue or accumulate, especially indebtedness	“He **ran up** a huge bill at dinner.”
run away with	To hurriedly leave with someone else, as to elope	“His husband **ran away with** the secretary.”
run over	To hit someone or something with a vehicle, usually a car	“He’s still very upset after **running over** the cat last night.”
run through	To quickly discuss, summarize, or outline	“OK, can we just **run through** the main points again?”
run to	To immediately seek assistance from someone	“He always **runs to** his mother whenever he’s in trouble.”

run on	To be powered by	“Those new cars **run on** electricity, but they are so expensive.”
run up against	To encounter an obstacle, difficulty, or problem	“The company **ran up against** some problems initially, but now things are operating smoothly.”

Phrasal Verbs with *take*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
take up	To begin, especially a hobby or pastime	“I’m thinking of **taking up** a new hobby.”
take up	To occupy, such as space or time	“I’m going to buy a smaller table. This **takes up** too much room.”
take up	Of clothes, to shorten or tighten	“My new pants are too long for me. I’m going to have to them **taken up** a bit.”
take to	To have a newfound liking or appreciation for	“The boss has really **taken to** the new intern.”
take out	To obtain a legal agreement, such as insurance or a financial loan	“I’ve **taken out** an insurance policy on my house.”
take over	To obtain control of	“The company has been **taken over** by a Spanish corporation.”
take off	To leave the ground and begin flight	“You’ve just missed the plane: it **took off** a few minutes ago.”
take off	To remove an article of clothing	“**Take off** your jacket. It’s hot in here.”
	To become successful or	“Business has really **taken off** this

take off	popular	year.”
take off	To not go to work or school for a certain period of time	“I’m really tired. I’m going to **take** a day **off** tomorrow.”
takes after	To be similar in character or appearance to a close relative	“He **takes after** his father in his love of tennis.”
take back	To return something to the place where it was purchased	“My new cell phone doesn’t work. I’m going to **take** it **back** tomorrow and ask for a refund.”
take on	To recruit or employ	“Why don’t you apply for a job at the new phone company? They are **taking on** new staff.”
take on	To agree or commit to doing something	“I’ve **taken on** too much work. How will I ever find the time to finish it all?”
take in	To give shelter and/or assistance	“She’s a very kind person. She always **takes in** stray dogs that she finds in the street.”

As we said already, there are hundreds of different phrasal verbs in English. If you would like to learn more about the different meanings of phrasal verbs, as well as some interesting idioms and proverbs, go to The Free Dictionary’s **Collection of Idioms and Phrases** at idioms.thefreedictionary.com.

Conditional Verbs

Definition

Conditional verbs are constructions of verbs that are used in **conditional sentences**. Conditional sentences express something that might happen, depending on whether or not a particular condition is met. The word *if* is commonly used with one of the verbs to denote such a condition in conditional

sentences.

Here are some examples of conditional verbs being used in sentences.

• “The leaves **will fall** if the wind **blows**.”

• “If you **drive** on this road for 20 miles, you **will reach** your destination.”

• “If only the striker **had shot** the ball earlier, he **would have scored** a goal.”

• “If you **do** your chores, you **can have** an ice cream cone later.”

• “You **can get** a good grade if you **study** very hard.”

Constructing conditional verbs

Conditional verbs are typically formed when a clause in the sentence contains the word *if*, and the action of the sentence depends on the condition established by this clause. **Modal auxiliary verbs** (such as *can, will, would, shall, should,* and *could*) are often used to help indicate the tense and intention of the verbs in the conditional or resulting clause(s). For example

• “If you **see** the desert, it ***could*** **mean** that you ***have*** **gone** too far.

• “If you **see** her, you ***can*** **tell** her I **said** ‘Hello.’”

• “If I ***could*** **be** anyone in history, I ***would*** **be** Leonardo da Vinci.”

Tenses

Conditional verbs can be in the past, present, or future tense. Which tense they take depends on whether the sentence is referring to a condition or possible result in the past, the present, or the future. Conditional sentences often feature a mix of tenses depending on the relationship between the condition and the result.

Past tense

The past tense is used for conditional verbs when the sentence refers to an action or event that might have happened in the past depending on a hypothetical past condition. For example:

• “She **would have succeeded** if she **had tried** harder.”

• “The cake **would have been** ready if the baker **had hurried** up a little bit more.”

Present simple tense

A conditional sentence that is only in the present simple tense refers to something that always happens when a condition is met. For example:

• “The television **turns** on if you **press** the power button.”

• “The car **moves** faster if you **press** the pedal down harder.”

Future tense

The future tense is used to describe hypothetical future results. It is often used with conditions in the present tense to describe what might happen. For example:

• “If our team wins the World Series, it **will be** amazing.”

• “The sheep **will escape** if the fence is left unlocked.”

Types of Conditionals

There are different types of conditionals that express a range of hypothetical information depending on the combination of verb tenses used in the conditional sentence.

Zero conditional

The zero conditional refers to conditional sentences in which the “if clause” and the main clause both contain conditional verbs that are in the simple present tense. It is used to talk about facts that are always true.

First conditional

First conditional sentences contain a conditional verb in the simple present tense in the “if clause,” and a future tense verb preceded by the auxiliary verb *will* in the main clause. First conditional sentences explain a hypothetical result in the future depending on a non-real condition in the present.

Second conditional

Second conditional sentences include a simple past tense verb in the “if clause” and a future tense verb in the main clause, preceded by the auxiliary verb *would*. These sentences refer to things that would happen in the future if something else happens.

Third conditional

Third conditional sentences have a past perfect verb in the “if clause” and have a past participle verb in the main clause, preceded by the auxiliary verbs *would have*. Third conditional sentences describe a hypothetical situation or condition in the past that might have led to a different outcome in the present.

If you want to learn more about these types of sentences, see the **Conditional Sentences** section in the chapter on **Sentences**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which word in the following sentence is a conditional verb?
“If clouds form on the horizon, it will likely rain.”

a) likely
b) If
c) form
d) will
e) rain
f) A, B, & C
g) C, D, & E

2. The conditional verbs in the following sentence are in which tense?
“The pie will taste delicious if you make it properly.”

a) past
b) present
c) future
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) None of the above

3. Which set of conditional verbs is in the past tense?

a) had played
b) will run
c) is walking
d) will drive

4. Which word in the following sentence is **not** a conditional verb?
“The band will have played for three hours if it plays for another 20 minutes.”

a) will
b) if
c) have
d) played

5. Identify the conditional verbs in the following sentence.
“If everything goes according to plan, the group will arrive on Tuesday.”

a) everything, goes, plan
b) goes, then, will
c) according, will, arrive,
d) goes, will, arrive

Causative Verbs

Definition

Causative verbs indicate that a person, place, or thing is causing an action or an event to happen. Causative verbs are followed by a noun or pronoun and a non-causative verb in either the infinitive or base form; these non-causative verbs describe the action that the subject has caused to happen.

Examples of causative verbs include the words ***enable, cause, have, force, let, keep, hold, got*** and ***require***. Here are some examples of causative verbs being used in sentences.

• “He **let** his dog run through the field.”

• “You **got** to go to the basketball game last night?”

• “The bigger house **enabled** the family to have more room for their belongings.”

• “The new dress code **forced** the students to wear different shoes.”

• “The landlord **kept** his property to rent out to many different tenants.”

Tense

Because the non-causative verb is always in the infinitive form, the tense of the sentence depends on the conjugation of the causative verb. Causative verbs can

take the **past**, **present**, or **future tense**. Here are some examples of each:

Past

• “The woman **caused** the accident to occur by driving carelessly.”

• “The law **required** a person to obtain a permit before hunting on public land.”

Present

• “The store **holds** certain items on layaway to sell to particular customers at a later date.”

• “They **get** a tax break on any purchases related to the business.”

Future

• “The manager of the store **will *force*** her employees to work shorter hours in order to cut costs.”

• “They **will *allow*** the company to install more solar panels on their roof.”

Causative verbs with other verbs in the sentence

As previously mentioned, the non-causative verbs that follow causative verbs explain the action that is being caused in the sentence. Depending on the causative verb that’s used, these non-causative verbs will either be in the infinitive or base form of the verb, or, in certain circumstances, the past participle form.

Infinitives

Infinitives are base-form verbs that are preceded by the **particle** *to*—for example, *to run, to see, to climb,* etc. The majority of causative verbs are paired with infinitives to complete their meaning, as in:

• “He **forced** himself *to train* harder.”

• “The woman **holds on** to her past memories *to remember* all the good times she had.”

• “The government is **requiring** all citizens *to carry* identification at all times.”

Base form

Base-form verbs appear exactly as they would in the infinitive, except they are not preceded by the word *to*—they are not conjugated for tense in any way. Only three causative verbs pair with the base form of the verb instead of an infinitive: ***have, make***, and ***let***. For example:

• "They **let** the light *stay* on until morning."

• "Albert **made** people *remove* their shoes when entering his house."

• "She **had** him *prepare* lots of finger foods before the guests arrived."

There is an exception to these, however: when we use the **passive voice** with *make*, it will take the infinitive rather than the base form, as in:

• "I'm sorry, but I **was made** *to report* my suspicions to police."

• "Employees **are often made** *to feel* responsible for the company's financial woes."

Past participles

Uniquely, the causative verbs *have* and *get* are also able to take the **past participle** of non-causative verbs if they themselves are in the past tense. For example:

• "My mother **had** the car *cleaned* after our soccer practice."

• "John's drinking problem finally **got** him *fired*."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is a causative verb?

a) climb
b) enable
c) manage
d) face

2. Identify the causative verb in the following sentence:
"They kept their snowblower to use whenever it snowed outside."

a) snowed
b) whenever

c) to use
d) kept

3. Which of the following is **not** a causative verb?

a) bounce
b) have
c) let
d) force

4. The causative verb in this sentence is in what tense?
“The couple forced themselves to save money so they could buy their dream home.”

a) base
b) present
b) past
d) future

5. True or false: Causative verbs require another verb in a sentence?

a) true
b) false

Factitive Verbs

Definition

Factitive verbs are used to indicate the resulting condition or state (known as the **object complement**) of a person, place, or thing (the **direct object**) caused by the action of the verb. Examples of factitive verbs include *elect, appoint, make, choose, deem, assign, name, select, judge,* and *designate*. Here are some examples of factitive verbs used in sentences:

• “The populace **elected** him president of the United States.”

• “The committee **named** Mr. Fuller chairman of the board.”

• “The jury **judged** the defendant not guilty.”

• “She **deemed** him a person of high quality.”

• “The group **designated** Marshall leader from then on.”

• “The coach **made** Timothy point guard.”

Direct Objects and Object Complements

Factitive verbs have both direct objects and object complements. Direct objects are phrases, clauses, nouns, and pronouns that directly receive the action of the verb.

Object complements are adjectives, nouns, or pronouns that follow direct objects in order to indicate what the direct object's new state is. In other words, object complements reveal what the direct object has become.

Factitive verbs always indicate that the direct object has been changed or placed into a new condition, state, or category as indicated by the object complement.

To understand this concept, consider the following sentence:

• “The company **appointed** *the most experienced employee* manager.”

In this sentence, *appointed* is the factitive verb, *the most experienced employee* is the direct object, and *manager* is the object complement. *Appointed* is a factitive verb because it indicates that someone is having his or her status changed. *The most experienced employee* is the direct object because he or she is receiving the action of the verb, while *manager* is the object complement because it indicates what the direct object has become.

Here is another example:

• “The team **made** *the star quarterback* the new captain.”

In this sentence, *made* is a factitive verb acting directly upon *the star quarterback*, its direct object. *The new captain* is the object complement, indicating what *the star quarterback* was designated as.

Role in sentences

Factitive verbs serve the purpose of helping to answer the question of how a person, place, or thing was changed. For example, consider the following sentence, which does not have a factitive verb:

✖ “The school hired Mrs. McMillian principal.”

In this sentence, the verb *hired* is not sufficient to convey all of the intended information. However, the following sentence uses a factitive verb to make it

clear:

✔ “The school **appointed** Mrs. McMillian principal.”

By changing *hired* to the factitive verb *appointed*, it becomes clear that *Mrs. McMillian* (the direct object) was made principal. Thus, the factitive verb *appointed* successfully serves its role in the sentence. Here are two more comparisons of sentences to illustrate this concept:

✖ “The organization **brought in** Brad Ryan chief executive officer.” (non-factitive)

✔ “The organization **named** Brad Ryan chief executive officer.” (factitive)

The addition of a factitive verb reveals the status or characteristic being given to someone or something. In this case, *Brad Ryan* is being given the status of *chief executive officer*. The non-factitive verb **brought in** does not indicate this change at all, so the meaning of the sentence becomes incomplete or obscure.

✖ “The builder **constructed** the house more modern.” (non-factitive)

✔ “The builder **made** the house more modern.” (factitive)

Once again, the non-factitive verb *constructed* describes a straightforward action, and so is unsuited to indicating a categorical change in something. By using *made*, we can clearly see the intended relationship between the direct object, *house*, and the object complement, *more modern*.

Difference from linking and causative verbs

Factitive verbs are similar to linking and causative verbs. However, there are some important differences.

Linking verbs

Linking verbs link a subject to a noun or adjective that describes it. Linking verbs include words such as *appear, seem,* and *become*, as well as various forms of *be*. For example:

• “She **appears** cold.”

• “He **is** a very tall man.”

• “The group **seems** interested in the discussion”

Linking verbs and factitive verbs both tie a subject to another part of speech that provides more information about it. However, unlike factitive verbs, linking verbs do not reveal that a person, place, or thing is being made, named, or deemed something else. Instead, they only add information about the subject as it already exists.

Causative verbs

Causative verbs require that another action be mentioned in the sentence, thus forcing the sentence to have at least one other verb. *Enable, cause, have, force, let, keep, hold, and require* are all examples of causative verbs. Here are some examples of causative verbs being used in sentences:

• "She was **required** *to bring* a pen and paper to her physics class."

• "His mom **let** him *go sledding* on his snow day."

• "The parents **forced** their child *to tie* his shoes."

Like linking verbs, causative verbs also tie a subject to other parts of the sentence that reveal more about the subject. In this way, they serve a similar function to factitive verbs. However, unlike factitive verbs, causative verbs simply cause another action to be described in the sentence. They do not describe a change in the subject's category, status, or characteristics like factitive verbs do.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is **not** a factitive verb?

a) elect
b) assign
c) jump
d) appoint

2. Identify the factitive verb in the following sentence:
"The board of trustees met on Friday and appointed Ralph leader."

a) leader
b) met
c) trustees
d) appointed

3. What is the direct object of the factitive verb in the following sentence?
“Americans elected Abraham Lincoln president in the year 1860.”

a) Abraham Lincoln
b) Americans
c) president
d) the year 1860

4. Which of the following words is a factitive verb?

a) be
b) designate
c) swim
d) sing

5. In what way are linking verbs different from factitive verbs?

a) Linking verbs reveal an action.
b) Linking verbs sometimes take an object complement.
c) Linking verbs do not reveal that a person, place, or thing is being made or deemed something else.
d) Linking verbs link a subject to another part of the sentence.

Reflexive Verbs

Definition

Reflexive verbs are verbs whose subjects are also their direct objects—that is, the action of the verb is both committed and received by the same person or thing. Reflexive verbs are sometimes identified as being in the “**middle voice**” (as opposed to the **active voice** or the **passive voice**).

Identifying reflexive verbs

Verbs with reflexive pronouns

Reflexive verbs can most easily be identified by the use of **reflexive pronouns**, which are used as the direct object and refer back to the subject of the sentence.

For example:

• “I accidentally **burned *myself*** with the hairdryer.” (*Myself* refers to the subject, *I*.)

• “The baby is **smiling at *herself*** in the mirror.” (*Herself* refers to the subject, *the baby*.)

• “The problem seems to have **worked *itself* out** in the end.” (*Itself* refers to the subject, *the problem*.)

When the same verb is paired with an object that is **not** a reflexive pronoun, then the verb is no longer considered reflexive.

For example, consider how the first two examples change if we use non-reflexive pronouns:

• “I accidentally **burned *him**** with the hairdryer.” (*Him* refers to a second person who is not the subject, *I*.)

• “The baby is **smiling at *her*** in the mirror.” (*Her* refers to a second person who is not the subject, *the baby*.)

(*When the subject is *I*, we might be tempted to use the personal pronoun *me*, as in, “I accidentally **burned *me*** with the hairdryer,” but this is grammatically incorrect.)

In the third example, it would not make sense to use a different pronoun because the subject, *the problem*, is inanimate and cannot have agency over a separate direct object.

Reflexive verbs with implied objects

Certain reflexive verbs can also have reflexive pronouns as direct objects that are implied and therefore omitted from the sentence. For example:

• “My father is **shaving** in the bathroom.” (with the reflexive pronoun *himself* implied)

• “She always **stretches** before doing yoga.” (with the reflexive pronoun *herself* implied)

• “Children, please **keep** quiet!” (with the reflexive the pronoun *yourselves* implied)

Intransitive verbs in the “middle” voice

While the majority of reflexive verbs are **transitive**, with reflexive pronouns as their objects, certain **intransitive verbs** can be used to modify a subject (usually an inanimate object) that is also the receiver of the action. In the middle voice, this type of verb does **not** take a reflexive pronoun (or any direct object). For example:

• "*My sister's lunch* **is cooking** on the stove." (*Cook* is an intransitive verb indicating **what** is being cooked.)

• "*This car* **doesn't drive** smoothly anymore." (*Drive* is an intransitive verb indicating **what** is being driven.)

• "*Her engagement ring* **broke** in half." (*Break* is an intransitive verb indicating **what** is being broken.)

We can see that the subjects of these examples (*my sister's lunch*, *this car,* and *her engagement ring*) are also the recipients of the action in each sentence, even though the verbs are intransitive and do not take direct objects.

Changes in meaning with reflexive verbs

Most of the time, a verb's meaning is not inherently different when it becomes reflexive. However, there are some instances in which reflexive verbs have slightly different meanings from standard transitive verbs. For example:

• "He decided to **apply *himself*** to the work at hand." (reflexive verb, meaning "to engage in something with great diligence and persistence")
• "She **applied *pressure*** to the wound." (non-reflexive verb, meaning "to bring into contact with")

• "They **found *themselves*** without a leader." (reflexive verb, meaning "to perceive oneself to be in a specific place or condition")
• "We **found *the solution*** we were looking for." (non-reflexive verb, meaning "to come upon, discover, or ascertain")

• "Please, **help *yourself*** to the food." (reflexive verb, meaning "to serve or provide oneself with")
• "Please **help *your brother*** with his homework." (non-reflexive verb, meaning "to give assistance to")

We must be careful whenever we make a verb reflexive, as there is no rule to know when or if a verb's meaning might be altered.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following distinguishes **reflexive verbs** from non-reflexive verbs?

a) They do not take a direct object
b) The agents of their action are also the recipients of their action
c) The agents of their action are implied in a sentence
d) They are always transitive

2. Which of the following is the **most obvious** indication that a verb is reflexive?

a) It has a possessive personal pronoun as a direct object
b) It is intransitive but in the middle voice
c) The direct object is implied and omitted
d) The direct object is a reflexive pronoun

3. Which of the following determines whether a verb's meaning will change when it is used reflexively?

a) If a reflexive pronoun is the only direct object possible
b) If the verb is used intransitively in the middle voice
c) If the reflexive pronoun is implied and omitted
d) There is no rule that determines if its meaning will change

4. Which of the following sentences uses a reflexive verb?

a) "I don't know why, but I love washing in the river when we're camping."
b) "My brother never stops helping others."
c) "The kids are all out swimming today."
d) "Paul seems fine, but John said he hurt him during football practice."

Adjectives

Definition

Adjectives are used almost exclusively to modify nouns, as well as any phrase or part of speech functioning as a noun. For example:

• "John wears **red** *glasses*." (*Red* modifies the noun *glasses*.)

• “A **loud** *group of students* passed by.” (*Loud* modifies the noun phrase *group of students*.)

• “**Excellent** *writing* is required for this job.” (*Excellent* modifies the **gerund** *writing*.)

Attributive vs. Predicative Adjectives

Adjectives are broken down into two basic syntactic categories: attributive and predicative.

Adjectives that appear directly before (or sometimes directly after) the noun or pronoun they modify are known as **attributive adjectives**. These can appear anywhere in a sentence, and can modify parts of either **the subject** or **the predicate**.

Predicative adjectives, on the other hand, always appear after the noun they modify, connected to it by a **linking verb**. They are one of the three types of **subject complements**, and they are always part of **the predicate**—hence their name.

Let’s compare two examples to highlight this difference:

• “The **black** *dog* is barking.”

In this sentence, **black** is an **attributive adjective**. It is part of the noun phrase and is not connected to the noun *dog* by a linking verb. Now let’s look at a *predicative adjective*:

• “The *dog* was **black**.”

In this sentence, **black** is a *predicative adjective*. It follows *dog*, the noun that it modifies, and is connected to it by the linking verb *was*.

Modifying pronouns

While adjectives usually modify nouns, they can also modify **pronouns**. This most commonly occurs when adjectives are **predicative**. For example:

• “*That* was **great**!”

• “*She* is very **nice**.”

• “A *few* were **late**.”

Attributive adjectives can also modify **indefinite pronouns**, as in:

• “A **happy** *few* were able to attend the show.”

• “They were the **lucky** *ones*.”

In informal speech or writing, it is not uncommon to modify **personal pronouns** attributively, as in:

• “Wow, **lucky** *you*!”

• “**Silly** *me*, I forgot to turn on the oven.”

However, avoid using attributive adjectives with personal pronouns in anything other than casual conversation or writing.

Other categories of adjectives

There is a huge variety of adjectives in English. While many words are inherently adjectival, such as colors (*red, black, yellow,* etc.) or characteristics (*strong, weak, nice,* etc.), there are also several categories of adjectives that are formed from other sources. The table below gives a brief breakdown of these different categories of adjectives, along with some examples of how they are used in a sentence. Go to each individual section to learn more.

Category of Adjective	Definition	Example adjectives	Example sentence
Proper Adjectives	Formed from **proper nouns** to create descriptive words.	*Italian, Shakespearean, Alaskan, Middle Eastern, Nordic*	“He writes in a **Shakespearean** style.”
Compound Adjectives	Created from two or more words that work together to modify the same noun; they are often joined with one or more **hyphens**.	*top-right, last-minute, sugar-free, record-breaking, expensive-looking*	“I know this is a **last-minute** suggestion, but it’s a good idea.”
Demonstrative Adjectives (or **Demonstrative Determiners**)	Used to specify what we are referring to and whether it is singular or plural, and to give more information about its	*this, that, these, those*	“**These** cups are very pretty.”

	proximity to the speaker.		
Interrogative Adjectives (or **Interrogative Determiners**)	Usually used to ask questions about something.	*what, which, whose*	"**Whose** computer is this?"
Nominal Adjectives	Adjectives that perform the function of a **noun** in a sentence. They are preceded by the word *the* and can be found as the **subject** or the **object** of a sentence or clause.	*the best, the strongest, the blue*	"He wants the red car, but I want **the blue**."
Collective Adjectives	A subgroup of **nominal adjectives**, used to refer to a group of people based on a shared characteristic.	*the rich, the poor, the innocent, the French, the Americans, the Dutch*	"**The rich** should help **the poor**."

Adjective Phrases and Clauses

In addition to the single-word adjectives we looked at above, we can also use **adjective phrases** and **relative clauses** (also called **adjective clauses**) to modify nouns. We'll look at both briefly below, but to learn more about how they are formed and used, go to their respective sections in this chapter.

Adjective Phrases

An **adjective phrase** is an adjective and any additional information linked to it that work together to describe a noun or pronoun in a sentence. This additional information can include **determiners** or adverbial **modifiers**.

The adjective around which an adjective phrase is formed is known as the **head word** or **head adjective** of the phrase.

Adjective phrases can be either attributive (appearing before the nouns they modify) or predicative (appearing after a linking verb)

For example:

• “You have **a beautiful** voice.” (head word *beautiful* plus the determiner *a*)

• “He is **a very good** swimmer.” (head word *good* plus the determiner *a* and the adverb *very*)

• “The helicopters are **controlled remotely**.” (head word *controlled* plus the adverb *remotely*)

• “I am **perfectly content on my own**.” (head word *content* plus the adverb *perfectly* and the adverbial prepositional phrase *on my own*)

• “They felt **relieved to return home**.” (head word *relieved* plus the adverbial infinitive phrase *to return home*)

Note that prepositional phrases can also function as adjectives. These are considered ***adjectival* phrases** rather than true ***adjective* phrases**, because there is not a head adjective at the root of the phrase. Adjectival prepositional phrases always appear directly after the noun they modify.

For example:

• “The cat **on the shed** was old.” (modifies the noun *cat*)

• “Please hand me that book **over there**.” (modifies the noun *book*)

Relative Clauses (Adjective Clauses)

Relative clauses (also known as **adjective** or **adjectival clauses**) are **dependent clauses** that provide descriptive information about a noun or noun phrase. If the information it presents is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it is known as a **restrictive clause**; if it is extra information that is not essential, it is known as a **non-restrictive clause**.

Relative clauses are introduced by either a **relative pronoun** or, less commonly, a **relative adverb**. Unlike attributive adjectives, they always appear directly after the noun they modify.

For example:

• “There’s the woman ***who* always sits next to me on the bus**.” (restrictive clause introduced by the relative pronoun *who*, modifying *woman*)

• “The book ***that* I wrote** is being published in January.” (restrictive clause introduced by the relative pronoun *that*, modifying *book*)

• “The escaped giraffe, **which had been on the loose for weeks**, was finally captured.” (non-restrictive clause introduced by the relative pronoun *which*,

modifying *giraffe*)

• “The house **where I was born** is a very special place.” (restrictive clause introduced by the relative pronoun *where*, modifying *house*)

• “I love casual Fridays, **when we get to wear jeans to work**.” (non-restrictive clause introduced by the relative adverb *when*, modifying *casual Fridays*)

Order of adjectives

We often use multiple adjectives to modify the same noun or pronoun. Note that these are **not** compound adjectives or adjective phrases, but rather individual adjectives that work independently to modify the same word.

To avoid unnatural-sounding sentences when we use more than one adjective in this way, we put them in a specific **order** according to the type of description they provide. This is known as the **order of adjectives**:

1. Opinion (*good, bad, strange, lovely*)
2. Measurement (*big, small, tiny, huge*)
3. Shape (*curved, straight, round, square*)
4. Condition (*wet, dry, clean, sad, happy*)
5. Age (*old, young, new, ancient*)
6. Color (*red, yellowish, transparent, blue*)
7. Pattern (*checked, striped, plaid, flowered*)
8. Origin (*American, British, eastern, western*)
9. Material (*wooden, plastic, steel, cloth*)
10. Purpose (*sleeping, shopping, work, gardening*)

While we would almost never use a sentence with so many adjectives in a row, it’s very common to use two or three. In this case, we generally must follow the order above, as in:

• “I bought an **enormous rectangular Turkish** *rug* on my vacation.”

• “It is a **long, heavy** table.”

Note that in some circumstances we separate adjectives with commas and/or the coordinating conjunction *and*, while in other cases we use them without any separation at all. To learn more about the rules that determine this, go to the section on the **Order of Adjectives** later in this chapter.

Degrees of comparison

We can also use adjectives to create comparisons between two or more people or things, or to identify someone or something with the highest (or lowest) degree of some quality. To do this, we **inflect** (change the form of) the adjective to create **comparative adjectives** or **superlative adjectives**. For example:

• "*I* am **strong**." (basic adjective)

• "*John* is **stronger** than I am." (comparative adjective)

• "*Janet* is the **strongest** of us all." (superlative adjective)

This process of changing an adjective's form is known as the **Degrees of Comparison**; go to that section in this chapter to learn more.

Adjectives and Determiners

Adjectives and **determiners** both provide extra information about a noun (or pronoun). But while adjectives provide descriptive, modifying information about a noun, determiners are used to introduce and specify a noun.

The most common determiners are the articles *the* and *a/an*. These indicate whether a noun is specific or general (i.e., *the book* vs. *a book*). Numbers can also act as determiners, as in *three books, 10 books, 1000 books,* etc.

However, there are a number of categories of adjectives that are also considered to be types of determiners—they share the features of both. These are:

• **demonstrative adjectives** (*this, that, these, those*—also called **demonstrative determiners**);

• **possessive adjectives** (*my, his, your, our*—also called **possessive determiners**);

• **interrogative adjectives** (*what, which, whose*—also called **interrogative determiners**);

• **distributive determiners** (*each, every, either*—also called **distributive adjectives**;

• **quantifiers** (*many, much, several, little*).

Demonstratives and interrogatives are more commonly classed as **adjectives**, while possessives and distributives are more commonly classed as **determiners**; this is how they are grouped in this guide. Quantifiers are much harder to distinguish, but, for the purposes of this guide, they are covered in the chapter on

Determiners.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following parts of speech are adjectives **not** able to modify?

a) Nouns
b) Pronouns
c) Adverbs
d) B & C

2. Adjectives that appear after **linking verbs** are known as:

a) Attributive adjectives
b) Predicative adjectives
c) Demonstrative adjectives
d) Interrogative adjectives

3. Which of the following types of adjectives are formed from two or more words and a hyphen?

a) Compound adjectives
b) Nominal adjectives
c) Proper adjectives
d) Collective adjectives

4. What is the name for an adjective used to describe someone or something with the **highest** degree of a certain quality?

a) Comparable adjectives
b) Comparative adjectives
c) Superior adjectives
d) Superlative adjectives

5. Which of the following often have properties similar to adjectives?

a) Adverbs
b) Particles
c) Determiners
d) Conjunctions

Attributive Adjectives

Definition

Attributive adjectives are adjectives that describe a characteristic (or attribute) of the noun or pronoun that they modify. They form part of a noun phrase, appearing immediately before (or sometimes after) the noun in a sentence.

Attributive vs. Predicative Adjectives

Attributive adjectives are usually considered in opposition to **predicative adjectives**, which follow the noun they modify and are connected to it by a **linking verb**. We can quickly illustrate the difference here:

• "The **black** dog is barking."

In this sentence, *black* is an **attributive adjective**. It is part of the noun phrase and is not connected to the noun *dog* by a linking verb. Now let's look at a **predicative adjective**:

• "The dog was **black**."

In this sentence, *black* follows the noun *dog*, the noun that it modifies, and is connected to it by the linking verb *was*; it is a **predicative adjective**.

While most adjectives can occur either as **attributive adjectives** or **predicative adjectives**, there are certain adjectives that can *only* occur predicatively. Most, but not all, of these adjectives begin with the letter "a":

- **afloat**
- **afraid**
- **alike**
- **alone**
- **asleep**
- **awake**
- **aware**
- **upset**
- **well**

For example:

✔ "The baby is **asleep**." (correct)

✖ “The **asleep** baby is in the crib.” (incorrect)

✔ “The woman is **well** again.” (correct)
✖ “The **well** woman got out of bed.” (incorrect)

If you want to learn more about **predicative adjectives**, they are dealt with in greater detail in another section of this chapter.

Restrictive vs. Non-Restrictive Attributive Adjectives

Attributive adjectives can be either **restrictive** or **non-restrictive**. **Restrictive adjectives** help establish the identity of the noun or pronoun being modified, while **non-restrictive adjectives** simply help describe a noun that is already clearly identified. Note the difference between these two sentences:

• “She was emotional, and would avoid a **sad** film at all costs.”

• “*Titanic* was a **sad** film that no viewer could finish with dry eyes.”

In the first sentence, *sad* is **restrictive**: it tells us what kind of films she avoids. In the second sentence, *sad* is **non-restrictive**. We already know that *Titanic* is the film in question; the adjective *sad* simply serves to describe it further.

Prepositive adjectives: Before the noun

In simple sentences, **attributive adjectives** usually occur before the noun they modify, like in our first example, “The **black** dog is barking.” Adjectives in this position are known as **prepositive** or **prenominal adjectives**.

While most attributive adjectives can also occur as predicative adjectives after the noun, there are a number of specific adjectives which can **only** occur before the noun they modify. Some of these are: *main*, *former*, and *mere*.

✔ “The **main** idea is at the beginning of the paragraph.” (correct)
✖ “The idea at the beginning of the paragraph is **main**.” (incorrect)

Another adjective that only occurs attributively before the noun is the word *utter*, which provides heavy emphasis to the noun it modifies:

✔ “The dress was in **utter** ruin.” (correct)
✖ “The ruin was **utter**.” (incorrect)

Postpositive Adjectives: After the noun

It's fairly common to find attributive adjectives defined as "adjectives that are placed before the noun or pronoun they modify." However, it's a bit more complicated than that. While attributive adjectives are *generally* found before the noun they modify, especially in simple sentences, there are also many cases in which they are placed immediately after the noun.

When this happens, they are called **postpositive** or **postnominal adjectives**. This often occurs in the following cases:

Terms derived from other languages

Postpositive adjective placement is very common in other languages, especially those derived from Latin. **Postpositive** placement in English occurs especially when using terms that were borrowed from French, a Latin-derived language.

English borrows many official, military, governmental, and administrative terms from other languages, and the adjectives have retained their postpositive position. For example:

• Legal and financial terms: *body **politic**, court-**martial**, pound **sterling**, accounts **payable***, and *heir **apparent***.

• Important positions of individuals: *secretary-**general**, poet **laureate**, attorney **general**, princess **royal***, and *professor **emeritus***.

In these types of terms, it's conventional to pluralize the noun, not the adjective. For example:

• "One poet laureate."

• "Two poets laureate."

However, it is becoming more and more common for writers to treat these terms as compound nouns, pluralizing the adjective instead of the noun:

• "Two poet laureates."

Traditional grammarians, though, consider the pluralization of the adjective to be incorrect.

After indefinite pronouns

Attributive adjectives almost always appear postpositively when they modify **indefinite pronouns**, such as *someone, anyone, nobody, anyone*, etc.

For example:

• “I wish I could find *somebody* **perfect** for the job.”

• “We can give these jeans to *anybody* **tall**.”

• “Is *anyone* **talented** at math here?”

After superlative attributive adjectives

Superlative adjectives are those that that compare three or more nouns to indicate which exhibits the highest degree of something, for example: *the best, the worst, the tallest, the biggest*, etc. When a superlative adjective is used attributively before a noun, we can use other attributive adjectives in a postpositive position for emphasis.

• “Let’s find the *best* hotel **possible**.”

• “She’s the *worst* singer **present**.”

In addition, the attributive adjective can sometimes come before the noun when paired with a superlative, as in:

• “We climbed the *highest* **nearby** mountain.”

Some adjectives ending in “-able/-ible”

Often, attributive adjectives ending in “-able/-ible” are placed in the postpositive position:

• “It’s the only time **available**.”

• “It’s the only option **imaginable**.”

Be careful though, because sometimes placing an adjective of this type in the prepositive or postpositive position can actually change the meaning of the sentence. For example:

• “She’s looking for a **responsible** man.”

In this sentence, **responsible** is in the prepositive positive and seems to be a

good characteristic. She is likely looking for a man who can be trusted. If we place the word *responsible* in the postpositive position, though, we have a very different meaning:

• “She’s looking for the man **responsible**.”

In this sentence, the word **responsible** takes on a different connotation, perhaps a negative one. She’s looking for the man who has done something; in most cases, the “something” is negative, such as a mistake or even a crime.

Not many adjectives change meaning so drastically based on their position in the sentence, but it is something to be aware of.

After expressions of measurement

Nouns are often used in combination with numbers and adjectives to give measurements of height, depth, age, etc. For example:

• “He’s only one *year* **old**.”

• “She’s five *feet* **tall**.”

• “The river is five *miles* **long**.”

• “The lake is one *kilometer* **deep**.”

A notable exception to this pattern is when we discuss *weight*. Instead, we use the verb *weigh* and a unit of measurement, or else just the unit of weight after the verb *be*. For example:

✔ “She *weighs* 120 pounds.” (correct)
✔ “She *is* 120 pounds.” (correct)
✖ “She is 120 *pounds* **heavy**.” (incorrect)

When the adjective modifies the object of factitive verbs

Factitive verbs are used to describe an action that results in a new condition or state of a person or thing. When an adjective modifies the **direct object** of a factitive verb, it is known as an **object complement**, and we place it in the postpositive position. For example:

• “He makes *her* **happy**.”

• “I find *horror films* **terrifying**.”

• “We painted *the wall* **yellow**.”

For poetic effect

Postpositive placement of **attributive adjectives** is frequently used for poetic effect, as it gives a somewhat archaic and literary twist to otherwise plain expressions. Take for example this excerpt from the poem “Happiness,” by Thomas Frederick Young:

“Fair Happiness, I've courted thee,
And used each cunning art and wile,
Which lovers use with *maidens* **coy**,
To win one tender glance or smile.”

In this example, the poet places the adjectives *coy* after the plural noun *maidens*, instead of before it, creating a stronger poetic effect.

We can see the same effect again in the poem “The Bouquet,” by Edward Smyth Jones:

“A *blossom* **pink**,
A *blossom* **blue**,
Make all there is in love
So true.”

The same phenomenon can also be seen in titles of books and films, which often use postpositive placement for its dramatic effect. Consider the titles of works such as *Jupiter **Ascending***, *The Matrix **Reloaded***, or *The Brothers **Karamazov***, for example.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is an example of an attributive adjective?

a) A **black** dog.
b) The dog is **black**.
c) The dog **black**.
d) The **dog**.

2. Which of the following is *not* an attributive adjective?

a) Sarah is **short**.
b) The **blond** girl went to the party.

c) My **dear** friend James is here.
d) Have you called your **poor** brother?

3. Attributive adjectives never ____.

a) come after the noun.
b) precede the noun.
c) follow a linking verb.
d) appear in the postpositive position.

4. Most adjectives that are never attributive begin with the letter "____."

a) A
b) B
a) C
b) D

5. Which sentence is traditionally considered to be more correct?

a) The secretary-generals of the three countries are meeting today.
b) The secretaries-general of the three countries are meeting today.

Predicative Adjectives

Definition

A predicative adjective (or simply "predicate adjective") is used in the **predicate** of a clause to describe either the subject of the clause or the direct object of a verb.

As a subject complement

Predicative adjectives that describe the subject of the clause will follow a **linking verb**. In such cases, they are known as **subject complements**. For example:

• "You look *nice*."

• "He is *old*."

Here, "nice" describes the subject "you," while "old" describes the subject "he."

Note that adjectives appearing immediately *before* the noun they are describing

are known as **attributive adjectives**. For example:

• “The *old* man seems nice.”

“Old” is an attributive adjective that describes the subject, “man.” “Nice” also describes “man,” but it is a predicative adjective because it follows the linking verb “seems.”

As an object complement

Predicative adjectives can also describe the direct object of non-linking verbs. In this case, such adjectives function as **object complements**. For example:

• “They painted the door *red*.”

• “All that training made me *stronger*.”

The predicative adjectives here are describing (complementing) the direct objects of the verbs, rather than the subjects of the sentences. “Red” describes the noun “door” (not the subject, “they”), while “stronger” describes the pronoun “me” (not the subject, “training”).

Sense verbs

Certain verbs are used to indicate perceptions, opinions, or bodily sensations. They are known as **verbs of the senses**, or “**sense verbs**” for short. Those verbs are as follows:

- taste
- smell
- sound
- seem
- feel
- look
- appear

Sense verbs merely relate the means by which the speaker has arrived at such a sensation about the subject. When we use them like this, they are functioning as linking verbs (rather than **action verbs**) and we pair them with predicative adjectives. This is not because the predicative adjective describes the verb, as an adverb would do. Rather, the predicative adjective describes the *subject* of the clause—they are subject complements, which we looked at above.

For example:

• “I *feel terrible* today.” (A feeling inside of being very unwell.)

• “You *sound tired*.” (A perception of tiredness in your voice.)

• “She didn’t *sound Italian*.” (An opinion based on the way her voice sounds.)

• “You *look fabulous* today.” (This is my opinion when I look at you.)

• “He doesn’t *look very happy*.” (Again, my opinion based on what my eyes tell me. Note that the adverb “very” is modifying the adjective “happy,” not the verb “look.”)

• “This doesn’t *feel right*.” (An opinion or perception of something not being as it should.)

• “The car *appears OK*, but I’ll have to drive it to be sure.” (From what I can see, the car looks like it’s in good condition.)

• “That *smells nice*.” (Sensation of a pleasant aroma.)

• “This milk *tastes funny**.” (Sensation of an odd or unpleasant taste.)

**The adjective “funny” has two meanings. It can describe something that makes you laugh, or something that is strange, unpleasant, dubious, or not as it should be. It carries the latter meaning in the above example.*

If any of the above verbs were used as action verbs, they could no longer be followed by an adjective—you would have to pair them with an adverb. For example:

• “I *felt gently* around the table in the dark.” (Describes the action of feeling with one’s hand.)

• “He *looked quickly* to the right.” (Describes the action of looking in a certain direction.)

• “The car *appeared out of nowhere*.” (Describes the action of coming into sight, using a **prepositional phrase as an adverb**.)

• “Yes, you *heard right*!” (*Right* in this case is an adverb meaning “accurately or correctly.”)

Sources of confusion – Good vs. Well

A common stumbling block for natives and learners of English alike is the correct usage of *good* versus *well*.

In most instances, *good* is an attributive adjective directly describing a noun, while *well* is an adverb describing a verb, adjective, or other adverb. For

example:

• “He is a *good driver*.”

• “She *writes well*.”

We cannot use *good* and *well* interchangeably in these instances, and we can see immediately that the following would be incorrect:

✖ “He is a *well* driver.”

✖ “She writes *good*.”

However, *well* can also function as a predicative adjective, where it usually means “healthy” or “not ill.” We use it in this sense after linking verbs such as *be*, *get*, or the sense verbs above:

• “Jenny looks *well* lately.”

• “Get *well* soon!”

In these examples, *well* does not describe the verbs, but rather the subjects of the sentences (implied in the second example).

Good can be used as a predicative adjective as well, meaning “of a high or satisfactory quality.” This can be used after linking verbs to talk about an opinion of something, an emotional state, or general well-being (as opposed to physical health, specifically). For example:

• “The movie *was good*.” (Opinion of the quality of the movie.)

• “I’m *feeling good* about my chances!” (Emotional state.)

• “Janet looks *good* lately.” (Opinion of Janet’s appearance.)

• A: “How are you, Bob?” B: “I’m *good*, thanks!” (General well-being.)

The last example is perfectly correct, and it is very frequently used as a stock response to the question “How are you?” You could also say “I’m well,” and no one is likely to take issue with it. However, if someone asks how you are after, for instance, an illness or injury, it would be better to respond with “I’m well.”

If saying “I’m good” still does not sound quite right to you, you could also say “I am *doing well*,” in which case *well* is used adverbially once more.

You can learn more about such adjective/adverb oddities in the **irregular adverbs** section of the chapter on **Adverbs**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the function of an adjective when it describes a noun that is part of the predicate?

a) Subject complement
b) Object complement
c) Attributive adjective
d) None of the above

2. What does a predicative adjective that follows a linking verb modify?

a) The verb
b) The object of the verb
c) The subject of the clause
d) The predicate of the clause

3. When can “well” function as a predicative adjective? (Choose the answer that is **most correct**.)

a) When it follows a linking verb
b) When it modifies a linking verb
c) When it means “in good health”
d) When it functions as an object complement
e) A & C
f) B & D

4. Which of the following sentences does **not** have a predicate adjective?

a) “I don’t think I heard you right.”
b) “I am feeling well.”
c) “My father is really nice.”
d) “Does this seem different to you?”

Proper Adjectives

Definition

Proper adjectives, like all adjectives, modify nouns, but they are different from other adjectives because they are actually formed from **proper nouns**.

A **noun**, we know, is a person, place, or thing. We can distinguish between two types of nouns: **common nouns** and **proper nouns**. Common nouns are general,

such as *man*, *street*, and *city*. *James*, *Canning Street*, and *Paris* are all proper nouns, because they talk about specific people, places, or things. “James” is a specific man, “Canning Street” is a specific street, and “Paris” is a specific city. Proper nouns are always written with a capital letter in English.

Proper adjectives are formed from these proper nouns, and they are also capitalized. They are often made from the names of cities, countries, or regions to describe where something comes from, but they can also be formed from the names of religions, brands, or even individuals. Some examples will make this clear:

Proper Noun	Proper Adjective	Example Sentence
Italy	Italian	I love **Italian** food.
China	Chinese	How much does this **Chinese** robe cost?
Christ	Christian	In Europe, you can visit many ancient **Christian** churches.
Shakespeare	Shakespearean	He writes in an almost **Shakespearean** style.
Canon	Canon	I’m really excited to use my new **Canon** camera.

Why We Use Proper Adjectives

We use proper adjectives to describe something efficiently, directly, and explicitly. We could manage to avoid them, but it would result in clunky, awkward sentences. If we want to express the same meaning as the example sentences from the table above, we could write:

• “I love food *that comes from Italy*.”

• “How much does this robe *that comes from China* cost?”

• “In Europe, you can visit many ancient churches *of the religion that worships Christ*.”

• “He writes almost in the style *of the writer Shakespeare*.”

• “I’m really excited to use my new camera *from the Canon brand*.”

These sentences are lengthy, awkward, and choppy to read. Using the **proper adjectives** *Italian, Chinese, Christian, Shakespearean,* and *Canon* makes our meaning come across much more smoothly.

Proper adjectives are often used in an academic or artistic context, when the speaker (or writer) is addressing an audience of his or her peers and knows that they will quickly understand the reference. For example, the sentence “He writes in an almost *Shakespearean* style” would frequently be used among scholars of English literature. You would want to avoid the term *Shakespearean* if you were addressing a group of young students who had not yet heard of the author. Likewise, a group of architects or historians may refer to a “*Romanesque* building,” while we would want to avoid that term if we were addressing a group that lacks background knowledge in historical architecture.

How to Form Proper Adjectives

A proper adjective is usually formed by adding an ending to the noun that it is derived from. There is not an easy rule to memorize for which ending to use. If you’re not sure, you can try some of the most common endings—*-ian, -an, -esque, -like,* and *-istic*—and see which sounds right.

Proper Adjectives for Countries, Cities, and Regions

Countries

Many proper adjectives are formed from the names of countries to describe where a person, place, or thing is from. We have seen some examples already. The most common endings for nationalities are *-ian/-ean/-an, -ic*, *ese*, and *-ish*. The reason that English has so many endings for different nationalities is that we borrowed them from other languages. We borrowed the *-ian, -ean, -an* from Latin, *-ic* also from Latin but via Germanic languages, *-ese* from Italian, and *-i* from Arabic. The native Germanic suffix is *-ish,* which English has only kept for only a small number of nationalities.

Here are some of the most common proper adjectives for countries:

-ian/-ean/-an	-ic	-ese	-i	-ish	-ish
Italian	Greenlandic	Chinese	Iraqi	Danish	Chinese

Armenian	Icelandic	Japanese	Israeli	Finnish	Japanese
Australian	Nordic	Lebanese	Pakistani	Irish	Lebanese
Bulgarian	Hispanic	Portuguese	Saudi	Scottish	Portuguese
Korean		Sudanese	Emirati	Spanish	Sudanese
Moroccan		Vietnamese	Yemeni	Turkish	Vietnamese

Cities

Proper adjectives can also describe what city or state/province something or someone comes from. Often, these are formed without an additional ending. For example:

• “Let’s have a **New York** bagel for breakfast.”

• “She has a real **London** etiquette.”

Other proper adjectives are formed by adding an ending to the name of the city or state, but it’s impossible to learn them all. They’re very irregular. You may find it useful to learn the endings for the most famous cities of the world, or the places around where you live. Some examples of well-known proper adjectives for cities or states are:

• “I will never be able to keep up with **Parisian** fashion.”

• “There is nothing better than **Alaskan** smoked salmon.”

Regions

Finally, we also have proper adjectives for general geographic regions. For example:

• “An **African** elephant.”

• “An **Asian** person.”

• “A **European** museum.”

• “A **South American** blanket.”

• “A **Middle Eastern** film.”

A Few More Notes

Sometimes, a word that began as a proper adjective can lose its “proper” significance over time. In these cases, the word is no longer capitalized. Take the following sentence:

• “He was making **quixotic** mistakes.”

Quixotic was a proper adjective derived from the name *Don Quixote*, a fictional character who was prone to foolish, grandiose behavior. Through time, it has come to mean “foolish” in its own right, without necessarily pointing to the character of Don Quixote. Therefore, it has lost its capitalization.

Another example of this phenomenon is the word *gargantuan*. Once associated with the name of a giant in a 16th-century book, it has come to mean “huge” in daily use. Since losing its link with the fictional monster, it is no longer capitalized.

• “The couple purchased the house next door and built a **gargantuan** house.”

On the other hand, there are some common nouns that can act as proper nouns in specific cases and need to be capitalized. For example, the adjective *native* would normally be considered a common noun, as in the sentence “I want to practice Spanish with a *native* speaker.” Consider the word *native* in the following sentence, though:

• The indigenous people of Canada and the United States are commonly referred to as **Native Americans**.

In this sentence, *Native* acts as a proper adjective because it describes a specific group of people, just like *Italian* or *French*.

When a proper adjective needs a prefix, make sure to place a hyphen between the prefix and the proper adjective. Don’t capitalize the prefix, though. For example:

• “He was accused of stirring up *anti*-**Chinese** sentiment.”

• “I love studying *pre*-**Shakespearean** theater.”

The exception to this rule is if the prefix is formed from a proper noun itself, as in the “**Austro-Hungarian** empire.” In this example, both *Hungarian* and its prefix *Austro* are derived from proper nouns (Hungary and Austria), so they are both capitalized.

Lastly, while proper adjectives are generally placed <u>before</u> the noun they modify,

most can also be placed after the noun, provided that there is also a linking verb before them. For example, all of the following sentences are correct:

• “The winning team was **Spanish**.

• “The man over there is **Italian**.”

• “The monks in this monastery are **Buddhist**.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a proper adjective?

a) Blue
b) Spanish
c) Tall
d) Tired

2. Which of the following is *not* a proper adjective?

a) Spanish
b) Grecian
c) Intelligent
d) Muslim

3. In the sentence “I went to a private catholic school,” which word or words should be capitalized?

a) catholic
b) private
c) school
d) catholic and school

4. In the sentence “The number of afro-europeans has risen steadily,” which word or words should be capitalized?

a) number
b) afro
c) europeans
d) afro and europeans

5. Proper adjectives are adjectives formed from ____.

a) proper nouns
b) common nouns
c) adjectives
d) verbs

Collective Adjectives

Definition

Collective adjectives are a subgroup of **nominal adjectives**, or adjectives that act as nouns. They are used to refer to a group of people based on a characteristic that they share. For example:

• "**The rich** should help **the poor**."

This sentence is another way of saying, "Rich people should help poor people."

Some common **collective adjectives** are:

- **the blind**
- **the elderly**
- **the hardworking**
- **the homeless**
- **the innocent**
- **the intelligent**
- **the poor**
- **the rich**
- **the sick**
- **the strong**
- **the weak**
- **the young**

In addition, a large amount of collective adjectives refer to the nationality of a group of people. For example, instead of saying "*French people* cook well," we can say, "**The French** cook well." Other nationalities for which we have collective adjectives are:

- **the Chinese**
- **the English**
- **the Irish**

- **the Japanese**
- **the Scottish**
- **the Spanish**
- **the Vietnamese**

Notice that when we use a collective adjective for nationality, it's capitalized.

Finally, collective adjectives for nationality have to be learned by heart, as we don't have collective adjectives for all nationalities. For example, to refer to a group of German people, we have to say ***the Germans*** or simply ***Germans***, which is a **plural proper noun**—a corresponding collective adjective doesn't exist for German people. Other examples include ***(the) Canadians, (the) Russians, (the) Americans***, and ***(the) Slovaks***.

How to use collective adjectives

Using **collective adjectives** is simple. There are only a couple of things that we need to remember:

1. We always add the article *the* before the adjective (except for nationalities that use plural proper nouns).

2. We always treat collective adjectives as **plural nouns**. This means that they have to take plural forms of verbs.

3. We do not pluralize collective adjectives by adding the suffixes *-s* or *-es*. They are already considered plural (except for nationalities that use plural proper nouns).

Let's look at some examples:

• "**The rich** *are* usually powerful."

• "**The French** *are* the best chefs."

• "**The elderly** *need* proper care."

In these examples, **the rich, the French**, and **the elderly** function as the **subjects** of the sentences. They are treated as plurals, which is why the sentences use the plural forms of the verbs *be* and *need*.

Collective adjectives can also function as the **object** of a sentence, as in:

• "We are working hard to help **the homeless**."

In this example, the subject of the sentence is *we*, while the **object** is the collective adjective *the homeless*.

Common Errors

Collective adjectives are often confused with **collective nouns**, but there are key differences. While they both refer to a group of people, collective nouns (such as *team, staff* or *class*) are inherently **nouns** in structure and function; collective adjectives, on the other hand, are **adjectives** that merely *function* as nouns.

Additionally, collective nouns are often treated as singular (as in, “The best *team* is going to win”), whereas collective adjectives, as we have mentioned, are always treated as plural.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a collective adjective?

a) the rich
b) the tenants
c) the girls
d) the German

2. Which of the following is *not* a collective adjective?

a) the poor
b) the meek
c) the team
d) the French

3. Collective adjectives are always ____.

a) plural
b) singular
c) verbs
d) subjects

4. In the following sentence, which word or words should be capitalized?
“i want to help the poor.”

a) Both “i” and “poor.”
b) Only “i.”
c) “I,” “help,” and “poor.”
d) Only “poor.”

5. Collective adjectives are adjectives that function as ____.

a) nouns
b) subjects
c) objects
d) verbs

Demonstrative Adjectives

Definition

Like all adjectives, **demonstrative adjectives** modify nouns or pronouns. We use demonstrative adjectives to specify what we are referring to, to indicate whether the person or thing is singular or plural, and to give the listener information about that person or object's proximity to the speaker (identifying whether it's nearby or far away). Because they are used to determine a specific noun, demonstrative adjectives are sometimes known as **demonstrative determiners**.

There are four common demonstrative adjectives in English: *this*, *that*, *these,* and *those*.

Placement

Demonstrative adjectives always come before the noun they modify. Often, they start the sentence. For example:

• "**This** *toy* is my brother's favorite."

• "**These** *cups* are very pretty."

They can also come at the middle or at the end, as long as they are followed by a noun (if they were not followed by a noun, they would become demonstrative pronouns):

• "My brother's favorite toy is **this** *train*."

• "I wish I had more of **these** *chocolates*!"

• "Can you please go buy me **those** *books*?"

In the examples above, the demonstrative adjective is placed immediately before the noun it modifies. However, if there are additional adjectives that also modify the same noun, they should be placed between the demonstrative adjective and

the noun. For example:

• “My brother’s favorite toy is **this** blue *train*.”

• “I wish I had more of **these** delicious *chocolates*!”

• “Can you please go buy me **those** school *books*?”

Choosing the Correct Demonstrative Adjective

Use this table to easily reference which demonstrative adjectives to use in different contexts:

	Near	**Far**
Singular	this	that
Plural	these	those

This/That

As you can see from the table, *this* and *that* are used when the person or thing we are talking about is **singular** (there is only one).

This is used for things that are nearby. The proximity is sometimes stated explicitly in the sentence. For example:

• “**This** toy I’m holding is my brother’s favorite.”

• “**This** chair I’m sitting on is broken.”

It’s also common for the demonstrative adjective to be the only information we have about how near or far the person or object is. For example, imagine that there are two cups: One is on the table next to “Jen”; the other is across the room, next to “David.”

Jen says: “**This** cup is very pretty.”

Because she used the demonstrative adjective *this*, it’s clear that Jen is talking about the cup that is on the table next to her, and not the cup that’s next to David.

That is used for a singular person or object that is farther away. Again, the proximity is sometimes stated explicitly, as in:

• “**That** toy on the table over there is my brother’s favorite.”

• “**That** chair across the room is broken.”

But again, the distance can also be unstated and implied by the demonstrative adjective. Let’s go back to our example about Jen and David. This time, Jen says: “**That** cup is very pretty.”

Because Jen used the demonstrative adjective *that*, it’s clear that she is now talking about the cup that is on the table next to David, and not the one that’s next to her.

These/Those

These and *those* work in the same way as *this* and *that*, but as you can see in the table, they are used to refer to people and objects that are **plural** (more than one.)

These is used for plural objects that are nearby. As we saw with *this*, the proximity can be explicit, as in:

• “**These** toys I’m holding are my brother’s favorites.”

• “**These** chairs we’re sitting on are broken.”

Or, the proximity can be implied:

• “**These** cups are very pretty.” (We know the cups are near the speaker.)

Those is used for plural objects that are farther away. Again, the distance can be stated. For example:

• “**Those** toys on the table over there are my brother’s favorites.”

• “**Those** chairs across the room are broken.”

Or, the distance can be implied:

• “**Those** blue cups are very pretty.” (We know the cups are not near to the speaker.)

Yon/Yonder

Yon and *yonder* are lesser-known demonstrative adjectives. They’re both considered archaic and don’t exist in most modern dialects of English. However, you may encounter them in older texts or songs. For example, this famous line from Romeo and Juliet uses the demonstrative adjective *yonder*:

• “What light on **yonder** *window* breaks?”

Yon and *yonder* are still used in a few dialects of English, such those spoken in certain Celtic-influenced areas like Scotland and the Southern United States. Generally, they can be used interchangeably, and are both understood to indicate that the noun is not near the speaker, but the proximity really depends on the dialect of the people using it.

Here are some examples of how *yon* and *yonder* could be used in a sentence:

• "We will have to cross **yon** *field* to get home."

• "Something has frightened **yonder** *horses*."

Demonstrative Adjectives vs. Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative adjectives are often confused with **demonstrative pronouns**, because *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* can serve both functions. If you think about the role of an adjective and the role of a pronoun, though, you'll see that they're not so confusing after all.

Demonstrative **adjectives** do what all adjectives do: modify a noun or pronoun. On the other hand, demonstrative **pronouns** do what all pronouns do: stand in place of a noun. Let's clarify the difference through some examples:

• "**This** *toy* is his favorite." (demonstrative adjective.)
• "**This** is his favorite toy." (demonstrative pronoun.)

• "Give **that** big *book* to me." (demonstrative adjective.)
• "Give me **that**." (demonstrative pronoun)

• "I want **this** *TV* for Christmas." (demonstrative adjective.)

• "**This** is what I want for Christmas." (demonstrative pronoun.)

As you can see, each of the demonstrative adjectives modifies a noun (*toy, book, TV*), while the demonstrative pronouns stand in place of nouns.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Choose the correct demonstrative adjective to complete the sentence: "Stay away from ____ black dog next door."

a) this
b) that

c) these
d) those

2. Choose the correct demonstrative adjective to complete the sentence:
“____ books here on my desk are for you.”
a) This
b) That
c) These
d) Those

3. Choose the correct demonstrative adjective to complete the sentence:
“Look at ____ trees over there. Aren’t they beautiful?”
a) this
b) that
c) these
d) those

4. Which of the following sentences **does not** contain a demonstrative adjective?
a) “Please give that to me quickly.”
b) “Can you hand me those books?”
c) “Do you have this movie at home?”
d) “That girl is bad news.”

5. Which of the following sentences **does** contain a demonstrative adjective?
a) “That’s my boyfriend over there.”
b) “Can you give me a hand with this homework?”
c) “Have you seen this before?”
b) “Those are the ones that I want.”

Interrogative Adjectives

Definition

Like all adjectives, **interrogative adjectives** (also known as **interrogative determiners**) modify nouns and pronouns. English has three interrogative adjectives: *what, which,* and *whose*. They are called “interrogative” because they

are usually used to ask questions. For example:

• “**What** book are you reading?

• “**Which** shirt are you going to buy?”

• “**Whose** computer is this?”

In each of the examples, the interrogative adjective modifies the noun it immediately precedes: *book, shirt,* and *computer*.

How to Use Interrogative Adjectives

The interrogative adjectives *what* and *which* can often be used interchangeably, while *whose* is very different. Let’s look at when to use each:

What vs. Which

Although *what* and *which* are often interchangeable, there is a subtle difference between the two.

Generally, we use *what* when the amount of possible answers is unknown or unlimited, and we use *which* when we either know how many choices there are, or we consider the options to be more limited. Think about the difference between these two sentences:

• “**What** present do you think you’ll get for Christmas?”

• “**Which** present do you think you’ll get for Christmas?”

In the first sentence, the speaker does not have any idea how many possible presents there are. In the second sentence, it seems that the speaker *does* have an idea of what the presents may be, and that the choices are limited.

Let’s look at a similar example:

• “**What** movie do you want to see?”

• “**Which** movie do you want to see?”

Again, in the first sentence, it seems like the options are unlimited, while in the second sentence, the speaker may have been discussing two or three movies with the listener, and they are trying to make a final decision.

In most instances, we can use either *what* or *which* without causing confusion for the reader. However, if there is clearly a limited number of options to choose from, *which* is the preferred interrogative adjective to use.

Whose

Whose is an adjective that denotes **possession**, or belonging. We can use it to ask who the owner of an object is. For example:

• “**Whose** socks are on the floor?”

• “**Whose** book is this?”

• “**Whose** turn is it?”

In these examples, the speaker is trying to find out who the *socks*, *book*, and *turn* belong to.

Direct questions

When interrogative adjectives appear in normal **direct questions**, they are placed at the beginning of the sentence and are immediately followed by the noun that they modify. All the examples that we have seen up until this point were direct questions. However, interrogative adjectives don’t *only* appear in direct questions.

Indirect questions

Interrogative adjectives can also appear within **indirect questions**. When this happens, they appear in the middle of the sentence, but they still immediately precede the modified noun. Some indirect questions are used to express politeness:

• “Could you tell me **whose** socks are on the floor?”

• “Would you mind telling me **which** way is north?”

• “Do you know **what** day it is?”

Other indirect questions are used to ask for clarifying information, or to convey surprise:

• “You want **which** computer for Christmas?”

• “You’re going out with **whose** brother?”

• “He wants to watch **what** movie?”

In such cases, emphasis is put on the interrogative adjective—we can hear the stress on the words when we say the sentences aloud.

In reported questions

Interrogative adjectives also appear in the middle of **reported questions**. Reported questions are also indirect; they tell us *about* questions. For example:

• “She wants to know **whose** socks are on the floor.”

• “He asked **which** way was north.”

• “I asked you **what** day it was.”

The speaker in each of the examples isn’t asking a definite question, but rather is reporting or clarifying a question that has already been asked.

Other statements

Interrogative adjectives are sometimes used in other statements that aren’t questions at all: they don’t ask questions, either directly or indirectly, but still modify the nouns in the same kind of way. For example:

• “I can’t remember **whose** socks they are.”

• “I don’t know **which** way is north.”

• “I know **what** day it is.”

Common Mistakes

Interrogative Adjectives vs. Interrogative Pronouns

The most common mistake regarding interrogative adjectives is confusing them with interrogative pronouns. This is because all three interrogative adjectives, *what*, *which*, and *whose*, can also function as **interrogative pronouns**. An easy way to be sure whether you are dealing with an interrogative adjective or an interrogative pronoun is to check whether the question word is immediately followed by the noun it modifies, like in all the examples that we have seen:

• “**What** *book* is your favorite?”

In this example, *what* is immediately followed by the noun *book*. We can be sure that, in this case, *what* is a **possessive adjective**.

• “**What** are you reading?”
In this sentence, *what* is not immediately followed by a noun that it modifies, which means that in this case, it is an **interrogative pronoun**.

Just remember: Even though all interrogative adjectives are question words, not all questions words are interrogative adjectives.

Whose vs. Who’s

Finally, beware of the common error of confusing *whose* and *who’s*. *Whose* is an interrogative adjective or pronoun, while *who’s* is the contraction of *who is*.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **is not** an interrogative adjective?

a) which
b) whom
c) which
d) whose

2. What comes immediately after an interrogative adjective?

a) The verb it modifies
b) Another adjective
c) The noun it modifies
d) An adverb

3. Complete the sentence: “____ stars can we see from Earth?”

a) whose
b) which
c) what
d) either A or B
e) either B or C

4. Which of the following sentences does **not** contain an interrogative adjective?

a) “Tell me which car you like best.”
b) “I forgot what I was going to do this evening.”
c) “Do you know which dress I’m going to buy?”

d) “Would you mind telling me whose car this is?”

5. Which of the following sentences is **incorrect**?

a) “Who’s book is this?”
b) “Do you know whose book this is?”
c) “What book do you want to read tonight?”
d) “Which book do you want to read tonight?”

Nominal Adjectives

Definition

We know that **adjectives** are words that modify (or describe) nouns, such as the word *red* in “the *red* jacket,” or the word *beautiful* in “that girl is *beautiful*.”

Nominal adjectives, on the other hand, are adjectives that perform the function of a **noun** in a sentence. They are preceded by the word *the* and can be found as the **subject** or the **object** of a sentence or clause. For example:

• “**The elderly** are a great source of wisdom.”

• “**The French** have amazing restaurants.”

• “**The opposite** of up is down.”

• “**The best** is yet to come.”

In the examples above, the nominal adjectives do not modify any other noun—they’re acting as nouns themselves. Specifically, they are performing the function of the subject of the sentences, but, as we mentioned, they can also function as objects. For example:

• “We should treat **the elderly** with respect.”

• “This law protects **the innocent**.”

• “We all want **the best** for her.”

Uses of Nominal Adjectives

Nominal adjectives perform several different functions. Some nominal adjectives are used to refer to a group of people who all share a certain characteristic, which can be a physical or non-physical characteristic. Other nominal adjectives refer to a characteristic of an individual person or thing. We’ll look at each type

of nominal adjective separately.

Collective Adjectives

Collective adjectives are nominal adjectives that are used to refer to groups of people. Sometimes they refer to a shared physical characteristic, such as *the blind, the deaf, the short,* or *the tall*. Other times, they refer to non-physical characteristics, like *the hardworking, the intelligent, the poor,* or *the rich*.

In each of these cases, the nominal adjective takes the place of a lengthier description, such as "*all the people who are rich*," or "*all the intelligent people*."

Collective adjectives can also refer to some nationalities, such as *the Chinese, the English,* or *the French*.

If you'd like to learn more about **collective adjectives**, they are covered in greater depth in their own section of the chapter about the **Categories of Adjectives**.

Comparative and superlative forms

Adjectives in their **comparative** or **superlative** form can also be nominal adjectives. Comparative adjectives are those that end in "-er" or are preceded by the word *more*, as in *stronger, taller, cleverer, more beautiful*, etc. They are used to compare two things. Have a look at these examples of nominal adjectives in comparative form:

• "His brother is **the taller**, but he is **the cleverer**."

• "They gave the prize to **the more beautiful** of the two."

• "Of the two cars, we chose **the more expensive**."

Superlative adjectives are those that end in "-est" or are preceded by the word *most*, such as *strongest, tallest, most beautiful, most clever,* etc. They compare three or more things, and they can function as nominal adjectives in the same way that comparatives can. For example:

• "Dan is **the strongest**."

• "I want **the best** for you."

• "Whenever we have a job to do, you give me **the most difficult**."

Other adjectives

Most of the time, nominal adjectives are collective, comparative, and superlative adjectives. However, just about any adjective can be made nominal. They can make sentences shorter and more concise by avoiding repetitive use of a noun. Here are some instances in which nominal adjectives might be preferable:

• "I liked the red car but we bought the **blue**." (nominal adjective)
instead of
• "I like the red car but we bought the *blue car*." (standard adjective)

• Speaker A: "Which color did you like best?"
• Speaker B: "I thought the **blue** was the prettiest." (nominal adjective)
instead of
• Speaker B: "I thought the blue *color* was the prettiest." (standard adjective)

• "You've heard the good news, now I'll tell you the **bad**."
instead of
• "You've heard the good news, now I'll tell you the bad *news*."

Other options

You may have noticed that a lot of these examples could be worded differently. For example, when using collective adjectives, we can just as easily say "French people" instead of "the French," or "poor people" instead of "the poor."

With comparative and superlative forms, we can add a noun to provide more emphasis or clarity. For example, we could say "He was **the stronger *man*** of the two" instead of "he was **the stronger**" or "I want **the best *thing*** for you" instead of "I want **the best** for you."

Often, we can also replace a noun with the pronoun *one* instead of using a nominal adjective. For example, "you take the green t-shirt, I'll take the blue *one*" instead of "you take the green t-shirt, I'll take the blue."

In many cases, these options are less formal than using a nominal adjective.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Nominal adjectives take the place of a _____ in a sentence.

a) verb
b) person
c) adjective
d) noun

2. Which of the following **cannot** function as a nominal adjective?

a) poor
b) red
c) shirt
d) French

3. Nominal adjectives are preceded by the word _____.

a) the
b) one
c) those
d) noun

4. In the sentence “You rent the green car, I’ll rent the red,” which word (or words) is the nominal adjective?

a) Only *green*
b) *Green* and *red*
c) Only *red*
d) *car*

5. Which of the following sentences *does not* include an example of a nominal adjective?

a) “I’m sure you’ve chosen the best.”
b) “I wish I had bought the red.”
c) “The elderly deserve respect.”
d) “You really know how to find the best music.”

Compound Adjectives

Definition

A **compound adjective** (also known as a **compound modifier** or a **phrasal adjective**) is created by two or more words that work jointly to modify the same noun; they always appear before the noun they modify, and they are usually joined together by a **hyphen** (or **hyphens**) to clarify that the words are working as a single modifying unit.

Creating compound adjectives

Compound adjectives are made up of multiple words, and, in various combinations, they can be composed of adjectives, nouns, quantifiers, participles, and adverbs.

Sometimes, other types of words are used to join two (or more) others. For example, the conjunction *and* is often used between two nouns or two adjectives to create a three-word compound adjective.

Let's look at some examples of the different combinations we can make below.

Adjective + Adjective

When multiple adjectives are used to modify the same noun, they usually appear with commas between them or simply in a row with no punctuation, depending on the **order of adjectives**. If two or more adjectives are functioning together as a single unit, though, we must use hyphens. This most commonly occurs with colors or position, as in:

• "She had bright, **blue-green** eyes."

• "His **orange-yellow** skin looked very unhealthy."

• "Look in the **top-right** corner of the screen."

• "The scissors are in the **bottom-left** drawer."

More often, adjectives are paired with other parts of speech to create compound nouns, as we shall see.

Adjective + Noun

It is very common to follow an adjective with a noun to create a compound adjective:

• “They went on a **wild-goose** chase.”

• “I can only find **part-time** work at the moment.”

• “The dog is a **short-hair** breed.”

• “I know this is a **last-minute** suggestion, but hear me out.”

It is equally common to use nouns before adjectives, as in:

• “I’d love an **ice-cold** soda right about now.”

• “Do you have any **sugar-free** cookies?”

Quantifiers

When we use a quantifier (a kind of **determiner**) with a noun to create a compound adjective, we often pair the quantifier with a noun of **measurement** (length, height, weight, age, or time). For example:

• “It is the only **10-storey** building in the town.”

• “We bought a **three-foot** sandwich to share.”

• “The **eight-pound** bag fell to the floor.”

• “This is a very nice **12-year** whiskey.”

When indicating age, we often add the adjective *old* to the end, as in:

• “His **11-year-old** niece is coming to visit.”

(Note that we also use this same hyphenation when making a **compound noun** from an age, as in “My **11-year-old** is coming to visit.”)

When we indicate cost, we normally use quantifiers with symbols of currency, such as $, £, €, etc. When the currency is spelled out, however, we must use hyphens to form compound adjectives. Likewise, we use hyphens if the numerals are spelled out as well. For example:

• “He bought a **$5,000** computer.”

• “He bought a **5,000-dollar** computer.”

• “He bought a **five-thousand-dollar** computer.”

We can also use quantifiers with other nouns, too:

• “There was an **11-car** pileup on the highway.”

• “The theater has a **400-person** capacity.”

Participles

Past and present participles can be paired with adjectives, nouns, and adverbs to form compound adjectives. For example:

With nouns

• “Many legends still survive about **man-eating** whales, but they are simply untrue.”

• “It’s another **record-breaking** race for the Kenyan runner.”

• “There are many **mouth-watering** items on the menu.”

• “I won’t spend another night in this **dust-ridden** house.”

• “The **crocodile-infested** waters are particularly dangerous.”

With adjectives

• “The table is made from **rough-hewn** wood.”

• “My **old-fashioned** aunt would never approve.”

• “There are several **delicious-sounding** things on the menu.”

• “He has an **expensive-looking** car.”

With adverbs

• “This company runs like a **well-oiled** machine.”

• “Our eyes had to adjust in the **dimly-lit** corridor.”

• “There are a only few **well-running** cars to choose from.”

• “We need some **forward-thinking** individuals for the job.”

• “My **early-rising** brother always baulks at me when I sleep in late.”

Prepositions

Prepositions are also used to form compound adjectives, as in:

• “You need an **up-to-date** computer to run this software.”

• “I’ve lived in too many **run-down** apartments.”

Other cases

And

When the conjunction *and* is used between two words (usually nouns) to join them as a single modifier, we must hyphenate all three words. For example:

• “I find her **salt-and-pepper** hair very attractive.”

• “These old **stone-and-mortar** buildings have stood the test of time.”

Proper nouns

We sometimes use a multi-word **proper noun** to identify a noun as belonging to a particular person or brand. In this case, we do **not** hyphenate the words. For example:

• “Can you play any **Elton John** songs?”

• “Did you see the **Arthur Miller** play on Broadway?”

Pronouns

Occasionally it is possible to use pronouns (especially **personal pronouns**) to form compound adjectives, though this is not very common. For example:

• “It turned into a **he-said-she-said** situation.”

Adverbs before adjectives

Adverbs are often used in conjunction with adjectives to jointly modify a noun, but they are not really considered to be compound adjectives and they usually do **not** require a hyphen—the fact that they work together with the adjective is implied. For example:

• “It was a **very brave** thing to do.”

• “She is an **exceptionally talented** girl.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which punctuation mark do we use to create compound adjectives?

a) comma

b) semicolon
c) hyphen
d) period

2. Which of the following **cannot** be used to form compound adjectives?
a) participles
b) verbs
c) nouns
d) prepositions

3. Which of the following are **not** hyphenated when functioning as compound adjectives?
a) proper nouns
b) adjectives
c) quantifiers
d) pronouns

4. Identify the combination used to create the compound adjective (in bold) in the following sentence:
“It was my **well-educated** apprentice who saved the day.”
a) adjective + noun
b) adverb + past participle
c) adjective + past participle
d) noun + adjective

Order of Adjectives

Definition

Adjectives are words that modify a noun or a pronoun. In other words, they describe a person, place, or thing in a sentence. Adjectives usually come **before** the noun. For example:

• “The **small** dog jumped over the **white** fence.”

Small is an adjective that describes the noun *dog*, and **white** is an adjective that describes the noun *fence*.

Adjectives add to the richness of our descriptions of people and things. They

allow the listener or the reader to paint a mental picture of the person or object that is being described to them.

Think about some adjectives that you know. Some of the most common words are adjectives like *good*, *bad*, *young*, *old*, *big*, and *small*.

Each of these adjectives serves a purpose by describing a different aspect of the noun. *Good* and *bad* give an opinion of the noun, *old* and *young* tell us about the noun's age, while *big* and *small* describe the noun's size.

The good news is that adjectives are relatively simple in English. In some languages, the adjective changes its form depending on whether the noun it modifies is singular/plural, or feminine/masculine. In English, we don't have those complications: the adjective always remains the same.

When we speak or write, we don't want to bore our listener or reader with repetitive sentences. Imagine a description like this:

• "He is a **tall** man. He is a **healthy** man. He is a **young** man."

You would be so bored that you wouldn't want to listen to another word. Luckily, we have another option. We can make such a description more concise by using all three adjectives in one sentence:

• "He is a **tall healthy young** man."

Using more than one adjective in a sentence makes our writing and speech richer and more concise. However, this is also where we have to be careful, because certain adjectives appear in a certain order. For example, in the description above, which would be more correct: *tall healthy young man,* or *young healthy tall man*?

The answer is *tall healthy young man*, but why?

In English, the **order of adjectives** can sometimes be flexible, but most of the time we use a very specific order; if we don't, the sentence sounds unnatural, as in "*young healthy tall man*." To avoid unnatural-sounding sentences, we group adjectives by type, and we try to use them in this order:

1. Opinion
2. Measurements
3. Shape
4. Condition
5. Age
6. Color
7. Pattern



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8. Origin
9. Material
10. Purpose

Obviously we never have a sentence that uses 10 adjectives to describe one noun. That would be far too long of a sentence!

In fact, it would even be rare to find a sentence that uses more than three adjectives to modify one noun. We do need to know a little about each type, though, so that when we need to use two or three adjectives in a row, we'll use them in the right order.

First, let's look at each type of adjective in detail. After that we'll see some examples of sentences that string two or more adjectives together.

Types of Adjectives

Opinion

Adjectives of opinion always come first before any other factual descriptions of the noun. There are two types of opinion adjectives. The first are general opinion adjectives and can be used with any kind of noun, whether it is a person, place, or thing.

Some of the most common general opinion adjectives are:

- good
- bad
- lovely
- strange
- beautiful
- nice

The second type are specific opinion adjectives. These are adjectives that can only be used with particular types of nouns. For example:

• People and animals: *intelligent, friendly, unfriendly, hard-working*

• Buildings and furniture: *comfortable, uncomfortable*

• Food: *flavorful, tasty, delicious*

If you want to use a general opinion adjective and a specific opinion adjective in the same sentence, the general opinion adjective should come first. For example:

• “Isn’t Maria a **lovely, intelligent** girl?”

Lovely is a general opinion adjective because it can be used with any noun. Therefore, it comes first. *Intelligent* is a specific opinion adjective because it can only be used with people and animals, so it comes second.

Measurements

Adjectives of measurement can tell us about the size, height, length, and weight of a person or a thing. Some of the most common adjectives of measurements are:

- big
- small
- tiny
- huge
- enormous
- short
- tall
- long
- heavy
- light

If we were to use more than one adjective of measurement in a sentence, we would normally use the adjective that mentions the general size first, and the other measurements after. For example:

• Correct: “He’s a **big, tall** man.”

Incorrect: “He’s a **tall, big** man.”

• Correct: “I bought a **huge, heavy** table for the kitchen.”

Incorrect: “I bought a **heavy, huge** table for the kitchen.”

Shape

Adjectives of shape usually describe objects. The most common are *round, square, rectangular, triangular,* and *oval*. However, there are many words that describe the shapes of objects that we see all around us but that are used less frequently. For example:

- bent

- concave
- convex
- flat
- pointy
- straight
- twisted
- symmetrical

Condition

Adjectives of condition tell us whether something is in a good or bad state. These are generally adjectives that describe a temporary state of the person or thing in the sentence. Some common adjectives of physical condition are *clean*, *dirty*, *wet*, and *dry*. Emotions like *happy*, *sad*, *angry*, *scared*, and *excited* are also adjectives of condition, as are general states such as *rich*, *powerful*, *shy*, or *clever*."

Age

Adjectives of age can describe how old a person, place, or thing is. We have to be careful with adjectives of age, because some are used to describe only people, some are used only for things, and a few are used for both people and things. For example:

• To describe people: *young*, *youthful*, *elderly*

• To describe things: *new*, *antique*

• To describe both: *old*, *ancient*

Color

Adjectives of color include the names of particular colors themselves, such as *yellow*, *red*, and *blue*, but they can also be approximate colors, like *reddish* or *yellowish*, or even properties of colors, such as *transparent*, *translucent* or *opaque*.

If you use both a color and a property of a color in one sentence, the property should come first, and the color after, immediately before the noun. For example:

• "A **translucent, yellow** cup."

• “An **opaque, blue** curtain.”

Pattern

Adjectives of pattern can describe patterns of materials or even of animals. Some of the most common pattern adjectives are *checked*, *polka-dot*, *striped*, *plaid,* and *flowered*.

Origin

Adjectives of origin describe where something comes from. Usually, these are adjectives that refer to a specific country or region.

When we use a country adjective, like *American*, *British*, *Indian,* or *Korean*, note that we capitalize the adjective. Adjectives of origin that refer to a general region, such as *eastern* or *southern*, are not capitalized.

Material

Adjectives of material tell us what something is made of. For example:

• “A **wooden** table.”

• “A **plastic** chair.”

• “A **steel** railroad track.”

Purpose

Last in the order of adjectives are **adjectives of purpose**. They tell us what something is for. For example:

• “A **sleeping** bag.”

• “A **shopping** cart.”

Now, let’s put all of this information about the different types of adjectives together and see some examples of how it works when we modify a noun with more than one adjective:

• “Don’t forget to bring your **new striped** jacket.”

This sentence has two adjective types: *New* is an adjective of age and **striped** is an adjective of pattern.

• “Yesterday my sister gave me a **blue wool** sweater.

This sentence also has two adjective types: *Blue* is an adjective of color, and *wool* is an adjective of material.

• “I bought an **enormous rectangular Turkish** rug on my vacation.”

This sentence includes three adjective types: *Enormous* is an adjective of measurement; *rectangular* is an adjective of shape; and *Turkish* is an adjective of origin (specifically of a country, so it’s also capitalized).

We use *and* to link two adjectives of the same type that describe separate parts of one object. For example:

• “The child was playing with a **blue** and **red plastic** robot.

Blue and *red* are two adjectives of color, joined by *and*. They are followed by the adjective of material, *plastic*.

Sometimes a series of adjectives follows a linking verb, like *to be*. In this case, the last adjective is connected to the previous ones with the word *and*. For example:

• “The house *is* **big, white**, *and* **wooden**.”

Using commas with adjectives

Last but not least, we need to mention commas. You have probably noticed that in some of our example sentences the adjectives are separated by commas, and in others they’re not.

Coordinate adjectives

In general, we *do* use commas between adjectives that belong to the same category. For example:

• “I bought a **heavy, long** table.”

Adjectives of the same category are called coordinate adjectives. They each describe the same feature of the noun that follows them. Coordinate adjectives are separated by a comma. One way that we can check if adjectives are coordinate is by trying to switch around the order and see if the sentence still makes sense. For example:

• “I bought a **long, heavy** table.”

The sentence still sounds correct, so we know that we are looking at coordinate adjectives and that we need to use a comma. Another way that we can check is by inserting the word *and* where the comma would go:

• “I bought a **heavy** *and* **long** table.”

Again, the sentence still sounds correct, so we know we are dealing with coordinate adjectives.

Cumulative adjectives

When the adjectives are from different categories, they are called cumulative adjectives. This is because they *accumulate* as they describe the noun; that is, they build on each other to create a complete description, and so we don’t separate them with commas:

• “I bought a **black wooden** table.”

Black is describing *wooden table* (not just *table* alone), and so this sentence would sound strange if rearranged, like this:

• “I bought a **wooden black** table.”

We can also try inserting *and*, with the same result:

• “I bought a **black** *and* **wooden** table.”

The sentence doesn’t sound right either rearranged or using the *and* test, so we know that we are dealing with cumulative adjectives, and we should not separate them with commas.

Exceptions

Finally, we should remember that like with most grammar rules, the order of adjectives is not fixed, and there are exceptions. We can do our best to keep adjectives in their natural order, but we may encounter variations.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is an adjective of material?

a) tall
b) silk
c) good
d) straight

2. Which of the following is an adjective of measurement?

a) long

b) beautiful
c) intelligent
d) round

3. Complete the sentence (using correct adjective order): “I bought an old ____ typewriter.”

a) beautiful
b) square
c) gray
d) dirty

4. Choose the correct adjective order:

a) a big fantastic old house
b) an old big fantastic house
c) a fantastic old big house
d) a fantastic big old house

5. Choose the correct adjective order:

a) a clean pink polka-dot sweater
b) a pink clean polka-dot sweater
c) a polka-dot clean pink sweater
d) a polka-dot pink clean sweater

Degrees of Comparison

Definition

Adjectives describe a quality or characteristic of a noun or pronoun. The basic form of an adjective is sometimes known as the **positive degree**.

But adjectives can also be **inflected** (changed in form) to compare a quality between two nouns—this form is known as the **comparative degree**.

Similarly, we can also inflect an adjective to identify a noun with the highest (or lowest) degree of an attribute among a group—this is known as the **superlative degree**.

Forming the Comparative and

Superlative Degrees

We generally form the comparative degree by adding the suffix “-er” to the end of the adjective, or by using the words *more* or *less* before it.

To form the superlative degree, we either add “-est” to the end of the adjective or use the words *most* or *least* before it.

In some cases, depending on how the adjective is spelled, we have to change the spelling slightly to accommodate the addition of the suffix; there are some simple rules we can follow to know when such a change is necessary.

(To learn when and how to use these inflected degrees of comparison, go to the sections on **Comparative Adjectives** and **Superlative Adjectives**.)

“Short” Adjectives

With one-syllable adjectives, we add “-er” or “-est” and double the final consonant if preceded by one vowel. For example:

Adjective (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
big	big**ger**	big**gest**
thin	thin**ner**	thin**nest**
sad	sad**der**	sad**dest**
slim	slim**mer**	slim**mest**

The final consonant is **not** doubled if it is preceded by two vowels or another consonant, as in:

Adjective (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
weak	weak**er**	weak**est**
strong	strong**er**	strong**est**
large*	large**r***	large**st***
small	small**er**	small**est**

(*If the adjective ends in an “e,” then you only need to add “-r” or “-st.”)

If an adjective has two syllables and ends in “-y,” we replace “y” with “i” and add “-er” or “-est,” as in:

Adjective (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
happy	happ**ier**	happ**iest**
chewy	chew**ier**	chew**iest**

“Long” Adjectives

“Long” adjectives are adjectives that have three or more syllables, or adjectives that have two syllables and *do not* end in “-y.” Rather than changing the ending of long adjectives, we use the words *more* or *less* before the adjective to make them comparative, or *most/least* to make them superlative. For example:

Adjective (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
careful	more/less careful	most/least careful
caring	more/less caring	most/least caring
gifted	more/less gifted	most/least gifted
intelligent	more/less intelligent	most/least intelligent
beautiful	more/less beautiful	most/least beautiful
amazing	more/less amazing	most/least amazing

Irregular adjectives

As with most grammatical rules in English, there are some exceptions to the patterns above. Adjectives that do not inflect according to the normal patterns are known as **irregular adjectives**. For example:

Irregular adjective (positive	Comparative	Superlative

degree)	degree	degree
fun	more/less fun	most/least fun
bad	worse	worst
well (healthy)	better	best
good	better	best
far*	farther/further*	farthest/furthest*

(*Although *farther/further* and *farthest/furthest* are often used interchangeably, there are differences between these two forms. In American English, *farther/farthest* is preferred when comparing physical distances, and *further/furthest* is preferred when comparing figurative distances; in British English, *further/furthest* is preferred for both uses.)

Adjectives with multiple forms of inflection

There are also some adjectives that can be inflected using either form we looked at above. The following are some of the most common:

Adjective (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
clever	cleverer ***or*** more/less clever	cleverest ***or*** most/least clever
likely	likelier ***or*** more/less likely	likeliest ***or*** most/least likely
narrow	narrower ***or*** more/less narrow	narrowest ***or*** most/least narrow
quiet	quieter ***or*** more/less quiet	quietest ***or*** most/least quiet
	simpler ***or*** more/less	simplest ***or*** most/least

simple	simple	simple

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following suffixes is used to shift a one-syllable adjective to the **superlative degree**?

a) -ed
b) -er
c) -est
d) -en

2. Which of the following pairs of words is used to shift a two-syllable "-ly" adjective to the **comparative degree**?

a) more/less
b) most/least
c) much/many
d) most/less

3. What is the **comparative form** of the irregular adjective *well*?

a) good
b) better
c) worse
d) best

4. What is the **superlative form** of the adjective *likely*?

a) likelier
b) likeliest
c) more/less likely
d) most/least likely
e) A & C
f) B & D

Comparative Adjectives

Definition

Comparative adjectives are adjectives that compare differences between the attributes of two nouns. These are often measurements, such as height, weight, depth, distance, etc., but they don't have to be. We can also use comparative adjectives to compare non-physical characteristics.

For example:

Adjective	Comparative
tall	taller
fast	faster
sweet	sweeter
beautiful	more/less beautiful
intelligent	more/less intelligent

Forming Comparative Adjectives

As we can see above, we form comparative adjectives either by adding "-er" to the end of the adjective, or by adding the word *more* (or *less*) before the adjective. So how do we know which to choose? Although there are some exceptions, you can follow some simple general rules for forming comparative adjectives:

Short Adjectives

When we discuss comparative adjectives, we class them into two types: **short** and **long**. **"Short" adjectives** are adjectives that have only one syllable, or else have two syllables and end in "-y." For the majority of short adjectives, we form the comparative according to the following rules:

Syllables	Rule	Examples
One syllable	Add "-er" to the end of the adjective.	*Tall* becomes **Taller**

Two syllables ending in “-y”	Replace “-y” with “-ier”	*happy* becomes **happier**

Aside from the major rules in the table, there are two other things we must keep in mind about short adjectives.

First, if the adjective ends in “-e,” we just add “-r,” not “-er.” This is to avoid doubling the letter “e.” For example:

• *Large* becomes **larger**, not *largeer*.

• *Cute* becomes **cuter**, not *cuteer*.

• *Safe* becomes **safer**, not *safeer*.

Second, if the last three letters of the adjective are in the pattern *consonant, vowel, consonant*, we double the final consonant before adding “-er” to the word. For example:

• *Big* becomes **bigger**, not *biger*.

• *Sad* becomes **sadder**, not *sader*.

• *Thin* becomes **thinner**, not *thiner*.

Long Adjectives

“Long” adjectives are adjectives that have three or more syllables, or adjectives that have two syllables and do not end in “-y.” For these adjectives, we can follow these rules:

Syllables	Rule	Examples
Two syllables not ending in “-y”	Insert the word *more/less* before the adjective.	*Careful* becomes **more/less careful**.
Three or more syllables	Insert the word *more/less* before the adjective.	*Intelligent* becomes **more/less intelligent**.

Irregular adjectives

As with most grammatical “rules” in English, there are some exceptions to the patterns above. Here are a few of the adjectives that have **irregular** comparative forms:

Adjective	Comparative form
fun	**more/less fun**
bad	**worse**
good	**better**
well (not ill)	**better**

There are also some adjectives that have two generally accepted comparative forms. These are some of the most common:

Adjective	Comparative Form 1	Comparative Form 2
clever	**cleverer**	**more/less clever**
likely	**likelier**	**more/less likely**
narrow	**narrower**	**more narrow**
quiet	**quieter**	**more/less quiet**
simple	**simpler**	**more/less simple**
far*	**farther**	**further**

*When referring to distance, *farther* and *further* can be used interchangeably. However, in American English, *farther* is preferred when comparing physical distances and *further* when comparing figurative distances. For example:

• “San Francisco is **farther** from New York than Boston.” (physical distance)

BUT

• “I was able to make **further** progress at work.” (figurative distance)

In British English, *further* is more common both for physical *and* figurative distances.

Using Comparative Adjectives

Now that we have discussed how to *form* comparative adjectives, we can look at

how they are used in sentences and within larger conversations. Depending on the situation, you may or may not need to explicitly mention both nouns being compared.

Explicitly mentioning both nouns

Often, the two nouns that are being compared both appear in the sentence. This is the case if there is any chance of the listener or reader being confused by what you're talking about. When we need to mention both nouns, we follow this structure:

Noun 1 + *be* + comparative adjective + *than* + noun 2

For example:

• "An airplane is **bigger** than a car."

• "Mt. Everest is **taller** than Mt. Fuji."

• "Tom is **faster** than John."

In each of these sentences, the noun that has the characteristic to a greater degree comes first. We can achieve the same meaning by using opposite adjectives and switching the order that the nouns appear in. For example:

• "A car is **smaller** than an airplane."

• "Mt. Fuji is **shorter** than Mt. Everest."

• "John is **slower** than Tom."

If we want to achieve the same effect using "long" adjectives, instead of inserting the word *more* before the adjective, we can insert the word *less*. For example:

• "Tom is **more studious** than John."

OR

• "John is **less studious** than Tom."

Keep in mind that the two nouns being compared don't necessarily have to be individual people or objects. One or both of the nouns or noun phrases being compared can also refer to groups. For example:

• "*Cats* are **more independent** than *dogs*."

• “*Women* are **shorter** than *men*.”

• “*Jen* is **smarter** than *the rest of the students in her class*.

We can even compare two **gerunds** (verbs ending in “-ing” that function as nouns). We can compare characteristics of two gerunds in the same way that we can compare any other type of noun:

• “*Running* is **faster** than *walking*.”

• “*Drawing* is **easier** than *painting*.”

• “*Sailing* is **more relaxing** than *waterskiing*.”

Finally, we can use the regular patterns for making **negative** and **interrogative** sentences. For negatives, we simply add the word *not*, or its contracted form, “-n’t,” after the verb *be*:

• “Walking is ***not*** **faster** than running.”

• “Women are***n’t*** **taller** than men.”

• “Waterskiing is***n’t*** **more relaxing** than sailing.”

To form interrogatives (questions), we simply place the conjugated form of the verb *be* at the beginning of the sentence:

• “*Is* running **faster** than walking?”

• “*Is* Jen **smarter** than the rest of the students in her class?”

• “*Are* cats **more independent** than dogs?”

If we are not sure which noun is *taller, faster,* etc., we can ask by adding a **question word** like *who, which,* or *what* to the beginning of the sentence, and placing the two nouns as options at the end:

• “*Who* is **taller**, Mary or Jane?”

• “*Which* is **tastier**, pizza or pasta?”

• “*What*’s **faster**, a car or a motorcycle?”

Omitting one or both nouns

Sometimes in conversation, it isn’t necessary to explicitly mention one or both nouns that we’re comparing. In fact, it might even sound repetitive. Take for example the following conversation:

• Speaker A: “I don’t think you should be running. Swimming is **easier** on the knees than running.”

• Speaker B: “Yes, but running is **better** for my heart than swimming.”

That’s a very repetitive conversation and probably wouldn’t occur in natural speech. Instead, the two speakers can omit the parts underlined, which avoids repetition and creates a more natural-sounding conversation:

• Speaker A: “I don’t think you should be running. Swimming is **easier** on the knees.

• Speaker B: “Yes, but running is **better** for my heart.”

Note that when we omit a noun, we also omit the word *than*.

Gradable and ungradable adjectives

We can only use **gradable adjectives** as comparative adjectives. Gradable adjectives are adjectives that can move up and down on a scale of intensity. For example, *tall* is a gradable adjective because something can be *a little tall, tall,* or *very tall*.

We can also use expressions like *a bit, a little, much, a lot,* and *far* before the comparative adjective to indicate scale. For example:

• “Jane is *much* **taller** than Emily.”

• “Giraffes have *far* **longer** necks than elephants.”

• “Is your dad *a little* **bigger** than you?”

Ungradable adjectives are adjectives that **can’t** move up and down on a scale of intensity. For example, you cannot say “I am very *married*.” You are either married, or you aren’t. The same can be said for the adjective *dead*: something is either *dead* or it isn’t. These types of adjectives cannot be used in the comparative form.

Expressing Equality and Inequality using as … as

There is another way to express similarities and differences between two nouns using adjectives that aren’t comparative. To describe two things as equal, we can use the construction *as + adjective + as*. For example:

• “The apple is **as *big* as** the orange.” (The two are the same size.)

• “The table is **as *heavy* as** the desk.” (The two are the same weight.)

• “Jane is **as *talkative* as** Mary.” (They both like to talk the same amount.)

We can use the same construction to say that two things are unequal. We just have to add the word *not*:

• “The apple is ***not* as *big* as** the orange.” (The orange is bigger.)

• “The table is ***not* as *heavy* as** the desk.” (The desk is heavier.)

• “Jane is ***not* as *talkative* as** Mary.” (Mary is more talkative.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Comparative adjectives express differences between _____ nouns.

a) Two
b) Two or three
c) Three
d) More than three

2. Which of the following comparative adjectives is misspelled?

a) bigger
b) taller
c) longer
d) smaler

3. Comparative adjectives are never _____.

a) gradable
b) ungradable

4. Which of these sentences is incorrect?

a) “I think ice cream is better than cake.”
b) “I wish I had a faster car.”
c) “Are you going to buy a nicer radio than?”
d) “I’m always looking for a cheaper option.”

5. Which sentence has a different meaning from the other three?

a) John is taller than Tom.
b) Tom is shorter than John.
c) Tom isn’t as tall as John.

d) John isn’t as tall as Tom.

Superlative Adjectives

Definition

Superlative adjectives are adjectives that describe the attribute of a person or thing that is the highest (or lowest) in degree compared to the members of the noun’s group. Superlative adjectives are similar to **comparative adjectives**, except they express the most extreme degree of comparison, and they are only used when talking about groups of three or more people or things.

Forming Superlative Adjectives

We form superlative adjectives either by adding “-est” to the end of the adjective, or by adding the word *most* before the adjective.

Although there are some exceptions, we can follow some simple general rules for forming superlative adjectives.

“Short” Adjectives

With one-syllable adjectives, we add “-est” and double the final consonant if preceded by one vowel. For example:

- big – biggest
- thin – thinnest
- sad – saddest
- slim – slimmest

The final consonant is **not** doubled if it is preceded by two vowels or another consonant, as in:

- weak – weakest
- strong – strongest
- large – largest
- small – smallest

(If the adjective ends in an “e,” then you only need to add “-st,” as in the case of *large – large**st***.)

If an adjective has two syllables and ends in “-y,” we replace “y” with “i” and

add “-est,” as in:

- happy – happiest
- chewy – chewiest
- sticky – stickiest
- furry – furriest

“Long” Adjectives

“Long” adjectives are adjectives that have three or more syllables, or adjectives that have two syllables and *do not* end in “-y.” Rather than changing the ending of long adjectives to make them superlative, we use the word *most* before the adjective to indicate the highest degree of something, or *least* to indicate the lowest degree. For example:

- careful – most/least careful
- caring – most/least caring
- gifted – most/least gifted
- intelligent – most/least intelligent
- beautiful – most/least beautiful
- amazing – most/least amazing

Exceptions

As with most grammatical “rules” in English, there are some exceptions to the patterns above. Here are a few of the adjectives that have **irregular** superlative forms:

- fun – most/least fun
- bad – worst
- good – best
- far – farthest/furthest*

*When referring to distance, *farthest* and *furthest* can be used interchangeably. However, in the American English, *farthest* is preferred when comparing physical distances, while *furthest* is preferred when comparing figurative distances. For example:

• “San Francisco is farther from New York than Boston, but Hawaii is **the farthest**.” (physical distance)

BUT

• “Of all the lies I’ve heard today, that one is **the furthest** from the truth.” (figurative distance)

In British English, *furthest* is more common both for physical *and* figurative distances.

Adjectives with multiple superlative forms

There are also some adjectives that can either take the “-est” ending or be preceded by “most” to become superlative. The following are some of the most common:

Adjective	Superlative Form 1	Superlative Form 2
clever	cleverest	most/least clever
likely	likeliest	most/least likely
narrow	narrowest	most/least narrow
quiet	quietest	most/least quiet
simple	simplest	most/least simple

Using Superlative Adjectives

We usually use superlative adjectives when comparing the attributes of someone or something to others, either in a collective group or among several individuals.

When we use a superlative adjective in a sentence, we almost always precede it with the word *the*. For example:

• “John is **the tallest** student in his class.”

• “Daniel always buys **the most advanced** smartphones available.”

• “Mrs. Phillips is **the nicest** teacher among the staff.”

• “It is **the highest** mountain in the world.”

• “There are many expensive brands of watches, but these are **the most**

expensive kind."

• "This is **the best** book I've ever read."

• "Among her four sisters, Georgina has **the worst** eyesight."

We can also identify a superlative attribute of a person or thing compared to him-/her-/itself in other points in time. In this case, we generally do **not** use the word *the*. For example:

• "I am **most alert** after my morning coffee." (compared to a different time of day)

• "The car is **fastest** when the engine has warmed up." (compared to when the engine is cold)

• "Flowers are **prettiest** in the spring." (compared to the other seasons)

Omitting the group of comparison

When we use superlatives, it is very common to omit the group that something or someone is being compared to because that group is often implied by a previous sentence, and to repeat the group would sound very repetitive. For example:

• "My brothers are all fast swimmers. John is **the fastest**, though."

In informal speech or writing, it is quite common for the word *the* to be left out when the group of comparison is omitted, as in:

• "We all were carrying big, heavy sticks with us. Mine was **biggest**, though."

However, this should be avoided, especially in formal or professional speech or writing.

Superlatives for hyperbole

We can also omit a group of comparison when a superlative adjective is being used for hyperbolic effect. For instance:

• "I'm going to buy my daughter **the most beautiful** puppy for her birthday."

• "I had **the biggest** steak for my lunch today."

Expressing the lowest degree

As we've seen, "long" adjectives can either take *most* or *least* to indicate the highest and lowest degrees of comparison. For example:

• “Though it was **the least intelligent** movie that I’ve seen this year, it was **the most exciting** one I’d been to in a long time.”

“Short” adjectives, on the other hand, have only one superlative form that expresses the highest degree of its characteristic. For two-syllable adjectives ending in “-y,” we can generally just use the word *least* with the base form of the adjective. For example:

• “He’s **the least tidy** child I’ve ever met.”

• “The baby’s **least grumpy** when he’s had enough naps.”

We can also technically use *the least* with a single-syllable adjective in its normal form to express the lowest degree, but this is often awkward to read or say. For example:

• “John is **the tallest** student in his class, but he is **the least tall** on the baseball team.”

When we want to express the lowest quality of a single-syllable adjective, it is better just to use the opposite superlative adjective, as in:

• “John is **the tallest** in his class, but he is **the shortest** on the baseball team.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Superlative adjectives express differences among a group of _____ nouns.

a) Two
b) Two or three
c) Three or more
d) Five or more

2. Which of the following suffixes is used to create the superlative form for short adjectives?

a) -er
b) -est
c) -ier
d) -ence

3. Which of the following is an **incorrect** superlative adjective?

a) biggest

b) least intelligent
c) longest
d) most small

4. When do we generally **not** use the article *the* with a superlative adjective?
a) When the person or thing is being compared to itself in other times
b) When the person or thing is being compared with a group in other times
c) When the superlative adjective is being used for hyperbolic effect
d) When a single-syllable adjective is being made into the superlative form

Adverbs

Definition

An **adverb** refers to any element in a sentence used to modify a verb, adjective, another adverb, or even an entire clause.

Adverbs can be single words, as in:

• “You write **beautifully**.”

• “He **slowly** walked towards the bus.”

• “He owns the **bright** red car.”

They can also be phrases (called **adverbial phrases**) or entire clauses (called **adverbial clauses**). For example:

• “She ran **very quickly** so as not to be late.” (The adverbial phrase *very quickly* modifies the verb *ran*.)

• “The cat lives **in the shed**.” (The adverbial prepositional phrase *in the shed* modifies the verb *lives*.”

• “She looked excited, **as if she could jump up and dance at any moment**.” (The adverbial clause *as if she could jump up and dance at any moment* modifies the independent clause *She looked excited*.)

Single-word adverbs, adverbial phrases, and adverbial clauses are sometimes grouped together under the umbrella term **adverbials**, which simply means any word or group of words used as an adverb in a sentence. However, because the term is so broad in meaning, it is very common to simply call any adverbial element an “adverb.”

Categories of Adverbs

There are many different categories of adverbs, which provide specific kinds of descriptions and which behave slightly differently in a sentence.

The table below provides a quick breakdown of the different categories and how they are used to describe something in a sentence. Go to the sections of each individual category to see more examples and learn more about how they are used.

(Note that most of the examples below are single-word adverbs. However, adverbial phrases—and sometimes adverbial clauses—can also belong to each category.)

Category of Adverb	Function	Example adverbs	Example sentence
Adverbs of Time	Describe when or for how long something happens or is the case.	*now, tomorrow, yesterday, still, yet, later*	"We are eating **now**."
Adverbs of Frequency	Describe how frequently something happens or is the case. A subset of Adverbs of Time.	*always, usually, sometimes, often, rarely, daily, weekly, monthly*	"I **rarely** eat breakfast in bed."
Adverbs of Place	Describe the direction, distance, movement, or position involved in the action of a verb.	*north, everywhere, here, there, forward, downward, up, uphill, behind*	"I absolutely hate running **uphill**."
Adverbs of Manner	Describe how something happens or how someone does something. Usually formed from adjectives.	*beautifully, wonderfully, slowly, deliberately, happily*	"He walked **slowly** toward the bar."

Adverbs of Degree	Describe the intensity, degree, or extent of the verb, adjective, or adverb they are modifying.	*undoubtedly, truly, very, quite, pretty, somewhat, fairly*	"I'm **fairly** certain this is correct."
Adverbs of Purpose	Describe why something happens or is the case. Single-word adverbs are usually **conjunctive adverbs**.	*therefore, thus, consequently, hence*	"We've never seen such high numbers. We must **therefore** conclude that the results are not normal."
Focusing Adverbs	Used to draw attention to a particular part of a clause.	*also, exclusively, just, mostly, notably, primarily*	"They played **mostly** techno music at the party."
Negative Adverbs	Used to modify the meaning of a verb, adjective, other adverb, or entire clause in a negative way. Used in many of the other categories above.	*no, not, hardly, barely, never, seldom*	"He does **not** work on Mondays."
Conjunctive Adverbs	Used to connect independent clauses and describe the relationship between them.	*comparatively, therefore, also, however, moreover, similarly*	"Jen is terrible at math; **however**, she still likes it."
Evaluative Adverbs	Used by the speaker to comment or give an opinion on something. Evaluative adverbs modify the entire clause.	*apparently, astonishingly, clearly, frankly, obviously, presumably*	"**Clearly**, we're going to have to work harder."

Viewpoint Adverbs	Used to indicate whose point of view we are expressing, or to specify what aspect of something we are talking about. (Many viewpoint adverbs are **adverbial phrases**.)	*personally, in my point of view, according to you, scientifically, biologically*	"**Personally**, I don't believe it's true."
Relative Adverbs	Used to introduce **relative clauses**, when the information relates to a place, time, or the reason an action took place.	*where, when, why*	"I don't know **why** he got angry."
Adverbial Nouns	Nouns or noun phrases that function grammatically as adverbs to modify verbs and certain adjectives, usually specifying time, distance, weight, age, or monetary value.	*tomorrow, an hour, an ounce, five dollars, 25 years*	"I can barely see **a foot** in front of me in this fog."

Regular and irregular adverbs

Regular adverbs are formed by adding "-ly" or some variation thereof onto the end of an adjective. Sometimes the adjective's spelling needs to be altered slightly to accommodate this, but the rules of doing so are consistent and fairly straightforward.

Irregular adverbs, on the other hand, are adverbs that are not formed according to standard English spelling conventions. Because they do not follow the "rules," there is no trick to using them: you simply have to memorize them.

Continue on to the section **Regular and Irregular Adverbs** in this chapter to learn more about both kinds.

Comparative and Superlative Adverbs

Comparative and **superlative adverbs** are almost exclusively used to modify verbs.

Comparative adverbs express a higher (or lower) degree of how a verb's action is performed, usually in comparison to another person or thing. They are generally formed by adding the suffix "-er."

Superlative adverbs, on the other hand, are used to identify the highest (or lowest) degree of how an action is performed. They are generally formed by adding the suffix "-est."

Adverbs in their basic forms are sometimes known as being in the **positive degree**.

The way in which an adverb shifts from the basic degree to the comparative and superlative degrees is known as the **Degrees of Comparison**.

Adverbial Phrases

An **adverbial phrase** (also known as an **adverb phrase**) is a group of words that functions as an adverb in a sentence. These can be adverbs modified by other adverbs, adverbial prepositional phrases, or adverbial infinitive phrases.

Adverbs modified by mitigators and intensifiers

Adverbial phrases are commonly formed when an adverb's intensity is being modified by another adverb. These modifying adverbs are known as **mitigators**, which decrease the intensity of the main adverb, and **intensifiers**, which increase its intensity. For example:

• "The kicker is running ***somewhat*** **slowly** back to the bench. He might be injured." (mitigator)

• "She performed ***very*** **well** on her exam." (intensifier)

Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases are often used adverbially in a sentence. For example:

• "We were playing Frisbee **at the park**."

• "**After they woke up**, they packed up their things and went on a hike."

Infinitive phrases

We can also use infinitive phrases as adverbial phrases in a sentence to describe purpose or reason for an action or state of being. For instance:

• “Patricia went to the mountains **to go for a hike**.”

• “I’m so happy **to be your friend**.”

Adverbial Clauses

An **adverbial clause**, or **adverb clause**, is a group of words that contains a **subject** and a **predicate verb** and is used, like a regular adverb, to modify adjectives, verbs, and adverbs.

Adverbial clauses use **subordinating conjunctions** to connect them to **independent clauses**; the way an adverbial clause modifies an element in a sentence depends on the kind of subordinating conjunction used. For example:

• “I will arrive ***when*** **dinner is ready**.” (adverbial clause of time)

• “Peter brings his sunglasses ***everywhere*** **he goes**.” (adverbial clause of place)

• “I admire you ***because*** **you are an inspiration to many people**.” (adverbial clause of purpose)

• “They’ll approve your request ***provided*** **you pay the appropriate amount of money**.” (adverbial clause of condition)

• “She looked excited, ***as if*** **she could jump up and dance at any moment**.” (adverbial clause of comparison or manner)

• “***Although*** **she doesn’t have much money**, Wendy often goes traveling.” (adverbial clause of contrast)

Order of Adverbs

Adverbs can appear almost anywhere in a sentence

If we use more than one adverb to describe a verb, though, there is a general order in which the different categories of adverbs should appear—this is known as the **order of adverbs** (sometimes called the **royal order of adverbs**):

1. **Adverbs of Manner**
2. **Adverbs of Place**
3. **Adverbs of Frequency**

4. **Adverbs of Time**

5. **Adverbs of Purpose**

However, we'll see in that section that there is still a lot of flexibility as to how we order adverbs in a sentence.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. How are regular adverbs **generally** formed?

a) By adding "-er" to the end of an adjective
b) By adding "-est" to the end of an adjective
c) By adding "-ly" to the end of an adjective
d) By adding "-lier" to the end of an adjective

2. Which of the following **cannot** be used to create an adverbial phrase?

a) Intensifiers
b) Prepositional phrases
c) Gerund phrases
d) Infinitive phrases

3. Identify the category of the adverb (in **bold**) in the following sentence:
"I'm **pretty** happy with the way this turned out."

a) Adverb of degree
b) Adverb of manner
c) Focusing adverb
d) Viewpoint adverb

4. Which of the following is used to create **adverbial clauses**?

a) Correlative conjunctions
b) Subordinating conjunctions
c) Relative adverbs
d) Coordinating conjunctions

5. Where can adverbs appear in a sentence?

a) At the beginning
b) In the middle

c) At the end
d) Anywhere in the sentence

Adverbs of Time

Definition

Adverbs of time tell us at what time (*when*) or for how long (*duration*) something happens or is the case. There is also a specific category of time adverbs that describe **frequency**, or *how often* something happens or is the case; however, their usage is a bit more complex, so we will examine those in a separate section.

Positioning

Adverbs of time are most often placed at the end of a sentence. For example:

• “I’m going to the movies **tomorrow**.” (When are you going? *Tomorrow*.)

• “She left **yesterday**.” (When did she leave? *Yesterday*.)

• “We are eating **now**.” (When are we eating? *Now*.)

However, we can sometimes place adverbs of time at the beginning of the sentence to put an extra emphasis on the time or duration being described. They are usually offset by a comma if appearing at the beginning of the sentence, although this is not always necessary. For example:

• “**Next year**, I’m going to run for president.” (Emphasizes a point in time.)

• “**Now**, I have to start the whole project again from scratch.” (Emphasizes *now* in a sequence of events.)

• “**For 17 years** we’ve been dating, and not once has he proposed!” (Emphasizes the duration of time.)

Special exceptions

The majority of time-related adverbs appear at the end of a sentence (or the beginning, for emphasis), but there are a few exceptions to this rule.

Later

The adverb *later*, in addition to its normal placement at the end or beginning of a

sentence, can also be placed immediately after the main verb. This creates a formal tone to the sentence, as might be found in official reports or in newspaper articles. Compare these three sentences:

• “She spoke to an adviser **later**.” (A simple sentence with no particular emphasis.)

• “**Later**, she spoke to an adviser.” (Extra emphasis on when she spoke to the advisor.)

• “She **later** spoke to an adviser.” (Slightly formal tone, as might be used by someone reporting the sequence of events to someone else.)

Yet

As an adverb of time, the word *yet* is used primarily in **negative** sentences or in questions. It can appear at the end of the sentence, or it can follow the word *not* before the main verb in a negative sentence. It does not appear at the beginning of the sentence (except when it functions as a **conjunction**, rather than an adverb). Here are some examples:

• “He hasn’t gone to the doctor **yet**.”

• “We have not **yet** sold our house.”

• “Have you finished your homework **yet**?”

However, *yet* can also be used after **auxiliary verbs** and before the main verb in positive sentences to talk about a future possibility, as in:

• “I *have* **yet** to decide whether I’m leaving.”

• “They *may* **yet** file for bankruptcy.”

• “Things *could* **yet** improve in the region.”

• “We *might* **yet** be able to strike a deal with them.”

Still

The adverb of time *still* is used to describe something that is continuously happening. *Still* comes before the main verb of the sentence in questions, if used before *not* in negative sentences, or if used after auxiliary verbs in positive sentences about the future:

• “Are you **still** working on that project?”

• “He’s **still** *not* sure about how to proceed.”

• “I *am* **still** thinking about moving to Europe.”

The adverb *still* can also be used with the **modal auxiliary verbs** *may, might, can,* and *could* to describe something that was a possibility in the past, and which could possibly happen in the future. In this case, it has the same meaning as *yet*, and the two are all but interchangeable (though *yet* sounds a little bit more formal). Here are the same sentences we looked at with *yet*, but this time using *still* instead:

• “They *may* **still** file for bankruptcy.”

• “Things *could* **still** improve in the region.”

• “We *might* **still** be able to strike a deal with them.”

Adverbs of Duration – *For* and *Since*

When we want to talk about for how long something happens or is the case, we generally use the prepositions *for* and *since* along with a determiner of time. When we use *for*, we pair it with a word or words that specify a **length of time**; with *since*, on the other hand, we use specific **points in time**. Both usually occur at the end of the sentence, unless they are being followed by infinitive or a prepositional phrases. And, as we’ve seen already, they can also be used at the beginning of the sentence to add emphasis.

Here are a few examples of each:

for

• “I have been running *for* ***three hours***.”

• “They have been waiting *for* ***two months*** to be seen by a doctor.”

• “*For* ***10 years***, we’ve seen this country’s economy continue to decline.”

since

• “Our computer systems have been having issues **since** ***last week***.”

• “We have been looking **since** ***September*** for a place to live.”

• “**Since** ***we were kids***, we’ve always dreamed of being astronauts.” (The phrase *we were kids* in this sentence might seem like it should be “**the time when we were kids**,” but because it is used with *since*, the shorter version is acceptable.)

In Proper Order

Remember, adverbs of time can be used to describe three different aspects: **duration**, **frequency**, and *certain points in time (when)*. If we are using multiple adverbs of time in the same sentence, and if there is no special emphasis given to one aspect over another, then that is the order in which they generally appear. Even if one of the three aspects is omitted, the other two still maintain their position in relation to each other. Here are some examples:

• "I went door to door **for two hours** every afternoon *last year*."

• "He will be traveling **for two years** *after college*."

• "The train runs hourly *in the fall*."

If one aspect of time is being given particular emphasis in the sentence, then it generally comes later in the order. Let's look at the first sentence arranged in a different order:

• "I went door to door every afternoon *last year* **for two hours**."

As we can see, **for two hours** is given stronger emphasis than either every afternoon or *last year*.

Notice as well that each adverb of duration is made using *for*; we can't use *since* in the same way with multiple adverbs. For instance, we can see how the following would not make any sense:

✖ "She's known him **since high school** each day *this year*." (incorrect)

If we are using *since* to indicate duration along with other adverbs of time in the same sentence, then it must come after adverbs of frequency (or at the beginning of the sentence), and it can only be used with certain kinds of verbs. For example:

• "We've spoken to each other every day **since high school**."

• "**Since my operation**, I've been getting stronger every day."

• "He's been feeling dizzy frequently **since his car accident** *last spring*."

Sources of confusion

Soon vs. Early

When we say, "I arrived early," it means before the expected or required time. It

can also be used in the future tense, as in “I will arrive early.”

We use *soon*, on the other hand, for a future time frame; it isn’t used in the past.

For instance, if we say, “I will see you **soon**,” it means *in a short time* (the near future). We cannot say “I saw you **soon**,” because it cannot be used in the past tense.

Any longer vs. Any more vs. No longer

Any longer and *any more* (or *anymore*, see below) are synonyms, and they can be used interchangeably.

When we use *any longer* or *any more*, we need to use *don’t/doesn’t* because the adverbs express a negative relationship with time. No matter which adverb you use, it is important that they are positioned at the end of the sentence.

However, when we use *no longer*, it comes between the subject and the verb. In contrast to *any longer* or *any more*, it is used in positive sentences because it **makes** the sentence negative. It would be wrong to say, for example, “He doesn’t work there *no longer*”—this creates a double negative and makes the sentence positive, therefore creating the opposite meaning to what was intended.

Let’s take a look at some examples in order to clarify.

• “I don’t work for that company **any longer**.”

• “I don’t eat meat **anymore**.”

• “I **no longer** work for that company.”

• “I **no longer** eat meat.”

Anymore vs. Any more

In American English, people often use these two terms interchangeably as adverbs of time. Outside of America, though, using *anymore* is more rare, and some even consider it to be incorrect. Therefore, it is better to avoid using it outside of American English. Also, because *anymore* is considered by some to be an informal, modern coinage, it is safer to avoid using it in formal writing as well.

However, if we are talking about an *amount* of something, we must only use *any more*. This is because *more* is used an adjective describing the amount of a noun,

with *any* modifying *more*. For instance:

✖ “I don’t want **anymore** pasta. I’m full.” (incorrect)

✔ “I don’t want **any more** pasta. I’m full.” (correct)

No longer vs. no more

The phrase *no more* cannot be used interchangeably with *no longer*. While it **can** technically function as an adverb, it is very rarely used this way and would usually sound quite awkward or contrived. It is much more often used as a pronoun phrase meaning “no further amount (of something).” Here are some examples showing correct and incorrect uses:

✔ “He **no longer** works here.” (correct)
✖ “He **no more** works here.” (incorrect)

✔ “We will tolerate **no more**.” (correct)
✖ “We will tolerate **no longer**.” (incorrect)

• “I love you **no more**.” (technically correct, but very awkward)
• “I love you **no longer**.” (more correct, but still awkward)
• “I **no longer** love you” ***or*** “I don’t love you **any more**.” (most correct)

That having been said, a common slang expression is to use *no more* as an adverb in a negative sentence, as in, “He doesn’t work there **no more**.” This is grammatically incorrect, but slang very often ignores or upends common grammatical rules.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What are the three different categories of adverbs of time?

a) Manner, duration, and frequency
b) Points in time, duration, and place
c) Points in time, duration, and frequency
d) Duration, frequency, and degree

2. Where do the **majority** of adverbs of time appear in a sentence?

a) At the beginning of the sentence

b) After the verb they modify
c) Before the verb they modify
d) At the end of the sentence

3. Which adverb of time **cannot** appear at the beginning of a sentence?

a) yet
b) still
c) for
d) since
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) C & D

4. Identify the adverb of time used in the following sentence:
“I quickly realized that if we wanted the job done next year, we would have to work hard and fast.”

a) quickly
b) next year
c) hard
d) fast

5. Which of the following adverbs of time can be used to complete the following sentence?
“They _____ plan to drive to Mexico.”

a) no longer
b) any more
c) any longer
d) no more

Adverbs of Place

Definition

Adverbs of place tell us about an aspect of location associated with the action of a verb, specifying the direction, distance, movement, or position involved in the action. Because adverbs of place are specific to actions of verbs, they cannot be used to modify adverbs or adjectives (with one exception, as we shall see).

We'll first look at where such adverbs are used in a sentence, and then we'll examine the different types of adverbs of place.

Position in a sentence

Adverbs of place generally appear immediately after the main verb in a sentence if it is **intransitive**, or else after the verb's object if it is **transitive**.

For example:

• "We were walking **north**." (intransitive—adverb follows the verb)

• "He kicked the ball **into the field**." (transitive—adverb follows the object)

• "My friend is moving **far away**." (intransitive—adverb follows the verb)

• "The wind keeps scattering sand **everywhere**." (transitive—adverb follows the object)

Adverbial prepositional phrases can also be placed at the beginning of the sentence. Doing so adds a large amount of emphasis to the location they describe. However, the resulting sentences are more likely to be found in literary writing; they might sound out of place or contrived in day-to-day English. For example:

• "**In this house** we have lived our entire lives."

• "**Outside the office**, I could hear my parents talking to the principal."

• "**Across the meadow** I spied a beautiful woman."

Adverbs ending in "-ward" or "-wards" (such as *homeward(s), eastward(s), onward(s)*, etc.) can appear at or near the beginning of a sentence to put emphasis on their description as well. Again, this creates a more literary style to the writing, and wouldn't be suited to everyday speech or writing. For example:

• "**Onwards** we marched, hoping to arrive before sunset."

• “Ever **upwards** the mighty redwood trees grow.”

The only adverbs of place that *are* very commonly used at the beginning of sentences are the adverbs *here* and *there*. As with the others, this adds emphasis to the location or direction being described, and we can also use them in this way to create exclamations. For instance:

• “**Here** is the book I was telling you about.”

• “**There** is the rest of the team!”

Now that we’ve seen where in a sentence the adverbs of place go, let’s look at the various types that we can use.

Types of adverbs of place

Adverbs of direction

Many adverbs of place indicate a specific direction of movement. For example:

- *up, down, across, north, south, east, west.*

Here are a few example sentences illustrating their use:

• “The house is situated **north** of the city.”

• “Let’s drive **down** a bit farther.”

• “They walked **across the field**.”

Adverbs of movement and direction

There are also adverbs of place that end in “-ward” or “-wards” that describe movement in particular directions, as in *homeward(s), backward(s), forward(s),* or *onward(s)*. While quite similar to the adverbs of direction we looked already, they add a sense of continual movement along with the direction they specify.

Here are some examples used in sentences:

• “We headed **eastwards**.”

• “The people all gazed **upwards** at the meteor shower.”

• “You should always go **forward** in life.” (Describes metaphorical rather than physical direction and movement.)

In each instance, the word can include an “s” or not; they are interchangeable, so use whichever sounds better.

Toward and towards

Toward (or *towards*), while very similar to the above adverbs, is actually a **preposition**—it cannot stand alone as an adverb. It must be followed by a noun to create a prepositional phrase, which can then function adverbially to describe movement, as in:

• “I saw them coming **toward me**.”
• “He walked **towards the car**.”

Also note that while *toward*, without an “s,” is more common in American English, *towards*, with an “s,” is more common in British English.

Adverbs of location

These adverbs all indicate the location of someone or something in relation to someone or something else. They can each function either as adverbs, in which case they stand alone, or as prepositions, in which case they are followed by nouns to form adverbial prepositional phrases. Here are a few common adverbs related to position that can also function as prepositions:

- *behind, inside, outside, next to, between, over*

Let’s look at some examples where these stand alone as adverbs, and then we’ll look at the same words functioning as prepositions.

As adverbs

• “We were waiting **outside**.”
• “I kicked the ball **around**.”
• “The others started lagging **behind**.”

As prepositions

• “We were waiting **outside his office**.”
• “I kicked the ball **around the field**.”
• "The others started lagging **behind us**.”

Adverbs of movement and location

Just as the “-ward(s)” adverbs indicated both movement and direction, other

adverbs of place can be used to indicate both movement and *location*. Examples of these include *indoors, inside, outdoors, outside, uphill, downhill* and *abroad*.

Here are some sentences where these are used to describe both movement and location:

• "Our mother told us to go play **outside** for a while."

• "I absolutely hate running **uphill**."

• "They're thinking of going **abroad** for their vacation."

Note that, depending on the verb they are modifying, some of these may only describe location, as in "I am living *abroad*" or "I like camping *outdoors*." These verbs do not indicate movement-based actions, and so the accompanying adverbs only specify location.

Unspecified location or direction

Everywhere, somewhere, anywhere, and *nowhere* are adverbs of place. They describe locations or directions that are indefinite or unspecific. For example:

• "I looked **everywhere** for my book."

• "I would like to go **somewhere** tropical for my birthday."

• "You're going **nowhere**!"

• "Is there **anywhere** to sit down?"

In less formal speech or writing, "place" can be used instead of "where," thus creating *everyplace, someplace, anyplace,* and *no place*. Note that only the last of these is made into two words.

Here and there

Here and *there* are adverbs of place that relate specifically to the speaker. *Here* indicates a location or direction that is with, towards, or near to the speaker, while *there* indicates a location or direction that is away from, not near to, or not with the speaker.

For example:

• "I put my book **there**."

• "Yes, you can sit down **here**."

• "Let's go **there** for our trip."

• “Turn **here**, please.”

And, as we mentioned earlier in this section, both *here* and *there* can be used at the beginning of sentences to emphasize the location they are describing or to create exclamations:

• “**There**’s the restaurant we were looking for.”

• “**Here** I am!”

It may seem like *there* in the first example is functioning as the subject of the verb *is*, but it is actually functioning as an adverb. In this construction, the subject (*the restaurant*) is inverted with the verb *is*.

As the object of a preposition

Here and *there* are also often combined with prepositions to create more specific references to location. Note that, because they are the objects of prepositions, they are functioning as nouns in this case rather than adverbs. For instance:

• “Please put the table **over there**.”

• “Why are the keys **up here**?”

• “Don’t put your muddy boots **on there**!”

• “It’s rather hot **in here**.”

With the adjective *bound*

We’ve already mentioned that adverbs of place are not used to describe adjectives, but there is one unique adjective that *can* take adverbs of place: the adjective *bound* (meaning “heading, or intending to head, in a given direction”). Note that only adverbs or adverbial phrases specifying direction can be used with this, as in:

• **homeward bound**
• **bound south**
• **bound for home**

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What are generally **not** modified by adverbs of place?

a) verbs
b) adverbs

c) adjectives
d) B & C
e) A & C

2. If an adverb of place is modifying an **intransitive** verb, where is it **usually** located in a sentence?

a) Immediately before the verb it modifies
b) Immediately after the verb it modifies
c) Immediately after the object of the verb
d) B & C

3. Which of the following adverbs of place is used to describe both **movement** and **direction**?

a) here
b) outside
c) onwards
d) everywhere

4. Identify the adverb of place in the following sentence:
“Hastily, he fell silent and withdrew into his study.”

a) hastily
b) silent
c) into
d) into his study

5. Which of the following is an adverb of place?

a) abroad
b) resoundingly
c) very
d) generally

6. Which of the following is **not** an adverb of place?

a) east
b) out
c) toward
d) upward

Adverbs of Manner

Definition

Adverbs of manner are used to tell us how something happens or is done. They can modify verbs, adjectives, or clauses of a sentence.

Creating adverbs of manner

Adverbs of manner are very often formed from adjectives by simply adding "-ly." For example:

• "She is a *beautiful* singer." (*Beautiful* is an adjective. It describes the noun "singer.")
• "She sings **beautifully**." (*Beautifully* is an adverb of manner. It describes the verb "sing." How does she sing? She sings *beautifully*.)

• "He is a *slow* walker." (*Slow* is an adjective describing the noun *walker*.)
• "He walks **slowly**." (*Slowly* is an adverb of manner. How does he walk? *Slowly*.)

Changes in spelling

Sometimes the spelling of a word will have to change slightly so as to better accommodate the extra "-ly." If the adjective ends in "-ic," for instance, it will usually become "-ically":

• "They are *enthusiastic* students."
• "They work **enthusiastically**."

If the adjective ends in a "-y," it usually becomes "-ily":

• "The children are *happy* when they are playing."
• "The children are playing **happily**."

And if it ends in "-le," the "e" on the end is dropped to make "-ly":

• "He is a *terrible* golfer."
• "He plays golf **terribly**."

If an adjective already ends in "-ly," we can give it an adverbial function by simply using it in the adverbial **prepositional phrase** "in a _____ manner":

• “They played **in a *lively* manner**.”
• “Please arrive **in a *timely* manner**.”

Irregular adverbs

There are a number of exceptions to these spelling rules, though, which are known as **irregular adverbs**. Here are some irregular adverbs of manner:

• The adjectives *straight*, *fast*, and *hard* all remain the same (with no “-ly” ending) when they function as adverbs.

• The adjective *wrong* can become *wrongly*, or simply remain *wrong*—both are acceptable. However, *wrong* as an adverb **must** come after the verb if modifies (as in “I guessed *wrong*” or “he filled out the form *wrong*”), but *wrongly* can be used both before or after the word it modifies (as in “**wrongly** accused” or “judged **wrongly**”).

• Finally, *well* is the irregular adverb of the adjective *good*—but *well* can be used as an **adjective**, too!

(There are more irregular adverbs than the ones above. Go to the chapter on **Regular and Irregular Adverbs** to learn more.)

Adverbial Phrases

As we saw above, phrases can also function as adverbs in a sentence. These are called **adverbial phrases**, or sometimes simply **adverbials**.

Besides the ones we looked at above, other prepositional phrases can also function as adverbs of manner. For example:

• “They left **in a hurry.**”

• “He lived **without a care**.”

We can also use similes with the word *like* to describe manner in metaphorical terms. For instance:

• “I slept **like a baby** last night.”

• “He ran out **like a shot**.”

Positioning

The position we use for adverbs of manner depends on whether they are modifying a verb, a clause, or an adjective.

Modifying verbs

Adverbs of manner most commonly come directly after **intransitive verbs** that they modify. If the verb is **transitive**, then the adverb must not immediately follow the verb; it can either come before the verb or after the **direct object**. For example:

• “He *speaks* **well**.” (intransitive)
• “She *walked* **slowly**.” (intransitive)

✖ “Janet *wrote* **beautifully** the letter.” (transitive—incorrect)
✔ “Janet *wrote* the letter **beautifully**.” (transitive—correct)

Rearranging the order

You may have noticed that in the second example we can put the adverb first: “She quickly walked” is perfectly correct, and it adds a bit more emphasis to *quickly*. The adverb can also come before a transitive verb, as in “Janet slowly sang a song.”

However, for simple sentences that don’t require extra emphasis, it is better to have the adverb come after the verb. (And, in some instances, the adverb **can’t** come first. For example, “he **well** *speaks*” is clearly incorrect.)

Modifying clauses

Adverbs of manner can also come at the beginning of the sentence, usually set apart by a comma, which serves to modify the entire clause and add a lot of emphasis to the adverb. Consider these two examples:

• “**Quietly**, *he held the candle aloft*.”
• “He **quietly** *held* the candle aloft.”

Although they are both quite close in meaning, we can see how the first sentence places much more emphasis on the adverb *quietly*. In the second example, the adverb is only modifying the verb *held*, so its impact on the sentence is less intense.

Adjectives

Adverbs of manner can also be used to describe adjectives, giving them an extra depth or dimension of character. In contrast to verbs, adverbs of manner always

come before the adjective they modify; this order cannot change. For example:

✔ "The book was **beautifully** *profound*." (correct)
✔ "The prisoner remained **stoically** *silent*." (correct)
✖ "Darling, you are *brave* **wonderfully**." (incorrect)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the most **common** way to form an adverb of manner?

a) Use an adjective in the phrase "in a _____ manner"
b) Add "-ly" to the end of the adjective
c) Use "like" or "as" to form a simile
d) You have to know them by heart

2. How is an adverb formed from an adjective ending in "-ic"?

a) By adding "-ly"
b) By dropping the "-ic" and adding "-y"
c) By using the adjective in the phrase "in a _____ manner"
d) By changing the ending to "-ically"

3. Where does an adverb of manner come in a sentence if it is modifying a **clause**?

a) At the beginning of the sentence
b) At the end of the clause
c) Immediately after the noun
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) A & C
g) None of the above

4. Which of the following is an **adverb of manner**?

a) strongly
b) hourly
c) usually
d) very

5. Identify the **adverb of manner** in the following sentence:

“I never knew how absolutely lovely it is to have such wonderfully loyal friends like them.”

a) never
b) absolutely
c) wonderfully
d) lovely
e) like them

Adverbs of Degree

Definition

Adverbs of degree are used to indicate the intensity, degree, or extent of the verb, adjective, or adverb they are modifying. They always appear before the adjective, verb, or other adverb they describe (except for the adverb *enough*, which we’ll look at further on.)

Degrees of strength

Adverbs of degree can be **mild, medium, strong**, or **absolute** in how they describe the intensity, degree, or extent of the word they modify.

Adverbs that are mild, medium, or strong are known as **grading adverbs**; those that describe an absolute state or degree are known as **non-grading adverbs**. Sometimes a grading adverb of degree can change in strength depending on the verb, adverb, or adjective it describes. Non-grading adverbs, on the other hand, always describe absolute states or degrees.

Here are some examples of adverbs of degree:

• “He **undoubtedly** stole the money.” (Absolute; non-grading)

• “He is **definitely** coming to the party.” (Absolute; non-grading)

• “It’s **absolutely** freezing outside.” (Absolute; non-grading)

• “She is **very** sorry for her bad behavior.” (Strong; grading)

• “I **really** love reading good books.” (Strong; grading)

• “Are you **quite** certain?” (Absolute; quite is a grading adverb, but it can describe absolute states when paired with **non-gradable adjectives**, which we will look at below.)

• “She’s **quite** mad.” (Strong)

• “I **quite** like Indian food.” (Medium)

• “My camera was **pretty** expensive.” (Medium)

• “It’s **a bit** cold outside.” (Medium or mild, depending on the speaker’s emphasis.)

• “It will take **a bit** longer to complete.” (Mild)

• “We were **somewhat** surprised.” (Mild)

Adverbs of degree with gradable vs. non-gradable adjectives

Gradable adjectives are those that can have measurable levels of degree or intensity. **Non-gradable adjectives**, on the other hand, describe an extreme or absolute state. Here are some examples of gradable versus non-gradable adjectives:

Gradable	Non-gradable
small	tiny
cold	freezing
hot	boiling
difficult	impossible
sad	devastated

Because non-gradable adjective describe an absolute state, they can generally only be modified by **non-grading** adverbs of degree. These serve to emphasize the extreme nature of the adjective. Likewise, gradable adjectives are generally only paired with **grading** adverbs of degree. For example, the following would be **incorrect**:

× Non-grading adverb with gradable adjective	× Grading adverb with non-gradable adjective
absolutely small	**a bit** tiny
utterly cold	**dreadfully** freezing

fully hot	**unusually** boiling
virtually difficult	**extremely** impossible
completely sad	**slightly** devastated

However, we can see how they become **correct** if we reverse the adverbs of degree:

✓ Grading adverb with gradable adjective	✓ Non-grading adverb with non-gradable adjective
a bit small	**absolutely** tiny
dreadfully cold	**utterly** freezing
unusually hot	**fully** boiling
extremely difficult	**virtually** impossible
slightly sad	**completely** devastated

There are exceptions to this rule, however: the adverbs *really*, *fairly*, *pretty,* and *quite* can all be used with both gradable and non-gradable adjectives:

really small	**really tiny**
pretty cold	**pretty** freezing
fairly difficult	**fairly** impossible
quite sad	**quite** devastated

Note that in informal speech or writing, many grammar rules are often ignored, misused, or misunderstood, so you may come across non-grading adverbs used with gradable adjectives (e.g., “utterly surprised,” “absolutely interested”) or grading adverbs used with non-gradable adjectives (e.g., “extremely certain,” “very tiny”). However, other than the exceptions listed above, this usage should be avoided, especially in formal or professional writing.

Enough as an adverb of degree

The word *enough* can be used as another adverb of degree, meaning “sufficiently or to a satisfactory amount or degree,” “very, fully, or quite,” or “tolerably.” Unlike other adverbs of degree, though, *enough* can only modify adverbs and adjectives, and it always comes after the word it is describing in a sentence. For example:

• “He didn’t finish the exam quickly **enough**.”

• “I’ll be happy **enough** to be back home.”

• “The play was interesting **enough**, but I wouldn’t go see it again.”

Enough as an adjective

If *enough* appears before a noun that it modifies, then it is functioning as a determiner (a type of adjective) meaning “adequate or sufficient to meet a need or desire,” as in “I have had **enough** food, thanks!”

Enough as a pronoun

It may also seem like *enough* can be used as an adverb to describe verbs, as in “I’ve had **enough**,” or “you’ve studied **enough**,” but be careful: in such instances, *enough* is actually functioning as an **indefinite pronoun**, meaning “an adequate or sufficient amount (of something).” *Enough* **cannot** modify verbs.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the **adverb of degree** used in the sentence below?
“I will happily do as you ask, but it will take a bit of time, so I will try to work very quickly.”

a) happily
b) a bit
c) very
d) quickly

2. Where does an adverb of degree **usually** appear in a sentence?

a) Before the word it modifies
b) After the word it modifies

c) After a linking verb
d) Before a noun

3. Which of the following is a **non-grading** adverb of degree?

a) very
b) rather
c) extremely
d) utterly

4. Which of the following adverbs can be used with both **gradable** and **non-gradable** adjectives?

a) virtually
b) really
c) extremely
d) enough

5. Select the appropriate adverb of degree to fill in the blank:
“I know I didn’t ace the exam, but I think I did well _____.”

a) really
b) enough
c) somewhat
d) a bit

Mitigators

Definition

Mitigators, a subset of **adverbs of degree**, are adverbs or *adverbials* (groups of words that function as adverbs) that modify adjectives and adverbs to reduce their intensity, making them seem less extreme or powerful. The following are all examples of mitigators:

- **rather**
- **pretty**
- **slightly**
- **fairly**
- **a bit**
- **a little bit**

• **just a bit**
• **just a little bit**
• **a little**

Here are some examples of mitigators being used in sentences:

• “The movie was **rather** *dull*.”

• “He thought that the parade was **just a bit** *too long*.”

• “The runner performed **fairly** *well*, but not well enough to win the race.”

• “The sky was **slightly** *red* and *orange* at the time of the sunset.”

• “They were all **a little** *annoyed* that the fair had been cancelled due to rain.”

• “The cake was **pretty** *good*, but not excellent.”

• “I can jump **pretty** *high* for my height.”

Difference from intensifiers

Mitigators are the opposite of **intensifiers**, which are used to increase the intensity of the words they modify. Knowing what the main intensifiers are, as well as how they are used, makes it easier to tell the difference between these two different types of adverbs. Here are some of the most commonly used intensifiers:

• **very**
• **remarkably**
• **extremely**
• **amazingly**
• **incredibly**
• **completely**
• **exceptionally**
• **super**
• **really**

Here are some examples of intensifiers in sentences:

• “The weather was **exceptionally** *warm*.”

• “The scenery on the train ride from New York to Chicago was **incredibly** *beautiful*.”

• “Her mind was **completely** *focused* on getting her coffee in the morning.”

• “The ocean was **very** *cool* when he jumped in.”

• “Your appointment was **really** *long*.”

• “All of the students did **remarkably** *well* on the exam.”

Now, let’s look at some sentences that have both mitigators and intensifiers. Notice how each one is used to modify its respective adjective or adverb in a different way:

• “The line was **fairly** *short* for the **extremely** *scary* roller coaster.”

• “You were **pretty** *late* for the show, but the singer was **incredibly** *late*!”

• “Some trees in the forest were **exceptionally** *tall*, but some were **just a bit** *taller* than me.”

Notice that in all of these sentences, the mitigators reduce the intensity of the adjectives that they modify, while the intensifiers increase the intensity.

Importance in sentences

Adjectives and adverbs help to describe the quality of something or its actions. However, adjectives and adverbs on their own often cannot produce the exact level of description we want when speaking or writing. For example, consider the following sentence:

• “The rapids looked *dangerous*.”

This implies that the river might not be safe for recreational activities. However, the meaning of the sentence can change significantly if a mitigator is added. For example:

• “The rapids looked **slightly** *dangerous*.”

By adding the mitigator *slightly* before the adjective *dangerous*, the whole meaning of the sentence is changed. Now the rapids seem much less hazardous; they could potentially be safe if the person is very careful.

Here is another example:

• “The vacation was *boring*.”

vs.

• ”The vacation was **a bit** *boring*.”

The mitigator *a bit* implies that the vacation wasn't completely boring. It also implies an element of surprise or disappointment, as if the speaker expected the vacation not to be boring.

Here is one last example:

• “Henry felt *excited* to meet his long lost relative for the first time.”

vs.

• “Henry felt **a little** *excited* to meet his long lost relative for the first time.”

In the second sentence, the mitigator *a little* reduces the intensity of the adjective *excited*. This change not only results in the man being less excited, it now also carries a possible implication that he was not looking forward to meeting his relative before, or that he was not expecting to be excited.

Small changes such as we’ve seen can have both minute and profound impacts on what we write and the way we speak.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is a mitigator?

a) rather
b) cold
c) quickly
d) extremely

2. Identify the mitigator in the following sentence.
“Kevin quickly decided that he was having a pretty good day after all.”

a) good
b) decided
c) quickly
d) pretty

3. Which of the following words or group of words is **not** a mitigator?

a) slightly
b) just a little bit
b) amazingly
d) fairly

4. Mitigators do which of the following things?

a) increase the intensity of an adjective or adverb
b) reduce the intensity of an adjective or adverb
c) replace other words in the sentence

d) eliminate the need for punctuation

5. Mitigators act as which part of speech in a sentence?
a) adjective
b) noun
c) adverb
d) subject

Intensifiers

Definition

Intensifiers, a subset of **adverbs of degree**, are adverbs or *adverbials* (groups of words that function as adverbs) that modify adjectives and other adverbs to increase their strength, power, or intensity. The following words are all examples of intensifiers:

• **very**
• **remarkably**
• **extremely**
• **amazingly**
• **incredibly**
• **completely**
• **exceptionally**
• **super**
• **really**

Here are some examples of intensifiers being used in sentences:

• “The soup was **very** *hot*, so he put it down.”

• “The park in the middle of the city was **amazingly** *beautiful*.”

• “You were **completely** *sure* that you had done the assignment correctly.”

• “Sunlight in spring feels **incredibly** *uplifting* after a long, cold winter.”

• “Everyone was **really** *excited* to go to the beach and go swimming in the ocean.”

• “They were all **remarkably** *moved* by the movie they saw in the theatre.”

• “This table was crafted **really** *beautifully*.”

Difference from mitigators

Intensifiers are the opposite of **mitigators**, which are used to decrease the intensity of the words they modify. Knowing what the main intensifiers are, as well as how they are used, makes it easier to tell the difference between these two different types of adverbs. Here are some of the most commonly used mitigators:

- **rather**
- **pretty**
- **slightly**
- **fairly**
- **a bit**
- **a little bit**
- **just a bit**
- **just a little bit**
- **a little**

Here are some examples of mitigators being used in sentences:

- "The eagle flew over the **fairly** *large* canyon before it swooped to the ground for a landing."
- "After eating dinner, everyone in the room was **a little bit** *full*."
- "When Sarah stepped outside, she noticed that the weather seemed **just a bit** *chilly*."
- "All the players on the soccer team **were** *slightly* nervous before stepping out onto the field for the big game."
- "The woman sang **pretty** *well*, but it was clear she was not a professional."

Let's examine some sentences that contain both intensifiers and mitigators. Notice how each one is used to modify its respective adjective or adverb in a different way:

- "The dog was **rather** *tired*, so he took a **very** *long* nap in his favorite spot."
- "The spring blossoms looked **incredibly** *gorgeous* in the **fairly** *strong* sunlight."
- "Timothy was claiming that everything he was saying was **completely** *true*, but it still seemed **just a little bit** *suspicious*."
- "The book was **really** *entertaining*; however, she thought the ending was **a bit**

anti-climactic."

In each of these sentences, the intensifier strengthens the intensity of the adjective that it modifies while the mitigator weakens its adjective.

Importance in sentences

Intensifiers not only elevate adjectives and adverbs to higher levels of intensity. In many circumstances, the way adjectives and adverbs are described can drastically impact their meaning in a sentence. For example, consider the following sentence:

• "The 5k race around the city was *tough*."

In this sentence, the adjective *tough* informs you that the race was challenging, but we don't know any more than that. However, adding an intensifier can change the whole description of the race:

• "The 5k race around the city was **incredibly** *tough*."

By simply adding the intensifier *incredibly*, the race comes across as being much more challenging, perhaps more challenging than the speaker expected or was able to handle. Here is another example:

• "When the ship was leaving the harbor, the waves were *choppy*."

vs.

• "When the ship was leaving the harbor, the waves were **extremely** *choppy*."

There is a large difference between *choppy* and *extremely choppy* waves. Such a difference could mean that a storm is coming in, and the ship may even have to turn back due to danger. Once again, the intensifier modifies its adjective and alters the sentence's meaning in the process. Here is one final example to illustrate this concept:

• "The old bridge was *safe* to walk on."

vs.

• "The old bridge was **very** *safe* to walk on."

In the second sentence, the intensifier *very* implies that the bridge is still in excellent condition, and there is no danger whatsoever associated with walking on the bridge. The first sentence, however, only implies that the bridge is passable.

Small changes such as we've seen can have both minute and profound impacts on what we write and the way we speak.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is an intensifier?

a) slowly
b) just a little bit
b) completely
d) slightly

2. Identify the intensifier in the following sentence.
“Almost everyone in the group was incredibly excited to go sightseeing in New York City.”

a) almost
b) go
c) excited
d) incredibly

3. Which of the following words is **not** an intensifier?

a) fairly
b) amazingly
c) super
d) really

4. Which part of speech do intensifiers function as in a sentence?

a) adjective
b) noun
c) adverb
d) subject

5. Which part(s) of speech do intensifiers modify?

a) nouns
b) adjectives
c) verbs
d) adverbs
e) A & C
f) B & D

g) All of the above

Adverbs of Frequency

Definition

Adverbs of frequency (sometimes called **frequency adverbs**) tell us how often something happens or is the case; they can describe verbs and adjectives, but they do not modify other adverbs.

Range of frequency

Frequency adverbs can range in frequency from 100% of the time (always) to 0% of the time (never). The following table gives some examples of different adverbs expressing the full range of frequency:

Frequency	Definite Adverbs	Indefinite Adverbs
100%	every second	always
▲	hourly	usually
▲	daily	normally
▲	weekly	often
▲	monthly	sometimes
▲	quarterly	occasionally/infrequently/seldom
▲	yearly	rarely/hardly ever
0%	never	never

Notice how the frequency adverbs above are split into two categories: definite and indefinite. Let’s take a look at each.

Adverbs of definite frequency

Adverbs of **definite** frequency describe a specific or exact range of time for when something occurs or is the case. Some common examples are:

- **yearly/annually**
- **biannually** (This can mean either twice a year or two times in a year, depending on context.)
- **quarterly** (Meaning four times in a year, at the end of every quarter.)
- **monthly**
- **weekly**
- **daily**
- **hourly**
- **every minute** (*Minutely* means the same thing, but is much less commonly used.)
- **every second** (We do not say *secondly*, because this means "in the second place.")

Adverbs of definite frequency modify verbs and generally appear at the beginning or end of the sentence. (The "-ly" adverbs come **only** at the end, though.) If appearing at the beginning of a sentence, they are usually offset by a comma. For example:

• "I run eight miles **daily**."

• "**Every year**, our office holds a big raffle for charity."

• "He makes a point of going to his local bar **once a week**."

✖ "**Hourly**, you need to update me on your progress." (incorrect)

Note that most of the "-ly" adverbs above can also function as adjectives, as in "yearly meetings," "monthly report," "hourly updates," etc.

Adverbs of indefinite frequency

The frequency adverbs that are used most often, however, are adverbs of **indefinite** frequency. As the name suggests, these are adverbs that give a sense of frequency but do **not** specify exactly how often something happens or is the case. Unlike definite frequency adverbs, these can modify both verbs and adjectives, but their usage for each differs.

Modifying verbs

Positioning

If they are modifying verbs, the adverbs of frequency usually come before the main verb in a sentence:

✖ “We *go* **usually** to the movies on Sundays.” (incorrect)
✔ “We **usually** *go* to the movies on Sundays.” (correct)

Here are some more examples:

• “Bethany **always** *runs* late for work in the morning.”

• “I **never** *get* what I want!”

• “We **seldom** *see* her anymore.”

• “He *travels* to Europe **frequently**.”

Notice how *frequently* appears at the end of the sentence in the last example. Certain frequency adverbs—*usually, sometimes, normally, occasionally, often,* and *frequently*—can appear at the beginning or end of a main clause as well as before the verb they modify. If they appear at the beginning, they are usually (but not always) followed by a comma.

For example:

• “**Usually**, I would go to the movies on Sundays, but not this time.”

• “He comes up to visit **sometimes**.”

• “**Occasionally** I’ll read a romance novel as a guilty pleasure.”

The adverbs *always, seldom, rarely, hardly ever,* and *never* can also appear at the end of a sentence or clause; however, they do not go at the beginning unless they are creating a special emphasis, in which case the sentence structure changes. For example:

• “**Never** have I felt so insulted!”

• “**Rarely** does she leave the house unattended.”

• “**Seldom** is it that we part on good terms.”

Different tenses

Frequency adverbs are often used to modify verbs that are in the **present simple tense**, which is used when we speak about habits, general facts, and timetables.

However, we can also use them with other verb tenses. For example:

• “She **often** *traveled* when she lived in Spain.” (**Past simple tense**)

• “I *have* **rarely** *seen* the sun rise.” (**Present perfect tense**)

Notice that in the second example, the adverb *rarely* appears after the auxiliary verb *have* and before the main verb *seen*. This is always the case when we use auxiliary verbs:

• “She *will* **occasionally** *go* for walks alone.”

• “You *can* **seldom** *see* very far because of the fog.”

• “I *will* **never** *be* an actor!”

Notice that in the final example, *never* is modifying the **linking verb** *be* and appears before it. This is always the case if *be* is used with an auxiliary verb; most of the time, however, adverbs of frequency appear after the verb *be*. For example:

• “That *is* **often** the case.”

• “This class *is* **always** a bore!”

• “She *was* **never** very friendly.”

In the third example, the adverb of frequency is modifying an adjective, rather than the verb.

Modifying adjectives

Adverbs of frequency can also modify adjectives, in which case they come after the verb *be*. This is because *be* is a **linking verb** (not a main verb), and the adverbs modify the **predicative adjective(s)** associated with it.

For example, compare how the adverb of frequency *always* is used with the main verb *have* and the linking verb *be* in the following examples:

• “I **always** *have* lunch at one o’clock.”

• “I *am* **always** late for work.”

In the first sentence, *always* is modifying the verb *have,* whereas in the second sentence, it is modifying the adjective *late*. Here are some other examples:

• “The dog is **rarely** *quiet*.”

• “The trains are **occasionally** *late*, but they are **generally** *on time*.”

• “She is **often** *alone*, but I don’t think she minds.”

Putting extra emphasis on *be*

The only time adverbs of frequency come before the verb *be* (when it is not used

with an auxiliary verb) is when *be* is given extra emphasis in a sentence. For example:

• "I **never** *was* fond of his writing."

When we read this, we can hear the stress being put on the word *was*. Though it comes before *was*, the adverb *never* is actually modifying the adjective *fond*.

Note that this construction can also be used when the adverb modifies *be* rather than an adjective, as in:

• "You **occasionally** *are* a nit-picker."

If we take the emphasis off *be*, however, the adverb would come after it as usual.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Where do **definite** adverbs of frequency appear in a sentence?

a) Before the verb they modify
b) After the verb they modify
c) At the beginning of a main clause
d) At the end of a main clause
e) A & B
f) C & D

2. What can adverbs of **indefinite** frequency do that adverbs of definite frequency cannot?

a) modify verbs
b) modify adjectives
c) modify adverbs
d) modify prepositional phrases

3. Which of the following is an adverb of frequency?

a) once in a while
b) somewhat
c) anymore
d) very

4. When does an adverb of frequency appear **before** the verb *be*?

a) When it is modifying a predicative adjective

b) When *be* is a main verb
c) When *be* is being emphasized
d) A & B

5. Identify the adverb of frequency in the following sentence:
“I quickly left so I could catch the next train, which luckily left hourly.”

a) quickly
b) next
c) luckily
d) hourly

6. Which of the following adverbs **cannot** fill in the blank space of the following sentence?
“_____, I go to visit my sister on the weekend.”

a) frequently
b) sometimes
c) always
d) usually

Adverbs of Purpose

Definition

Adverbs of purpose (sometimes called **adverbs of reason**) tell us why something happens or is the case. They can modify verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.

Types of Adverbs of Purpose

Adverbs of purpose are generally made up of **conjunctive adverbs**, **prepositional phrases**, **infinitive phrases**, or **adverbial clauses**.

Conjunctive adverbs of purpose

We often use **conjunctive adverbs** to indicate a relationship of reason or purpose between two **independent clauses**. Some common conjunctive adverbs of purpose are *thus, therefore, consequently, hence*, and *as a result*.

When we join two independent clauses with a conjunctive adverb, they are traditionally separated with a **semicolon**.

It is also acceptable to use a **period** and keep them as two discrete sentences. The conjunctive adverb still usually appears at the beginning of the second sentence, but it can also appear before or after the word it is modifying.

For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **as a result**, she didn’t recommend it.”

• “We’ve never seen such high numbers. We must **therefore** conclude that the results are not normal.”

• “I’ve had some bad experiences with business partners in the past. **Consequently**, I am a little nervous about entering into this deal.”

• “The market here has been shrinking every year. We have **thus** decided to close our branch in this country.”

• “There has been some talk of the company going bankrupt in the near future; she is **consequently** looking for a new job.”

• “I broke my leg last month; **hence**, I was unable to work for several weeks.”

Non-conjunctive adverbs of purpose

It is also possible to use many of the adverbs above in a non-conjunctive manner, especially when modifying an adjective that derives purpose or reason from a previous part of the sentence. For example:

• “The clothing is handcrafted and **hence** *expensive*.”

• “I’ve grown fond of our time together and am **thus** *sad* to see it end.”

• “The markets proved to be volatile and **therefore** *unreliable*.”

Adverbial phrases of purpose

A variety of phrases are often used to indicate purpose or reason. The most common of these are **prepositional phrases** and **infinitive phrases**.

Prepositional phrases

It is very common to use prepositional phrases adverbially, and in some cases they can be used to indicate purpose. These prepositional phrases usually occur at the end of the clause, appearing after the verb or adjective they are describing, but they can also appear at the beginning of a clause or sentence, in which case they are set apart by a comma.

The most common prepositional phrase of purpose uses the **compound preposition** *because of,* as in:

• “I am feeling tired ***because of*** **this cold**.”

• “***Because of*** **my operation**, I had to cancel my flight.”

Some other common prepositions that can create prepositional phrases of purpose are *for, given, owing to,* and *due to**. For example:

• “Every year, we honor the soldiers who sacrificed their lives ***for*** **their country**.”

• “***Given*** **the huge amount of public interest**, they are extending the program for another three months.”

• “Our game was delayed ***due to*** **rain**.”*

• “He had to leave early ***owing to*** **an emergency at the hospital**.”

(*Note: Some traditional grammarians insist that *due* should never be used as a preposition, and that it should instead only be used as an adjective. However, there is no logical reason that it can’t function as part of the compound preposition *due to,* and it is very often used this way in both formal and informal speech and writing.)

Infinitive phrases

An **infinitive** is the most basic form of a verb. It is “unmarked” (which means that it is not conjugated for tense or person), and it is preceded by the **particle** *to*. Any predicative information that follows an infinitive verb creates what’s known as an **infinitive phrase**.

Infinitives and **infinitive phrases** can serve as **nouns, adjectives**, or **adverbs**. Infinitives always indicate purpose when they function as adverbs, and for that reason they are sometimes known as **infinitives of purpose**. For example:

• “I started running ***to improve*** **my health**.”

• “I went to the store ***to buy*** **some milk**.”

We can also use the phrases *in order* and *so as* to add formal emphasis to an infinitive of purpose, as in:

• “We must leave now in order ***to catch*** **our train**.”

• “He’s been working quietly so as ***not to disturb*** **his roommates**.”

Lone infinitives of purpose

We can also use infinitives in this way as isolated responses to questions asking *why* something is done or is the case. For example:

• Speaker A: “Why are you going to New York?”
• Speaker B: “***To see* the Empire State Building**.”

• Speaker A: “Why did you turn on the TV?”
• Speaker B: “***To watch* the news**.”

These responses are known as **elliptical sentences**, meaning that part of the sentence has been omitted because it is implied. In the last example, the implied section is “I turned on the TV because I wanted…. ” As this element is implicitly understood, we often leave it out entirely and simply use the infinitive on its own.

Adverbial clauses of purpose

We can also use the **subordinating conjunctions** *as, because, since*, so (that), in order that, for fear that, hence,* or (less commonly) *lest*** to create **adverbial clauses** that indicate reason or purpose. For example:

• “I am exhausted ***because* I was working all night**.”

• “***As* it’s raining**, we probably shouldn’t play in the park today.”

• “I’m going to Johnny’s house later ***since* all my homework is finished**.”*

• “He left the house ***so (that)* he could be alone**.”

• “I take my kids hiking in the mountains each summer ***in order that* they learn to appreciate nature's beauty**.”

• “***For fear that* his son may get hurt**, Dan never lets him play any contact sports.”

• “I should explain myself to him, ***lest* he thinks I am being ungrateful**.”**

(*Be careful with the subordinating conjunction *since*, because it is also used with adverbial clauses of time, as we saw above.)

(**The subordinating conjunction *lest* is not commonly used today, as it sounds old-fashioned and overly formal in modern English.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **cannot** be used to form adverbs of purpose?

a) Conjunctive adverbs
b) Coordinating conjunctions
c) Subordinating conjunctions
d) Infinitives

2. Which of the following sentences does **not** use an adverb of purpose?

a) “I am studying James Joyce because of my love of Irish literature.”
b) “The flight leaves at 10 AM; therefore, we must be at the airport by 6 o’clock in the morning.”
c) “We’ve decided to move to a small villa in Italy.”
d) “I have to travel to New York to meet with the investors.”

3. Which of the following prepositions can be used to form a prepositional phrase of purpose?

a) unto
b) into
c) onto
d) owing to

4. Where can **adverbial clauses** of purpose appear in a sentence?

a) At the beginning
b) In the middle
c) At the end
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) B & C

Focusing Adverbs

Definition

Focusing adverbs are used to draw attention to a particular part of a clause. They frequently point to verb phrases, but they can also draw attention to noun phrases, prepositional phrases, adjective phrases, and adverbial phrases.

When we speak, we often emphasize a particular part of a sentence using stressed intonation. This is sometimes represented in writing by using *italics*. Both speech and writing can be simplified and ambiguity reduced by using focusing adverbs instead. Let's see this done both ways:

• Through intonation: "I know *Tom* is coming to the party."

• Using a focusing adverb: "I know that **at least** Tom is coming to the party."

Both the emphasis through intonation and the use of the focusing adverb *at least* draw attention to *Tom* in the sentence. This signals to the listener or reader that this information is important.

Focusing adverbs also often imply some sort of contrast. In the examples above, drawing attention to *Tom* implies that there are other people who may not be coming to the party.

Types of Focusing Adverbs

We select a focusing adverb according to how we intend to emphasize the word or phrase. There are different focusing adverbs that are used to draw attention to information that is being added, information that is being limited or partially limited, information that is negative, information that presents a choice, or information that is considered surprising. Let's look at some of the most common focusing adverbs for each function:

Adding information

When we want to emphasize information that is being added to previous information, we can use the following focusing adverbs:

- **also**
- **as well**
- **too**

For example:

• “Tom is coming to the party and *is **also** bringing James*.”

The focusing adverb *also* adds emphasis to the entire verb phrase: *is bringing James*. This lets the listener know that this information is especially important to the speaker. Let’s look at another example:

• “Tom is coming to the party, and *James is coming **too***.”

Again, using the focusing adverb *too* adds the information about James coming in addition to Tom and stresses its importance.

Limiting information

When we want to emphasize information that presents limits, we use the following focusing adverbs:

• **alone**
• **but**
• **exactly**
• **exclusively**
• **just**
• **merely**
• **not only**
• **only**
• **precisely**
• **purely**
• **simply**
• **solely**

Observe how these focusing adverbs emphasize limits:

Example: “**Just** Tom is coming to the party.”
Implication: Tom is coming to the party but is not bringing a friend, or nobody else is coming to the party.

Example: “I’m going to study for **exactly** half an hour, then I’ll go to the party.”
Implication: I will study for no more than half an hour.

Example: “I’m **only** bringing James to the party.”
Implication: I am not bringing anybody else.

Example: “The party starts at **precisely** 10 o’clock.”
Implication: The party won’t start earlier or later than 10 o’clock.

Partially limiting information

Sometimes, we want to emphasize information that isn't *completely* limited, but rather *partially* limited. For that purpose, we can use the following focusing adverbs:

- **chiefly**
- **especially**
- **mainly**
- **mostly**
- **notably**
- **particularly**
- **in particular**
- **predominantly**
- **primarily**
- **at least**
- **for the most part**
- **by and large**

Let's see how partially limiting focusing adverbs can work:

Example: "I want everybody to come to the party, **especially** James."
Implication: I want everybody to come to the party, but I want James to come the most.

Example: "They played **mostly** techno music at the party."
Implication: They played several types of music, but most of it was techno.

Example: "A few people were missing at the party, **notably** Tom."
Implication: Several people who were supposed to be at the party did not go. Tom didn't go, and that was significant.

Example: "The people coming to the party are going to be **predominantly** students."
Implications: There are a variety of people coming to the party, but the majority will be students.

Other purposes

Negatives

When we want to draw attention to a negative statement, we can use *neither/nor*.

Example: “**Neither** Tom **nor** James turned up at the party.” ***or***:
“Tom didn’t turn up to the party, and **neither** did James.”
Implication: It is significant that neither Tom nor James went to the party.

Choices

When we want to draw attention to a choice of two things, we can use *either/or*.

Example: “You can **either** bring Tom **or** James to the party.”
Implication: You have to choose one friend to bring. You cannot bring both.

Surprise

Finally, when we want to show that a particular piece of information is surprising, we can use *even*.

Example: “**Even** Tom was at the party!”
Implication: Absolutely everybody was at the party, including Tom, which was unexpected.

Placement

Focusing adverbs can take the initial, middle, or final position in a sentence depending on what you want them to draw attention to.

According to what you want to emphasize

Changing the placement of the adverb changes which part of the clause is emphasized, and thereby can greatly change the implications of the sentence. Let’s see how this works using the base sentence “Jen can play piano for her friends at the party.” Notice how the meaning changes as we move around the focusing adverb *only*:

1. “**Only** *Jen* can play piano for her friends at the party.”
Implication: Nobody else can play piano for her friends.

2. “Jen can **only** *play piano* for her friends at the party.”
Implication: Jen can’t do anything else at the party, or Jen cannot play any other instruments for her friends.

3. “Jen can play **only** *piano* for her friends at the party.”

Implication: Jen cannot play any other instruments for her friends.

4. “Jen can play piano for **only** *her friends* at the party.”
Implication: Jen can play piano for her friends, but not for anybody else.

5. “Jen can play piano for her friends **only** *at the party*.”
Implication: Jen cannot play piano for her friends in other circumstances.

Placement of focusing adverbs around verbs

When the focusing adverb modifies a verb or verb phrase, it is placed before the main verb. For example:

• “We didn’t go to the party. We **just** *stayed* at home.”

• “We **only** *went* for one hour.”

• “We **even** *danced*.”

However, focusing adverbs should be placed after the verb *be*:

• “It *is* **just** Tom.”

• “It *was* **mostly** Jen who danced at the party.”

• “I *am* **especially** sorry that I missed it.”

When a focusing adverb modifies a verb phrase that includes an auxiliary verb and a main verb, it is placed between them. For example:

• “Jen *can* ***only*** *play* piano for her friends at the party.”

• “Tom *didn’t* ***even*** *go* to the party!”

• “They *had* ***particularly*** *wanted* a DJ instead of a band.”

Too and as well

In exception to the rules above, the focusing adverbs *too* and *as well* normally take the final position in a clause. For example:

• “Tom is going to the party, and James is going **too**.”

• “I want to go to the party **as well**.”

Extra Notes

It’s worth mentioning that the words *also* and *just* have varying functions and

meanings from the examples given above. Let’s take a closer look:

Also

Also does not always function as a focusing adverb. It can also be used as a **conjunctive adverb**. For example:

“Tom is coming to the party. **Also**, James is coming.”

Just

The word *just* also has different functions and meanings. We have already seen that when used as a focusing adverb, *just* can limit the phrase it points to, in the same way as *only* or *merely*.

However, it can also mean *recently*, as in “I **just** got home”; *really*, as in “I **just** love it here”; *barely*, as in “We **just** made it on time”; and *exactly*, as in “It’s **just** ten o’clock right now.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. *Too* is a focusing adverb that stresses _____.

a) addition
b) limitation
c) partial limitation
d) surprise

2. *Predominantly* is a focusing adverb that stresses _____.

a) addition
b) limitation
c) partial limitation
d) surprise

3. *Merely* is a focusing adverb that stresses _____.

a) addition
b) limitation
c) partial limitation
d) surprise

4. Complete the following sentence with the correct focusing adverb:
“This party is _____ for students. I’m sorry, but nobody else can come.”

a) even
b) mostly
c) especially
d) exclusively

5. Complete the following sentence with the correct focusing adverb:
“There can be _____ 100 invited guests, no more and no less.”

a) exactly
b) particularly
c) also
d) not only

Negative Adverbs

Definition

Negative adverbs and negative adverbials (groups of words that function as an adverb) are used to modify the meaning of a verb, adjective, other adverb, or entire clause in a negative way. Like all adverbs, they usually answer questions about manner, place, time, or degree.

No and *Not*

There is debate whether *no* and *not* should be classed as adverbs, but they are by far the most commonly used words for creating negative statements, so we’ll briefly look at how they work.

Using *no*

We use *no* as a negative answer to questions or an expression of disagreement. It’s often classed as a determiner or an exclamation, but other grammarians argue that it’s an adverb, especially when it is used to negate **comparative adjectives** or **comparative adverbs**. For example:

• “He is **no** *better* than his rival.”

• “She runs **no** *more quickly* than her sister.”

Using *not* with auxiliary and modal verbs

To negate a verb phrase, we insert *not* after the first **auxiliary** or **modal verb**. For example:

• “I have seen him here before.” (positive)
• “I have **not** seen him here before.” (negative)

• “I would have done the same.” (positive)
• “I would **not** have done the same.” (negative)

Using *not* with only a main verb

If the verb phrase contains only a main verb, we negate it by adding *do/does/did + not*. For example:

• “I go swimming on Mondays.” (positive)
• “I *do* **not** go swimming on Mondays.” (negative)

• “He works every day.” (positive)
• “He *does* **not** work every day.” (negative)

• “We went to the supermarket yesterday.” (positive)
• “We *did* **not** go to the supermarket yesterday.” (negative)

Using *not* with the verb *be*

When a form of the verb *be* is the only verb in the statement, we place *not* after it. For example:

• “They *are* tall.” (positive)
• “They *are* **not** tall.” (negative)

• “It *is* an interesting project.” (positive)
• “It *is* **not** an interesting project.” (negative)

Other negative adverbs

Now that we have seen how *no* and *not* are used, let’s look at other negative adverbs. The principle characteristic they all have in common is that we don’t modify them with *not* because they already express negative meaning on their own.

Negative adverbs meaning “almost not”

Some negative adverbs mean “almost not.” They are:

- hardly
- barely
- scarcely

These negative adverbs are placed in the same position as *not*. They generally go after the first auxiliary or modal verb, before a main verb when it is the only verb, and after forms of the verb *be*.

For example:

• “I **hardly** go out anymore.” (I almost don’t go out anymore.)

• “I can **barely** see the mountain through the clouds.” (I almost can’t see it.)

• “It’s **scarcely** surprising that you’re quitting your job.” (It is not very surprising at all.)

Negative adverbs meaning “not often” or “not ever”

When we want to stress how infrequently something occurs, we can use these negative adverbs:

- no longer
- rarely
- seldom
- barely ever
- hardly ever
- never

Again, these adjectives are usually placed in the same position as *not*. For example:

• “I **no longer** cook at home.” (I cooked at home before, but now I don’t.)

• “He has **seldom/rarely/hardly ever** played football.” (very infrequently)

• “We are **never** late.” (not ever)

Note that *seldom, rarely, barely ever*, and *hardly ever* are interchangeable. They all mean “very infrequently.”

Negative adverbs that emphasize quick succession of events

When we want to express that two events happened in quick succession (one event almost did not finish before the next event happened) we can use any of these negative adverbs:

- hardly
- barely
- scarcely
- no sooner

Some of these are the same negative adverbs that mean “almost not,” but when we use them for events in quick succession, we must use them in combination with either *when* (for *hardly, scarcely* and *barely*), or *than* (for *no sooner*).

The first event is usually expressed in the **past perfect** tense, with the negative adverb following the auxiliary verb *had*. The two clauses are joined with *when* or *than* (depending on which negative adverb is used), and the second event follows in the **past simple** tense.

For example:

• “We had **hardly** finished cleaning **when** the guests arrived.”

• “I had **barely** walked in the door **when** she called.”

• “She had **scarcely** been home five minutes **when** they arrived to take her to the movie.”

• “We had **no sooner** put dinner on the table **than** the doorbell rang.”

Adverbial phrases for total negation

There are a few adverbial phrases that are used to completely negate a clause. For example:

- under no circumstances
- in no way
- on no condition

Like *not*, these adverbials can be placed in mid position:

• “We **in no way** like this plan.” (We don’t like this plan.)

• “We have **under no circumstances** allowed them to come inside.” (They have definitely not been allowed inside.)

• “She is **on no condition** to be disturbed.” (Don’t disturb her.)

However, they are more commonly placed in initial position using inversion, which we will examine later in this article.

Using *only* for conditional negativity

Only can be used when we want to place conditions on whether something is going to occur or not. It most closely means “exclusively,” and can be used in several combinations. For example:

- only… after
- only… if
- only… when
- only… until

Usually, we place *only* before the action that may or may not occur, and *if/after/when/until* before the condition. For example:

• “I will **only** go to the movie **if** you go too.”
Meaning: I am not going to the movie if you don’t go.

• “I’ll **only** help you **when** you ask for it.”
Meaning: I will not help you when you don’t ask for help.

• “They are **only** living here **until** they find a new house.”
Meaning: They will leave here when they find a new house.

Using inversion

We have shown how negative adverbs are often placed in mid position. However, it’s also very common for negative adverbs to appear at the beginning of a sentence. This is often done in more formal or literary styles, as well as when we want to place special emphasis on the negative adverb.

When we place the negative adverb at the beginning of the sentence, we must use **inversion**. This is when we rearrange the normal subject/verb order of the sentence. We already use the principle of inversion all the time when we form questions. For example:

• “*He has* seen this movie.” (no inversion)

• “*Has he* seen this movie?” (inversion)

To form the question, the subject (*he*) and the auxiliary verb (*has*) switch places. The process is the same when we use negative adverbs.

Inversion with auxiliary/modal verbs

If a negative adverb is being used at the beginning a sentence that has a modal or auxiliary verb, we simply switch the order of the first auxiliary/modal verb and the subject. For example:

• “*I have* **never** seen such a beautiful creature.” (no inversion)
• “**Never** *have I* seen such a beautiful creature.” (inversion)

• “*We had* **scarcely** arrived home when they called.” (no inversion)
• “**Scarcely** *had we* arrived home when they called.” (inversion)

• “*He can* **under no circumstances** play that game.” (no inversion)
• “**Under no circumstances** *can he* play that game.” (inversion)

Inversion with only a main verb

If a negative adverb is placed at the beginning of a sentence that contains only a main verb, we must insert the auxiliary verbs *do/does* or *did* and use the **bare infinitive** form of the verb, just like when we form questions. For example:

• “We **in no way** *like* this plan.” (no inversion)
• “**In no way** *do we like* this plan.” (inversion)

• “She **scarcely** *leaves* the city anymore.” (no inversion)
• “**Scarcely** *does she leave* the city anymore.” (inversion)

• “He **barely** *stopped* in time.” (no inversion)
• “**Barely** *did he stop* in time.” (inversion)

Inversion with the verb “be”

When a negative adverb begins a sentence that only contains the verb *be*, we switch the order of the subject and *be* (again, the same as when we form questions):

• “*We are* **seldom** late.” (no inversion)
• “**Seldom** *are we* late.” (inversion)

• “*He is* **hardly** working.” (no inversion)
• “**Hardly** *is he* working.” (inversion)

• “*She is* **on no condition** to be disturbed.” (no inversion)
• **On no condition** *is she* to be disturbed.” (inversion)

Inversion of “only” for conditional negativity

When we form negative conditional expressions with *only*, we have to do a bit more rearranging. The entire **conditional clause** joins *only* in the beginning of the sentence, and the subject-verb word order changes in the **main clause**. For example:

• “I will **only** go to the movie **if** you go too.” (no inversion)
• “**Only if** you go too *will I* go to the movie.” (inversion)

• “I’ll **only** help you **when** you ask for help.” (no inversion)
• “**Only when** you ask for help *will I* help you.” (inversion)

• “They are **only** living here **until** they find a new house.” (no inversion)
• “**Only until** they find a new house *are they* living here.” (inversion)

Common Errors

Negative adverbs leave lots of room for little mistakes. The most common errors are using double negatives, not using inversion when starting a sentence with a negative adverb, and misunderstanding or misusing the negative adverb *hardly*.

Double Negatives

In English, we generally cannot use **double negatives**, which occur when two negative elements are used in the same part of a sentence. We must remember that when we use a negative adverb, we cannot further negate the sentence with *no*, *not* or another negative adverb because the two negatives cancel each other out, making the sentence **affirmative** in meaning. For example:

✖ “You **shouldn’t** under **no** circumstances cheat on a test.” (incorrect)
• Literal meaning: There are certain circumstances under which you should cheat.

✔ “You should under **no** circumstances cheat on a test.” (correct)

Meaning: You should never cheat.

✖ “I **scarcely** had **not** enough time to get ready.” (incorrect)
• Literal meaning: I actually had plenty of time to get ready.

✔ “I **scarcely** had enough time to get ready.” (correct)
Meaning: I almost did not have enough time.

Using double negative for emphasis
While we should generally avoid using double negatives in our speech and writing, there are certain circumstances in which they **can** be used for an emphatic, rhetorical effect. For example: • “Well, I **didn’t not** tell him the truth; I just didn’t tell him the whole truth.” • Literal meaning: I didn’t lie, I just left out some information. • “You **can’t** just **not** go to school!” • Literal meaning: You must go to school. However, these are very informal constructions, so they should only be used sparingly, and they should not be used in formal or professional writing at all.

Not using inversion

Another common error is when we place a negative adverb at the beginning of the sentence but forget to use inversion. For example:

✖ “Under no circumstances you can watch that movie.” (incorrect)
✔ “Under no circumstances *can you* watch that movie.” (correct)
Meaning: You cannot watch that movie.
Explanation: You must invert the order of the subject (*you*) and the modal verb (*can*).

✖ “Never he did visit the Eiffel Tower.” (incorrect)
✔ “Never did he visit the Eiffel Tower.” (correct)
Meaning: He never visited the Eiffel Tower.
Explanation: You must invert the order of the subject (*he*) and the modal verb (*did*).

Hardly

Finally, a common error is misusing or misunderstanding the meaning of the negative adverb *hardly*. Although many adverbs are formed by adding "-ly" to the end of an adjective, this is not the case with *hardly*.

The adverb form of the adjective *hard* is also *hard*. *Hardly*, however, never means "in a hard way," but rather means "almost not." For example:

✖ "He's working hardly." (incorrect)
✔ "He's working hard." (correct—He's working a lot or with much effort.)
✔ "He's hardly working." (correct—He's almost not working at all.)

(See the chapter section on **Regular and Irregular Adverbs** to learn more about adverb forms that are exceptions to the conventional rules of English.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which negative adverb **does not** mean the same as the other three?

a) barely ever
b) scarcely
c) rarely
d) never

2. Which sentence shows **correct** use of the negative adverb *barely*?

a) "Barely she goes out anymore."
b) "She barely goes out anymore."
c) "She goes barely out anymore."
d) "She goes barely anymore out."

3. Which of the following sentences is **incorrect**?

a) "I had no sooner finished cooking when they came in."
b) "I had barely finished cooking when they came in."
c) "I had scarcely finished cooking when they came in."
d) "I had hardly finished cooking when they came in."

4. Which of the following sentences uses inversion **correctly**?

a) "Rarely have we tasted such delicious food."
b) "Rarely we have tasted such delicious food."
c) "We have tasted such delicious food rarely."
d) "Have we tasted rarely such delicious food."

5. Which of the following sentences is **incorrect**?

a) “Under no circumstances can you go out on Saturday.”
b) “Never have I been so upset.”
c) “Scarcely has he not seen her in the last few years.”
d) “He’s working hard.”

Conjunctive Adverbs

Definition

Conjunctive adverbs (also called **linking adverbs** or **connecting adverbs**) are a specific type of **conjunction**. Conjunctions are used to join together words, phrases, or clauses. Conjunctive adverbs are specifically used to connect two independent clauses.

An **independent clause** (also called a **main clause**) contains a **subject** and a **predicate**, and it expresses a full thought. In other words, it can stand on its own and makes sense as a complete simple sentence. For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play. She didn’t recommend it to her friend.”

This example shows two independent clauses. The first contains the subject *Jen* and the predicate *hadn’t enjoyed the play*, while the second includes the subject *she* and the predicate *didn’t recommend it to her friend*. Each clause expresses a complete idea and makes sense on its own. However, they would sound more natural if they were connected. This is where **conjunctive adverbs** come in. For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **therefore**, she didn’t recommend it to her friend.”

The two independent clauses are now connected in a more natural way, using the conjunctive adverb *therefore*.

Punctuating the clauses

When we join two independent clauses with a conjunctive adverb, they are traditionally separated with a **semicolon** (as in our example above). It is also acceptable to use a **period** and keep them as two discrete sentences. Either way, the conjunctive adverb typically begins the second clause, followed by a **comma**. (We will examine alternative placement of the adverb later in this

section.) However, we cannot separate the two clauses using a comma. For example:

✔ “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **therefore**, she didn’t recommend it.” (correct)

✔ “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play. **Therefore**, she didn’t recommend it.” (correct)

✖ “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play, **therefore**, she didn’t recommend it.” (incorrect)

If we choose to separate the two clauses with a period, we must remember to capitalize the conjunctive adverb, since it is the first word in a new sentence.

For the sake of consistency, we will use semicolons in all of the examples below.

Choosing a conjunctive adverb

There are many conjunctive adverbs. To choose the right one, we must consider the relationship between the first and second clause. Let’s look at the example again:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **therefore**, she didn’t recommend it to her friend.”

The second clause is a result of the first clause. Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play, and that is the reason that she didn’t recommend it to her friend. So, when we connect the two clauses, we choose a conjunctive adverb (*therefore*) that makes this cause-and-effect relationship clear. Think about how the relationship between *these* two clauses is different from the previous example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play. She recommended it to her friend.”

We still have two independent clauses, but now the relationship between them is different. Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play, but recommended it to her friend anyway. We can no longer use the conjunctive adverb *therefore*, because we are no longer dealing with cause and effect. Instead, we need to choose a conjunctive adverb like *nevertheless*, which is used to express unexpected results:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **nevertheless**, she recommended it to her friend.”

These are some the most common conjunctive adverbs and their functions:

Result	**Comparison**	**Contrast**	**Adding info**	**Adding *stronger* info**	**Unexpect Results**
accordingly	comparatively	contrarily	also	further	neverthele

as a result	equally	conversely	besides	furthermore	nonethele
consequently	likewise	however	in addition	moreover	surprising
hence	similarly	in comparison			still
therefore		in contrast			
thus		instead			
		on the other hand			
		rather			

Result

When the second clause is a result of something that happened in the first clause, we have a few options. One is *therefore*, which we looked at already.

We can also use *accordingly, as a result, consequently, hence*, and *thus* interchangeably with *therefore*; the meaning of the sentence remains the same. For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **hence**, she didn’t recommend it.”

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **as a result**, she didn’t recommend it.”

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **consequently**, she didn’t recommend it.”

Comparison

When we state that two things are alike, we can use the conjunctive adverbs *comparatively* and *similarly*. For example:

• “Jen grew up in New York City; **similarly**, her boyfriend grew up in inner-city Chicago.”

• “Sam always wanted to be a famous movie star; **comparatively**, his brother wanted to be a famous rock star.”

When we state that two things are not just similar, but *equal*, we can draw a

comparison using conjunctive adverbs like *equally* and *likewise*.

• “Jen grew up in New York; **likewise**, her boyfriend was raised in the city.”

• “Sam always wanted to be a movie star; **equally**, his brother dreamed of starring in films.”

Contrast

There are two types of contrast that we can illustrate using conjunctive adverbs. The first, known as **complete contrast**, is when the two opposing things are total opposites. For this type of contrast, we can use any of the contrasting conjunctive adverbs in the table. For example:

• “Tom has a black backpack; **in contrast**, his brother has a white one.”

• “I absolutely love singing; **on the other hand**, my sister hates it.”

• “Jen is terrible at math; **however**, her friend is amazing at it, so she helps her.”

The other type of contrast is **weak contrast**. This is when the two clauses are opposing but are *not complete opposites*. For this type of contrast, we are limited to using only the weaker of the contrasting conjunctive adverbs, and not the strong ones like *on the other hand* and *in contrast*. For example:

✔ “Jen is terrible at math; **however**, she still likes it.” (correct)
✖ “Jen is terrible at math; **on the other hand**, she still likes it.” (incorrect)

✔ “I would have liked to stay in bed all day; **instead**, I got up and went to the park.” (correct)
✖ “I would have liked to stay in bed all day; **in contrast**, I got up and went to the park.” (incorrect)

Adding information

Sometimes we want to add information of equal value to the information in the first clause. In this case, we can use *also* or *in addition*. For example:

• “When you make the dinner, remember that he doesn’t like chicken; **in addition**, he can’t eat shellfish.”

• “Her favorite animals are dogs; **also**, she likes cats.”

When we want to add information that further explains something, we use *besides*. For example:

• “I heard this movie is terrible; **besides**, I hate horror films.”

• “Jen passed her test because she’s good at English; **besides**, she studies hard.”

Adding *stronger* information

When the information that we want to add has more value (is stronger) than the information in the first clause, we can use the conjunctive adverbs *further, furthermore*, or *moreover*. For example:

• “He was fired because he was often late; **furthermore**, the quality of his work was poor.”

• “Being a doctor is an exhausting job; **moreover**, you don’t earn good money until you’ve been practicing for many years.”

Unexpected result

When the second clause is an unexpected result of the first clause, we can use the conjunctive adverbs *nevertheless*, *nonetheless*, *surprisingly* or *still*. For example:

• “I am terrible at math; **nonetheless**, I passed my exam!”

• “That car cost far too much money; **nevertheless**, Tom bought it.”

• “She has never been to France; **surprisingly**, she speaks French fluently.”

Emphasis

When we want to place special emphasis on the second clause, we can use the conjunctive adverbs *indeed* or *in fact*. For example:

• “I didn’t study as much as I should have; **indeed**, I hardly opened a book!”

• “He doesn’t like swimming very much; **in fact**, he hates all sports!”

Condition

The conjunctive adverb *otherwise* is used to place conditions on whether something will occur or not. It most closely means “*if not*.” For example:

• “You have to come with me; **otherwise**, I’m not going.”

• “Maybe she didn’t study very hard; **otherwise**, she would have passed the test.”

Where to use conjunctive adverbs

Conjunctive adverbs must appear in the second of the two clauses that are connected. For the sake of consistency, we have shown all of them at the beginning of the second clause in the examples, but they can actually be moved around within it.

Depending on where we place the conjunctive adverb in the sentence, there are certain rules regarding commas that we must be aware of.

At the beginning of the second clause

Conjunctive adverbs are often placed at the beginning of the second clause, which is how we have shown them in all of our examples up to now. Note that when they are placed in this position, they are usually followed by a comma. The comma is sometimes optional with the conjunctive adverb *thus*, but this is a stylistic preference. For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **thus**, she didn’t recommend it.”

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **thus** she didn’t recommend it.”

In the middle of the second clause

We can also place the conjunctive adverb in the middle of the second clause. It should come after the subject or introductory phrase. When the introductory phrase is short (i.e., one to two syllables), it may not be necessary to place a comma after the conjunctive adverb. For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; she **therefore** didn’t recommend it.”

If the introductory phrase is any longer, it is generally necessary to enclose the conjunctive adverb between two commas. For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; she decided, **therefore**, not to recommend it.”

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; she did not, **as a result**, recommend it.”

At the end of the second clause

Finally, a conjunctive adverb can also appear at the end of the second clause. When placing the conjunctive adverb in this position, it is usually preceded by a comma; however, this depends on the flow of the sentence and it can be omitted if it seems unnatural. For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; she did not recommend it, **consequently**.”

• “Tom had never been good at basketball; he had always loved it, **nonetheless**.”

• “I wanted to stay in bed; I went to the park **instead**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Conjunctive adverbs are used to connect two _____.

a) phrases
b) words
c) dependent clauses
d) independent clauses

2. We must separate the two clauses with _____.

a) a comma
b) a period
c) a semi-colon
d) Either A or B
e) Either B or C

3. Which sentence is **correct**?

a) “I love cake; however, I’m not a fan of pie.”
b) “I love cake. however, I’m not a fan of pie.”
c) “I love cake, However, I’m not a fan of pie.”
d) “I love cake, however, I’m not a fan of pie.”

4. Complete the following sentence with the correct conjunctive adverb:
“I really wish I were better at soccer; _____, I’m quite good at basketball.”

a) in addition
b) however
c) in fact
d) furthermore

5. Complete the following sentence with the correct conjunctive adverb:
“He didn’t get the job because he was late to the interview. _____, he had absolutely no experience.”

a) On the other hand
b) Furthermore
c) However
d) Thus

Evaluative Adverbs

Definition

Most adverbs describe how or when an action occurs. **Evaluative adverbs**, which are also referred to as **commenting adverbs**, are different. Instead of giving us information about the action itself, evaluative adverbs are used by the speaker to comment or give an opinion on something. Evaluative adverbs modify the entire clause.

Types of Evaluative Adverbs

There are several types of evaluative adverbs, which can be classified according to their function. Some give information about how certain we consider something to be, others express our attitude (negative or positive) about something, while others are used to pass judgment on someone's actions. Some of the most common evaluative adverbs for each function are listed in the table below:

Degree of Certainty	Attitude	Judgment
apparently	astonishingly	bravely
clearly	frankly	carelessly
definitely	fortunately	fairly
doubtfully	honestly	foolishly
doubtlessly	hopefully	generously
obviously	interestingly	kindly
presumably	luckily	rightly
probably	sadly	spitefully

undoubtedly	seriously	stupidly
	surprisingly	unfairly
	unbelievably	wisely
		wrongly

To indicate a degree of certainty

We can use the evaluative adverbs listed in the first column of the table to state how certain we are about something. For example:

• “**Clearly**, we're going to have to work harder.” (I am sure that we are going to have to work harder.)

• “**Apparently**, we’re going to have to work harder.” (There is some indication that we may have to work harder.)

To indicate attitude

We can use the evaluative adverbs in the second column of the table to make our attitude about something clear. For example:

• “**Astonishingly**, she did well on the test.” (I feel surprised that she did well on the test.)

• “**Sadly**, he couldn’t come to the party.” (It is unfortunate that he couldn’t come to the party.)

• “**Honestly**, I couldn’t eat another bite.” (The truth is that I couldn’t eat another bite.)

To indicate judgment

We can use the evaluative adverbs in the third column to make judgments about someone’s actions, including our own. For example:

• “I **stupidly** forgot my phone at home.” (I forgot my phone at home, and I think that was stupid of me.)

• “You **carelessly** dropped my favorite cup.” (You dropped my cup, and I think it’s because you were not being careful.)

• “She **bravely** traveled across Asia alone.” (She traveled across Asia alone, and, in my opinion, that was brave.)

Sentence Placement

The evaluative adverb is usually placed at the beginning of the sentence, followed by a comma. For example:

• “**Clearly**, he didn’t mean to ignore you.”

• “**Apparently**, she has real talent.”

• “**Interestingly**, he is very good at chess.”

However, they can also appear at the end of the sentence, preceded by a comma, as in:

• “He didn’t mean to ignore you, **clearly**.”

• “She has real talent, **apparently**.”

• “He is really good at chess, **interestingly**.”

Some evaluative adverbs can also appear in the mid position, in which case we usually do not set them apart with commas. In particular, *probably* and *definitely* are most likely to occur in this position, appearing after the subject or after the verb *be*. For example:

• “He **probably** *didn’t* mean to ignore you.”
• “She **definitely** *works* hard.”

• “He *is* **probably** really good at chess.”
• “They *are* **definitely** the best of friends.”

When we use an evaluative adverb to make a judgment of an action, we usually put the adverb after the subject. For example:

• “*She* **bravely** told the truth.”

• “*He* **generously** offered the lady a ride home.”

• “*You* **carelessly** dropped my favorite cup.”

However, if we want to place a strong emphasis on the judgment, we can also place it at the beginning of the sentence, set apart by a comma. For example:

• “**Bravely**, she told the truth.”

• “**Generously**, he offered the lady a ride home.”

• “**Carelessly**, you dropped my favorite cup.

Placing this type of evaluative adverb at the end of the sentence is less common, but still acceptable. For example:

• “She told the truth, **bravely**.”

• “He offered the lady a ride home, **generously**.”

• “You dropped my favorite cup, **carelessly**.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Evaluative adverbs are used to give the _____.

a) reader’s opinion
b) writer’s opinion
c) speaker’s opinion
d) Both A & C
e) Both B & C

2. Which evaluative adverb **does not** indicate **degree of certainty**?

a) clearly
b) generously
c) apparently
d) obviously

3. Which adverb **does not** indicate a **judgment** of someone’s actions?

a) stupidly
b) generously
c) wisely
d) certainly

4. Which adverb **does not** indicate **attitude**?

a) luckily
b) definitely
c) sadly
d) surprisingly

5. Which of the following sentences is **incorrect**?

a) “Surprisingly, he didn’t come with us.”

b) “He surprisingly didn’t come with us.”
c) “He didn’t come surprisingly with us.”
d) “He didn’t come with us, surprisingly.”

Viewpoint Adverbs

Definition

Viewpoint adverbs are often confused with **evaluative adverbs**. Although they are similar in form, and the specific adverbs used can overlap, the two actually serve different functions. While evaluative adverbs are used to give an opinion, viewpoint adverbs are used to indicate whose point of view we are expressing, or to specify what aspect of something we are talking about. They modify an entire sentence or **independent clause**.

Indicating point of view

Many common viewpoint adverbs are actually **adverbials**, or groups of words that function together as an adverb. Here are some common viewpoint adverbs and adverbials for indicating whose point of view we are expressing:

- according to *me/you/him/her/them*
- as far as *I/you/he/she/they* am/is/are concerned
- in *my/your/his/her/their* opinion
- in *my/your/his/her/their* view
- to *my/your/his/her/their* knowledge
- from *my/your/his/her/their* perspective
- from *my/your/his/her/their* point of view
- personally

We can use these viewpoint adverbs and adverbials to express who supports the statement. For example:

• “**In my opinion**, you shouldn’t go to that party.” (*I* believe you shouldn’t go to that party.)

• “**According to my sister**, I have a fantastic sense of humor.” (*My sister* thinks I have a fantastic sense of humor.)

• “**To my teacher’s knowledge**, my homework has been eaten by a dog.” (*My teacher* believes that my homework has been eaten by a dog.)

• “**Personally**, I don’t believe it’s true.” (*My own* personal opinion is that it isn’t true.)

Specifying an aspect of something

We also use specific viewpoint adverbs to delimit, or specify, what part or aspect of something we are talking about. These adverbs are often called **domain adverbs**, and are almost limitless. Some examples are:

- biologically
- environmentally
- ideologically
- industrially
- financially
- formally
- inwardly
- linguistically
- mathematically
- medically
- morally
- officially
- outwardly
- physically
- politically
- scientifically
- technically
- theoretically
- visually

For example:

• “**Biologically**, insects are some of the most amazing creatures on the planet.” (From a biological point of view, insects are amazing.)

• “**Industrially**, 19th-century London was the most advanced city in the world.” (19th-century London was the most advanced city in terms of industry.)

• “**Officially**, we’re not allowed to sit here.” (According to official rules, we are not allowed to sit here.)

For variety, we can also adapt the above adverbs into adverbial phrases with no change in meaning. We can use the following patterns:

- adverb + “speaking”
- “in terms of” + noun
- “in” + adjective + “terms”
- “from a” + adjective + “point of view”
- “as far as” + noun + “is concerned”

For example:

• “**Biologically speaking**, insects are some of the most amazing creatures on the planet.”

• “**In terms of biology**, insects are some of the most amazing creatures on the planet.”

• “**In biological terms**, insects are some of the most amazing creatures on the planet.”

• “**From a biological point of view**, insects are some of the most amazing creatures on the planet.”

• “**As far as biology is concerned**, insects are some of the most amazing creatures on the planet.”

Sentence Placement

As we’ve seen in the examples above, viewpoint adverbs usually appear at the beginning of the clause, followed by a comma. However, they can also appear at the end of the clause. For example:

• “You shouldn’t go to that party, **in my opinion**.”

• “I don’t believe it's true, **personally**.”

• “19th -century London was the most advanced city in the world, **industrially**.”

• “Insects are some of the most amazing creatures on the planet, **biologically speaking**.”

Note that whether they appear at the beginning or the end, they are set apart from the rest of the clause by a comma.

Viewpoint adverbs can appear in other positions in the sentence, but this is less common. If we place a viewpoint adverb in mid position, we should be sure to double check the readability of the sentence, and always set it apart from the rest

of the clause between two commas.

For example:

• “You shouldn’t, **in my opinion**, go to that party.”

• “Insects are, **in terms of biology**, some of the most amazing creatures on the planet.”

• “We are not, **in official terms**, allowed to sit here.”

• “19th-century London was, **industrially**, the most advanced city in the world.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Viewpoint adverbs are often used to indicate _____.

a) who believes something
b) why you believe something
c) what you believe
d) how much you believe something

2. Viewpoint adverbs must be separated from the rest of the clause by a _____.

a) a colon
b) a semi-colon
c) a period
d) a comma

3. Which of the following sentences is **punctuated correctly**?

a) “Personally I don’t like cake.”
b) “Personally; I don’t like cake.”
c) “Personally, I don’t like cake.”
d) “Personally I don’t, like cake.”

4. Complete the following sentence:
“In scientific _____, humans are mammals.”

a) science
b) speaking
c) according
d) terms

5. Complete the following sentence:
“_____ my knowledge, he is at home.”

a) In
b) To
c) By
d) For

Relative Adverbs

Definition

Relative adverbs, like **relative pronouns**, introduce **relative clauses** (also called **adjective clauses**) that modify a noun or a noun phrase. However, while relative pronouns (such as *that, which*, or *who*) are used to relate information to a person or a thing, relative adverbs (*where*, *when* and *why*) are used when the information relates to a place, time, or the reason an action took place.

Functions of relative adverbs

Place

We use the relative adverb *where* to introduce information that relates to a place. The place can be any location: a house, city, country, geographical region, or even a planet.

For example:

• “*The house* **where** I was born is a very special place.”

• “*Paris*, **where** I want to live, is the most beautiful city in the world.”

• “I’ll always remember *the river* **where** we learned to swim.

Time

We use the relative adverb *when* to introduce information that relates to a time. That time can be an actual time of day, a day, a week, a year, or even an era. For example:

• “The 80s were *a time* **when** big hair was considered fashionable.”

• “I love casual *Fridays*, **when** we get to wear jeans to work.”

• “Yesterday was *the day* **when** I met my husband for lunch.”

Reason

We use the relative adverb *why* to introduce information that relates to the reason something happened. In this case, the noun being modified is “the reason,” but it is often omitted to reduce repetitiveness. For example:

• “I don’t know *the reason* **why** he got angry.”
OR
• “I don’t know **why** he got angry.”

• “Do you know *the reason* **why** the sky is blue?”
OR
• “Do you know **why** the sky is blue?”

Restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses

Like relative pronouns, relative adverbs can introduce a **restrictive relative clause** (also called a defining clause), or a **non-restrictive relative clause** (also known as a non-defining clause). **Restrictive relative clauses** identify the noun, giving us essential information about it, while **non-restrictive** clauses simply give us additional information that is not essential to the sentence. Let’s look at the difference:

Restrictive relative clauses

As mentioned, restrictive relative clauses identify the noun, giving us information about it that we need to know in order to understand the speaker’s meaning. This type of clause does not need any commas. For example:

• “*The house* **where** I was born is a very special place.”
• “I’ll always remember *the river* **where** we learned to swim.”

• “Yesterday was *the day* **when** I met my husband for lunch.”
• “The 80s were *a time* **when** big hair was considered fashionable.”

• “I don’t know (*the reason*) **why** he got angry.”
• “Do you know (*the reason*) **why** the sky is blue?”

The restrictive relative clause in each of the sentences above is underlined. Now, observe what happens to the meaning of the sentences if we remove the relative clause:

• "*The house* is a very special place." (What house?)
• "I'll always remember the river." (What river?)

• "Yesterday was *the day*." (What day?)
• "The 80s were a time." (What kind of time?)

• "I don't know the reason." (The reason for/about what?)
• "Do you know the reason?" (What reason?)

When you remove a restrictive relative clause, the nouns are no longer identifiable and the sentences contain much less information, as you can see from the examples above. Instead, the listener or reader is left with questions.

Non-restrictive relative clauses

Non-restrictive relative clauses give us additional information about a noun that has already been identified, but this information is not essential for the sentence to make sense. Only two of the relative adverbs, *where* and *when*, can be used to introduce non-restrictive relative clauses; *why* cannot.

Note that non-restrictive relative clauses must be set apart from the rest of the sentence by commas. For example:

• "*Paris*, where I want to live, is the most beautiful city in the world."
• "*The blue house on the corner*, where those kids are playing, is the house I want to buy."

• "I love *casual Fridays*, when we get to wear jeans to work."
• "*May*, when flowers bloom, is my favorite month of the year."

In the examples above, the underlined relative clauses merely give extra information about the nouns; they do not define them. The sentences would still make sense even if the relative clauses were removed, which is how we know that we are dealing with non-restrictive relative clauses. For example:

• "Paris is the most beautiful city in the world."

• "The blue house on the corner is the house I want to buy."

• "I love casual Fridays."

• "May is my favorite month of the year."

Formality

Relative adverbs are used in daily speech and writing to take the place of the structure *preposition + which*. This structure is considered very formal and is usually only used in academic writing or particularly formal speech.

For example:

• “This is the house *in which* I was born.”

• “April 10th is the day *on which* I met my husband.”

• “Do you know the reason *for which* the sky is blue?”

These sentences all sound too formal for daily use. Instead, we usually use relative adverbs instead:

• “This is the house **where** I was born.”

• “April 10th is the day **when** I met my husband.”

• “Do you know the reason **why** the sky is blue?”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Relative adverbs are used to introduce _____.

a) nouns
b) adjectives
c) people
d) adjective clauses

2. Which of the following is **not** a relative adverb?

a) where
b) who
c) when
d) why

3. A restrictive relative clause includes _____.

a) essential information
b) extra information
c) non-essential information
d) a non-restrictive relative clause

4. Complete the following sentence:
“Monday, _____ I usually have the most work, is now my day off.”

a) that
b) where
c) when
d) why

5. Complete the following sentence:
“That’s _____ I haven’t called you for so long.”

a) that
b) where
c) when
d) why

6. Which sentence is punctuated **correctly**?”

a) “My brother’s house, where I used to spend a lot of time, was just sold.”
b) “My brother’s house where I used to spend a lot of time was just sold.”
c) “My brother’s house where I used, to spend a lot of time, was just sold.”
d) “My brother house where I used to spend, a lot of time was just sold.”

Adverbial Nouns

Definition

Adverbial nouns are nouns or noun phrases that function grammatically as adverbs to modify verbs and certain adjectives.

Modifying verbs

Adverbial nouns are sometimes referred to as **adverbial objectives**. This is because they hold a position normally occupied by a verb’s direct object, yet they act as an adverb to modify the verb with an aspect of time, distance, weight, age, or monetary value.

Time

• “I am leaving **tomorrow**.”

• “We walked **an hour** out of town.”

• “I’ll see you **next year**.”

Distance

• “I run **five miles** every day.”

• “I can barely see **a foot** in front of me in this fog.”

Weight

• “They are displaying a block of cheese that weighs **a ton**!”

• “I’m trying to lose **a few pounds** before the wedding.”

Age

• “She is *35 years* old.” (In this case, the adverbial noun phrase modifies the adjective *old*.)

• “This wine is aged **25 years**.”

Monetary value

• “This car only costs **$2,000**.”

• “That speeding ticket set me back **300 bucks**.”

Complementing certain adjectives

Certain adjectives, such as *worth* and *due*, are able to take nouns or noun phrases as complements when they are in a **predicative position**. For example:

• “This coat is only worth **a dollar**.”

• “I think Mary is due **an apology**.”

Some sources also consider the word *like* to be an adjective that can take a noun/noun phrase complement, as in:

• “He is very much like **your brother**.”

Other sources only consider it as a preposition in this capacity, which would make *like your brother* a prepositional phrase.

Likewise, *worth* and *due* are sometimes considered to be more like prepositions than adjectives when they function this way. However, there is not a clear

agreement on the terminology that is most appropriate, because it is so unusual for nouns to be the complements of adjectives.

Finally, note that adverbial nouns are **not** the same as **attributive nouns** (also called **noun adjuncts**), which are used with another noun to form **compound nouns**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following are **not** modified or complemented by adverbial nouns?

a) verbs
b) adjectives
c) adverbs
d) None of the above

2. Which of the following is **not** one of the ways verbs are modified by adverbial nouns?

a) To describe time
b) To describe distance
c) To describe weight
d) To describe manner

3. Identify the adverbial noun in the following sentence:
“I can’t wait to start school this September in Canada.”

a) school
b) this September
c) in Canada
d) None of the above

4. Identify the adverbial noun in the following sentence:
“She’s going to be 20 next July.”

a) going to
b) 20
c) next
d) next July

Regular and Irregular Adverbs Definition

Adverbs generally correspond to an adjective, so that when we want to apply the adjective's meaning to a verb (or to an adjective or another adverb), we have a straightforward way to do so. **Regular adverbs** are formed by adding "-ly" or some variation thereof onto the end of the adjective. Sometimes the adjective's spelling needs to be altered slightly to accommodate this, but the rules of doing so are fairly straightforward.

Irregular adverbs, on the other hand, are adverbs that are not formed from standard English spelling conventions. Because they do not follow the "rules," there is no trick to using them: you simply have to memorize them. Here is a table of the most common irregular adverbs and their adjectival counterparts:

Adjective	Irregular Adverb	Sources of Confusion
fast	fast	
hard	hard	*Hardly (ever)* is an adverb of frequency, meaning "almost never."
straight	straight	
lively	lively	*Lively* still exists as an adverb in phrases like "step lively." However, it is more often used in the adverbial prepositional phrase "in a lively manner."
late	late	*Lately* is a different adverb that means "recently."
daily	daily	
early	early	
friendly	no adverb	Can be used in the adverbial prepositional phrase "in a friendly manner."
timely	no adverb	Can be used in the adverbial prepositional phrase "in a friendly manner."

good	well	*Well* is the adverb form of **good**; it can also function as a **predicative adjective**.

First, let's examine the normal rules for making **regular adverbs**, and then we'll examine more closely the **irregular adverbs** above that do not follow these rules.

Regular adverbs

Regular adverbs are formed by taking an adjective and adding some form of the suffix "-ly." Sometimes the spelling of the adjective changes to accommodate this suffix; sometimes the suffix itself must change. As with most spelling rules in English, though, there are exceptions even to these patterns. We'll look at these rules individually, and highlight any exceptions to each.

Adjective + "-ly"

The most straightforward rule is to simply add "-ly" to the end of an adjective, without changing the spelling at all. This occurs when an adjective ends in a consonant (except for "-ic") or a consonant + "-e" (except for "-le"). For example:

• "She is a **beautiful** singer."
• "She sings *beautifully*."

• "He is a **slow** walker."
• "He walks *slowly*."

• "This is the **last** item we need to discuss."
• "*Lastly*, let's discuss the impact on the environment."

Adjectives ending in "-ic"

Sometimes the spelling of a word will have to change slightly so as to better accommodate the extra "-ly." If the adjective ends in "-ic," for instance, it will become "-ically":

• "They are **enthusiastic** students."
• "They work *enthusiastically*."

• "There are some **drastic** differences between these."

• “These are *drastically* different.”

The one exception to this rule is the adjective **public**, which becomes the adverb *publicly*.

Adjectives ending in “-y”

If the adjective ends in a “-y,” it is replaced with “-ily”:

• “The children are **happy** when they are playing.”
• “The children are playing *happily*.”

• “Why are you so **noisy** when you eat?”
• “Quit eating so *noisily*!”

Adjectives ending in “-le” and “-ue”

For adjectives ending in “-le” or “-ue,” the “e” on the end is dropped and is replaced with “-ly”:

• “He is a **terrible** golfer.”
• “He plays golf *terribly*.”

• “You will get what is **due** so long as you are **true** to your word."
• “It is *duly* noted that the defendant is *truly* remorseful.”

Irregular Adverbs

The majority of adverbs end in “-ly,” but as we will see, there are some irregular ones that need to be memorized.

Spelling doesn’t change

Fast is one of the irregular adverbs—the adjective and the adverb are the same. For example:

• “A Ferrari is a **fast** car.

• “He drives *fast*.”

Hard is another irregular adverb. If we say, “I work hardly,” it could impede understanding. The listener may think you mean, “I hardly work,” which has the opposite meaning (*hardly (ever)* is a frequency adverb and means “very rarely”). The correct use of *hard* as an adverb would simply be “I work *hard*.”

Other exceptions to the spelling rules include *straight, lively, late,* and *early*,

which all have the same spelling whether they are used as **adjectives** or as *adverbs*. For example:

• “Draw a **straight** line.”
• “We drove *straight*.”

• “It was a **lively** game.”
• “Step *lively*,* everyone!”

• “I think I need to have an **early** night.”
• “I’m going to bed *early* tonight.”

Late vs. Lately

A common source of confusion is the proper use of the words “late” and “lately.” *Late*, as already mentioned, is both an adjective and an adverb. Lately, on the other hand, is only an adverb of time meaning “recently.” For example:

• “Why are you always **late**?” (adjective)

• “We arrived *late*.” (adverb)

• “I’ve been feeling unwell *lately*.” (adverb of time)

• **Incorrect**: “I hope the guests don’t arrive *lately*.”

Only adjectives

Timely and *friendly* are only adjectives. To use these as adverbs, we simply use them in an adverbial prepositional phrase, such as “in a _____ way/manner”:

• “Please arrive *in a **timely** manner*.”

• “He spoke to me *in a **friendly** way*.”

*Though *lively* still exists as an adverb in phrases like “step lively,” it is more often used in an adverbial prepositional phrase, such as:

• “The boys all played *in a **lively** manner*.”

Adverbs of frequency

Adverbs of frequency that deal with specific measures of time and end in “-ly” can function both as adjectives and adverbs. Examples of these include *yearly, weekly, daily*, and hourly. For instance:

• “It’s good to have a **daily** routine.” (adjective)
• “I make sure to exercise *daily*.” (adverb)

• “I want **weekly** updates, Jenkins!” (adjective)
• “I update the boss *weekly*.” (adverb)

Wrong vs. Wrongly

The adjective *wrong* can become the adverb *wrongly*, but we can use *wrong* as an irregular adverb as well—both are acceptable. However, *wrong* as an adverb **must** come after the verb if modifies, as in:

• “I guessed *wrong*.”

• “He filled out the form *wrong*.”

Wrongly, on the other hand, can be used either before or after the word it modifies:

• “He was *wrongly* accused.”

• “They judged *wrongly*.”

Good vs. Well

Good is an adjective used to describe a noun; *well* is the adverb derived from **good** and describes how you do something. For example:

✖ “I speak English *good*.” (incorrect)
✔ “I speak English *well*.” (correct)

✖ “I did *good* on the English exam.” (incorrect)
✔ “I did *well* on the English exam.” (correct)

“I speak English good” is incorrect, as we need to use an adverb when describing a verb. In the second example, “I did good” is incorrect because we need an adverb to describe how the speaker did on the exam. The phrase “do good” is especially tricky, because it can also mean “to do that which is good or virtuous.” (*Good* in this sense is a noun acting as the object of the verb.)

Adjectives after linking verbs

It is important to remember that linking verbs (such as *be, become, get,* and the sense verbs *feel, taste, look, sound, smell,* and *seem*) are followed by **predicative adjectives**, not adverbs. For example:

• “You seem **happy**.”

• “She sounds **English**.” (An opinion based on her voice.)

• “We became **tired**.”

• “You look **good**.”

• “You look **well**.”

Notice that the last two examples are both correct. Not only is *well* an adverb, but it also functions as an adjective. Its opposite adjective is *ill*, while the opposite of *good* is *bad*. When we say, “You look good,” we are referring to the person’s physical appearance. If, on the other hand, we say, “You look well,” we are referring to the health or well-being of the person. To learn more about adjectives that follow linking verbs, as well as the “good/well” distinction, see the chapter on **Predicative Adjectives**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the **most common** way to make an adverb from an adjective?

a) Use the adjective in the prepositional phrase “in a _____ manner”
b) Use the adjective before a verb
c) Add “-ly” to the end of the adjective
d) Add “-ically” to the end of the adjective

2. What is the irregular adverb of the adjective **late**?

a) late
b) lately
c) in a late manner
d) latterly

3. How does the usage of *wrong* as an adverb differ from *wrongly*?

a) *Wrong* must come before the verb it modifies, while *wrongly* must come after
b) *Wrong* must come after the verb it modifies, while *wrongly* must come before
c) *Wrong* must come before the verb it modifies, while *wrongly* can come before or after
d) *Wrong* must come after the verb it modifies, while *wrongly* can come before or after

4. How are adjectives ending in “-le” or “-ue” changed to become adverbs?

a) By adding “-ly” to the end
b) By replacing the “e” at the end with “-ly”

c) By replacing the “e” at the end with “-ily”
d) By replacing the “e” at the end with “-ically”

5. Which of the following is an irregular adverb?

a) lastly
b) publicly
c) early
d) lately

6. Which of the following is **not** an irregular adverb?

a) lively
b) friendly
c) early
d) hourly

Degrees of Comparison

Definition

Just like adjectives, adverbs have **comparative** and **superlative degrees**; adverbs in their basic forms are sometimes known as being in the **positive degree**.

Comparative adverbs express a higher (or lower) degree of how an action is performed, usually in comparison to another person or thing.

Superlative adverbs, on the other hand, are used to identify the highest (or lowest) degree of how an action is performed.

Forming the comparative and superlative degrees

Adverbs are commonly categorized in three ways: one-syllable adverbs, “-ly” adverbs, and irregular adverbs. We create the comparative and superlative forms of each category in different ways.

One-syllable adverbs

One-syllable adverbs are formed into comparatives by adding the suffix “-er” to the end of the word. The superlative form is created by adding the suffix “-est” to the end.

Adverb (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
fast	faster	fastest
hard	harder	hardest
high	higher	highest
late	later*	latest*
long	longer	longest
low	lower	lowest
wide	wider*	widest*

(*Spelling note: When the adverb already ends in the letter “e,” simply add “-r” or “-st” to the end.)

Adverbs ending in “-ly”

Many adverbs are formed by adding “-ly” to the end of an adjective. If an adverb has been created according to this pattern, we simply use the words *more* and *less* to create the comparative degree, and we use the word *most* or *least* to make the superlative degree. For example:

Adjective	Adverb (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
careful	carefully	more/less carefully	most/least carefully
efficient	efficiently	more/less efficiently	most/least efficiently
happy	happily	more/less happily	most/least happily
horrible	horribly	more/less horribly	

			most/least horribly
recent	recently	more/less recently	most/least recently
sad	sadly	more/less sadly	most/least sadly
strange	strangely	more/less strangely	most/least strangely

Irregular adverbs

Of course, the rules we've just looked at have some exceptions, which are known as **irregular verbs**. Below are the degrees of comparison for some of the most common irregular adverbs:

Irregular adverb (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
badly	worse	worst
early	earlier	earliest
far	farther/further	farthest/furthest*
little	less	least
well	better	best

(*Although *farther*/*farthest* and *further*/*furthest* are often used interchangeably, there are differences between them. In American English, *farther/farthest* is preferred when comparing physical distances, and *further/furthest* is preferred when comparing figurative distances; in British English, *further/furthest* is preferred for both uses.)

To learn more about irregular adverbs, see the chapter section covering **Regular and Irregular Adverbs**.

Adverbs with two forms

There are a few adverbs that have two generally accepted forms. In these cases,

they also have two commonly used comparative and superlative degrees. Some of the most prevalent of these exceptions are:

Adverb (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
cheap ***or*** cheaply	cheaper ***or*** more/less cheaply	cheapest ***or*** most/least cheaply
loud ***or*** loudly	louder ***or*** more/less loudly	loudest ***or*** most/least loudly
quick ***or*** quickly	quicker ***or*** more/less quickly	quickest ***or*** most/least quickly
slow ***or*** slowly	slower ***or*** more/less slowly	slowest ***or*** most/least slowly

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following suffixes is used to shift a one-syllable adverb to the **superlative degree**?

a) -ed
b) -er
c) -est
d) -en

2. Which of the following pairs of words is used to shift an "-ly" adverb to the **comparative degree**?

a) more/less
b) most/least
c) much/many
d) most/less

3. What is the **comparative form** of the irregular adverb *well*?

a) good
b) better

c) worse
d) best

4. What is the **superlative form** of the adverb *slowly*?

a) slower
b) slowest
c) more/less slowly
d) most/least slowly
e) A & C
f) B & D

Comparative Adverbs

Definition

Comparative adverbs, like **comparative adjectives**, are used to describe differences and similarities between two things. While comparative adjectives describe similarities and differences between two **nouns** (people, places, or objects), comparative adverbs make comparisons between two **verbs**—that is, they describe how, when, how often, or to what degree an action is done. For example:

• "John is **faster** than Tim." (comparative adjective)
• "John *runs* **faster** than Tim." (comparative adverb)

• "John is **more careful** than Tim in his work." (comparative adjective)
• "John *works* **more carefully** than Tim." (comparative adverb)

Comparative adverbs and comparative adjectives sometimes have the same form (as in ***faster*** above); other times, they have different forms (as in ***careful/carefully***). However, even when the forms are the same, we can tell the difference between the two by looking at what they modify. While the comparative adjectives describe differences between the physical or personal characteristics of John and Tim, the comparative adverbs describe differences in how they carry out actions (*run, work*).

Forming Comparative Adverbs

We form comparative adverbs by adding the ending "-er" to the base adverb, or by adding the word *more* (or *less*) before the base adverb. There are simple rules

that tell us which method is correct.

One syllable + “-er”

In general, when the adverb has only one syllable, we add “-er” to the end of it. The table below shows some of the most common one-syllable adverbs and their comparative forms:

Adverb (base form)	Comparative Adverb
fast	**faster**
hard	**harder**
high	**higher**
late	**later**
long	**longer**
low	**lower**
wide	**wider***

(*Spelling note: When the adverb already ends in the letter “e,” just add “-r,” not “-er.”)

More +“-ly” adverb

Many adverbs are formed by adding “-ly” to the end of an adjective. If an adverb has been created according to this pattern, we insert the word *more* or *less* to form the comparative. For example:

Adjective	Adverb	Comparative Adverb
careful	carefully	**more/less carefully**
efficient	efficiently	**more/less efficiently**
happy	happily	**more/less happily**
horrible	horribly	**more/less horribly**

recent	recently	**more/less recently**
sad	sadly	**more/less sadly**
strange	strangely	**more/less strangely**

Irregular comparative adverbs

Of course, there are some exceptions to the rules we've just looked at. These are some of the most common irregular comparative adverbs:

Adverb	Comparative Adverb
badly	**worse**
early	**earlier**
far	**farther/further***
little	**less**
well	**better**

(*Although *farther* and *further* are often used interchangeably, there are differences between these two forms. In American English, *farther* is preferred when comparing physical distances and *further* when comparing figurative distances; in British English, *further* is preferred for both.)

To learn more about irregular adverbs, see the chapter section covering **Regular and Irregular Adverbs**.

Comparative adverbs with two forms

There are a few adverbs that have two generally accepted forms. In these cases, they also have two commonly used comparative forms. Some of the most prevalent of these exceptions are:

Adverb	Comparative Adverb
cheap/cheaply	**cheaper/more cheaply**

loud/loudly	**louder/more loudly**
quick/quickly	**quicker/more quickly**
slow/slowly	**slower/more slowly**

Although traditional grammarians often consider these adverb forms without "-ly" to be incorrect, they are commonly used in modern English. However, they are still considered less formal than their "-ly" equivalents.

Using Comparative Adverbs

Now that we have seen how to *form* comparative adverbs, let's look at how they are used within the context of affirmative, negative, and interrogative statements.

Affirmative statements

We can describe change or differences between two things within one sentence, using the word *than*. For example:

• "An airplane moves **faster** *than* a car."

• "I eat **more neatly** *than* my sister."

• "I work **more carefully** *than* I used to."

Note that while the first two examples describe differences between how two things or people carry out an action, the third example describes a *change* in how one person has carried out an action. Also, in each of the examples, the person or thing that does the action to a greater degree comes first in the sentence. We can also use the opposite adverbs to achieve the same meaning in a different order:

• "A car moves **slower/more slowly** *than* an airplane."

• "My sister eats **more sloppily** *than* me."

• "I used to work **less carefully** *than* I do now."

Negative Statements

It's easy to form negative statements with comparative adverbs. We just follow the regular patterns for negatives: if the statement contains an **auxiliary** or **modal** verb, or if it uses a form of the linking verb *be*, we insert the word *not* (either in its full or its contracted form). For example:

• “My brother can run **faster** than me.” (affirmative)
• “My brother *can’t* run **faster** than me.” (negative)

• “Sam is learning to read **more quickly** than Jen.” (affirmative)
• “Sam *is not* learning to read **more quickly** than Jen.” (negative)

If a statement contains only a main verb, we add the auxiliary verb *do/does/did* and *not*. For example:

• “Tom sings **more beautifully** than Sam.” (affirmative)
• “Tom *does not* sing **more beautifully** than Sam.” (negative)

• “Cats hide **better** than dogs.” (affirmative)
• “Cats *don’t* hide better than dogs.” (negative)

Interrogatives

We form **interrogatives** with comparative adverbs using normal question formation. For example:

• “*Did you* always run **faster** than your brother?”

• “*Has she* ever performed **better** than you on a test?”

• “*Can monkeys* jump **higher** than cats?”

We can also ask questions by placing a **question word** at the beginning of the sentence, and adding the two people or things at the end. For example:

• “*Who* runs **faster**, you or your brother?”

• “*Who* performs **better** on tests, you or Jen?”

• “*Which* animal can jump **higher**, a cat or a monkey?”

Note that in this type of question, we do not include the word *than*. We tend to use *than* with a question word if the second person or thing is unknown, as in:

• “*Who* runs **faster** than you?”

• “*Who* performs **better** on tests than Jen?”

• “*What* animal can jump **higher** than a monkey?”

Omitting one of the nouns

Often, we don’t need to explicitly mention both of the people or things that we’re comparing because it’s already obvious from the context. If the speaker already knows who or what we’re talking about, we can omit one of the nouns.

If we do this, we also omit the word *than*. For example:

• Speaker A: “Who swims **faster**, you or your brother?”

• Speaker B: “My brother does, but I can run **faster**.”

Speaker B doesn’t need to say “than my brother” at the end, because it’s already clear from the context.

Gradability

We can only make comparisons using **gradable adverbs**, meaning adverbs that are able to move up and down on a scale of intensity. The majority of adverbs are gradable. For example, *quickly* is gradable because a person can run *quickly, very quickly,* or *extremely quickly*.

As with comparative adjectives, we can state differences in scale by using words and phrases like *a bit, a little (bit), much, a lot,* and *far* before the comparative adverb. For example:

• “Tom can run *much* **faster** than his brother.”

• “Monkeys jump *a lot* **higher** than cats.”

• “Sam drives *a little (bit)* **more carefully** than Tom.”

Not all adverbs are gradable in nature. For example, *absolutely, completely, totally* and *utterly* are all **ungradable adverbs**. These are used to modify ungradable adjectives, and they cannot move up and down on a scale. They do not have a comparative form, and therefore cannot be used to draw comparisons.

Expressing equality and inequality using *as … as*

Another way of expressing similarities, differences, or changes with comparative adverbs is by using the structure “*as … as*.” To describe two things as equal, we use the construction *as + adverb + as*. For example:

• “I still run **as *slowly* as** I used to.”

• “Tom always drives **as *carefully* as** you’d want him to.”

• “Sam finished **as *quickly* as** his brother.”

We can use the same construction to say that two actions are unequal by adding an auxiliary verb and the word *not*.

• I *don't* run **as *slowly* as** I used to."

• "Tom *doesn't* always drive **as *carefully* as** you'd want him to."

• "Sam *didn't* finish **as *quickly* as** his brother."

Finally, we can inquire as to whether two actions are equal by adding the auxiliary verbs *do/does* or *did* to the beginning of the sentence and forming a question:

• "Do you still run **as slowly as** you used to?"

• "Does Tom drive **as carefully as** you'd want him to?"

• "Did Sam finish **as quickly as** his brother?"

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following facts about comparative adverbs is **correct**?

a) They always take a different form than a comparative adjective.
b) They always take the same form as a comparative adjective.
c) They sometimes take the same form as a comparative adjective.
d) They never take the same form as a comparative adjective.

2. Which of these adverbs has an **irregular** comparative form?

a) fast
b) badly
c) carefully
d) sadly

3. Which of these is an **incorrect** comparative adverb?

a) more beautifully
b) more quickly
c) more carefully
d) more higher

4. Which of the following sentences is **correct**?

a) "He runs fast as his brother."
b) "He runs as fast as his brother."
c) "He runs faster as his brother."
d) "He faster runs as his brother."

5. Which of the following sentences is **correct**?

a) “She studies hardlier than her sister.”
b) “She studies harder than her sister.”
c) “She studies harder as her sister.”
d) “She studies hard as her sister.”

Superlative Adverbs

Definition

Superlative adverbs, like **superlative adjectives**, are used to describe differences among three or more people or things. But while superlative adjectives describe the highest (or lowest) degree of an attribute among a multiple **nouns** (people, places, or objects), superlative adverbs describe the action of a person or thing compared to that of several others—that is, they describe how, when, how often, or to what degree an action is done. For example:

• “John is **the fastest** runner of the group.” (superlative adjective)
• “John *runs* **the fastest** of the group.” (superlative adverb)

• “Out of all the students in the class, Sally is the **most careful** with her work.” (superlative adjective)
• “Out of all the students in the class, Sally *works* **most carefully**.” (superlative adverb)

Superlative adverbs and superlative adjectives sometimes have the same form (as in ***fastest*** above); other times, they have different forms (as in ***careful/carefully*** above). However, even when the forms are the same, we can tell the difference between the two by looking at what they modify. While the superlative adjectives describe the characteristics of John and Sally, the superlative adverbs describe how they carry out actions (*run*, *work*).

Forming Superlative Adverbs

We form superlative adverbs by adding the ending “-est” to the base adverb, or by adding the word *most* before the base adverb. There are simple rules that tell us which is the correct method.

One syllable + “-est”

In general, when the adverb has only one syllable, we add “-est” to the end of it. The table below shows some of the most common one-syllable adverbs and their superlative forms:

Adverb (base form)	Superlative Adverb
fast	fastest
hard	hardest
high	highest
late	latest
long	longest
low	lowest
wide	widest*

(*Spelling note: When the adverb already ends in the letter “e,” just add “-st,” not “-est.”)

“-ly” adverbs

Many adverbs are formed by adding “-ly” to the end of an adjective. If an adverb has been created according to this pattern, we add the word *most* or *least* to make the superlative form(s). For example:

Adjective	Adverb	Superlative Adverb
careful	carefully	most/least carefully
efficient	efficiently	most/least efficiently
happy	happily	most/least happily
horrible	horribly	most/least horribly
recent	recently	most/least recently

sad	sadly	most/least sadly
strange	strangely	most/least strangely

Irregular superlative adverbs

Of course, there are some exceptions to the rules we've just looked at. These are some of the most common irregular superlative adverbs:

Irregular Adverb	Irregular Superlative Adverb
badly	worst
early	earliest
far	farthest/furthest*
little	least
well	best

(*Although *farthest* and *furthest* are often used interchangeably, there are differences between these two forms. In American English, *farthest* is preferred when comparing physical distances, and *furthest* is preferred when comparing figurative distances; in British English, *furthest* is preferred for both.)

To learn more about irregular adverbs, see the chapter section covering **Regular and Irregular Adverbs**.

Superlative adverbs with two forms

There are a few adverbs that have two generally accepted forms. In these cases, they also have two commonly used superlative forms. Some of the most prevalent of these exceptions are:

Adverb	Superlative Adverb
cheap ***or*** cheaply	cheapest ***or*** most/least cheaply
loud ***or*** loudly	loudest ***or*** most/least loudly

quick ***or*** quickly	quickest ***or*** most/least quickly
slow ***or*** slowly	slowest ***or*** most/least slowly

Although traditional grammarians often consider these adverb forms without "-ly" to be incorrect, they are commonly used in modern English. However, they are still considered less formal than their "-ly" equivalents.

Using Superlative Adverbs

We usually use superlative adjectives when describing an action of someone or something among a group of several others, either in a collective group or among several individuals.

Superlative adverbs come after the verb in a sentence, and they are almost always preceded by the word *the*. For example:

• "Cars and motorcycles can go fast, but an airplane moves **the fastest**."

• "I eat **the most neatly** among my siblings."

• "She works **the least carefully** in her class."

Omitting the group of comparison

When we use superlatives, it is very common to omit the group that something or someone is being compared to because that group is implied by a previous sentence. For example:

• "My brothers are all fast swimmers. John swims **the fastest**, though."

We can also identify a superlative attribute of a subject's action compared to itself in other contexts or points in time. In this case, we do not have another group to identify, and we generally do **not** use the word *the*. For example:

• "I work **best** by myself." (compared to when other people are involved)

• "The engine runs **most smoothly** after it has warmed up for a while." (compared to when the engine is cold)

• "Flowers bloom **most beautifully** in the spring." (compared to the other seasons)

Expressing the lowest degree

As we've seen, "-ly" adverbs can either take *most* or *least* to indicate the highest and lowest degrees of comparison. For example:

• "Though he performed **the least compellingly** among the other actors on stage, he was **the most authentically** dressed."

Irregular (non-"ly") adverbs, on the other hand, have only one superlative form that expresses the highest degree of its characteristic. When we want to express the lowest quality of an irregular adverb, we could technically just use the word *least* before its basic form, as in:

• "John runs **the fastest** in his class, but he swims **the least fast**."

However, this construction is rather awkward, and it is best just to use another superlative adverb with the opposite meaning, as in:

• "John runs **the fastest** in his class, but he swims **the slowest**."

Most as an intensifier

We often find the adverb *most* being used as an **intensifier** of other adverbs, especially in formal speech or writing. Rather than indicating a superlative adverb (i.e., in comparison to others in a group), it simply adds intensity to the word, having approximately the same meaning as the adverb *very*. For example:

• "You sang **most beautifully**, Jack."

• "The play was **most tastefully** performed."

We can see in the above examples that *most* is not identifying the subsequent adverbs as being of the highest degree among other people or things—it simply intensifies their meaning.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Superlative adverbs describe the highest or lowest degree of how an action is performed among a group of _____ people or things.

a) Two
b) Two or three
c) Three or more
d) Five or more

2. Which of the following facts about superlative adverbs is **correct**?

a) They always take a different form than a superlative adjective.
b) They always take the same form as a superlative adjective.
c) They sometimes take the same form as a superlative adjective.
d) They never take the same form as a superlative adjective.

3. Which of these adverbs has an **irregular** superlative form?

a) fast
b) badly
c) carefully
d) sadly

4. Which of these is an **incorrect** superlative adverb?

a) most beautifully
b) most quickly
c) least carefully
d) least higher

5. Which of the following sentences is **correct**?

a) “He runs fast of all his brothers.”
b) “He runs the fastest of all his brothers.”
c) “He runs faster of all his brothers.”
d) “He fastest runs of all his brothers.”

Order of Adverbs

Definition

Because **adverbs** are used to modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, phrases, clauses, or even entire sentences, they are able to function nearly anywhere in the sentence, depending on their type and what it is they are modifying.

If we use more than one adverb to describe a verb, though, there is a general order in which the different categories of adverbs should appear—this is known as the **order of adverbs** (sometimes called the **royal order of adverbs**):

1. Manner

2. Place

3. Frequency

4. Time

5. Purpose

Of course, it is uncommon to use five adverbs in a row to modify the same word, but if a sentence uses two or three, then it is best to follow this order to avoid sounding unnatural.

First, let’s briefly summarize the different categories of adverbs, and then we’ll look at how we can use them together in sentences.

(*Note: For the sake of conciseness, both single-word adverbs and adverbial phrases will be referred to together as “adverbs” throughout this section.)

Categories of Adverbs

Adverbs of Manner

Adverbs of manner tell us how something happens, how someone does something, or give character to a description. They are usually formed by adding “-ly” to an adjective, as in:

• “She sings **beautifully**.”

• “He walks **slowly**.”

• “The children are playing **happily**.”

If an adjective already ends in “-ly,” we can give it an adverbial function by simply using it in the **prepositional phrase** “in a _____ manner”:

• “They played *in a **lively** manner*.”

• “Please arrive **in a *timely* manner**.”

Adverbs of Place

Adverbs of place tell us about an aspect of location associated with the action of a verb, specifying the direction, distance, movement, or position involved in the action.

For example:

• “He kicked the ball **into the field**.”

• “Let’s drive **down** a bit farther.”

• “Everyone gazed **upwards** at the meteor shower.”

• “I’ve looked **everywhere** for my book.”

Adverbs of Frequency

Adverbs of frequency (sometimes called **frequency adverbs**) tell us *how often* something happens or is the case. They are sometimes used to describe **definite** frequency, as in:

• “I run eight miles **daily**.”

• “**Every year**, our office holds a big raffle for charity.”

More often, though, these adverbs are used to describe **indefinite** frequency. For example:

• “We **usually** go to the movies on Sundays.”

• “Bethany **always** runs late for work in the morning.”

Adverbs of Time

Adverbs of time tell us *when* or *for how long* something happens or is the case. They are similar to but distinct from adverbs of **frequency**.

For example:

• “I’m going to the movies **tomorrow**.”

• “**Next year**, I’m going to run for president.”

• “We’ve been dating **for 10 years**, and not once has he proposed!”

• “Are you **still** working on that project?”

Adverbs of Purpose

Adverbs of purpose (sometimes called **adverbs of reason**) tell us why something happens or is the case. They are generally made up of **conjunctive adverbs**, **prepositional** or **infinitive phrases**, or **adverbial clauses**. For example:

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **as a result**, she didn’t recommend it.”

• “The clothing is handcrafted and **hence** *expensive*.”

• “***Given* the huge amount of public interest**, they are extending the program for another three months.”

• “I went to the store **to buy some milk**.”

• “I am exhausted **because I was working all night**.”

Using multiple adverbs

Remember, the **order of adverbs** is *manner, place, frequency, time,* and *purpose*.

As we already noted, it is unusual to find several adverbs consecutively modifying the same word. However, if we were to make a sentence with all five categories of adverbs together, it might look like this:

• “I have to run **quickly** (*manner*) **down the street** (*place*) **each morning** (*frequency*) **after breakfast** (*time*) **in order to catch my bus to school** (*purpose*).”

Even though the string of adverbs is unusually long, the sentence still sounds smooth and logical because the order is correct. Now let’s try rearranging the order of the adverbs:

• “I have to run **each morning** (*frequency*) **quickly** (*manner*) **after breakfast** (*time*) **in order to catch my bus to school** (*purpose*) **down the street** (*place*).”

By changing the order of the adverbs, we’ve actually changed the meaning of the sentence, or at least made original meaning nearly incomprehensible. This is especially apparent with the adverb of purpose *in order to catch my bus to school*: by placing it **before** the adverb of place, it now sounds as though it’s the school that’s *down the street*. There is not such a drastic shift in meaning for the adverbs of frequency, manner, and time, but they still sound awkward and unnatural in the new order.

When we *can* change the order

There is a great deal of flexibility regarding where in a sentence an adverb can appear, regardless of its content and the rules of order that we looked at above. While the **order of adverbs** is useful to keep in mind, it is a guide, rather than a law.

Introductory adverbs

As you may have noticed when we looked at the different **categories of adverbs**, adverbs can appear in different places in a sentence. When an adverb is used at the beginning a sentence, it results in a great deal of emphasis. Depending on the sentence, we can do this with nearly any category of adverb regardless of the **order of adverbs**—although we must always be careful that

doing so does not make the sentence awkward or alter its meaning.

For example, let's look at the example sentence again, this time slightly shifting where in the sentence the adverbs appear:

• "**In order to catch my bus to school** (*purpose*), I have to run **quickly** (*manner*) **down the street** (*place*) **each morning** (*frequency*) **after breakfast** (*time*)."

Placing the adverb of purpose at the beginning of the sentence doesn't alter the meaning in any way—instead, it gives the adverb extra emphasis and highlights the purpose of the entire sentence.

In this particular sentence, we can move the adverb of frequency to the beginning of the sentence as well:

• "**Each morning** (*frequency*), I have to run **quickly** (*manner*) **down the street** (*place*) **after breakfast** (*time*) **in order to catch my bus to school** (*purpose*)."

We can also do this with the adverb of time, but in this instance it has to be moved <u>with</u> the adverb of frequency; otherwise, the sentence sounds awkward. For example, compare these two sentence constructions:

✔ "**Each morning** (*frequency*) **after breakfast** (*time*), I have to run **quickly** (*manner*) **down the street** (*place*) **in order to catch my bus to school** (*purpose*)." (correct)

✖ "**After breakfast** (*time*), I have to run **quickly** (*manner*) **down the street** (*place*) **each morning** (*frequency*) **in order to catch my bus to school** (*purpose*)." (incorrect)

We can see that the adverb of time sounds awkward when it is placed by itself at the beginning of this particular sentence.

Adverbs of manner and place can also sometimes go at the beginning of the sentence, but we have to be careful with how the sentence sounds as a whole. For example, neither would work well at the beginning of the example above because the emphasis placed on them would sound unnatural as a result. However, in a different sentence, this emphasis might be suitable. For example:

• "**On my father's ranch** (*place*), I **often** (*frequency*) helped gather the animals **at the end of the day** (*time*)."

• "**Impatiently** (*manner*), I waited **by the bank** (*place*) **for my father to arrive** (*purpose*)."

Short vs. long adverbs

Generally speaking, we also tend to put adverbs that are shorter and more concise before those that are longer, regardless of which category they belong to (though we must make sure that the information's meaning doesn't change as a result). For example:

• "I lived **with my parents** (*place*) **to save money** (*purpose*) **while I working on my Ph.D.** (*time*)."

• "He dances **every night** (*frequency*) **in the most extraordinary way** (manner)."

Multiple adverbs of the same category

When we use multiple adverbs of the same category to modify the same verb, we order them based on how specific the information is that they provide. For example:

• "**On my father's ranch** (*place*), I **often** (frequency) helped gather the animals **at the end of the day** (*specific time*) **when I was younger** (*non-specific time*)."

• "I lived **at home** (*more specific place*) **with my parents** (*less specific place*) **to save money** (*purpose*) **while I working on my Ph.D.** (*time*)."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is an adverb of **manner**?

a) in my mother's yard
b) in a beautiful way
c) in a few hours
d) given the way he talks

2. Which of the following is an adverb of purpose?

a) to be more healthy
b) for a while
c) infuriatingly
d) seldom

3. Complete this sentence using correct adverb order: “He sang beautifully _____ every night.”

a) to impress his parents
b) for a week
c) at the opera
d) last year

4. Choose the sentence that uses the **most** correct order of adverbs:

a) “I must drive to the store after we’re finished with dinner to pick up a few things for breakfast.”
b) “I must after we’re finished with dinner drive to the store to pick up a few things for breakfast.
c) “After we’re finished with dinner, I must drive to the store to pick up a few things for breakfast.”
d) “To pick up a few things for breakfast, I must drive to the store after we’re finished with dinner.”
e) A & C
f) B & D

5. Choose the sentence that uses the **most** correct order of adverbs:

a) “I don’t want to go to work again tomorrow.”
b) “Again I don’t want to go to work tomorrow.”
c) “I don’t want to go to work tomorrow again.”
d) “Tomorrow, I don’t want to go to work again.”

Prepositions

Definition

Prepositions are used to express the relationship of a noun or pronoun (or another grammatical element functioning as a noun) to the rest of the sentence. The noun or pronoun that is connected by the preposition is known as the **object of the preposition**.

Some common prepositions are *in, on, for, to, of, with*, and *about*, though there are many others.

Prepositional Phrases

Prepositions and their objects together form **prepositional phrases**, which can function as either adjectives or (more commonly) adverbs.

For example:

• “There is a film ***at*** **noon** we could see.” (adjectival, modifying the noun *film*)

• “He hit the nail ***with*** **a hammer**.” (adverbial, modifying the verb *hit*)

A prepositional phrase always contains at least a preposition and its object (a noun or pronoun), but it can also contain modifiers that add additional meaning to the object. These can even be other prepositional phrases functioning as adjectives. For example:

• “He arrived to school ***in*** **a red car**.”

• “We keep the lawnmower ***in*** **the shed *out* back**.”

Adjective complements

Occasionally, adverbial prepositions are used to modify **predicative adjectives** to complete or elaborate upon their meaning. When they are used in this way, they function as **adjective complements**. For example:

• “Megan was afraid ***of*** **thunderstorms**.”

• “Philip is upset ***about*** **what was said**.”

• “We are very pleased ***with*** **the number of donations we received**.”

Choosing the appropriate preposition

Common Prepositional Errors

Prepositions can be very difficult to navigate because many of them are used to express multiple kinds of relationships, and it’s easy to use one in the wrong context. For example:

✖ “I had breakfast ***with*** **cereal and milk**.” (incorrect)

✔ “I had cereal and milk ***for*** **breakfast**.” (correct)

The first sentence is a common error. It implies that you, the cereal, and the milk all had breakfast together. You can have breakfast with your friends or your family, but not with cereal and milk. However, we can use *with* to show a

connection between cereal and milk, as in:

✔ "I had cereal ***with*** **milk** ***for*** **breakfast**."

Another similar error is:

✖ "I go to work ***with*** **my car**."

✔ "I go to work ***by*** **car**."

In the first sentence, it implies that you and your car go to work together. You can go to work with a person, but when speaking about a means of transportation, we often use the preposition *by*. If the object is modified by a possessive determiner, we can also use the preposition *in*, as in:

✔ "I go to work ***in*** **my car**."

When choosing the appropriate preposition in a sentence, we must consider their various **categories** as well as what the prepositional phrase is going to modify.

Categories of prepositions

Prepositions can be broadly divided into eight categories: *time, place, direction or movement, agency, instrument or device*, *reason or purpose*, *connection*, and *origin*.

The following table highlights the most common **categories of prepositions** and how they are used to form **adjectival** or **adverbial** prepositional phrases in a sentence:

Category	Preposition	Example sentences
Time	at, in, on, for, during, since, by, until, before, after, to, past	• "There is a film ***at*** **noon** we could see." (adjectival) • "We're meeting him ***in*** **an hour**." (adverbial)
Place	at, in, on, by/near/close to, next to/beside, between, behind, in front of, above/over, below/under	• "The cat ***on*** **the roof** was hissing at us." (adjectival) • "Try looking ***behind*** **the shed**." (adverbial)
Direction or Movement	to, from, over, under, along, around, across, through, into, out of, toward(s), away from, onto, off, up, down	• "The house ***down*** **the road** is being sold." (adjectival) • "They drove ***across*** **the**

		country.” (adverbial)
Agency	by, with	• “The book ***by*** **the famous author** is a big hit.” (adjectival) • “Her heart is filled ***with*** **emotion**.” (adverbial)
Instrument or Device	by, with, on	• “The journey ***by*** **boat** is long and arduous.” (adjectival) • “He hit the nail ***with*** **a hammer**.” (adverbial)
Reason or Purpose	for, through, because of, on account of, from	• “I have a separate computer ***for*** **work**.” (adjectival) • “They left early ***because of*** **the storm**.” (adverbial)
Connection	of, to, with	• “A well-written cover letter ***to*** **employers** helps your chances of being hired.” (adjectival) • “I think she decided to go ***with*** **Victor**.” (adverbial)
Origin	from, of	• “Tom is ***of*** **German descent**.” (adjectival) • “We started our trip ***from*** **Italy**.” (adverbial)

Notice that many prepositions fall under two or more categories. To determine what type of preposition is being used in a sentence, you must look closely at the context and what the prepositional phrase is modifying. Remember that prepositional phrases can be used **with verbs**, **with nouns**, and **with adjectives**.

Continue on to the rest of the sections in this chapter to learn more about how and when prepositions are (and are not) used.

Prepositions vs. Infinitives

The word *to* is a very common preposition, used to express time, direction, and connection. *To* is also used, however, as a **particle** to introduce the **infinitive form** of verbs—e.g., *to run*, *to play*, *to think*, *to be*, etc.

For example:

• "I often ride my bicycle ***to*** **work**." (preposition of direction)

• "I often ride my bicycle ***to*** **stay healthy**." (infinitive)

Because they share the same introductory word, it's easy to mistake one for the other. Just remember that **infinitives** always use the word *to* with the **base** or **bare** form of a verb, while the preposition *to* is always followed by a noun, pronoun, or a grammatical element functioning as a noun.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the primary function of a preposition?

a) To describe the characteristics of a noun or pronoun
b) To describe the relationship of a noun or pronoun to another part of the sentence
c) To introduce a dependent clause
d) To connect clauses together in a sentence

2. A **prepositional phrase** must contain <u>at least</u> which of the following?

a) A preposition and a noun
b) A preposition and a pronoun
c) A preposition and an adjective
d) Both A and B
e) Either A or B

3. Which of the following is the term for a prepositional phrase that completes the meaning of an **adjective**?

a) Adjective complement
b) Adjective modifier
c) Adverbial complement
d) Adverbial modifier

4. Which of the following is **not** one of the main categories of prepositions?

a) Time
b) Condition
c) Direction
d) Purpose

Prepositional Phrases

Definition

A prepositional phrase is made up of at least a **preposition** and its **object**, which can be a noun, pronoun, or a noun phrase. Often times, the object will have a modifier or modifiers (such as **adjectives**, **noun adjuncts**, etc.) that appear between it and the preposition. These specify or describe the object, but, unlike prepositions, they do not serve to connect the object grammatically to the rest of the sentence.

Examples

• **on the ground** — *On* describes the location in relation to *the ground*.

• **of the bedroom** — *Of* specifies that whatever is being discussed is particular to *the bedroom*.

• **down the dark alley** — *Down* describes the direction of movement in relation to *alley*, while the adjective *dark* is a modifier specifying that the alley is not well lit.

• **into an empty parking lot** — *To* describes the direction of movement in relation to the **compound noun** *parking lot*. The adjective *empty* is a modifier specifying that the parking lot doesn't have people or cars in it.

• **because of the nasty weather** — *Because of* is a compound preposition describing the reason why something happened—in this case, *the nasty weather*.

Prepositional phrases can behave in two ways in a sentence: as an adjective modifying a noun, or as an adverb modifying a verb, adjective, or adverb.

Adjectival Prepositional Phrases

When a prepositional phrase modifies a noun, pronoun, gerund, or noun phrase

(all of which function grammatically as nouns), it is considered to function as an adjective within the sentence. We call these **adjectival prepositional phrases**, or sometimes just **adjective prepositional phrases**.

Adjectival prepositional phrases always follow the noun they are modifying. And, like an adjective, this kind of prepositional phrase answers one or more of the following questions about the noun:

• Which one?

• What kind?

• How many or how much?

Examples

• "The cat **on the shed** is black."

On the shed is a prepositional phrase—*on* is a preposition describing the position of its object, *the shed*. The prepositional phrase is adjectival because it modifies the noun *cat* (which it follows directly in the sentence) by answering the question "Which cat?"

• "I would like to buy some flowers **in a glass vase**."

The prepositional phrase here is *in a glass vase—in* is a preposition describing the object *a vase*. *Glass* is a modifier of *vase*, appearing between the preposition and the noun that it modifies. The prepositional phrase in this sentence is adjectival because it immediately follows the noun that it describes (*flowers*), and it tells us **what kind** of flowers the speaker would like to buy.

• "People **from many different countries** have visited here."

From many different countries is a prepositional phrase modifying the noun *people*. It immediately follows that noun, and it answers the question **what kind** of people (people from different countries). But it also indirectly answers the question **how many**, because it tells the reader that a large number of people have visited.

Adverbial Prepositional Phrases

When a prepositional phrase modifies a verb, adjective, or adverb, it is considered to have the function of an adverb within the sentence. We call these **adverbial prepositional phrases**, or sometimes just **adverb prepositional phrases**, **adverb phrases**, or even just adverbs.

If an adverbial phrase is describing an adjective or an adverb, it will follow that word in the sentence. However, adverbial prepositional phrases don't always immediately follow the verb they are modifying. Like normal adverbs, adverbial prepositional phrases answer the questions:

• When?

• Where?

• How (in what way)?

• Why (for what purpose)?

• To what extent?

Examples

Verbs

• "She will leave **after a short run**."

Here the prepositional phrase *after a short run* follows the word it modifies, the verb *leave*. It describes a point in time (albeit a nonspecific one), answering the question of **when** the action will happen.

• "I ran a mile **down the road**."

Even though the prepositional phrase *down the road* follows the noun *mile*, it actually describes the verb *run*. Here it is answering the question **where**: "Where did you run (a mile)?" "Down the road."

An adverbial preposition can also be placed at different places in the sentence when modifying a verb, such as at the beginning. For example:

• "**Because of my operation**, I had to cancel my flight."

The prepositional phrase *because of my operation*, which opens the sentence, is describing the verb *cancel*—in this instance, it is describing **why** the speaker had to cancel.

Adjectives and adverbs

Adverbial prepositional phrases that modify adjectives and adverbs can be harder to identify because the adjectives and adverbs are usually paired with verbs. Remember that these prepositional phrases **always follow the adjective or adverb** and will contain information **specific to the adjective and adverb**.

• “I was delighted **with the results**.”

In this sentence, the prepositional phrase *with the results* is describing the **predicative adjective** *delighted*, and it answers the question “**Why** are you delighted?” Even though *delighted* is paired with the linking verb *was*, the prepositional phrase very clearly describes the adjective rather than the verb.

• “I can get there more quickly **on my new bike**.”

Here, *on my new bike* describes the adverb *more quickly*, answering the question “How?” or “In what manner?” It could also seem that the prepositional phrase is describing the verb *get*, but the information in the prepositional phrase is specific to getting there *quickly*.

Multiple Prepositional Phrases

Sentences can (and often do) have more than one prepositional phrase. What kind of prepositional phrase each one is depends on what it is modifying, which is generally indicated by where it is placed in the sentence and what kind of information it is providing. For instance, verbs often take multiple adverbial prepositional phrases as modifiers, while an adjectival prepositional phrase can modify the objects of **other** prepositional phrases. It can seem a little bit complicated, but if you break the sentence down into parts, you can still apply the rules that were outlined above.

Examples

• “**During the Christmas break**, I visited my old school **behind our house**.”

There are two prepositional phrases in this sentence.

The first, *during the Christmas break*, is an adverbial prepositional phrase. We know this because it comes at the very beginning of the sentence, and it describes the verb *visited* (answering the question “When?”).

The second prepositional phrase is *behind our house*. It is an adjectival prepositional phrase, modifying the noun *school* and answering the question “Which one?”

• “We ended our game **with the neighbors at once** when we heard our parents calling.”

Here, two prepositional phrases occur one after the other. The first one, *with the neighbors*, describes the noun *game*, so it is adjectival.

The second prepositional phrase, *at once*, describes the verb *ended*, even though it comes quite a bit later in the sentence. Because it describes a verb, it is an adverbial prepositional phrase.

• "While I was home **for the summer after my first semester of college**, I decided to work **in a store** to earn some extra cash."

This sentence features four prepositional phrases, three of which occur in succession.

The first is *for the summer*. It is functioning as an adverb to describe the verb phrase *was home*, specifying **when** the speaker was at home. (In this case it is describing a duration of time.)

Even though the second prepositional phrase, *after my first semester*, seems to describe the first one, it is actually also describing the verb phrase to further clarify **when** the speaker was home. In this instance, you can reverse the prepositional phrases—"While I was home *after my first semester for the summer*"—and still have the clause make complete sense (even if it's not as clearly written).

However, the third prepositional phrase, *of college*, is an adjectival prepositional phrase—it is describing the noun phrase *my first semester*, which is the object of the second prepositional phrase. Here, it serves to answer the question **which** (or even **what kind**) about the semester being discussed. As such, it is "tied" to that preposition: it would not make sense to place it elsewhere in the sentence. For instance, "While I was home for the summer of college after my first semester" does not make sense.

The final prepositional phrase, *in a store*, is much easier to understand. It is an adverbial prepositional phrase modifying the verb *work*, and specifies **where** the speaker is going to work.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What does a prepositional phrase **have** to include? (Select the answer that is **most correct**.)

a) A preposition, a verb, and an object
b) A preposition and a modifier
c) A preposition, an object, and a modifier
d) A preposition and an object

2. What does an **adverbial prepositional phrase** modify?

a) A noun
b) A verb, an adjective, or an adverb
c) A noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb
d) Another prepositional phrase

3. Which of the following prepositional phrases (in **bold**) is an **adjectival prepositional phrase**?

a) “I always eat toast **in the morning**.”
b) “While we were on our vacation, we visited the home **of my youth**.”
c) “After the game, I had to run quickly **across the field**.”
d) “I’ve been really hungry **because of my new diet**.”

4. Identify the prepositional phrase in the following sentence:
“I had to go home early due to a big storm.”

a) due to a big storm
b) had to go
c) go home early
d) early due

5. How many prepositional phrases (both **adjectival** and **adverbial**) are in the following sentence?
“After the game, we had to go to the library to get a book for my mother, who was waiting for us in the parking lot.”

a) Three
b) Two
c) Four
d) Five

Categories of Prepositions

Defining Categories

Most **prepositions** have multiple usages and meanings. Generally speaking, prepositions can be divided into eight categories: *time, place, direction or movement, agency, instrument or device, reason or purpose, connection,* and *origin*. The following table highlights the most common prepositions and their categories*:

Category	Preposition
Time	at, in, on, for, during, since, by, until, before, after, to, past
Place	at, in, on, by/near/close to, next to/beside, between, behind, in front of, above/over, below/under
Direction or Movement	to, from, over, under, along, around, across, through, into, out of, toward(s), away from, onto, off, up, down
Agency	by, with
Instrument or Device	by, with, on
Reason or Purpose	for, through, because of, on account of, from
Connection	of, to, with
Origin	from, of

*Many prepositions will fall under two or more categories. To determine what type of preposition is being used in a sentence, you must look closely at the context and what is being described.

Prepositions of time

A **preposition of time** describes when or for how long something occurred or

will occur. The three most common prepositions of time are *at*, *in*, and *on*. Each preposition of time refers to a different increment of or point in time, as shown below:

Preposition of Time	What it Describes	Example Sentences
at	specific and short times of day	“Let’s meet **at** noon.” “Chris arrived **at** one o’clock.”
in	months, years, and specific times of day	“Beth starts school **in** August.” “**In** 2008, the U.S. held a presidential election.” “I would rather work on the project **in** the afternoon.”
on	days and dates	“**On** Tuesday, Dad went to the grocery store.” “Valentine’s Day is **on** February 14.”
for	durations of time	“He lived abroad **for** many years.”
during	simultaneous events	“We’re not supposed to study **during** class.”
since	a continuous event originating from a specific point in the past	“She’s been waiting to hear back from the office **since** yesterday.”
by	a specific point in the future before which an event must be completed	“You must wake up **by** six o’clock tomorrow morning.”
until	a continuous event that will terminate at a specific point in the future	“Daniel can’t sneak out of the house **until** his parents go to bed.”

before	something prior to a specific time or event	“The moon rose **before** sunset.”
after	something following a specific time or event	“Katrina made a promise to help out **after** work today.”
to	time in relation to the next hour of the day	“My watch says it’s 10 minutes **to** three right now.”
past	time in relation to the previous hour of the day	“Ideally, the party would start no later than a quarter **past** eight.”

Prepositions of place

A **preposition of place** describes where something is located in reference to something else, or where something occurred or will occur. Like prepositions of time, the most common prepositions of place are also *at, in*, and *on*. The usages of these and other prepositions of place are explained below:

Preposition of Place	What it Describes	Example Sentences
at	specific points or locations	“Ben is planning on staying the night **at** a hotel.”
in	enclosed spaces	“The rice is **in** the cabinet.”
on	surfaces or tops of things	“Leave the towel **on** the counter.”
by, near, close to	lack of distance	“The library is **by/near/close to** the train station.”
next to, beside	adjacency	“Many people consider it rude to sit **next to/beside** a stranger in a movie theater.”
between	something in the middle of two people	“To make a sandwich, simply put something **between** two slices of

	or things	bread.”
behind	something at the back of something	“I stood **behind** my sister while we waited in line.”
in front of	something situated before something	“Let’s put the dresser **in front of** the window.”
above, over*	something higher than something	“The arch **above/over** the hallway reminded Natalie of a castle she’d visited.”
below, under**	something lower than something	“All children fear the monsters **below/under** their beds.”

**Over* and *above* both describe something higher than something else, but *over* can also describe something directly in contact with and covering something beneath it. For example: “I draped my jacket *over* the couch” is correct, whereas “I draped my jacket *above* the couch” is incorrect.

***Under* and *below* can both describe something lower than something else, but *under* can also describe something that is directly in contact with something on top of it. For example: “The puppy hid *under* the blanket” is correct, whereas “The puppy hid *below* the blanket” is incorrect.

Prepositions of direction or movement

A **preposition of direction or movement** describes how, where, or in what way something moves. The following table highlights the most common prepositions of direction and movement, as well as their different usages:

Preposition of Direction or Movement	What it Describes	Example Sentences
to	movement with a specific aim, direction, or destination	“My brother went **to** Europe with his friends.”

from	movement with a specific point of origin	“She told stories about the time she walked to Spain **from** France.”
over	movement higher than and across something else	“The bird flew **over** the trees.”
above	movement to a point higher than something else	“He shot his arrow **above** the target.”
under/beneath	movement lower than something	“That large worm went **under/beneath** the dirt.”
along	movement on a straight line or edge	“The childhood friends rode their bicycles **along** the road.”
around	movement in a circular direction	“The couple held hands and skated **around** the rink.”
across	movement from one end to the other	“I walked **across** the flimsy bridge.”
through	movement from one side of an enclosed space and out of the other	“The burglar entered the house **through** the basement window.”
into	movement ending inside something	“If you jump **into** the water like this, you can make a big splash.”
out of	movement ending outside something	“Get **out of** that cave before the bear comes back!”
toward(s)*	movement closer to something	“Laughing, she threw up her hands and ran **toward(s)** the park.”
away from	movement farther from something	“Get **away from** the fire before you get burned.”
	movement ending on top of	“Be careful climbing **onto**

onto	something	that ledge.”
off	movement down or away from something	“Parents are always yelling at their kids to get **off** the furniture.”
up	movement heading up	“When you use a fireplace, smoke goes **up** the chimney.”
down	movement heading down	“He jumped **down** and hurt his knee.”

**Toward* and *towards* are interchangeable. In formal American English, “toward” is preferred.

Prepositions of agency

A **preposition of agency** describes a person or a thing that has caused or is causing something to occur. Sentences containing prepositions of agency are usually written in the *passive voice* and employ the prepositions *by* (for people) and *with* (for things). For example:

• “The house was built **by** the three siblings.” (passive)
• “The three siblings built the house.” (active)

• “Her heart is filled **with** emotion.” (passive)
• “Emotion filled her heart.” (active)

Prepositions of instrument or device

A **preposition of instrument or device** is used when describing certain technologies, machines, or devices. These prepositions are *by*, *with*, and *on*. Typically, *by* refers to methods of transportation, whereas *with* and *on* describe the use of machines and other devices. For example:

• “Aunt Patricia returned home **by** ferry.”

• “She opened the locked door **with** an old key.”

• “May I finish my homework **on** your computer?”

Prepositions of reason or purpose

A **preposition of reason or purpose** describes why something has occurred or will occur. Common prepositions of reason or purpose include *for, through, because of, on account of*, and *from*. For example:

• “Everything I did was **for** you.”

• “**Through** her bravery, we were able to escape unharmed.”

• “**Because of** the delay, I was late to the parade.”

• “The employees refused to work **on account of** their low pay.”

• “He knows **from** experience how to deal with them.”

Prepositions of connection

A **preposition of connection** describes possession, relationships, or accompaniment. *Of* is used for possession, *to* for relationships between people or things, and *with* for accompaniment. For example:

• “The Statue **of** Liberty is located in New York Harbor.”

• “A well-written essay is impressive **to** teachers.”

• “Lisa wanted to go to the concert **with** Victor.”

Origin

When we describe a person or thing’s origin (such as nationality, hometown/state, ethnicity, the place where something was built or designed, etc.), we typically use the preposition *from* (and, to a lesser degree, *of*). For example:

• “I met the most delightful couple **from** Italy.”

• “I’m **from** New York originally, but I’ve lived in Dallas for many years.”

• “The new professor is **of** Turkish descent.”

• “The new computer **from** the tech giant should be revolutionary.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** one of the prepositions of **time**?

a) in
b) at
c) on
d) with

2. Which of the following sentences contains a **preposition of place**?

a) “She struggled to play the song on her guitar.”
b) “The kitten fell asleep beside me.”
c) “Nathan didn’t think the plan would work on account of its hasty development.
d) “The sound of voices could be heard coming through the vents.”

3. Which of the following sentences contains a **preposition of agency**?

a) “Emma couldn’t believe the song had been written for her.”
b) “Those roses were sent by Grandma.”
c) “The meeting will take place at 10 o’clock.”
d) “She decided to move away from her home city.”

4. Which of the following sentences contains a **preposition of reason or purpose**?

a) “I trekked across the country alone.”
b) “The book is on the desk.”
c) “Let’s talk about this again after the show.”
d) “He kept going because of his desire to succeed.”

Common Prepositional Errors

Due to the large number of **prepositions** in English, as well as the fact that many prepositions serve multiple purposes, it can be quite difficult to determine *which* preposition to use in a particular situation. This is especially tricky for the prepositions we use **after verbs**.

In this section, we’ll look at some common errors that arise when trying to determine the appropriate preposition to use with a particular kind of verb, as well as identifying patterns to help us make the correct choice.

Verbs of motion — *to* vs. *in*

Verbs that describe the movement from one place to another generally take the preposition *to*. However, when a verb describes a movement from one place into another, we use the prepositions *in* or *into*. This can lead to confusion between the two prepositions when using a motion verb that can describe either scenario. For example:

✖ "I went **in** London last year." (incorrect)
✔ "I went to London last year." (correct)

When we use a motion verb this way, we use the preposition of movement *to*. The only exception to the rule is the verb phrase *go home*, where *home* is an **adverbial noun** that modifies the verb. Otherwise we need to use *to* to express going from A to B.

Here are some more examples of motion verbs that take the preposition *to*:

• "Walk **to** school."

• "Run **to** the store."

• "Move **to** the left."

• "Turn **to** the right."

• "Swim **to** the shore."

• "Drive **to** the country."

• "Cycle **to** work."

Of course we can use other prepositions of movement when we describe different relationships between the verb and the object of the preposition. For example:

• "Walk **across** the road."

• "Run **along** the river."

• "Cycle **round** the park."

• "Drive **over** the bridge."

• "Swim **up** and **down** the pool."

• "Went **in** the school."

Static verbs — *at* vs. *to*

✖ "I arrived **to** the airport late." (incorrect)
✔ "I arrived **at** the airport late." (correct)

Remember, we use **to** with motion verbs when we describe the movement from one location to another. *Arrive*, however, is considered a "static" verb, meaning it indicates no movement from point A to point B. In this case, we need to use the preposition *at*, which is used to indicate being in a location.

Other examples of static verb are *be* and *stay*; we also use *at* rather than *to* with these verbs, as in:

✖ "I was **to** the theater last night." (incorrect)
✔ "I was **at** the theater last night." (correct)

✖ "I stayed **to** my brother's house last night." (incorrect)
✔ "I stayed **at** my brother's house last night." (correct)

Possession and access — *to* vs. *of*

The prepositions *to* and *of* can both be used to signify that something belongs to or is a property of another thing. However, we use *to* to indicate that something grants access or leads into another thing, which is a relationship that *of* does not describe. For example:

✖ "This is the key **of** my room." (incorrect)
✔ "This is the key **to** my room." (correct)

There are also certain instances in which we could use either preposition and still have a correct sentence, but the meaning would be subtly different:

✔ "This is the main door **of** the house." (correct—meaning the primary door belonging to the house)
✔ "This is the main door **to** the house." (also correct—meaning the primary door to gain access to the house)

Different media — *in* vs. *on*

Another pair of similar prepositions is *in* and *on*, which can both be used to describe the medium by which something is seen. We use *in* when we are talking about something appearing ***in* printed media**, while *on* is used to talk about something appearing ***on* televised or digital media**. Let's look at two sets of examples to better see this difference:

✖ "I saw it **on** the newspaper." (incorrect)
✔ "I read it **in** the newspaper." (correct)

✖ "I saw it **in** TV." (incorrect)
✔ "I saw it **on** TV." (correct)

Containment and nativity — *in* vs. *of*

✖ “The Nile is the longest river **of** the world.” (incorrect)
✔ “The Nile is the longest river **in** the world.” (correct)

Remember that *of* relates to belonging, while *in* refers to being inside or within someplace. We speak about countries and things being ***in*** the world, not *of* the world. On the other hand, when we describe someplace to which a person or thing is native, we use *of* and **not** *in*. For example:

✖ “He is a citizen **in** Greece.” (incorrect)
✔ “He is a citizen **of** Greece.” (correct)

✖ “The gray wolf **in** North America is a beautiful creature.” (incorrect)
✔ “The gray wolf **of** North America is a beautiful creature.” (correct)

Performance — *in* vs. *at*

When we describe how well someone does something, we often use the verb phrase *is good* followed by the preposition *at*. However, if we use the verb phrase *does well*, we usually use the preposition *in*, which can lead to a confusion between the two. For example:

✖ “My brother is good **in** English.” (incorrect)
✔ “My brother is good **at** English.” (correct)

✖ “My sister does well **at** school.” (incorrect)
✔ “My sister does well **in** school.” (correct)

When we are talking about a particular subject, we use *is good at*, but if we’re talking about a particular setting, we use *does well in*.

Over, *on*, and *at* the weekend

When we talk about our plans for an upcoming weekend, there are a number of prepositional constructions we can use. In American English, the most common prepositions to use are *over* and *on*. In British English, the most common preposition is *at*, though *over* is also used. Note that the preposition *during* is not used in either American **or** British English.

• “I will do my homework **on** the weekend.” (American English)
• “I will do my homework **over** the weekend.” (American and British English)
• “I will do my homework **at** the weekend.” (British English)

Transitive and intransitive verbs

We must be careful with prepositions when it comes to **transitive and intransitive verbs**. Remember, transitive verbs can take direct (and sometimes indirect) objects, while intransitive verbs cannot.

Prepositions with intransitive verbs

If we want to express a direct relationship between an intransitive verb and something that seems to be receiving its action, we often use a preposition. For example:

✖ “I listened the radio last night.” (incorrect)
✔ “I listened **to** the radio last night.” (correct)

✖ “I’ll wait you.” (incorrect)
✔ “I’ll wait **for** you.” (correct)

If we leave out the prepositions *to* and *for*, we make *the radio* and *you* the objects of the intransitive verbs *listen* and *wait*, which is incorrect.

Prepositions with transitive verbs

Likewise, we must be careful **not** to use a preposition with the objects of **transitive** verbs:

✖ “I’ll answer **to** the phone.” (incorrect)
✔ “I’ll answer the phone.” (correct)

✖ “She is going to marry **with** a lawyer.” (incorrect)
✔ “She is going to marry a lawyer.” (correct)

✖ “I asked **to** him to* buy some bread.” (incorrect)
✔ “I asked him to* buy some bread.” (correct)

(*Note that *to buy* in the last two examples is an **infinitive**, not a prepositional phrase; it is functioning as an **adverb of purpose** to modify the verb *ask*.)

The verb *ask* can also be an **intransitive** verb in some instances, in which case we can use the preposition *for*:

✔ “I asked Jeff.” (transitive)
✔ “I asked **for** Jeff.” (intransitive)

Be careful, though, because this changes the verb’s meaning. When we use *ask* with just a person’s name, as in the first example, it means to ask the person

something, such as a question. When we ask **for** someone, it means we are requesting to see or speak to that person.

Prepositions and indirect objects

Some transitive verbs are able to take both direct objects and **indirect objects** (people or things that receive the direct object of the verb). If a verb is capable of taking an indirect object, that person or thing appears immediately after the verb and before the direct object. We can also place it after the direct object with the preposition *to*, in which case it is no longer a true indirect object but an **adverbial prepositional phrase**. For example:

✔ "John sent *me* a letter." (correct—indirect object)
✔ "John sent a letter ***to*** *me*." (correct—adverbial prepositional phrase)

However, not all transitive verbs can take indirect objects. If a verb is unable to have a true indirect object, we have to put the person or thing receiving the direct object in a prepositional phrase with *to*. For instance:

✖ "I'll explain *you* the problem." (incorrect)
✔ "I'll explain the problem ***to*** *you*." (correct)

Verbs that take both *to* and *at*

Many verbs are able to take multiple prepositions after them. However, this often results in a change in the sentence's meaning. The most common of these pairs is *to* and *at*—a large number of verbs are able to take both. We'll look at a number of such constructions below.

Shout *to* vs. shout *at*

When you shout *to* someone, you raise your voice to ensure that he or she can hear you. If, on the other hand, you shout *at* someone, you raise your voice because you are angry with him or her. For example:

• "I shouted **to** Mary, but she was too far away to hear me."

• "He just kept shouting **at** me, even though I had apologized."

Throw *to* vs. throw *at*

If you throw something *to* someone, such as a ball, you intend for that person to catch it. For example:

• “She threw the ball **to** the dog. He caught it and ran away with it.”

If you throw something *at* someone, you want to hit them with it. This could be because you are angry with them, as in:

• “She was so angry with her husband that she threw her wedding ring **at** him.”

Point *to* vs. point *at*

You can point *to* or *at* a person as well as an object.

If we point *to* someone or something, we are indicating a location or direction. For example:

• “She pointed **to** the sky.”

If we point *at* someone or something, we draw attention to that specific person or thing, as in:

• “‘You’re the one who stole my bag!’ she shouted, pointing **at** the thief.”

Sometimes the difference between the two is very subtle, and we can use either preposition with little to no change in meaning.

• “He pointed **at/to** his watch and said, ‘I must go. It’s very late.’”

Learning the correct prepositions

In this guide, we provide some general guidelines for determining which preposition to use in a given situation. However, the use of prepositions is particularly varied and flexible in English, so the best way to learn correct prepositional use is to pay close attention to the way people speak and write.

Prepositions with Nouns

Definition

Certain **prepositions** can be used in conjunction with **nouns** to connect, emphasize, or provide clarification for ideas expressed in sentences. In this combination, the preposition always comes directly after the noun. Here are some of the most common prepositions used with nouns:

- **to**
- **for**
- **of**

- **in**
- **on**
- **at**
- **from**
- **with**
- **about**
- **between**

Rules

There is no clear-cut rule that determines which prepositions connect to which nouns; however, we can look at how **synonymous nouns** and **associated verbs** pair with prepositions to observe patterns or make an educated guess.

Synonymous nouns

Synonymous nouns typically employ identical prepositions. For example, when the noun *respect* is replaced with its synonyms (such as *admiration* or *esteem*), the preposition *for* remains the same:

• “I could never lose ***respect*** **for** you.” (original)

• “I could never lose ***admiration*** **for** you.”

• “I could never lose ***esteem*** **for** you.”

In the above case, the preposition does not change, regardless of what synonym is being used.

This is not *always* the case, however, so do not take this as a concrete rule. The examples below demonstrate cases in which the preposition changes with synonyms of the original noun:

• “My **addiction *to*** coffee is unhealthy.” (original)

• “My **obsession *with*** coffee is unhealthy.”

• “My **dependence *on*** coffee is unhealthy.”

Verbs with prepositions

For many words, the prepositions used with nouns are the same prepositions used with those nouns’ associated verb forms. For example:

• “He discussed his ***reaction* to** the results.” (noun)
• “He discussed how he ***reacted* to** the results.” (verb)

• “I have ***knowledge* of** that particular issue.” (noun)
• “I ***know* of** that particular issue.” (verb)

Be careful not to rely on this pattern, though, because in some cases changing a noun into its verb form alters the preposition:

• “I have deep **sympathy *for*** him.”
• “I deeply **sympathize *with*** him.”

• “She has an **obsession *with*** that comic book.”
• “She **obsesses *over*** that comic book.”

Examples of common pairings

Although there are some tricks we can use, there is no specific way of determining which prepositions pair with particular nouns—we just have to know them by heart. The only way to do this is by seeing them used in everyday writing and speech.

Below we will look at examples of the most common prepositions that pair with nouns.

Noun + to

One of the most common prepositions used with nouns is *to*. The following table contains examples of combinations you might see:

Noun + to	Example Sentence
access to	“I couldn’t enter the building without **access to** the door’s password.”
addiction to	“Alison has an **addiction to** football.”
answer to	“Her **answer to** the teacher’s question was incorrect.”
approach to	“Professor Smith’s **approach to** the experiment was incredibly innovative.”
damage to	“The **damage to** the car is worse than I thought it’d be.”

dedication to	“Ned has intense **dedication to** his schoolwork.”
devotion to	“Everyone admired the doctor’s **devotion to** her patients.”
reaction to	“The child had an adorable **reaction to** the kitten.”
response to	“She gave no **response to** the question I’d asked her.”
solution to	“No one could come up with a **solution to** the math problem.”
threat to	“Climate change is a potential **threat to** certain species.”

Noun + for

Another common preposition used with nouns is *for*. Examples can be seen in the table below:

Noun + for	Example Sentence
admiration for	“Penny has so much **admiration for** her mother.”
cure for	“Health officials recently announced that a **cure for** the fatal disease had been found.”
desire for	“My **desire for** success is more important than my **desire for** romance.”
hope for	“Youths often have high **hopes for** humanity.”
need for	“The **need for** social interaction is a basic human trait.”
passion for	“Simply having a **passion for** writing doesn’t necessarily mean you will become a best-selling author.”
reason for	“There is always a **reason for** change.”

respect for	“Certain cultures promote **respect for** elders.”
room for	“There’s **room for** one more person at this table.”
sympathy for	“You should always have **sympathy for** strangers.”
talent for	“Greg has a **talent for** stand-up comedy.”

Noun + of

The preposition *of* can be used with many nouns. Here are some common combinations:

Noun + of	Example Sentence
advantage of	“Most people seem to underestimate the **advantage of** majoring in philosophy.”
disadvantage of	“The **disadvantage of** becoming an entrepreneur is the amount of debt you can accumulate.”
fear of	“My niece has a **fear of** the dark.”
habit of	“I used to have a **habit of** biting my fingernails.”
intention of	“Do you have any **intention of** going out today?”
knowledge of	“Timothy’s **knowledge of** beekeeping is impressive.”
lack of	“The police cannot arrest him due to a **lack of** evidence.”
memory of	“I have no **memory of** my first year in school.”
process of	“The **process of** elimination is a popular technique when taking multiple-choice tests.”
smell of	“I love the **smell of** freshly baked cookies.”
sound of	“Can you hear the **sound of** birds chirping?”

taste of	“The **taste of** cooked octopus is an acquired one.”

Noun + in

Several nouns take the preposition *in*, examples of which can be seen in the following table:

Noun + in	Example Sentence
belief in	“It is not uncommon to have a **belief in** a higher power.”
change in	“Scientists detected little **change in** the atmosphere.”
decrease in	“A **decrease in** taxes would dramatically affect the economy.”
delay in	“There appears to have been a **delay in** processing your payment.”
experience in	“She has little **experience in** backpacking.”
increase in	“I’m hoping for an **increase in** environmentally friendly products.”
interest in	“Even as a child, the girl had an **interest in** archaeology.”
pleasure in	“He took **pleasure in** playing the piano.”
reduction in	“Meredith was forced to take a **reduction in** her pay.”
rise in	“After he won the jackpot, his hometown witnessed a sharp **rise in** sales of lottery tickets.”

Noun + on

The preposition *on* is less commonly paired with nouns, but there are instances

where it is used. Here are some examples of *on* being used with nouns:

Noun + on	Example Sentence
advice on	“I read magazines for **advice on** relationships.”
attack on	“Some view the new law as an **attack on** our rights.”
ban on	“The early 20th century saw a short-lived **ban on** alcohol.”
emphasis on	“She is studying East Asian cultures with an **emphasis on** Japanese society.”
focus on	“His **focus on** success has hindered his social life.”
report on	“The **report on** fast food made people more aware of the number of calories they consume.”

Noun + at

The preposition *at* is only paired with a few nouns. For example:

• “Though new to skiing, he made an **attempt at** the highest slope.”

• “I have no **chance at** winning this game.”

Often, we use the preposition in conjunction with *which*, as in:

• “This is the **age at which** you are eligible for military service.”

• “There’s always a **point at which** trying to reason with him becomes futile.”

Noun + from

From is only occasionally used with nouns. The preposition usually refers to two things at opposition with each other, or specifies an origin or starting point when used in conjunction with *to*:

• “The town sought **protection from** bandits.”

• “His **transition from** pauper **to** prince was something out of a fairy tale.”

Noun + with

Generally, nouns combined with the preposition *with* point to relationships and connections between two or more things. For example:

• “What’s the **matter with** you?”

• “I noticed a small **problem with** the story you submitted.”

• “Her close **relationship with** her sister is enviable.”

• “If you’re having **trouble with** the assignments, consult your teacher.”

Noun + about

When paired with a noun, *about* means *concerning* or *in regards to*. For example:

• “His **anxiety about** public speaking is so bad that he sweats when he’s onstage.”

• “Do you have any **information about** the changes in the schedule?”

• “She wants to hear the **story about** her favorite superhero again.”

Noun + between

A noun that takes the preposition *between* forms a **comparison between** two things. Here are some common combinations:

• “For her thesis, Stacy submitted a **comparison between** classical music and contemporary rock.”

• “The **connection between** good and evil is fascinating.”

• “Is there a **difference between** green onions and scallions?”

Nouns with multiple prepositions

Some nouns are capable of combining with more than one preposition. In some of these cases, the meaning does not change no matter which preposition is chosen:

• “My **opinion *of*** her is the same as yours.”
• “My **opinion *about*** her is the same as yours.”

• “Abby is an **expert *in*** changing tires.”

• “Abby is an **expert *at*** changing tires.”

• “I appreciate his newfound **love for** animals.”
• “I appreciate his newfound **love of** animals.”

In other cases, however, the meaning changes entirely when a different preposition is substituted:

• “No one can deny the positive **impact *of*** France.” (France has a positive influence.)
• “No one can deny the positive **impact *on*** France.” (Something positively affects France.)

• “Her **transition *from*** vegetarian ***to*** vegan wasn’t difficult.” (She started as a vegetarian and ended as a vegan.)
• “Her **transition *to*** vegetarian ***from*** vegan wasn’t difficult.” (She started as a vegan and ended as a vegetarian.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following prepositions is **most commonly** paired with nouns?

a) along
b) up
c) of
d) without

2. Which of the following sentences contains a ***noun* + *preposition*** combination?

a) “I walked in and ordered a drink.”
b) “It’s OK to take pride in your home country.”
c) “My nephew is interested in joining a club.”
d) “Did you look in the cupboard?”

3. Which of the following sentences **does not** contain a preposition with a noun?

a) “Did you laugh at Larry’s jokes?”
b) “My knowledge of comic books is limited.”
c) “The woman’s talent for singing is unmistakable.”
d) “Everyone deserves a chance at love.”

4. Which of the following sentences is **incorrect**?

a) “Gina found it difficult to satisfy her desire for adventure.”
b) “Gina found it difficult to satisfy her thirst for adventure.”
c) “Gina found it difficult to satisfy her interest for adventure.”
d) “Gina found it difficult to satisfy her longing for adventure.”

Prepositions with Verbs

Definition

Certain verbs require prepositions in order to connect to their sentences’ *objects*. These combinations, also known as **prepositional verbs**, allow the prepositions to act as necessary links between verbs and **nouns** or **gerunds**. The prepositions used in these combinations are sometimes called **dependent prepositions**.

Here are some of the prepositions most commonly used with verbs:

- **for**
- **to**
- **about**
- **with**
- **of**
- **in**
- **at**
- **on**
- **from**

Usage

Prepositional verbs always take a *direct object* (either a *noun* or *gerund*) after the *preposition* and cannot be separated by it. For example:

✖ “He **listens** classical music every night.” (Incorrect — the verb *listens* requires a preposition to connect to its object, *classical music*.)

✖ “He **listens** classical music **to** every night.” (Incorrect — *listens* and its preposition *to* cannot be separated by the object, *classical music*.)

✔ “He **listens to** classical music every night.” (Correct — the prepositional verb is not separated, and the object comes directly after the preposition.)

Prepositional verbs vs. phrasal verbs

Sometimes, a **phrasal verb** may be mistaken for a prepositional verb. Although both combinations employ *verbs* and *prepositions*, you can differentiate the two grammar structures by looking at the **literal meaning of the verb** and the **word order**.

Literal meaning of the verb

Prepositional verbs use the literal meanings of verbs, whereas phrasal verbs tend to be idiomatic. For example, the meaning of the verb *ask* doesn't change when combined with the preposition *for*; however, it changes dramatically when combined with the preposition *out*:

• "Kelly **asked *for*** a raise." (The literal meaning of *to ask* is *to inquire*. Kelly *inquired* about a raise, making it a prepositional verb.)

• "Kelly **asked *out*** Chad." (*Ask out* means *to invite someone on a date*, making it an idiomatic phrasal verb.)

Word order

The order of a verb's *preposition* and its *object* can also help determine whether a verb is prepositional or phrasal. As previously stated, the object of prepositional verbs *always* comes immediately after the **preposition**, which in turn comes immediately after the **verb**. Note that an exception to this rule is when an adverb is used to modify the prepositional verb, in which case it can appear between the verb and the preposition. However, the object must still follow the preposition. For example:

✔ "Kelly **asked for** a raise." (correct)
✔ "Kelly **asked *politely* for** a raise." (correct)
✖ "Kelly **asked** a raise **for**." (incorrect)

For phrasal verbs, however, *prepositions* and *objects* can often be rearranged without issue:

✔ "Kelly **asked out** Chad." (correct)
✔ "Kelly **asked** Chad **out**." (also correct)

Examples of common pairings

Because there are no established rules or methods to determine which prepositions accompany which verbs, we have to settle on memorizing some of the most common *verb + preposition* combinations.

The following sections contain numerous examples of commonly used prepositional verbs.

Verb + for

The preposition *for* can be used with a number of verbs, often to emphasize purpose or reason. For example:

Verb + for	Example Sentences
apologize for	“Brittany never **apologizes for** her behavior.”
ask for	“The student **asked for** a pencil.”
beg for	“The man **begged for** a second chance.”
care for	“I don’t **care for** salads.”
fight for	“Many generations of people have **fought for** freedom."
hope for	“The family is **hoping for** a miracle.”
long for	“The man **longed for** the days of his youth.”
pay for	“Who’s going to **pay for** these tickets?”
provide for	“Parents are expected to **provide for** their children.”
search for	“Did you **search for** the missing piece yet?”
wait for	“I’m **waiting for** the bus.”
wish for	“Some people **wish for** nothing but fame.”
work for	“She **works for** the government.”

Verb + to

To is commonly used with verbs and usually refers to direction (literal or metaphorical) or connections between people or things. For example:

Verb + to	Example Sentences
adjust to	“You’ll **adjust to** your new school in no time.”
admit to	“He **admitted to** reading her diary.”
belong to	“The wallet **belongs to** that woman over there.”
travel to	“I am **traveling to** England tomorrow.”
listen to	“Grace is **listening to** music in her room.”
go to	“Anthony, please **go to** the back of the classroom.”
relate to	“I can’t **relate to** this character at all.”
respond to	“Josh **responded to** his friend’s email.”
talk to	“He **talked to** the manager for more than an hour.”
turn to	“**Turn to** page 46 for a diagram of the procedure.”

Verb + about

Many verbs take the preposition *about* when referring to things, events, or gerunds. For example:

Verb + about	Example Sentences
ask about	“I **asked about** the company’s job opening.”
care about	“She doesn’t seem to **care about** going to college.”
complain about	“The boy **complained about** his early curfew.”
forget about	“I **forgot about** the wedding reception.”
hear about	“Did you **hear about** the renovation project?”
joke about	“Kim often **jokes about** her high-pitched voice.”
know about	“What do you **know about** physics?”

laugh about	“The friends **laughed about** their terrible luck.”
learn about	“Michelle is **learning about** film production.”
talk about	“What are you **talking about**?”
think about	“We’ll need to **think about** hiring some more staff.”
worry about	“So many adults **worry about** getting older.”
write about	“Dean **wrote about** his day in his journal.”

Verb + with

Verbs using the preposition *with* usually point to connections and relationships between people or things. For example:

Verb + with	Example Sentences
agree with	“I don’t **agree with** his opinions.”
argue with	“The two **argued with** each other for several minutes.”
begin with, start with	“Let’s **begin with** a short quiz.” “I shouldn’t have **started with** a salad.”
collide with	“It is possible, albeit unlikely, for an asteroid to **collide with** Earth.”
compare with	“How does the restaurant’s soup **compare with** Vera’s?”
compete with	“When I run races, I only **compete with** the clock.”
cope with	“It’s not easy to **cope with** failure.”
disagree with	“She **disagrees with** my suggestion.”
interfere with	“Be careful not to **interfere with** the conference upstairs.”
meet with	“When will you **meet with** her?”

Verb + of

The preposition *of* can be used with a variety of verbs. For example:

Verb + of	Example Sentences
approve of	“Ellen doesn’t **approve of** her sister’s friends.”
consist of	“Pizza **consists of** bread, cheese, and tomato sauce.”
dream of	“I **dream of** visiting Europe.”
hear of	“Have you **heard of** this new TV show?”
take care of	“Who will **take care of** your goldfish while you’re away?”
think of	“If you only **think of** failure, you’ll never take any risks.”

Verb + in

The preposition *in* accompanies several verbs and tends to point to involvement or connections between people or things. For example:

Verb + in	Example Sentences
believe in	“The majority of children **believe in** Santa Claus.”
engage in	“Maurice likes to **engage in** political debates.”
invest in	“Now is the time to **invest in** as many companies as possible.”
live in	“Haley **lives in** Seattle.”
participate in	“What sports did you **participate in** as a kid?”
result in	“The hotel’s failure to exterminate the bed bugs **resulted in** fewer customers.”

specialize in	“English majors can choose to **specialize in** creative writing or literature.”
succeed in	“Steven **succeeded in** earning a scholarship.”

Verb + at

At is commonly used with verbs to indicate places, skills, and reactions. For example:

Verb + at	Example Sentences
arrive at	“We **arrived at** the hotel in the morning.”
balk at	“Melissa **balked at** the news.”
excel at	“My five-year-old niece already **excels at** math and science.”
laugh at	“The boy couldn’t stop **laughing at** Isabella’s joke.”
look at	“**Look at** the whiteboard, please.”
nod at	“She **nodded at** her coworkers.”
shout at	“He could hear someone **shouting at** the TV.”
smile at	“My son **smiles at** me every time I walk through the door.”
stare at	“It’s uncomfortable when people **stare at** you.”

Verb + on

The preposition *on* is used with a number of different verbs. For example:

Verb + on	Example Sentences
agree on	“The committee finally **agreed on** a solution.”
bet on	“I wouldn’t **bet on** that happening.”

comment on	“The lawyer briefly **commented on** the lawsuit.”
concentrate on, focus on	“He’s trying to **concentrate on** his work.” “I'm too tired to **focus on** this assignment.”
decide on	“He eventually **decided on** a career path.”
depend on, rely on	“You can’t **depend on** him forever.” “Too many students **rely on** the Internet to conduct research.”
elaborate on	“This paragraph **elaborates on** the previous one’s claims.”
experiment on	“The company offered assurances that it does not **experiment on** animals.”
insist on	“She **insisted on** joining us.”
operate on	“Aspiring surgeons learn how to **operate on** people.”
plan on	“Do you **plan on** attending the concert tomorrow?”

Verb + from

The preposition *from* is commonly used with verbs to identify a point of origin or a connection or disconnection between people or things. For example:

Verb + from	Example Sentences
benefit from	“Aspiring musicians **benefit from** getting public exposure for their music.”
come from	“Saya **comes from** Japan.”
differ from	“How does milk chocolate **differ from** white chocolate?”
escape from	“The prisoners **escaped from** their captors.”

recover from	“The girl **recovered from** her illness.”
refrain from	“Could you please **refrain from** shouting?”
resign from	“The CEO **resigned from** her position after 25 years with the company.”
retire from	“He **retired from** his job last year.”
suffer from	“Many people **suffer from** social anxiety.”

Verb + other prepositions

Other prepositions can be used to create prepositional verbs. Some of these prepositions are *against, into,* and *like*. For example:

• “We **decided against** visiting my aunt.”

• “The car nearly **crashed into** a tree.”

• “I **feel like** going on an adventure.”

Verbs with multiple prepositions

Certain verbs can take multiple prepositions without changing the overall meaning of the sentence. For example, the verb *talk* can use the prepositions *to* and *with* interchangeably:

• “I need to **talk *to*** the principal.”

• “I need to **talk *with*** the principal.”

On the other hand, some verbs’ meanings do change when a different preposition is introduced. For example, the verb *dream* can mean *to aspire* when it is used with the preposition *of*; however, when it is used with the prepositions *about*, it means *to see images during sleep*. For example:

• “She **dreams *of*** becoming a pilot.” (aspiration)

• “She often **dreams *about*** flying.” (image during sleep)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following prepositions is **commonly** paired with verbs?

a) at
b) on
c) about
d) from
e) all of the above

2. Which of the following sentences contains a **prepositional verb**?

a) “I would be honored to give a speech.”
b) “He forgot about daylight saving time.”
c) “She had an allergic reaction to peanut butter.”
d) “Mitch has an obsession with comic books.”

3. Which of the following sentences **does not** contain a **prepositional verb**?

a) “I’m responsible for cleaning the office.”
b) “Let’s drink to your good fortune.”
c) “She begged for his forgiveness.”
d) “He looked at the sky.”

4. Which of the following sentences uses an **incorrect** preposition?

a) “He insisted on doing everything himself.”
b) “Haggis consists of meat, onions, oatmeal, and spices.”
c) “Consult a doctor if you suffer with bronchitis.”
d) “I don’t really care for chocolate.”

Prepositions with Adjectives

Definition

Prepositions can sometimes appear after **adjectives** to complete or elaborate on the ideas or emotions the adjective describes. Prepositions used in this way are known as **adjective complements**. The preposition always comes directly after the adjective and is typically followed by a *noun* or *gerund* to form a prepositional phrase.

The most common prepositions used alongside adjectives include the following:

- of
- to
- about
- for
- with
- at
- by
- in
- from

Rules

There are no definite rules when it comes to combining adjectives with prepositions, but a few patterns exist. One trick is to look at how **synonymous adjectives** and **antonymous adjectives** pair with prepositions; another is to memorize the prepositions used with adjectives' associated **noun forms**.

Synonymous adjectives

Synonymous adjectives generally take the same prepositions. For example, when the adjective *afraid* is replaced with its synonyms *scared* and *terrified*, the preposition *of* stays the same:

• "Megan was ***afraid*** **of** the thunderstorm." (original)

• "Megan was ***scared*** **of** the thunderstorm."

• "Megan was ***terrified*** **of** the thunderstorm."

Be careful, though, as some similar-sounding adjectives may require different prepositions:

• "Philip is **upset *about*** what was said." (original)

• "Philip is **displeased *with*** what was said."

• "Philip is **hurt *by*** what was said."

Antonymous adjectives

Like synonymous adjectives, the majority of antonymous adjectives use the

same prepositions:

• “It was ***smart*** **of** him to go on vacation.”
• “It was ***stupid*** **of** him to go on vacation.”

• “She’s ***good*** **at** skateboarding.”
• “She’s ***bad*** **at** skateboarding.”

Noun forms with prepositions

We can also examine the prepositions used with associated nouns, as the same prepositions are often used with the adjective forms as well. For example:

• “I am ***interested*** **in** astronomy.” (adjective)
• “I have an ***interest*** **in** astronomy.” (associated noun)

• “He is ***addicted*** **to** playing tennis.” (adjective)
• “He has an ***addiction*** **to** playing tennis.” (associated noun)

• “Julie is ***obsessed*** **with** that movie.” (adjective)
• “Julie has an ***obsession*** **with** that movie.” (associated noun)

On occasion, an adjective and its associated noun form may not share the same preposition, as in the example below:

• “He is **fond** ***of*** animals.” (adjective)

• “He has a **fondness** ***for*** animals.” (associated noun)

Examples of common pairings

Because there are no distinct rules for determining how adjectives combine with prepositions, the best way to learn correct *adjective + preposition* combinations is by memorizing some of the most common pairings.

Below are various examples of combinations you may come across in everyday English.

Adjective + of

An adjective paired with the preposition *of* can identify causes of mental and physical states (e.g., fear, exhaustion, anxiety, etc.) or offer descriptions for actions and people. For example:

Adjective + of	Example Sentences

afraid of, frightened of, scared of, terrified of	“Sam is **afraid of** dogs.” “Many kids are **frightened of** clowns.” “Are you **scared of** airplanes?” “The poor baby was **terrified of** her crib.”
kind of, nice of, sweet of, thoughtful of	“How **kind of** you to come early.” “That was **nice of** your sister to treat us to dessert.” “It’s very **sweet of** John to send a gift.” “It is **thoughtful of** passengers to thank their drivers.”
odd of, strange of	“How **odd of** that man to wear sunglasses inside.” “It’s **strange of** you to change your mind like that.”
proud of	“Mom told me she is **proud of** my accomplishments.”
rude of	“I thought it **rude of** her to interrupt me.”
smart of	“That’s very **smart of** you.”
sick of, tired of	“I am so **sick of** doing laundry every week.” “Olivia confessed that she is **tired of** dating Mike.”
silly of	“It was **silly of** me to assume I was right.”
stupid of	“How **stupid of** that boy to drop out of high school.”

Adjective + to

When paired with an adjective, the preposition *to* can describe behaviors, states, or connections between things and people. For example:

Adjective + to	Example Sentences
accustomed to	“He quickly became **accustomed to** city life.”
addicted to	“I think I'm **addicted to** action movies.”
committed to, dedicated to, devoted to	“She is **committed to** the art of dance.” “How **dedicated to** your studies are you?” “Lucy is **devoted to** her family.”
friendly to, good to, kind to, nice to	“Henry is **friendly to** everyone.” “Was she **good to** you?” “You should always be **kind to** others.” “Mrs. Roberts was **nice to** the cashier.”
married to	“Cassie is **married to** Nick.”
mean to, rude to, unfriendly to	“Don’t be **mean to** your classmates.” “The couple was **rude to** the waitress.” “A lot of cats are **unfriendly to** humans.”
opposed to	“I am **opposed to** these changes.”
similar to	“His idea is **similar to** mine.”

Adjective + about

The preposition *about* typically accompanies emotive adjectives in regards to specific situations or events. For example:

Adjective + about	Example Sentences
angry about, furious about, mad about	“My neighbor is **angry about** the loud music we played last night.” “That woman is **furious about** having to wait in line.” “You’re always **mad about** something.”

anxious about, nervous about, stressed about, worried about	“Joe is **anxious about** studying abroad next semester.” “She seemed **nervous about** the test.” “Rachel is **stressed about** finding a job.” “Dad is **worried about** filing taxes.”
excited about	“I am **excited about** a new book that’s coming out soon.”
happy about	“Aren’t you **happy about** the way things turned out?”
sad about, depressed about	“She might be **sad about** her grades.” “Bobby was **depressed about** his parents’ divorce.”
sorry about	“I’m **sorry about** yesterday.”
upset about	“He’s probably **upset about** losing the soccer match.”

Adjective + for

For can be used with adjectives to demonstrate purpose or reason. For example:

• “Texas is **famous for** rodeos.”

• “Australia is **known for** its large kangaroo population.”

• “Coach Brown is **responsible for** the football team.”

Of may also be used to emphasize someone’s feelings toward a specific event, thing, or person. This combination follows the basic form *feel/be + adjective + for + someone/something*. For example:

• “Marianne **feels *bad for* her coworker**.”

• “Kyle **is *happy for* his brother**.”

• “The company **felt *hopeful for* the future**.”

Adjective + with

When used with an adjective, the preposition *with* can indicate the cause of an emotional state or a connection between things or people. For example:

Adjective + with	Example Sentences
angry with, furious with	“Nicole is **angry with** her mother.” “I heard he’s **furious with** you!”
annoyed with, fed up with	“I’m **annoyed with** this traffic.” “She’s **fed up with** having to clean toilets all day.”
bored with	“It’s hard not to be **bored with** long lectures.”
content with, fine with, OK with	“Taylor was **content with** moving to Chicago.” “I’m **fine with** having to rewrite the introduction.” “Are you sure you’re **OK with** this?”
disappointed with, displeased with	“Molly seems **disappointed with** her performance.” “The boy’s parents are **displeased with** his behavior.”
pleased with	“We are very **pleased with** the number of donations we received.”

With may also be employed in passive sentences to describe the states of people or things:

• “Paris is especially **crowded with** tourists in the summertime.”

• “The cake is **filled with** fresh blueberries.”

• “The piñata is **stuffed with** hundreds of pieces of candy.”

Adjective + at/by

Most adjectives that take the preposition *at* can also take the preposition *by*. When combined with adjectives, these prepositions illustrate causes for specific reactions or emotional responses. *By* can be used in place of *at* only because these sentences require *passive voice*. For example:

• “The man was **amazed at/by** the number of people offering to help him.”

• “She was **astonished at/by** the movie’s poor ratings.”

• “I’m **shocked at/by** his behavior.”

• “Flight attendants were **surprised at/by** the plane’s abrupt landing.”

At can also describe skills and abilities when paired with positive and negative adjectives, such as *good/bad* and *wonderful/terrible*. In this case, *by* cannot be used in place of *at*, as the sentences are <u>not passive</u>. For example:

✔ “James is **good *at*** playing the guitar.” (correct)
✖ “James is **good *by*** playing the guitar.” (incorrect)

✔ “I’m **terrible *at*** golf.” (correct)
✖ “I’m **terrible *by*** golf.” (incorrect)

Adjective + in

Some adjectives can be paired with the preposition *in* to show connections or relationships between people and things. For example:

• “Bernard is **interested in** joining the school band.”

• “Is she **involved in** politics?”

Adjective + from

Adjectives taking the preposition *from* can emphasize a point of opposition or the result of an action. For example:

• “Turquoise is **different from** blue.” (point of opposition)

• “We were **protected from** the storm.” (point of opposition)

• “I became **tired from** studying all night.” (result of an action)

Adjectives with multiple prepositions

Many adjectives can be paired with multiple prepositions. While some prepositions may change the meaning of a sentence, others can behave interchangeably (such as *at* and *by*). Here are some sentence pairs that use different prepositions but have identical meanings:

• “She’s very **sorry *about*** the mistake.”
• “She’s very **sorry *for*** the mistake.”

• “Mark is **disappointed *with*** the decision.”
• “Mark is **disappointed *in*** the decision.”

In some cases, however, the prepositions are **not** interchangeable and can only be used to describe specific nouns or gerunds. For example, when paired with adjectives, *with* and *for* generally refer to people, whereas *about* usually refers to things, events, or gerunds:

• "I'm so **happy *for*** them." (people)
• "I'm so **happy *about*** the wedding." (thing/event)

• "Dad is **angry *with*** Elizabeth." (person)
• "Dad is **angry *about*** Elizabeth's sneaking out." (gerund)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following prepositions is **most commonly** paired with adjectives?

a) outside
b) around
c) over
d) about

2. Which of the following sentences contains a preposition paired with an **adjective**?

a) "I feel responsible for what happened."
b) "She went to the park to walk her dog."
c) "Something flew over the pond."
d) "Anna is preparing dinner for her family."

3. Which of the following sentences **does not** contain a preposition paired with an **adjective**?

a) "Ken has an obsession with skydiving."
b) "It would be fun to go on a road trip this weekend."
c) "She's upset about her computer breaking."
d) "Is he satisfied with the new employee?"

4. Which of the following sentences is **correct**?

a) "Dr. Donnelly is excited for conduct the experiment."
b) "Dr. Donnelly is excited with conduct the experiment."
c) "Dr. Donnelly is excited about conduct the experiment."

d) “Dr. Donnelly is excited to conduct the experiment.”

Prepositions in Idioms

Definition

Many **prepositions** can be used with certain words or phrases to form **idioms** (expressions that have a unique meaning that cannot be inferred from their constituent parts). These **prepositional idioms** typically begin or end with a preposition. Prepositional idioms can function adverbially, adjectivally, or verbally and may come at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence. For example:

• “**Turn down** the volume, please.” (verbal idiom at the beginning of a sentence)

• “She plays tennis **on average** three times a month.” (adverbial idiom in the middle of a sentence)

• “All the elevators are **out of order**.” (adjectival idiom at the end of a sentence)

Types of idioms

Prepositional idioms combine prepositions with verbs, nouns, or phrases to create idiomatic expressions. These expressions can be divided into two categories: **idioms that start with prepositions** and **idioms that end with prepositions**.

Idioms that start with prepositions

Idioms that start with prepositions are usually **prepositional phrases** and function adverbially or adjectivally. As with non-idiomatic prepositional phrases, idiomatic prepositional phrases consist of two or more words and always include a noun or phrase after the preposition. For example:

• “Chuck visits his grandparents **from time to time**.” (adverbial prepositional phrase)

• “The city is **in danger**.” (adjectival prepositional phrase)

Some idioms behave similarly to idiomatic prepositional phrases but are instead followed by an adverb or adjective. (Because they do not contain a noun, they are not complete prepositional phrases.) For example:

• “Answer me **at once**.” (*preposition + adverb*)

• “She explained the project details **in brief**.” (*preposition + adjective*)

Adverbial vs. adjectival prepositional phrases

Certain idiomatic prepositional phrases can behave both adverbially and adjectivally. For example, look at how the prepositional idiom *in depth* is used below:

• “He researches rainforests **in depth**.” (*In depth* is an adverbial prepositional phrase that modifies the verb *researches*.)

• “He conducts **in-depth** research of rainforests.” (*In-depth** is an adjectival prepositional phrase that modifies the noun *research*.)

(*We usually insert a **hyphen** when an adjective consists of two or more words and comes directly before the noun it modifies.)

Adding modifiers

Various adverbs and adjectives may be used as modifiers and placed inside idiomatic prepositional phrases for emphasis or clarification. For example:

• “Small electronics are **in demand**.”
• “Small electronics are **in *high* demand**.”

• “The user downloaded a virus **by accident**.”
• “The user downloaded a virus **by *complete* accident**.”

Idioms that end with prepositions

An idiom that contains a verb and ends with a preposition can be classified as a **phrasal verb**. Like normal verbs, phrasal verbs describe an action in the sentence; they are written as *verb + preposition* or *verb + particle + preposition*. For example:

• “I **turned down** the job offer.” (*verb + preposition*)

• “He is beginning to **get along with** his stepfather.” (*verb + particle + preposition*)

See the section about **Phrasal Verbs** in the chapter on **Verbs** to learn more about how these are formed and used.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In what part of a sentence can you insert a **prepositional idiom**?

a) at the beginning
b) in the middle
c) at the end
d) all of the above

2. Which of the following characteristics describes the function of an **idiomatic prepositional phrase**?

a) adverbial
b) verbal
c) adjectival
d) a and c
e) b and c

3. Which of the following characteristics describes the function of a **phrasal verb**?

a) adverbial
b) verbal
c) adjectival
d) a and c
e) b and c

4. What does a prepositional idiom **require** to be considered an **idiomatic prepositional phrase**?

a) a verb
b) a noun
c) a preposition
d) an adverb

5. How does the **prepositional idiom** function in the following sentence?
"She talked **in detail** about her trip to New Zealand."

a) adverb
b) adjective

c) verb
d) none of the above

Idioms that Start with Prepositions Definition

Most idioms that start with prepositions are **prepositional phrases** and consist of a **preposition** followed by a **noun** or **noun phrase**. (Some idioms may take an **adjective** or **adverb** instead, but these are not considered prepositional phrases because they do not have a noun or noun phrase.) This type of **prepositional idiom** can be used adverbially or adjectivally and may come at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

Examples of common prepositional idioms

Here are some of the most common prepositions found at the beginning of prepositional idioms:

- **in**
- **on**
- **out of**
- **at**
- **for**
- **by**
- **from**

As there is no way to decipher a prepositional idiom's meaning simply by looking at it, it is best to memorize as many combinations as possible. The following sections contain examples of some of the most common prepositional idioms that start with the above prepositions.

This is not an exhaustive list, however. There are other prepositions that can be used at the start of idioms, and many more combinations than the ones listed below. To learn more idioms, phrases, and phrasal verbs, check out The Free Dictionary's **Collection of Idioms and Phrases** at idioms.thefreedictionary.com.

Idioms that start with *in*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *in*:

Idiom that Starts with *In*	Meaning	Example Sentence
in advance	ahead of time; before	“Sue paid for her gift **in advance**.”
in brief	concisely; in a few words	“This textbook explains World War II **in brief**.”
in bulk	in large amounts	“We always buy toilet paper **in bulk**.”
in common	sharing a trait with someone or something else	“Dogs and wolves have several traits **in common**.”
in danger	prone to danger or threatened by a dangerous situation; about to be harmed	“Those little kids are **in danger**.”
in debt	owing money	“Many students are **in debt** due to the expense of higher education.”
in demand	desired; wanted; sought after (usually skills or products)	“Computer skills are really **in demand** these days.”
in depth	thoroughly; comprehensively	“Students must discuss their proposals **in depth** with their advisers.”
in detail	thoroughly; comprehensively	“Writers describe everything **in detail**.”
in the end	finally; at last	“**In the end**, what matters most is honesty.”

in fact	really; actually	“The man who is dressed in a T-shirt and jeans is **in fact** the CEO.”
in general	usually; most of the time	“**In general**, owners should feed their pets at least twice a day.”
in a minute	very soon	“Angela will arrive **in a minute**.”
in particular	especially	“I love history in general, but I would like to learn more about European history **in particular**.”
in reality	really; actually	“Oftentimes, the most talkative people are **in reality** quite shy.”

Idioms that start with *on*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *on*:

Idiom that Starts with *On*	**Meaning**	**Example Sentence**
on average	usually; typically; normally	“Bruce works out **on average** four times a week.”
on board	located on a ship, train, or airplane	“The ship will depart once everyone is **on board**.”
on demand	immediately available when asked for or requested	“Most people prefer to watch movies **on demand**.”
on display	being shown, showcased, or exhibited	“A famous painting is now **on display** at the museum.”
on fire	in flames; burning	“A building was **on fire** yesterday.”
on hand	available, accessible	“Do you have a notepad **on hand**?”

on the other hand	in contrast (to a previously stated point of view)	“It’s fun to see movies, but **on the other hand** tickets can be quite expensive.”
on purpose	intentionally; deliberately	“Liz left without us **on purpose**.”
on sale	being sold, especially at a reduced price	“The hat you wanted is **on sale** at the mall.”
on schedule	functioning as planned or scheduled	“The buses seem to be **on schedule** today.”
on time	at the planned or expected time (e.g., of arrival)	“Alfred never arrives **on time**.”

Idioms that start with *out of*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *out of*:

Idiom that Starts with *Out of*	Meaning	Example Sentence
out of the blue	without prior indication; unexpectedly	“He showed up at our house **out of the blue**.”
out of breath	tired; exhausted; panting	“She became **out of breath** after trudging up the stairs.”
out of character	contrary to one’s personality	“Teresa has been acting **out of character** lately.”

out of harm's way	safe	"I'm just glad the baby is **out of harm's way**."
out of order	not functioning or working properly; temporarily broken or unusable (usually referring to machinery)	"This printer is **out of order**."
out of the ordinary	unusual; not normal	"His methods are **out of the ordinary**."
out of print	no longer published or printed (usually referring to books)	"Unfortunately, that book is **out of print**."
out of the question	impossible or unlikely; unreasonable	"Your request is **out of the question**."
out of season	not ripe or readily available (usually fruits or vegetables)	"Grapes are **out of season** this time of year."
out of style	not fashionable or hip	"Perms have been **out of style** for decades."
out of time	having no more (remaining) time	"We are almost **out of time**."
out of town	temporarily away at a location in a different vicinity	"Brian will be **out of town** this weekend."
out of work	unemployed	"Most of my friends are unfortunately **out of work**."

Idioms that start with *at*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *at*:

Idiom that		

Starts with *At*	Meaning	Example Sentence
at all times	always	“Wear your seatbelt **at all times**.”
at fault	responsible for something bad; culpable	“She is the only one **at fault**.”
at first	in the beginning; initially	“**At first**, she attempted to speak to everyone individually."
at hand	near in space or time	“Always keep your passwords close **at hand**.”
at last	finally	“He made it to the airport **at last**.”
at once	immediately	“Go to your room **at once**!”
at rest	motionless	“An object **at rest** stays **at rest** unless acted on by an outside force.”
at risk	prone to danger or threatened by a dangerous situation	“Families residing near the volcano are especially **at risk**.”

Idioms that start with *for*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *for*:

Idiom that Starts with *For*	Meaning	Example Sentence
for certain	surely; definitely; positively	“Is Desmond coming to the party tomorrow **for certain**?”
		“English isn’t the only international language;

for example	as an example; for instance	**for example**, French is the national language of many different countries.”
for fun	as a hobby; for enjoyment	“What do you usually do **for fun**?”
for good	permanently or for an extended period of time	“I’ve decided to leave this city **for good**.”
for a living	as an occupation	“Herman cleans houses **for a living**.”
for now	temporarily; for the time being	“Please go to the waiting room **for now**.”
for sale	being sold; available to be purchased	“Is this diamond ring **for sale**?”

Idioms that start with *by*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *by*:

Idiom that Starts with *By*	**Meaning**	**Example Sentence**
by accident	unintentionally; not deliberately	“The kids broke the vase **by accident**.”
by all means	definitely; certainly	“Prospective students are **by all means** encouraged to visit the campus.”
by hand	without the use of machinery	“He makes intricate sculptures **by hand**.”
	unintentionally; not	

by mistake	deliberately; as a mistake	"I went to the wrong location **by mistake**."
by the way	incidentally (used to introduce a different topic)	"**By the way**, have you written your essay yet?"

Idioms that start with *from*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *from*:

Idiom that Starts with *From*	**Meaning**	**Example Sentence**
from afar	from a distance; coming from far away	"I could hear music **from afar**."
from head to toe	all over the body	"She was covered in mud **from head to toe**."
from scratch	from the beginning and using only the basic elements or ingredients	"Bob made raspberry cupcakes **from scratch**."
from time to time	occasionally; infrequently	"They return to their home country **from time to time**."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following prepositions is **not** commonly found at the **beginning** of prepositional idioms?

a) from
b) out of

c) toward
d) on

2. Which of the following sentences contains an idiom that **starts with a preposition**?

a) “He’s going to end his addiction for good.”
b) “Wade went to a baseball game yesterday.”
c) “I made this card for my friend.”
d) “Our car broke down on the highway.”

3. Which of the following sentences does **not** contain an idiom that **starts with a preposition**?

a) “She stepped down from her position at the firm.”
b) “My cousins have so many things in common.”
c) “In general, summers become hottest around mid-July.”
d) “The circus troupe traveled from afar.”

4. Which of the following sentences uses a prepositional idiom **incorrectly**?

a) “Many books written over 100 years ago are out of print today.”
b) “Do you think the dress is on sale?”
c) “We must leave at once.”
d) “Perhaps she did it on mistake.”

Idioms that End with Prepositions

Definition

Idioms that end with prepositions are typically **phrasal verbs** and consist of a *verb* followed by either a *preposition*, a *particle*, or a *particle* with a *preposition*. This type of **prepositional idiom** is used like a normal verb (describing the action of a subject) and may come at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

Examples of common prepositional idioms

Here are some of the most common prepositions found **at the end** of prepositional idioms:

- **up**
- **down**
- **on**
- **off**
- **with**

To determine the meanings of idiomatic phrasal verbs, we must memorize as many combinations as possible. The following sections contain examples of prepositional idioms that end with the most common prepositions.

This is not an exhaustive list, however: there are other prepositions that can be used to form phrasal verbs, and many more combinations than the ones listed below. Additionally, many phrasal verbs have several completely unrelated meanings, which we can only learn by encountering them in writing and speech. See the section on **Phrasal Verbs** to learn more about how they are formed, and see the section **Common Phrasal Verbs** to find more examples.

To learn more idioms, phrases, and phrasal verbs and their meanings, check out The Free Dictionary's **Collection of Idioms and Phrases** at idioms.thefreedictionary.com.

Idioms that end with *up*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that end with the preposition *up*:

Idiom that Ends with *Up*	Meaning	Example Sentence
act up	to misbehave	“The toddlers have been **acting up** lately.”
blow up	to explode; to detonate or make explode	“Demolition workers **blew up** an old building to make room for a new mall.”
bring up	to mention (in conversation)	“It’s a good idea to **bring up** your career goals during a job interview.”
come up	to happen (usually unexpectedly)	“Something **came up** yesterday, so I was unable to attend the event.”
give up	to stop (doing something); to quit	“Leah is trying to **give up** smoking.”
hang up	to end a phone call	“Always **hang up** if a telemarketer tries to sell you something.”
make up	“make up” has two unrelated meanings: to create (something) through one’s imagination, or to come to terms or settle an argument (with someone)	“I **made up** a fairy tale to tell my children at bedtime.” “The siblings finally **made up** after two days of fighting.”
mix	“mix up” has two similar meanings: to	“I always **mix up** the twins when I see them—one of these days I’ll learn to tell them apart.”

up	confuse, or to or assemble something out of order	“Someone must have **mixed up** the photo albums, because these pictures are all out of order.”
show up	to come, arrive, or appear	“The groom waited all day, but the bride never **showed up**.”
shut up	to stop talking; to be quiet	“If you don’t **shut up**, I’m leaving!”
throw up	to vomit	“The girl became sick and **threw up** several times.”
turn up	to (re)appear; to be found	“I’m sure your diary will **turn up** somewhere.”

Idioms that end with *down*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that end with the preposition *down*:

Idiom that Ends with *Down*	**Meaning**	**Example Sentence**
break down	“break down” has two unrelated meanings: to stop functioning due to a mechanical failure, or to start crying or become overwhelmingly emotional (about something)	“My car **broke down** on the way here, so I had to walk the rest of the way.” “The boy **broke down** when he realized he’d failed the exam.”

die down	to lessen in intensity or become weaker	“The wind has **died down** a bit.”
let down	to disappoint	“I feel like I’ve **let down** my parents.”
pipe down	to be less loud	“**Pipe down** or I’m sending you to your room!”
play down	to make something seem less important than it truly is	“Successful people often **play down** their achievements to avoid sounding arrogant.”
step down	to resign or retire from a position	“A prominent political figure recently **stepped down** in response to a scandal.”
turn down	to reject	“She has **turned down** many marriage proposals.”
wind down	to relax	“Let’s **wind down** with some popcorn and a movie.”

Idioms that end with *on*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that end with the preposition *on*:

Idiom that Ends with *On*	Meaning	Example Sentence
catch up on	to get informed about something; to get up to date	“Helen plans to **catch up on** her reading tonight.”

	with something	
count on	to rely or depend on	“I can always **count on** you to lend me a hand when I need it most.”
drag on	to continue for a long time and become boring or tedious	“The man’s speech **dragged on** for well over an hour.”
go on	to continue	“It might seem like the end of the world, but life still **goes on** after setbacks like this.”
grow on	to eventually become liked by	“This new flavor of ice cream has really **grown on** me.”
hang on	to wait; to be patient	“Could you **hang on** a moment?”
move on	to stop focusing on the past and continue with one’s life	“Gerald struggled to **move on** after losing the tennis match.”
pick on	to tease; to make fun of or bully	“You shouldn’t **pick on** your little brother.”
tell on	to report someone else’s wrongdoing to a person of authority	“She went to the teacher to **tell on** her friend.”
try on	to put on a garment or piece of clothing to see how it fits	“I’d like to **try on** this shirt, please.”

Idioms that end with *off*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that end with the preposition *off*:

Idiom that Ends	Meaning	Example Sentence

with *Off*		
back off	to withdraw or retreat	“Some salespeople don’t know when to **back off**.”
brush off	to ignore something; to pretend something important is not important	“You can’t just **brush off** what happened between you two.”
call off	to cancel	“Employees were forced to **call off** the strike.”
drop off	to take to and deposit at some location	“Dustin usually **drops off** his shirts at the dry cleaner before work.”
kick off	to begin	“They say the festival should **kick off** around noon.”
lay off	to terminate employees	“Oil companies have had to **lay off** many workers.”
nod off	to doze; to fall asleep	“I always **nod off** during long ceremonies.”
pull off	to successfully complete a difficult task	“Penny **pulled off** the challenging dance routine.”
show off	“show off” has two distinct meanings: to display something one is proud of, or to act as if one is superior to others	“Parents love to **show off** their children’s artwork.” “That girl is always

		showing off.”
take off	“take off” has two related but distinct meanings: to become successful or popular (usually for businesses), or to depart or go into the air (e.g., an airplane)	“My online business really **took off** after it was mentioned on the news.” “The plane **took off** an hour late.”
wear off	to lose effectiveness; to stop having an effect	“I think the pain medicine is starting to **wear off**.”

Idioms that end with *with*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that end with the preposition *with*:

Idiom that Ends with *With*	**Meaning**	**Example Sentence**
come down with	to become sick; to fall ill	“Dimitri **came down with** a terrible cold.”
come up with	to think of, suggest, or develop (an idea)	“Scientists are trying to **come up with** a solution to climate change.”
do away with	to stop or abolish; to get rid of	“Some people want to **do away with** taxes.”
get along with	to have a good or friendly relationship with someone	“They don’t seem to **get along with** each other.”
get away with	to avoid punishment for a wrongdoing	“The criminals didn’t **get away with** the robbery.”
go through	to undertake or complete (usually an undesirable or	“Will your family **go through**

with	difficult action)	**with** the move to Texas?”
keep up with	to stay up to date; to stay informed about	“I can’t **keep up with** celebrity gossip.”
put up with	to tolerate	“She shouldn’t **put up with** her brother’s pranks anymore.”

Idioms that end with other prepositions

Numerous other prepositions can be used with verbs and adverbs to create idiomatic phrasal verbs. The table below shows various examples of idioms that end with some of these less commonly used prepositions:

Idiom	Meaning	Example Sentence
come across	to find something unexpectedly; to meet or see someone unexpectedly	“He **came across** a bizarre inscription on the base of the statue.” “You might **come across** some of my relatives if you move to London.”
come to	to regain consciousness	“Minutes passed before he **came to**.”
get at	to mean or to express	“What is he trying to **get at**?”
get by	to barely manage to deal with a problem or extreme situation	“The hiker managed to **get by** on a single bottle of water.”
get over	to recover from or successfully deal with something (usually an illness or difficult situation)	“She’s finally **getting over** her cold.” “He can’t **get over** his self-esteem issues.”
go		“Dad is **going through** a mid-

through	to experience (something difficult)	life crisis.”
hang out	to socialize or get together (with someone)	“Do you want to **hang out** this weekend?”
root for	to cheer for someone; to support or take sides with someone	“You’d better **root for** me if I make it to the semi-finals.”
sink in	to become clearly and gradually understood	“He let the college’s rejection **sink in** before deciding to reapply the following year.”
stick around	to wait, stay, or remain (in a place)	“Is she **sticking around** for the next act?”
tag along	to accompany	“My little sister likes to **tag along** when I go out with my friends.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following prepositions is **not** commonly found at the **end** of prepositional idioms?

a) off
b) up
c) with
d) amid

2. Which of the following sentences contains an idiom that **ends with a preposition**?

a) “Oranges are out of season right now.”
b) “The cat jumped off the tree branch.”
c) “I’d like to travel to China one day.”
d) “He likes to wind down with a glass of wine.”

3. Which of the following sentences does **not** contain an idiom that **ends with a**

preposition?

a) “We should probably do away with these old plates.”
b) “Come to my birthday party tomorrow.”
c) “Never turn down a chance at love.”
d) “Action movies are starting to grow on me.”

4. Which of the following sentences uses an idiomatic phrasal verb **incorrectly**?

a) “I came around an interesting book recently.”
b) “Did the two of you make up yet?”
c) “He has no choice but to call off the trip.”
d) “The neighbor’s dogs are acting up again.”

Conjunctions

Definition

Conjunctions are used to express relationships between things in a sentence, link different clauses together, and to combine sentences.

Without conjunctions, we would be forced to use brief, simple sentences that do not express the full range of meaning we wish to communicate. Only using simple sentences would sound unnaturally abrupt and disjointed.

By using different kinds of conjunctions, however, we are able to make more complex, sophisticated sentences that show a connection between actions and ideas.

There are four main types of conjunctions: **coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions**, and **conjunctive adverbs**. We’ll briefly examine each kind below.

Coordinating Conjunctions

The most common conjunctions are the **coordinating conjunctions**: *and*, *but*, *or, yet, for, so* and *nor*. We use coordinating conjunctions between:

Individual words

• “I like to run **and** swim.”

• “Do you want pepperoni **or** anchovies on your pizza?”

Phrases

• “The president has been praised for both his willingness to negotiate **and** his strength in defending his principles.”

• “I am a big fan of playing sports **but** not watching them.”

Independent clauses

• “It was raining, **so** I took an umbrella.”

• “We went for a hike, **but** I didn’t bring the right shoes.”

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions connect a subordinate clause to an independent clause. For example:

• “**Although** it was raining, I didn’t take an umbrella.”
• “**Even though** she didn’t like pepperoni, she still ate the pizza.”
• “I went to work **in spite of** being sick.”
• “I intend to go to South America next month, **provided that** I can get the time off work.”

Correlative Conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions are pairs of conjunctions that work together to indicate the relationship between two elements in a sentence. For example:

• “Sports are a great way to bring people together, **whether** you like to play **or** just watch.”

• “I like **neither** pepperoni **nor** anchovies on my pizza.”

Conjunctive Adverbs

Conjunctive adverbs join two independent clauses. These can either be two separate sentences, or they can be joined into a single complex sentence with a semicolon. For example:

• “The English language school offers discounted English language courses. There’s **also** a library where you can study and borrow books.”

• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **nevertheless**, she recommended it to her friend.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What can **coordinating** conjunctions link together?

a) words
b) phrases
c) independent clauses
d) all of the above

2. How are independent clauses joined with **conjunctive adverbs**?

a) As separate sentences
b) As two independent clauses joined by a comma
c) As two independent clauses joined by a semicolon
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) B & C

3. How are independent clauses joined with **coordinating conjunctions**?

a) As separate sentences
b) As two independent clauses joined by a comma
c) As two independent clauses joined by a semicolon
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) B & C

4. What kind of conjunction is used in the following sentence?
"You can either take the exam again or receive a score of 0."

a) Coordinating conjunction
b) Subordinating conjunction
c) Correlative conjunction
d) Conjunctive adverb

Coordinating Conjunctions

Definition

Coordinating conjunctions are used to join two or more words, phrases, or

independent clauses. The two elements being joined must be grammatically equal or similar in both importance and structure. There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English, which can be remembered using the acronym FANBOYS:

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

Some coordinating conjunctions are more flexible than others. For example: *and, but, or,* and *yet* can join words, phrases, or independent clauses; *for, nor,* and *so* are more limited, as we'll see.

Let's look at each coordinating conjunction separately:

For

For is used to give a reason for something. It can normally only join two independent clauses, introducing the second clause as the reason for the first one.

We can use *for* whenever we mean *because*, but it's considered quite formal, literary, and even antiquated. For example:

• "I believe you, **for** you have never lied to me before."

• "He didn't come to the party, **for** he felt sick."

• "I wish you had been there, **for** we had a wonderful time."

And

And is used to add one element to another. It can join words, phrases, and entire independent clauses. For example:

• "James **and** Jack are coming to the party."

• "He ran, swam, **and** played with the other children."

• "Her beautiful long hair **and** dark brown eyes caught their attention."

• "The family moved into the new house, **and** the neighbors welcomed them warmly."

Nor

Nor is one of the most limited coordinating conjunctions. It's used to present an additional negative idea when a negative idea has already been stated. For example:

• "He *doesn't like* football, **nor** does he enjoy hockey."

• "I've *never seen* that movie, **nor** do I want to see it."

• She *hasn't been* to Paris, **nor** has she travelled to Rome."

Note that when *nor* is used to join two independent clauses, as in the examples above, **negative inversion** must be used in the second clause.

There is disagreement over whether *nor* should be used to join two elements that are *not* independent clauses. Therefore, the examples below would be considered *correct* according to some style guides and *incorrect* according to others:

• "I haven't seen **nor** heard from Mike in days."

• "He can't play football **nor** basketball."

• "She said she wasn't going to sing **nor** dance at the party."

For those who consider the above sentences to be incorrect, *or* would be the preferred coordinating conjunction, as in:

• "I haven't seen **or** heard from Mike in days."

• "He can't play football **or** basketball."

• "She said she wasn't going to sing **or** dance at the party."

But

But is used to present a contrast with previous information. It can be used to join an independent clause to a phrase or another independent clause. For example:

• "I want to go shopping **but** I can't."

• "He was upset **but** didn't cry."

• "I would love to travel more, **but** I just don't have the time."

Or

Or is used to present alternative choices or options. For example:

• "Would you like the chicken, the pork, **or** the beef?"

• “Which sport do you think is more exciting, football **or** hockey?”

• “We can go to the movies tonight, **or** we can just hang out at home.”

Yet

Yet, like *but*, is used to present contrast. However, there is a subtle implication when we use *yet* that the information is surprising in light of what we already know. For example:

• “The movie was depressing **yet** uplifting at the same time.”

• “It’s poured rain all day, **yet** they haven’t canceled the football game.”

• “I’ve read thousands of books since high school, **yet** *The Catcher in the Rye* is still my favorite.”

So

So is generally only used to join two independent clauses, where the second clause is a result of the first. For example:

• “He was exhausted, **so** he went to bed early.”

• “She was the most qualified candidate, **so** we gave her the job.”

• “He’s been working harder lately, **so** his grades are improving.”

Punctuation

Between independent clauses

When a coordinating conjunction joins two independent clauses, a comma normally precedes it, as in:

• “They moved into the new house**, and** the neighbors welcomed them warmly.”

• “I’ve never seen that movie**, nor** do I want to see it.”

• “We can go to the movie theater**, or** we can just hang out at home.”

Although it’s never *incorrect* to use a comma between two independent clauses, the comma is optional if the two clauses are very short and concise, and there is no possibility of confusion for the reader. For example:

• “He plays sports, and he’s fit.”

or

• “He plays sports and he’s fit.”

Between words or phrases

When coordinating conjunctions are used to join words or phrases that are not independent clauses, we don’t use a comma. For example:

• “James **and** Jack are coming to the party.”

• “Would you like the chicken **or** the beef?”

• “The movie was depressing **yet** uplifting at the same time.”

Before the last item in a list

A coordinating conjunction, usually *and*, is often used before the last item in a list. When we use a comma before this coordinating conjunction it is called a **serial comma** or **Oxford comma**. There are strong opposing opinions over whether this comma should ever be used. Neither side is right or wrong; it’s simply a stylistic preference. Therefore, all of the following sentences could be considered correct:

• “I like apples, bananas, pears, and figs.
• “I like apples, bananas, pears and figs.

• “She’s smart, beautiful, and witty.”
• She’s smart, beautiful and witty.”

• “We have always wanted to buy a boat, sell everything, and set sail.”
• “We have always wanted to buy a boat, sell everything and set sail.”

It should be noted that certain varieties of English use the serial comma more than others. For example, most American English style guides recommend its use. On the other hand, the majority of British English style guides recommend against it, with the most important exception being the *Oxford Style Manual* (from which the “Oxford comma” received its name).

Beginning a sentence with a coordinating conjunction

Many of us have been taught at some point that we should never begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. However, most grammarians and nearly all style guides state that this is not a grammatical rule, but a personal

preference.

Writers often begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction to emphasize an afterthought, lengthen a pause, or signify a shift in thinking. Commas are not used after coordinating conjunctions when they start sentences. For example:

• “She’s smart and beautiful. **And** she’s witty, too.”

• “We’ve never won anything before. **So** I doubt we’ll win this time.”

• “I think we should get Indian food. **But** maybe I want Italian instead.”

When we do start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction, we must take extra care that the sentence is not a fragment, but contains a subject, verb, and complete thought.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Coordinating conjunctions are used to join _____.

a) words
b) phrases
c) independent clauses
d) A & B
e) all of the above

2. Which of the following words **is not** a coordinating conjunction?

a) for
b) and
c) therefore
d) but

3. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** coordinating conjunction:
“I had studied a lot, _____ I did really well on the test.”

a) so
b) for
c) but
d) yet

4. Which of the following sentences is written **correctly**?

a) “He has hiked, climbed, and kayaked all over the country.”

b) “He has hiked, climbed and kayaked all over the country.”
c) “He has hiked, climbed, and, kayaked all over the country.”
d) A & B
e) All of the above

5. Which of the following sentences is written **correctly**?
a) “I have never seen a bat, nor have I seen an owl.”
b) “I have never seen a bat nor I have seen an owl.”
c) “I have never seen a bat or I have seen an owl.”
d) “I have never seen a bat nor have I seen an owl.”

Correlative Conjunctions

Definition

Correlative conjunctions, or **paired conjunctions**, are sets of conjunctions that are always used together. Like **coordinating conjunctions**, they join words, phrases, or independent clauses of similar or equal importance and structure. Unlike coordinating conjunctions, they can only join two elements together, no more. Some of the most common correlative conjunctions are:

- both … and
- either … or
- just as … so
- neither … nor
- not … but
- not only … but also
- whether … or

Functions of correlative conjunctions

both … and

We use *both … and* when we want to put emphasis on two elements that are true in a sentence. We could also use the coordinating conjunction *and*, but it doesn’t achieve the same emphatic effect. Compare:

• “This house is large and cozy.”

• “This house is **both** large **and** cozy.”

• “She cleaned her room and washed the dishes.”
• “She **both** cleaned her room **and** washed the dishes.”

• “My mother and father are bookworms.”
• “**Both** my mother **and** my father are bookworms.”

In the above examples, the sentences using *both … and* are more emphatic. Note, however, that the *both … and* construction doesn’t join independent clauses, only words or phrases.

either … or

We use *either … or* to present two options. Again, it emphasizes the fact that the choice is limited to only the two given options. For example:

• “I want to paint the house **either** white **or** green.”

• “Let’s **either** go swimming **or** go shopping.”

• “**Either** your father will pick you up, **or** you’ll get a ride home with a friend.”

neither … nor

We use *neither … nor* to negate two options. For example:

• “I have **neither** the time **nor** the patience for silly TV programs.” (I don’t have time, and I don’t have patience.)

• “**Neither** James **nor** Mike enjoys playing basketball.” (James and Mike both do not enjoy playing basketball.)

• “**Neither** does he understand, **nor** does he care.” (He doesn’t understand, and he doesn’t care.)

Note that when *neither* and *nor* begin two independent clauses, we must use **negative inversion** (the reversal of the subject and auxiliary verb) for each, as in the third example.

not … but

We use *not … but* to express a contradiction, negating the first option while emphasizing the second. For example:

• “He’s **not** happy **but** thrilled!”

• “She did **not** like **but** loved her new earrings.”

• “**Not** just one friend turned up to help, **but** the entire team arrived.”

not only … but also

We use *not only … but also* to emphasize an additional element in the sentence, especially when its occurrence seems contradictory or surprising in light of what we already know. For example:

• “This house is **not only** large **but also** cozy.” (The speaker believes that large houses are not usually cozy.)

• “She **not only** cleaned her room, **but she also** washed the dishes.” (The speaker is surprised that she did both chores.)

• “**Not only** is she an award-winning singer, **but** she **also** runs track.” (The speaker is impressed that she is able to do these two unrelated activities.)

Note that when *not only* is used to introduce an independent clause, as in the third example, we must use negative inversion (like with *neither … nor*). When *but* begins the second independent clause, the subject comes between it and *also*.

just as … so

We use *just as … so* to indicate that the two elements being joined are similar. Usually, *just as* begins an independent clause, and *so* is followed by a second independent clause. Traditionally, the clause after *so* should be inverted, as in:

• “**Just as** I love films, **so** *does my brother love* sports.”

• “**Just as** Americans love baseball, **so** *do Europeans love* soccer.”

• “**Just as** French is spoken in France, **so** *is English spoken* in England.”

However, it’s also common (especially in informal writing and speech) for this structure to occur *without* inversion, as in:

• “**Just as** I love films, **so** *my brother loves* sports.”

• “**Just as** Americans love baseball, **so** *Europeans love* soccer.”

• “**Just as** French is spoken in France, **so** *English is spoken* in England.”

whether … or

We use *whether … or* to express doubt between two possible options. *Whether* has the same meaning as *if* in this regard. For example:

• “I don’t know **whether** the white paint **or** the green paint is better.”

• “He’s not sure **whether** he’ll be able to attend the game **or** not.”

We also use *whether … or* to indicate that something will happen no matter which choice is made. For example:

• “**Whether** we stay home and eat a pizza, **or** we go out and watch a film, I’m sure we’ll have a good time.”

• “I’m going to help you **whether** you like it **or** not.”

Using correlative conjunctions

Parallel Structure

When we use correlative conjunctions, it’s important to use **parallel structure**, especially in formal writing. Parallel structure requires both elements that are joined by the correlative conjunction to be equal. For example:

• “This house is **both** *large* **and** *cozy*.” (Two adjectives are joined.)

• “Let’s **either** *go swimming* **or** *go shopping*.” (Two verb phrases are joined.)

• “**Either** *your father will pick you up*, **or** *you’ll get a ride home with a friend*.” (Two independent clauses are joined.)

Using correlative conjunctions to join non-parallel structures is considered incorrect. For example:

✖ “It was both *a long movie* **and** *boring*.” (Incorrect—a noun phrase is joined with an adjective phrase.)

✖ “I’m not sure **whether** *the white paint* **or** *painting it green* would be better.” (Incorrect—a noun phrase is joined with a verb phrase.)

✖ “**Either** *your father will pick you up* **or** *a friend*.” (Incorrect—an independent clause is joined with a noun phrase.)

Although the sentences above may be heard in everyday speech, they are considered incorrect.

Punctuation

When we use a correlative conjunction to join two independent clauses, we separate the two clauses with a comma, as in:

• “**Either** your father will pick you up, **or** you’ll get a ride home with a friend.”

• “**Not only** is she an award-winning singer, **but** she **also** runs track.”

• “She **not only** cleaned her room, **but she also** washed the dishes.”

We generally do not use commas when the two elements being joined *are not* independent clauses. For example:

• “This house is **both** large **and** cozy.”

• “I want to paint the house **either** white **or** green.”

• “**Neither** James **nor** Mike enjoys playing basketball.”

Subject-verb agreement

When we join two subjects with a correlative conjunction, subject-verb agreement can be tricky. Luckily, there are some widely accepted rules to help us.

Two singular subjects

In general, when we join two *singular* subjects using a correlative conjunction, the verb that follows should be singular. For example:

• “Neither the plumber nor the electrician *is* here yet.”

• “Not only Mike but also Daniel *is* coming with us.”

One exception to this rule is when using *both … and*. In this case, we use a plural subject:

• “Both Mike and Daniel *are* coming with us.”

Two plural subjects

When we join two *plural* subjects, the verb that follows should also be plural. For example:

• “Neither the plumbers nor the electricians *are* here yet.”

• “Not only Mike’s friends but also Daniel’s friends *are* coming with us.”

One singular and one plural subject

Sometimes, we join a singular subject to a plural subject. In this case, the majority of style guides state that the verb should agree with the noun that is closest to it. For example:

• “Every day both the cat and the dogs *wake* me up.” (*Wake* is plural because *the*

dogs is plural.)

• “Neither my cousins nor my mom *likes* swimming.” (*Likes* is singular, because *mom* is singular.)

However, there are also those who believe that if *either* of the subjects is plural, then the verb should also be plural. According to this preference, the second sentence above would require the plural form of the verb because the first subject, *my cousins*, is plural:

• “Neither my cousins nor my mom *like* swimming.”

If this is confusing or you’re not sure which style you should use, you can avoid the problem entirely by switching the order of the subjects so that the plural subject comes closest to the verb. In this way, we satisfy both styles:

• “Neither my mom nor my cousins *like* swimming.”

Pronoun agreement

Just as we have to take extra care with subject-verb agreement, we also have to be careful with pronoun agreement when using correlative conjunctions.

Two singular subjects

When we join two *singular* subjects, we should use a singular pronoun. For example:

• “Neither Mike nor Daniel found *his* shoes.”

• “Not only Jen but also Sara lost *her* book.”

Again, *both … and* presents an exception. We normally use a plural pronoun with this correlative conjunction:

• “Both Mike and Daniel found *their* shoes.”

Two plural subjects

When we join two *plural* subjects, we should use a plural pronoun to refer back to them. For example:

• “Neither Mike’s friends nor Daniel’s friends brought *their* shoes.”

• “I don’t know whether the girls or the boys have had *their* breakfast.”

One singular subject and one plural

subject

When we join a singular subject and a plural subject, we run into the same problem that we had with subject-verb agreement. Again, the most widely accepted practice is that the pronoun should agree with whichever noun is closest to it. For example:

• "Neither Mike nor his friends stated *their* opinion." (*Their* agrees with *his friends*.)

• "Neither Mike's friends nor Mike stated *his* opinion." (*His* agrees with *Mike*.)

As with subject-verb agreement, the other side of the argument is that if either of the subjects is plural, the pronoun should be plural. In this case, the second example above would be rewritten as:

• "Neither Mike's friends nor Mike stated *their* opinion."

Again, we can avoid the issue entirely by rewriting the sentence so that the plural subject is closest to the pronoun:

• "Neither Mike nor his friends stated *their* opinion."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Correlative conjunctions are conjunctions that join _____ together.

a) one element
b) two elements
c) three elements
d) three or more elements

2. Which of the following word pairs is **not** a correlative conjunction?

a) either … or
b) neither … nor
c) not only … but also
d) and … but

3. Complete the following sentence with the correct correlative conjunction: "_____ my friend studied a lot _____ he's a genius, because he got an A+ on the test."

a) Either … or

b) Neither … nor
c) Not only ... but also
d) Not … but

4. Complete the following sentence with the correct correlative conjunction: “He’s _____ a great rock climber _____ an expert skier.”

a) just as … so
b) whether … or
c) not only … but also
d) all of the above

5. Which of the following sentences **must** have a comma?

a) “Not only Mike but also Daniel is coming with us.”
b) “I think that we should not only go skiing but also go kayaking.”
c) “The house is not only large but also cozy.”
d) “Not only do I need you to come home early but I also need you to pick up dinner.”

Subordinating Conjunctions

Definition

Subordinating conjunctions are used to create **complex sentences** containing one **independent clause**, or **main clause**, and one **dependent**, or **subordinate**, clause. The subordinating conjunction does two things: it introduces and **subordinates** the dependent clause (telling the reader that it’s less important than the independent clause), and it explains what relationship it has to the independent clause. Consider the following example:

• “I went to the supermarket. We were out of milk.”

Both of these sentences can stand on their own. However, there is no clear relationship between them. Instead, we can join them together with a subordinating conjunction, which would sound more natural:

• “I went to the supermarket **since** we were out of milk.”

The subordinating conjunction *since* transforms the second clause from an independent clause into a dependent clause—it *subordinates* it. “*Since we were out of milk*” can no longer stand alone, but is dependent on the independent

clause that it’s now connected to.

The word *since* also clarifies that the relationship between the two clauses is one of cause and effect, and it tells the reader that the independent clause, “*I went to the supermarket*,” is more important.

Structure and punctuation

When we use subordinating conjunctions to join two clauses, it doesn’t matter which clause comes first: the subordinating conjunction may appear either at the beginning or in the middle of the new sentence. Therefore, the following two sentences are both correct:

• “I went to the supermarket **since** we were out of milk.”

• “**Since** we were out of milk, I went to the supermarket.”

Note that if when we place the subordinate conjunction in the middle of the sentence, as in the *first* example, we normally *don’t* need a comma. On the other hand, when we place the subordinating conjunction at the beginning of the sentence, as in the *second* example, we normally *do* need to use a comma.

For the sake of consistency, the independent clause will appear first in the examples we look at below, but remember that this order is reversible.

Functions of subordinating conjunctions

As mentioned, one of the jobs of a subordinating conjunction is to establish the relationship between the two clauses—which conjunction we use depends on the nature of that relationship. Below are some of the most common subordinating conjunctions and their functions:

Cause	Comparison / Concession	Condition	Place	Reason	Time
as	(just) as	even if	where	in order that	after
because	although	if	wherever	so that	before
since	even though	as long as			as soon as

	though	in case			once
	whereas	provided that			until
	while	providing			when
					whenever
					while

Examples of subordinating conjunctions

Cause

We use *as*, *because*, and *since* interchangeably to state the cause of something. For example:

• “The project was successful **as** you all worked very hard.”

• “The project was successful **because** you all worked very hard.”

• “The project was successful **since** you all worked very hard.”

Each of the three examples expresses the same causal relationship, although *as* is a bit more formal in tone than *because* or *since*.

Comparison and concession

Similarities

We can use *as* to state that two ideas are similar. We can also use *just as* to add extra emphasis to this statement. For example:

• “It’s pouring rain, **as** I thought it would.”

• “She was late again, **just as** we expected.”

• “He didn’t turn up, **as** you told me he wouldn’t.”

Note that the examples above flow better with a comma, even though the

subordinating conjunction is not in the initial position.

Expressing contrasts and concessions

While and *whereas* both express contrast. For example:

• “My brother worked really hard, **while** I didn’t make much of an effort.”

• “I can’t stand watching tennis, **whereas** I love watching basketball.”

While and *whereas* can be used interchangeably, but *whereas* is often considered more formal. Note also that, like with *(just) as* above, we use a comma between the clauses even though these subordinating conjunctions are not in the initial position.

We use *although, though,* and *even though* to say that something occurred in spite of something else. *Though* and *although* are interchangeable, while *even though* adds extra emphasis. For example:

• “I went to that restaurant **though/although** I was told it wasn’t very good.”

• “I went to that restaurant **even though** I was told it wasn’t very good.”

Condition

We use the subordinating conjunctions *even if, if, as long as, in case, provided that,* and *providing* when referring to a **hypothetical** situation.

If is the most common conjunction for hypothetical sentences. We use it when one action is required for another to occur. For example:

• “I will buy you a pizza **if** you help me move my furniture.”

• “You should buy a new TV **if** you get a bigger apartment.”

As long as, provided, provided that, and *providing* all mean the same as *if,* but they emphasize the requirement of the conditional action. We can use them interchangeably:

• “I will buy you a pizza **as long as/provided** you help me move my furniture.” (I will *only* buy you a pizza if you help me.)

• “You should buy a new TV **providing/provided that** you get a bigger apartment.” (You should *only* buy a new TV if you get a bigger apartment.)

We use **even if** when an outcome will occur despite a hypothetical action. For example:

• “I will buy you a pizza **even if** you don’t help me move my furniture.” (I will

buy the pizza anyway.)

• “He’s going to pass his test **even if** he doesn’t study.” (He will pass despite not studying.)

We use *in case* to suggest a precaution against a hypothetical possibility. For example:

• “I’m bringing an umbrella **in case** it starts raining.” (I’m worried it might rain, so I’m bringing an umbrella.)

• “She put her phone on silent **in case** it rang during the movie.” (She was concerned her phone would ring in the middle of the movie, so she silenced it.)

Place

When the dependent clause is related to a place, we use *where* and *wherever*, but they are not interchangeable.

For most situations, we use *where*, as in:

• “He lives **where** it’s always sunny.” (He lives in a place that is sunny.)

• “Can we go **where** it’s a little quieter?” (Can we go to a place that is quieter?)

We use *wherever* to emphasize that we mean any or every place, rather than a specific location. For example:

• “I want to go **wherever** it’s quieter.” (I want to go to any place quieter; I don’t mind where.)

• “He bikes **wherever** he goes.” (He bikes to every place that he goes.)

Reason

We use *in order that, so that,* and *so* to give a reason. They are interchangeable in meaning, but differ in formality. Compare the following sentences:

• “Our boss asked us to take detailed notes **in order that** nothing would be forgotten.” (formal)

• “Our boss asked us to take detailed notes **so that** nothing would be forgotten.” (neutral)

• “Our boss asked us to take detailed notes **so** nothing would be forgotten.” (less formal)

Time

Previously

To state that the action of the independent clause occurred first, we use *before*. For example:

• “I went shopping **before** I came home.” (I went shopping first.)

• “He won first prize in a spelling bee **before** starting fifth grade.” (He won the prize first.)

Concurrently

When two actions occur at the same time, there are several subordinating conjunctions we can use, but each has a slightly different meaning. If we are not adding any particular emphasis, we use *when*:

• “I was sleeping **when** the phone rang.”

• “I saw my brother **when** he was out with his friends.”

However, to emphasize that two actions occurred (or will occur) at exactly the same time, or in rapid succession, we use *once* or *as soon as*:

• “Please clean your room **once** you get home.”

• “Call me back **as soon as** you can.”

Subsequently

When the action of the independent clause happens second in a series of actions, we use *after*:

• “I went shopping **after** I finished work.” (I finished work first, then went shopping.)

• “He won first prize in a spelling bee **after** he started fifth grade.” (He started fifth grade first, then won a spelling bee.)

Up to a certain time

To state that one action stops when another one begins, we use *until*. For example:

• “He ran track **until** he moved here.” (He stopped running track when he moved here.)

• “You can borrow my jacket until I need it.” (You must stop using it when I

need it.)

Any time or every time

Finally, we use *whenever* to state that the time doesn't matter, or that two actions always happen together. For example:

• "Call me **whenever** you get home." (Call me when you get home, but I don't mind when that is.)

• "She cries **whenever** she sees a sad movie." (She cries every time she sees a sad movie.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Subordinating conjunctions are conjunctions that join _____ together.

a) two words
b) two independent clauses
c) an independent clause and a dependent clause
d) A & B

2. Which of the following words **is not** a subordinating conjunction?

a) and
b) if
c) when
d) because

3. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** subordinating conjunction: "You can only play outside _____ your father gets home."

a) because
b) whereas
c) until
d) in case

4. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** subordinating conjunction: "I'd rather not see that movie again _____ we just saw it last week."

a) where
b) as soon as

c) though
d) because

5. Which of the following sentences is punctuated **correctly**?

a) “He worked harder in order that he would get the promotion.”
b) “In order that he would get the promotion he worked harder.”
c) “In order that he would get the promotion, he worked harder.”
d) A & B
e) A & C

Other parts of speech

In addition to the seven **primary** parts of speech—**nouns**, **pronouns**, **verbs**, **adjectives**, **adverbs**, **prepositions**, and **conjunctions**—there are several classes of words that have unique grammatical functions but do not fit neatly into a single specific category. They often share characteristics with one or more other parts of speech, but do not properly belong to the same class.

We’ll give a brief introduction to these **other parts of speech** below; continue on to their individual sections to learn more about each.

Particles

A **particle** is a word that does not have semantic meaning on its own, but instead relies on the word it is paired with to have meaning. It is very similar to a preposition—in fact, they are almost always identical in appearance. However, prepositions are used to establish a relationship between their objects and another part of a sentence, while particles are only used to create **infinitives** and to form certain **phrasal verbs**.

Articles

There are three grammatical **articles**: *the*, *a*, and *an* (though *a* and *an* are sometimes considered a single article with two forms).

The **definite article** *the* is used to identify a specific or unique person, place, or thing, while the **indefinite articles** *a* and *an* identify nonspecific or generic people, places, or things.

Determiners

Determiners are used to introduce a noun or noun phrase and give determining information about it. Determiners often behave similarly to **adjectives** in that they modify the noun they precede, but they differ in how they signal that a noun will follow.

Gerunds

Gerunds are nouns that are formed from verbs. They are identical in appearance to present participles (the base form of the verb + "-ing").

Because they function as nouns, gerunds can be subjects or objects, and they can also act as **adjective complements**.

Interjections

Interjections are words, phrases, or sounds used to convey emotions such as surprise, excitement, happiness, or anger. They are grammatically unrelated to any other part of a sentence, so they are set apart by commas. They are also often used alone as **minor sentences**.

Particles

Definition

A **particle** is a word that does not have semantic meaning on its own, but instead relies on the word it is paired with to have meaning. A particle cannot **inflect**—that is, its form does not change to reflect grammatical person, number, case, gender, tense, mood, aspect, or voice.

A particle is very similar to a preposition—in fact, they are almost always identical in appearance. However, prepositions are used to establish a relationship between their objects and another part of a sentence, and so they have a unique lexical meaning of their own. Particles, on the other hand, are only used to create **infinitives** and to form **phrasal verbs**.

Infinitive *to*

The particle *to* is the only particle in English that can be used to create the **infinitive form** of a verb.

To is paired with the **base form** (uninflected form) of a verb to create the

infinitive, which can function as a noun, adjective, or adverb. For example:

• "**To love** another person is a wonderful thing." (noun—subject)

• "I would like **to be** alone." (noun—direct object)

• "I'm going to the store **to buy** milk." (adverb—modifies the verb *going*)

• "This is a good place ***to start*** **reading**." (adjective—modifies the noun *place*)

(Go to the section on **Infinitives** in the **Verbs** chapter to learn more about how they are used.)

Phrasal Verbs

A **phrasal verb** consists of a verb followed by either a preposition or a particle to create a unique, idiomatic meaning. Since particles and prepositions look identical, it can be tricky to know when a phrasal verb is using one or the other.

However, particles are used more like adverbs, modifying and uniquely expanding the meaning of the verbs they are paired with. For this reason, particles are sometimes referred to as adverbial particles, or even just adverbs. The key difference between particles and prepositions is that particles do not (and cannot) introduce a **prepositional phrase**, while the preposition in a phrasal verb always will.

Take the following sentence, for example:

• "My table **takes up** too much room." (The table occupies too much space.)

Takes up is made up of the verb *take* + *up*. *Up* changes the meaning of the verb, but it does not introduce a prepositional phrase expressing direction, location, time, or possession—therefore, it is functioning as a particle.

Let's look at another example:

• "Please **look over** the proposal and let me know what you think." (Please quickly examine the proposal.)

Again, the particle *over* is changing the meaning of the verb *look*, but it is not introducing a prepositional phrase.

Here are some other examples of phrasal verbs formed with particles:

• "I can't believe that you're **giving up**!" (I'm surprised that you're going to stop trying.)

• "We have to wait for the fire to **die down** before we can enter the building." (We have to wait for the fire to become less intense.)

• “The plane **took off** an hour late.” (The plane began its flight later than scheduled.)

• “She is always **making up** excuses.” (She is always inventing excuses that are not true.)

Now let’s look at some examples of phrasal verbs made with **prepositions** so we can see the difference more clearly:

• “He has been **looking *after*** *his mother*.” (He has been caring for his mother.)

• “I **came *across*** *that old watch* of mine when I was cleaning out the drawers.” (I found my old watch unexpectedly.)

• “Stop **picking *on*** *your brother* like that!” (Stop teasing or harassing your brother in that way.)

We can see that the phrasal verb in each of the above examples is formed using a preposition rather than a particle, because the information that comes immediately after the phrasal verb completes a prepositional phrase (in *italics*). Without these prepositional phrases, the sentences would be incomplete.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the only particle that can be used to create **infinitives**?

a) on
b) in
c) to
d) with

2. Which of the following is something a particle **cannot** do?

a) Conjugate to reflect tense
b) Introduce a prepositional phrase
c) Pair with a noun or adjective
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

3. Is the word in **italics** in the following sentence functioning as a particle or a preposition?
“My husband **cared *for*** me while I was sick.”

a) Particle
b) Preposition

4. Is the *italicized* word in the phrasal verb (in **bold**) in the following sentence functioning as a particle or a preposition?
“We’re looking for a substitute teacher to **fill *in*** next semester.”

a) Particle
b) Preposition

Articles

Definition

Articles identify whether a noun is **definite** (specific or particular) or **indefinite** (general or unspecific). For this reason, articles are divided into two categories: the **definite article**, *the*, and the **indefinite articles**, *a* and *an*.

The

The definite article *the* is used to identify a specific person, place, or thing. For instance:

• “I’m looking forward to **the** game.” (There is a specific game that the speaker is looking forward to.)

• “Would you pass me **the** phone?” (There is a specific phone that the speaker is asking for.)

• “She turned on **the** lamp next to her bed.” (There is a specific lamp next to her bed that she turned on.)

• “He’s going to **the** play later.” (There is a specific play that he is going to see.)

We can also use *the* to refer to plural nouns, when they are being referenced specifically, as in:

• “**The** dogs next door keep me awake with their barking.”

• “She’s looking for **the** papers she printed last night.”

• “I see that **the** students have already arrived.”

A/An

A and *an*, on the other hand, are used to identify a person or thing that is unspecific or generic—the speaker is not referring to someone or something in particular, or the person or thing may not be specifically known to the speaker. Unlike *the*, *a/an* can only be used before **singular** nouns. For instance:

• “I’m looking for **a** pen.” (There is not a specific pen that the speaker is looking for.)

• “Would you please turn on **a** light?” (There is not a specific light the speaker is asking to be turned on.)

• “There is **an** angry student waiting to speak with you.” (Although there is a particular student, he or she is unknown to the speaker.)

• “I’m waiting for **an** answer.” (There is not one specific answer the speaker is waiting for.)

Other parts of speech

Articles always modify nouns. For this reason, they are often considered a sub-class of **determiners**. However, an article can also precede a **noun phrase**, even if it begins with an adjective or an adverb. For example:

• “That was **an *exciting night***.” (noun phrase beginning with an adjective)

• “**The *truly remarkable thing*** is how long the deal took to happen.” (noun phrase beginning with an adverb)

Articles **can’t** precede verbs, however, as verbs are not used to create noun phrases.

Vowel Sounds vs. Consonant Sounds

We use the indefinite article *a* when it precedes a word beginning with a consonant sound, and we use *an* when the article precedes a word beginning with a vowel sound. Note that this rule applies to the sound of the noun, rather than the specific spelling. For example:

✖ “What **a *unusual*** discovery!” (incorrect)
✔ “What **an *unusual*** discovery!” (Correct—the word begins with the vowel “u,” and it makes the vowel sound “uh.”)

✖ “What **an *unique*** discovery!” (incorrect)
✔ “What **a *unique*** discovery!” (Correct—the word begins with the vowel “u,” but it makes the consonant sound “yu.”)

✖ “It is **a *honor*** to meet you.” (incorrect)
✔ “It is **an *honor*** to meet you.” (Correct—the word begins with the consonant “h,” but it makes the vowel sound “ah.”)

✖ “There was **an *heap*** of food left over.” (incorrect)
✔ “There was **a *heap*** of food left over.” (Correct—the word begins with the consonant “h,” and it makes the consonant sound “he.”)

Here are a few other examples where a word’s spelling goes against its pronunciation:

- **an *hour*** — makes the vowel sound “ow”
- **an *honest man*** — makes the vowel sound “awh”
- **a *university*** — makes the consonant sound “yu”
- **a *European* citizen** — makes the consonant sound “yu”
- **a *once-in-a-life-time* chance** — makes the consonant sound “wuh”

Herbs and History

One area of difficulty comes from dialectical differences between different speakers of English.

For example, the word *herb* is pronounced as “erb” (ɜːrb) in American English, with a silent “h,” so we would say “an herb.” However, in British English, *herb* is pronounced with a hard consonant “h” as “herb” (hɜːb), so “a herb” would be correct.

Similarly, some people pronounce the word “historic” and “historically” with a silent “h” in certain contexts. It is not unusual to read or hear “an historic moment” or “an historically important event,” for instance. Uniquely, the “h” is **never** silent if these words are preceded by anything other than an indefinite article, as in “the moment is historic” or “the historically significant moment.”

Some writers and grammarians believe it is never correct to pronounce *historic* or *historically* with a silent “h,” though, insisting that it can only take the indefinite article *a*, rather than *an*. In more formal or professional writing, it is advisable to follow this more strict guideline and always use the indefinite article *a*.

There are plenty of other oddities regarding spelling and pronunciation in the English language. To learn more about the various conventions, exceptions, and irregularities, see the guide on **English Spelling and Pronunciation**.

Other uses

Identifying a profession

In addition to identifying an unspecific noun, we also use the indefinite article *a/an* to talk or inquire about someone’s profession.

For example:

✖ “Are you teacher?” (incorrect)

✔ “Are you **a** teacher?” (correct)

✖ “John is engineer.” (incorrect)
✔ “John is **an** engineer.” (correct)

We only use the definite article *the* if we are referring to a particular person in that profession. For instance:

• “Are you *a* doctor?” (Unspecific—inquires about the person’s profession in general.)
• “Are you **the** doctor?” (Specific—inquires if this person is a particular doctor that the speaker was waiting or looking for.)

• “Mary is *a* technician for the gas company.” (Unspecific—Mary’s general profession is as a technician for the specific gas company.)
• “Mary is **the** technician for the gas company.” (Specific—Mary is either the *sole* technician for the gas company, or else she is a specific technician the speaker is referencing.)

Uncountable nouns

In addition to **plural nouns**, the indefinite article *a/an* cannot be used with **uncountable nouns** (also known as **mass nouns** or **non-count nouns**). These are nouns that cannot be divided or counted as individual elements or separate parts. They can be tangible objects (such as substances or collective categories of things), or intangible or abstract things such as concepts or ideas.

For example:

✖ “Would you like ***a*** **tea**?” (incorrect)
✔ “Would you like **tea**?” (correct)

✖ “Do you have ***an*** **information**?” (incorrect)
✔ “Do you have (***some/any***) **information**?” (correct)

(We often use the words *some* or *any* to indicate an unspecified quantity of uncountable nouns.)

Uncountable nouns can sometimes take the definite article *the*, as in:

• “Have you heard ***the*** **news**?”

• “***The*** **furniture** in my living room is old.”

However, this is only the case if a specific uncountable noun is being described. For example:

✖ “I am looking for ***an*** **accommodation**.” (incorrect)

✖ “I am looking for ***the*** **accommodation**.” (incorrect)
✔ “I am looking for **accommodation**.” (correct)
✔ “I am looking for ***the*** **accommodation** listed in this advertisement.” (correct—references specific accommodation)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which article is usually used when something specific is being referenced?

a) the
b) a
c) an

2. Complete the following sentence with the correct article:
“I know you have ___ long way to travel.”

a) the
b) a
c) an

3. Complete the following sentence with the correct article:
“Have you seen ___ blue pen that I like.”

a) the
b) a
c) an

4. Which of the following can the indefinite article *a/an* **not** precede?

a) noun phrases
b) adjectives
c) adverbs
d) uncountable nouns
e) all of the above
f) none of the above

5. Which of the following can the definite article *the* **not** precede?

a) noun phrases
b) adjectives
c) adverbs

d) uncountable nouns
e) all of the above
f) none of the above

Determiners

Definition

Determiners are used to introduce a noun or noun phrase. There are several classes of determiners: **articles, demonstrative adjectives, possessive adjectives, interrogative adjectives, distributive determiners, pre-determiners, quantifiers**, and **numbers**.

Determiners do two things. First, they signal that a noun or noun phrase will follow. Then, they give information about the item. They may tell us whether the item is general or specific, near or far, singular or plural; they can also quantify the item, describing how much or how many are referred to; or they can tell us to whom the item belongs. We'll look at each class of determiners separately.

Articles

There are two types of articles in English: the **definite article**, *the*, and the **indefinite article**, *a/an*. We're just going to cover the basic rules regarding when to use definite and indefinite articles. If you would like to learn more, please see the section on **Articles**.

The

In general, we use the definite article, *the*, to refer to an item or individual that is specific and unique. For example:

• "Close **the** *door* quietly; the baby is sleeping." (There is a specific door.)

• "Please pass **the** *salt*." (The speaker is requesting specific salt.)

• "Jen is **the** *woman* wearing red." (There is a unique individual wearing red clothing who is identified as Jen.)

A/an

The indefinite article, *a/an*, is used to precede a noun that is *not* a specific person, place, or thing. Instead, it indicates that it is a general member of a class

of nouns. For example:

• “I’d love to have **a** *pet dog*.” (No specific or unique dog is being discussed.)

• “I heard that **a** *famous musician* is going to be there.” (The musician is unspecified because he or she is unknown.)

• “She had never been in **an** *airplane* before.” (The speaker is talking about airplanes in general, rather than a specific aircraft.)

Note that *a* is used before consonant sounds, and *an* is used before vowel sounds.

Demonstrative Adjectives

Demonstrative adjectives, or **demonstrative determiners**, are used to specify which item or individual is being referred to when it could be confused with others of the same type. There are four demonstrative adjectives, which we choose from based on whether they introduce a singular noun or a plural noun, and whether the item is near or far in relation to the speaker.

	Near	**Far**
Singular	this	that
Plural	these	those

For example:

• “**This** *pen* is mine.” (The pen is nearby, perhaps in my hand.)

• “**That** *pen*is mine.” (The pen is far away, perhaps across the room.)

• “**These** *pens* are mine.” (The pens are nearby.)

• “**Those** *pens* are mine.” (The pens are far away.)

To learn more, go to the section on **Demonstrative Adjectives** in the chapter about **Adjectives**.

Possessive Adjectives

Possessive adjectives, also known as **possessive determiners**, are used to indicate whom an item belongs to. The possessive adjectives are:

	Singular	**Plural**

1st person	my	our
2nd person	your	your
3rd person	his / her / its	their

For example:

• “**My** *house* is on Steven Street.” (The house belongs to me.)

• “Please give your sister back **her** *pencil*.” (The pencil belongs to her.)

• “Look at the dog! **Its** *tail* is wagging like crazy!” (The tail belongs to the dog.)

• “Can you fix the table? **Its** *leg* is wobbly.”* (The leg belongs to the table.)

*Note that according to certain styles, *its* is typically only used when the owner is **animate**, such as *the dog* in the example above. To avoid using *its* with inanimate objects, some writers would use the … of the … structure. For example:

• “The *leg of the table* is wobbly. Can you fix it?”

In addition to the possessive adjectives listed, we can also create possessive determiners from nouns using **apostrophes**. We attach the possessive apostrophe to the end of the noun or pronoun that names the owner. If the noun is singular, the apostrophe is usually followed by an “s.”

This possessive noun introduces and modifies the owned object, and so it is considered a determiner as well. For example:

• “Dave**’s** *car* could use a bit of work.” (The car belongs to Dave.)

• “Could you help me find Jen**’s** *keys* for her?” (The keys belong to Jen.)

• “My parents**’** *house* is on a beautiful lake.” (The house belongs to my parents.)

To learn more about using apostrophes to indicate possession, see the chapter on **Apostrophes**.

Interrogative Adjectives

Like all adjectives, **interrogative adjectives** (also known as **interrogative determiners**) modify nouns and pronouns. English has three interrogative adjectives: *what, which,* and *whose*. They are called “interrogative” because they are usually used to ask questions. For example:

• “**What** book are you reading?

• “**Which** shirt are you going to buy?”

• “**Whose** computer is this?”

In each of the examples, the interrogative adjective modifies the noun it immediately precedes: *book, shirt,* and *computer*.

To learn more, please see the section on **Interrogative Adjectives** in the chapter about **Adjectives**.

Distributive Determiners

Distributive determiners, also known as **distributive adjectives**, are used to refer to individual members within a group or within a pair. The distributive determiners are *each, every, either* and *neither*. They are used to modify singular nouns or noun phrases.

Each

Each is used when one condition applies to all members of a group equally. For example:

• “**Each** *student* must attend a meeting with a guidance counselor.”

• “**Each** *person* in my family does a fair share of the chores.”

• “Please give a pen and paper to **each** attendee.”

Every

Every is also used when a condition applies to all members of a group. It can normally be used interchangeably with *each*. For example:

• “**Every** *student* must attend a meeting with a guidance counselor.”

• “**Every** *person* in my family does a fair share of the chores.”

• “Please give a pen and paper to **every** attendee.”

However, *every* puts a slight emphasis on the group as a whole, while *each* emphasizes the individual.

Either

Either is used when a condition applies to one or the other in a pair. When we

use *either*, we imply that there are two options.

• “**Either** girl could win this competition.” (There are two girls. One will win.)

• “We could give the new collar to **either** dog.” (There are two dogs. One will receive the new collar.)

• “**Either** book would be a great present.” (There are two books. One will be chosen as a gift.)

Neither

We use *neither* to state that not one or the other option is viable. For example:

• “**Neither** book would be a great present.” (There are two books; both would be unsuitable as gifts.)

• “**Neither table** will fit in our kitchen.” (There are two tables; both are too large for the kitchen.)

• “**Neither** question is easily answered.” (There are two questions; both have difficult answers.)

Pre-determiners

Pre-determiners are words that come before *another determiner* to give us more information about the noun that follows. They usually come before the articles *a/an* and *the*. Pre-determiners can be **multipliers, fractions, intensifiers**, or the words *both* and *all*.

Multipliers

Multipliers are words and expressions that modify uncountable nouns and plural countable nouns by multiplying quantity. For example:

• “I now earn **double** my previous wage.”

• “For this recipe, we need **three times** the sugar.”

• “This airplane holds **twice** the passengers as the other model.”

Fractions

Fractions are similar to multipliers, but instead of multiplying the quantity of the noun, they divide it. We usually use *of* between the fractional expression and the other determiner, but it is not always necessary. For example:

• “I used to earn **half (of)** *my* current salary.”

• “For this recipe, we need **a quarter (of)** *the* sugar as last time.”

• “**One-tenth of** *the* respondents answered ‘yes’ to my question.” (*Of* is necessary in this construction.)

Intensifiers

The most common intensifiers are *what, quite, rather,* and *such*. For example:

• “**What** a gorgeous horse!”

• “She’s **such** a sweet girl.”

• “It’s **quite** a beautiful house, don’t you think?”

• “They’re **rather** a nice group of students.”

Usage note: The words *quite* and *rather*, when used as intensifiers, are much more common in certain varieties of English than in others. For example, British English uses them often, while American English uses them much less frequently.

Both & all

Both and *all* can also occur as pre-determiners. *Both* is used when we refer to two out of two options, while *all* is used to refer to an entire amount. We often use *of* between *both/all* and the other determiner, but it is not required. For example:

• “**Both** (of) my brothers are coming with me.” (I have two brothers, and each one is coming.)

• “**Both** (of) the books have beautiful illustrations.” (There are two books and each one has beautiful illustrations.)

• “**All** (of) my brothers are coming with me.” (I have several brothers; every one of them is coming.)

• “**All** (of) the books have beautiful illustrations.” (There are many books, and they all have beautiful illustrations.)

Quantifiers

Quantifiers are used to indicate the number or quantity of the noun being referred to. The quantifier we choose depends on whether it introduces a

countable noun (sometimes called a **count noun**), or an **uncountable noun** (also known as a **mass noun**). Below, we'll look at some of the most common quantifiers:

With countable nouns

These are some of the most common quantifiers for countable nouns only, listed in order from largest to smallest quantity:

- many
- each
- several
- a few*
- a couple (of)
- both
- few*
- not many
- none of the

Note that when we use quantifiers with countable nouns, we use the plural form of the noun after the quantifier.

For example:

• "There are **many** *private schools* in this town."

• "**Both** *girls* went to the party."

• "**Not many** *people* came to the book launch."

*Usage Note: There is an important distinction between *a few* and *few*. While *a few* has a more positive connotation of signifying that there is enough of an item, *few* has the more negative connotation of signifying that there is not enough of an item. Compare the following two sentences:

• "There were **a few** *people* at the meeting." (more positive)

• "There were **few** *people* at the meeting." (more negative)

With uncountable nouns

These are some of the most common quantifiers for uncountable nouns only, in order from largest to smallest quantity:

- a good/great deal of (formal)

- a load of / loads of / heaps of / tons of (informal)
- a lot of (neutral)
- a (little) bit of
- a little*
- little*
- not much

For example:

• “We have **a lot of** *coffee* already, so don’t buy anymore.”

• “Could you lend me **a bit of** *sugar*?”

• “**Not much** *effort* is needed.”

*Usage Note: *A little* and *little* have the same important distinction as *a few* and *few*. *A little* has the positive connotation of signifying that there is enough of an item, while *little* has the negative connotation of indicating that there is not enough. Compare the following two sentences:

• “We still have **a little** milk left.” (We have enough, but not much.)

• “We have **little** milk left.” (We need more.)

With either countable or uncountable nouns

Finally, these are some of the most common quantifiers that can be used with either countable or uncountable nouns:

- all of the
- most of the
- a lot of / lots of / plenty of
- enough
- some
- a lack of
- no

For example:

• “**All of the** *recipes* call for sugar.” (countable)
• “**All of the** *sugar* is needed.” (uncountable)

• “Don’t worry, we have **enough** *cars* to get us all there.” (countable)
• “Don’t worry, we have **enough** *time* to get there.” (uncountable)

Numbers

Numbers can also be determiners when they are used to introduce and modify a noun. Both **cardinal numbers** (numbers signifying an amount of something) and **ordinal numbers** (numbers signifying rank or position in a list) are able to function in this way.

Cardinal numbers

Cardinal numbers are used to count the specific quantity of a noun. As such, they can only be used with countable nouns.

In writing, a common rule is to spell out the numbers *one* through *nine*, and use **numerals** for the numbers *10* and higher. For example:

• “My father’s company has **10** *cars* and **20** *drivers*.”

• “I’m taking **12** *shirts* and **three** *pairs of jeans* on my vacation.”

• “There were **160** *participants* in the competition.”

An alternate rule is to spell out one-word numbers and use numerals for multi-word numbers. So, the examples above would be rewritten:

• “My father’s company has **ten** *cars* and **twenty drivers**.”

• “I’m taking **twelve** *shirts* and **three** *pairs of jeans* on my vacation.”

• “There were **160** *participants* in the competition.”

However, there are many variations of style for writing numbers. In the end, it is best to be consistent, or to follow the style guide best suited to the type of writing you are doing.

Ordinal Numbers

Ordinal numbers do not represent quantity, but are used to indicate the rank or position of a noun in a list or series. They have two written forms: spelled out, or *numeral + suffix*:

Spelling	Numeral & Suffix
first	1st

second	2nd
third	3rd
fourth	4th
fifth	5th
sixth	6th
seventh	7th
eighth	8th
ninth	9th
tenth	10th
eleventh	11th
twelfth	12th
thirteenth	13th
fourteenth	14th
fifteenth	15th
sixteenth	16th
seventeenth	17th
eighteenth	18th
nineteenth	19th
twentieth	20th
twenty-second	22nd
twenty-third	23rd
twenty-fourth	24th

thirtieth	30th
fiftieth	50th
hundredth	100th

Note that numbers ending in *one*, *two*, and *three* have different suffixes than the rest of the numbers. A common rule in writing is to spell out *first* through *ninth* and to use the *numeral + suffix* for numbers *10* and higher. For example:

• "He won **first** *prize*!"

• "I went to Las Vegas for my **30th** *birthday*."

• "I was the **42nd** *person* in line."

An alternate rule is to spell out one-word ordinal numbers, but to use the *numeral + suffix* equivalent for multi-word ordinal numbers. So, the examples above would be written as follows:

• "He won **first** *prize*!"

• "I went to Las Vegas for my **thirtieth** *birthday*."

• "I was the **42nd** *person* in line."

Again, no matter which way you choose to write them, the key is to be consistent.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Determiners introduce _____.

a) verbs
b) nouns
c) adjectives
d) clauses

2. Which of the following words **cannot** function as a determiner?

a) some
b) the
c) when
d) ten

3. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** determiner:
“Can you buy _____ more sugar? We don’t have much left.”

a) ten
b) a
c) the
d) some

4. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** determiner:
“I’m afraid we need to go shopping. There’s very _____ milk left.”

a) little
b) much
c) a lot
d) some

5. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** determiner:
“Please give me _____ glass of water. I can’t reach it.”

a) this
b) that
c) these
d) those

Possessive Determiners

Definition

Possessive determiners, also known as **possessive adjectives**, are a class of **determiners** that are used to modify nouns to denote possession. They take the place of the definite article *the*, and state *whom* or *what* an item belongs to. We use a different possessive determiner to correspond with each **personal pronoun**. The main possessive determiners in English are:

Personal Pronoun	Possessive Determiner
I	**my**
you	**your**
he	**his**

she	**her**
it	**its**
we	**our**
they	**their**

The word *whose* and the structure *noun + possessive apostrophe* also function as possessive determiners, as we will see.

Using Possessive Determiners

Sentence placement

Possessive determiners are usually placed <u>in front</u> of the noun they modify. For example:

• “You remember Hannah, right? This is **her** *brother*, Richard.”

• “Please return **my** *books* as soon as possible.”

• “Have they found **their** *tickets* yet?”

• “The Earth spins on **its*** *axis*.”

If the noun is further modified by one or more other determiners, the possessive determiner is placed first. For example:

• “You remember Hannah, right? This is **her** <u>little</u> *brother*, Richard.”

• “Please return **my** <u>three library</u> *books* as soon as possible.”

• “Have they found **their** <u>train</u> *tickets* yet?”

• “The Earth spins on **its** <u>invisible</u> *axis*.”

(*Usage Note: A common mistake is to use an apostrophe with the word *it* when we want to indicate possession. *It’s* is a **contraction** that we use instead of writing out *it is* or *it has*. If we want to denote possession, we must use *its* <u>without</u> an apostrophe.)

Whose*

Whose is used as a possessive determiner in **interrogative sentences** to inquire about possession, as well as in indirect questions when the identity of the owner

is unknown. For example:

• “**Whose** *coat* is this?”

• “Do you know **whose** *idea* this was?”

• “I need to find out **whose** *car* this is. They keep parking in my spot.”

(*Usage Note: Similar to the issue with *its*, a common mistake is to use *who’s* rather than *whose* when we want to inquire about possession. *Who’s* is a contraction of *who is*; if we want to denote possession, we must use the possessive determiner *whose*.

The possessive apostrophe

We can form possessive determiners from other pronouns, nouns, and noun phrases by adding the **possessive apostrophe** + “s” (or just the apostrophe for plural nouns). For example:

• “Caring for **one’s** *family* is very important.”

• “**Hannah’s** *car* is parked outside; she must have already arrived.”

• “The former **Attorney General’s** *recommendations* were included in the report.”

• “Our school takes **parents’** concerns very seriously.”

Differences with possessive pronouns

Possessive determiners are often confused with **possessive personal pronouns** (*mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs*). Although some of the forms overlap, there are important distinctions between the two types of possessives.

While possessive pronouns can stand on their own, taking the place of a noun, possessive determiners cannot. For example:

• Speaker A: “Whose is this book?”
✔ Speaker B: “It’s **mine**.” (correct)
✖ Speaker B: “It’s **my**.” (incorrect)

The second example is incorrect because possessive determiners, such as *my*, can modify a noun, but cannot replace one. We would need to include the noun *book* in order to use the possessive determiner, as in:

• Speaker A: “Whose is this book?”
✔ Speaker B: “It’s **my** *book*.” (correct)

Note, however, that possessive determiners formed using "*-'s*" can function both as determiners **and** pronouns, as in:

• Speaker A: "Whose is this book?"
✔ Speaker B: "It's **Jane's** *book*." (correct)
or
✔ Speaker B: "It's **Jane's**." (correct)

Another distinction is that although the structure *of + possessive pronoun* can be used to create a possessive sentence, a possessive determiner gives the noun a more definite meaning. Compare the following two sentences:

• "A *friend of mine* is going to come with us."

• "**My** *friend* is going to come with us."

The first example gives the impression that either the speaker is unsure which friend is going to come, or that the listener has never met the friend. On the other hand, the second example, which uses the possessive determiner *my* to directly modify the noun *friend*, gives the impression that the speaker has a definite friend in mind, and/or the listener is familiar with this friend.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Possessive determiners modify _____.

a) nouns
b) verbs
c) adjectives
d) adverbs

2. Which of the following is a possessive determiner?

a) it's
b) Hank's
c) who's
d) they're

3. Which of the following words is **not** a possessive determiner?

a) my
b) his
c) their

d) hers

4. Complete the following sentence with the possessive determiner that is **most correct**:
“Your sister is worried that _____ phone might be lost. She hasn’t been able to find it since last night.”

a) his
b) their
c) our
d) her

5. Complete the following sentence with the possessive determiner that is **most correct**:
“We should go shopping; _____ fridge is looking empty.”

a) our
b) her
c) their
d) its

6. Complete the following sentence with the possessive determiner that is **most correct**:
“Look at that dog! _____ eyes are so blue!”

a) your
b) my
c) its
d) their

Gerunds

Definition

A **gerund** is the “-ing” form of a verb when it functions grammatically as a noun in a sentence. Gerunds are identical in appearance to **present participles**, but they are not used to form tenses of the verb or provide adjectival information.

Gerunds can either stand alone, or they can take a noun (the object of the gerund) and/or modifier(s) to form a **gerund phrase**.

Functions in a sentence

Because they act like nouns, gerunds can be used as the subject of a sentence, the subject complement of the linking verb *be*, the object of a preposition, or the object of a verb. They can also be used to form **compound nouns**.

As the subject

Just like a normal noun, a gerund or gerund phrase can be the subject of a sentence. For example:

• "**Swimming** is an excellent form of exercise!" (gerund only)

• "**Eating vegetables** gives you a lot of extra energy." (gerund + object)

• "**Studying too hastily** will result in a poor grade." (gerund + adverb(s))

• "**Reading romantic literature** proves to be an unpopular pastime among academics." (gerund + adjective + noun)

• "**Working from home** allows me to spend more time with my family." (gerund + prepositional phrase)

Adverbs modifying gerunds

Notice that in our third example, the gerund *studying* is being modified by an adverb, *hastily* (itself modified by *too*). Likewise, *working* in the last example is modified by the adverbial prepositional phrase *from home*.

This may seem contradictory, since gerunds act like nouns, and adverbs **can't** modify nouns. However, in this case, it is the gerund *phrase* that is functioning as a noun, so the gerund itself can still be modified by an adverb in the same way as a normal verb.

Present participial clauses

It's often easy to confuse present participles for gerunds because they look identical and operate in very similar ways. For instance, the present participles of verbs can be used to create dependent clauses that modify the rest of the sentence. For example:

• "**Singing in the shower**, *I* was oblivious to the doorbell ringing." (I was singing.)

• "**Having seen** the movie before, I wouldn't want to see it again."

Although they look quite similar, these clauses function like an adjective, whereas the gerund phrases we looked at above act like nouns functioning as the **subjects** of their sentences.

As a subject complement

Like **predicative adjectives**, gerunds can act as subject complements after the linking verb *be*. In this case, the gerund acts as a kind of modifier that gives more information about the sentence's subject. For example:

• "My main responsibility here ***is*** **operating the forklift**." (*operating* complements the noun *responsibility*)

• "My favorite thing about being in Japan ***is*** **eating sushi**." (*eating* complements *thing*)

• "The best thing in life ***is*** **spending time with loved ones.**"

Again, we have to be careful that we don't mistake a gerund for the present participle of a verb. This can be easy to do, because the present participle is paired with the verb *be* to form the **present continuous tense** and the **past continuous tense** of verbs, as in:

• "I **am running** five miles tomorrow." (present continuous tense)

• "I heard you **are operating the forklift** at work now." (present continuous tense)

• "I **was singing** in the shower when the doorbell rang." (past continuous tense)

• "She **was eating** dinner when I called." (past continuous tense)

Remember that a gerund or gerund phrase functions as a noun—if the sentence still makes grammatical sense after the word or phrase is replaced by a normal noun, then we are dealing with a gerund; if it does not make sense after being replaced by a normal noun, then it is a present participle.

As objects

Of prepositions

Gerunds are used as the objects of prepositions to describe an action that modifies another action, thus creating **adverbial prepositional phrases**. These can occur at the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence. For example:

• "**After sneezing**, I always get the hiccups."

• “I’m going to improve my health **by running** six miles every night.”

• “She started going crazy **from so much waiting**.”

• “He’s not **against marrying** me, he just isn’t ready.”

Of verbs

Gerunds can also act as the direct object of some verbs. Here a few examples:

• “Do you **mind watching** my seat for me while I go to the bathroom?”

• “I really **love hiking** in the mountains.”

• “I **enjoy eating** at restaurants, but Jenny **prefers cooking** at home.”

• “He **remembered turning** off the oven, but his husband thought he’d left it on.”

• “They **couldn’t help feeling** sorry for Bob.”

(If you want to see more examples, go to the section **Gerunds as Objects of Verbs**.)

Of phrasal verbs

Just like they do with normal verbs, gerunds can also function as the object of **phrasal verbs**. For example:

• “I am ***counting on*** **getting** tickets to that new movie.”

• “They’re ***looking forward to*** **meeting** you later.”

Forming compound nouns

Gerunds can be paired with regular nouns to become **compound nouns**, as in:

• “His new **running shoes** were already covered in mud.”

• “I’m hoping she can give me a **helping hand**.”

• “The **working conditions** are very poor here.”

These are distinct from *gerund* phrases, where the noun is functioning as the object of the gerund, as in our previous example of “**Eating vegetables** is good for your health.”

They should also not be confused with present participles that are functioning as adjectives. Though they look quite similar, adjectival present participles imply *action* on the part of the noun being modified. For example:

• “She soothed the **crying** *baby*.” (The baby is crying).

• “The **speeding** *car* crashed into the tree.” (The car was speeding.)

As an object complement

For certain **factitive verbs**, gerunds can also act as **object complements**. Object complements function by renaming or reclassifying a direct object, or by stating what the direct object has become or is doing. Gerunds can only function as object complements that state what the direct object is or was doing.

In the following examples, the verb or phrasal verb is *italicized*, the direct object is <u>underlined</u>, and the gerund or gerund phrase (as object complement) is in **bold**:

• “We *came across* <u>him</u> **lying in the yard**.”

• “My mother *noticed* <u>the baby</u> **walking by himself**.”

• “I can’t believe the bosses *caught* <u>you</u> **napping**.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In which of the following ways is a gerund **not** able to function?

a) As the subject of a sentence
b) As the object of a verb
c) As an adjective clause
d) As a subject complement

2. Which of the following linking verbs can a gerund follow as a **subject complement**?

a) be
b) become
c) seem
d) appear

3. In which of the following sentences is the word *talking* a gerund?

a) “I’ll be talking to your teacher after school.”
b) “I really love talking with my friends.”
c) “The talking students were oblivious to the principal.”
d) “Talking with her parents, it seems like there might be some issues at home.”

4. When gerunds function as the objects of **prepositions**, where can they occur in a sentence?

a) At the beginning
b) In the middle
c) At the end
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

5. Which of the following sentences does **not** use a gerund?

a) “His love of eating is going to lead to serious health problems.”
b) “One of the best things about spring is smelling all the flowers.”
c) “They had been driving for hours before they found a hotel.”
d) “We began shouting at the top of our lungs for the bus to stop.”

Gerunds as Objects of Verbs

Definition

Gerunds very frequently function as the direct objects of “true” verbs. However, there are some verbs that are more likely to take gerunds as objects than others.

In this section, we’ll look at some common verbs that take gerunds as their direct object to get a sense of how they’re used.

Stative vs. Action Verbs

Stative verbs that take gerunds

Stative verbs, also known as **verbs of feeling**, are very likely to take gerunds as their objects.

Here are some examples of common stative verbs that take gerunds (keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list):

Stative verb	Example with a gerund as an object
love	“I **love *going*** to the movies.”

like	“I **like *living*** by the ocean.”
enjoy	“Do you **enjoy *working*** in retail?”
mind	“Would you **mind *watching*** my seat for me while I go to the bathroom?”
feel like	“I **feel like *staying home*** tonight.”
stand	“She can’t **stand *being*** around him.”
imagine	“**Imagine *winning*** the lottery. It would be great!”

Action verbs that take gerunds

Certain **action verbs** (also called **dynamic verbs**) can also take a gerund as their object if describing a secondary action. For instance:

Action verb	Example with a gerund as an object
admit (to)	“He **admitted (to) *cheating*** on the exam.”
avoid	“He always tries to **avoid *doing*** his homework.”
consider	“He is **considering *moving*** to London.”
delay	“He **delayed *paying*** his phone bill.”
deny	“He **denied *stealing*** the money.”
insist on	“He **insisted on *giving*** me a ride to the train station.”
keep/continue	“Please, **keep/continue *telling*** me your story.”
mention	“She **mentioned *meeting*** him for a coffee earlier.”
practice	“She **practices *speaking*** English whenever she gets the chance.”
recommend	“I **recommend *going*** to the mountains in the summer.”

resist	“She **resisted *sneaking out*** to the party down the road.”
suggest	“They **suggested *staying*** at a five-star hotel.”

Again, the above is not a complete list. There are many other dynamic verbs that will take a gerund as their object.

Gerunds vs. Infinitives

Gerunds and **infinitives** are both verb forms that can function as nouns, and, as such, they are both often used as the objects of “main” verbs. In many cases, we can use **either** the infinitive *or* the gerund in addition to “standard” nouns.

Some verbs, however, can only be followed by infinitives and **not** gerunds. In each example below, we can see how a gerund does not fit with the main verb:

✓ Infinitive (Correct)	× Gerund (Incorrect)
“They **promised *to be*** quiet in the car.”	“They **promised *being*** quiet in the car.”
“I **agreed *to leave*** him alone.”	“I **agreed *leaving*** him alone.”
“She **asked *to see*** the landlord about the faulty stove.”	“She **asked *seeing*** the landlord about the faulty stove.”

Likewise, some verbs are followed only by gerunds and **not** infinitives. In most cases, these are action verbs. For example:

✓ Gerund (Correct)	× Infinitive (Incorrect)
“I **recall *seeing*** an advertisement for that somewhere.”	“I **recall *to see*** an advertisement for that somewhere.”
“I **recommend *reading*** *Moby Dick* at some point in your life.”	“I **recommend *to read*** *Moby Dick* at some point in your life.”
“He’ll **consider *hearing*** your side of the story later, if he has time.”	“He’ll **consider *to hear*** your side of the story later, if he has time.”

Unfortunately, there is not a set of rules to determine which verbs can take which forms as their objects.

Verbs followed by both gerunds and infinitives

For other verbs, we can use **either** the infinitive **or** the gerund.

Most of the time, there is no difference in meaning when we substitute the infinitive for the gerund. This is especially true for **stative verbs**. For example, each of the following pairs mean the same thing:

Gerund	Infinitive
"I **like *hiking***."	"I **like *to hike***."
"I **love *swimming***."	"I **love *to swim***."
"I **prefer *going out*** on the weekend."	"I **prefer *to go out*** on the weekend."

With some verbs, we can use both the infinitive and the gerund, but the meaning of the sentence changes subtly as a result. In this case, we have to use context to understand the meaning completely. For example:

Infinitive	Gerund
"I **remembered *to close*** the window." (I didn't forget to do this)	"No, I didn't leave the window open. I **remember *closing*** it." (I recall doing this)
"I **forgot *to read*** this book for school." (I didn't remember to do this, so it didn't happen)	"I **forget *reading*** this book for school." (I don't recall this fact)
"I've been **trying *to call*** you all day, but the line has been busy." (Attempt to do something)	"**Try *calling*** my cell phone next time." (This is a possible solution to the problem)
"I **stopped *drinking*** sugary drinks because of my health." (I don't drink	"I **stopped *to drink*** at the well." (I interrupted what I was doing to

sugary drinks anymore)	drink from the well)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following verbs will **not** take a gerund as its object?

a) deny
b) neglect
c) recommend
d) love

2. Which kind of verb is **more likely** to take a gerund as its object?

a) linking verb
b) auxiliary verb
c) stative verb
d) dynamic verb

3. Identify the gerund in the following sentence.
"I am waiting to see if the doctor recommends getting a transplant."

a) waiting
b) to see
c) recommends
d) getting

4. True or false: All gerunds can be replaced by infinitives when they function as the objects of verbs.

a) true
b) false

Interjections

Definition

An **interjection**, also known as an **exclamation**, is a word, phrase, or sound used to convey an emotion such as surprise, excitement, happiness, or anger. Interjections are very common in spoken English, but they appear in written

English as well. Capable of standing alone, they are grammatically unrelated to any other part of a sentence.

Primary Interjections

Primary interjections are interjections that are single words derived not from any other word class, but from sounds. Nonetheless, primary interjections do have widely recognized meaning. Some common primary interjections are:

Primary Interjection	Emotion
aah	fear
aha	triumph, sudden understanding
argh	frustration
brr	being cold
eww	disgust
grr	anger
hmm	thinking
ooh	amazement, being impressed
phew	relief
yay	approval, happiness

Secondary Interjections

Secondary interjections are interjections derived from words that *do* belong to other word classes—they may be adjectives, nouns, or entire clauses. Again, they have nothing to do with the grammar of the sentences that come before or after them. Some common secondary interjections are:

- bless you
- congratulations
- good grief

- hell
- hey
- hi
- oh my
- oh my God
- oh well
- shoot
- well
- what

Curse words (vulgar or offensive words; also called swear words) are also considered interjections when they are not linked grammatically with another part of a sentence.

Sentence Placement

Interjections are more commonly used in speech; however, we sometimes do need to express them through writing, especially if we are trying to capture dialogue. Usually, the interjection is placed before the sentence that explains the cause of the emotion. For example:

• "**Ooh**, that's a beautiful dress."

• "**Brr**, it's freezing in here!"

• "**Oh my God**! We've won!"

• "**Wow**! What a great achievement!"

Punctuation

As mentioned, interjections can stand alone. Therefore, they can be punctuated with a period, an exclamation point, or a question mark. The punctuation we choose depends on the emotion that we want to convey. However, since interjections are not complete sentences, some writers prefer to attach them to a complete sentence with a comma. Ultimately, it is up to preference.

Exclamation point

We use an exclamation point when the emotion we want to convey is very strong and is not a question. For example:

• “**Hooray!** I got accepted to my top choice university!”

• “**Yuck!** I hate coconuts!”

• “**Congratulations!** That was an impressive victory.”

Period or comma

When the expression is weaker, we can use a period or a comma. For example:

• “**Well**, isn’t that nice?”

• “**Oh well**, I’m sure we’ll have better luck next time.”

• “**Shoot.** I really thought we were going to win.”

Question mark

If the interjection expresses disbelief, uncertainty, or is interrogative, we should use a question mark. For example:

• “**Huh?** You’re not coming?”

• “**Well?** Are we going to watch a movie?”

• “**What**? You don’t like coconuts?”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Interjections are _____ to the grammar of the sentence that follows.

a) somewhat related
b) related
c) not related

2. Which of the following is a **primary interjection**?

a) well
b) oh my god
c) ugh
d) hello

3. Complete the following sentence with the **most appropriate** interjection:
“_____! I really thought we were going to lose!”

a) Phew

b) Oh no
c) Yuck
d) Argh

4. Complete the following sentence with the **most appropriate** interjection:
“_____. I’m still not sure of the right answer.”

a) Eew
b) Phew
c) Hmm
d) Congratulations

5. Complete the following sentence with the **most appropriate** interjection:
“_____. That bread is all moldy.”

a) Yay
b) Eww
c) Phew
d) Ooh

Inflection (Accidence)

Definition

Grammatical **inflection** (sometimes known as **accidence** or **flection** in more traditional grammars) is the way in which a word is changed or altered in form in order to achieve a new, specific meaning.

Verbs are the most commonly inflected words, changing form to reflect grammatical **tense**, as well as **mood**, **voice**, **aspect**, **person**, and **speech**. Collectively, this is known as **conjugation**.

The other parts of speech that can undergo inflection are nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs. These are categorized collectively under the term **declension**.

Most inflection is done according to consistent rules and patterns, but, as we'll see, there are many words that are **irregularly inflected**.

We'll look at the basics of conjugation and declension below, and then briefly discuss regular vs. irregular declension. Continue on to the individual sections to learn more about them in greater detail.

Conjugation

Below, we'll give a brief overview of the different elements used in **conjugation**. Continue on to **Conjugation** or go to its individual sections to learn more about each.

Tense

When we discuss conjugating verbs, we are usually referring to how a verb changes according to **tense**—that is, when an action happened in time. Verbs in their basic form are naturally in the **present tense** (specifically known as the **present simple tense**). For example:

• "She **walks** to work."

• "We **live** in the city."

• "They **work** too hard."

• "He **sings** for an hour."

Verbs can only be truly inflected for the **past tense** (specifically the **past simple**

tense). Most verbs are changed by adding “-d” or “-ed” to their end (which also forms their **past participle** form). However, many verbs are considered **irregular** and have past tense and past participle forms that cannot be predicted. For example:

• “She **walked** to work.” (regular verb)

• “We **lived** in the city.” (regular verb)

• “He **sang** for an hour.” (irregular verb)

Using **auxiliary verbs** and verb **participles**, we can also create the **continuous**, **perfect**, and **perfect continuous** forms of either the past or present tense. For instance:

• “She **is walking** to work.” (**present continuous tense**)

• “We **have lived** in the city.” (**present perfect tense**)

• “They **had been working** too hard.” (**past perfect continuous tense**)

• “He **had sung** for an hour.” (**past perfect tense**)

Finally, we can also form an *approximation* of the **future tense**. Verbs do not have a specific form to reflect future action, so we use other verb constructions to achieve this meaning, usually the **modal auxiliary verb** *will*, as in:

• “She **will walk** to work.” (**future simple tense**)

• “We **will be living** in the city.” (**future continuous tense**)

• “They **will have worked** too hard.” (**future perfect tense**)

• “He **will have been singing** for an hour.” (**future perfect continuous tense**)

Aspect

Grammatical **aspect** is concerned with how an action, state of being, or event occurs in time; we use it with tense to create specific forms of verbs in relation to time.

Each verb tense has four aspects, or temporal structures: the *simple*, the *perfect*, the *continuous*, and the *perfect continuous*. These coincide with the different verb tenses we looked at above. When we form the **present continuous tense** (“I **am walking**”), for instance, we are actually using the **continuous aspect** of the present tense.

Continue on to the **Aspect** section in this chapter to learn more about how aspect is used with verb tenses.

Mood

Most of the time when we speak or write, we are discussing or asking what is true, real, or actually happening. This is known as the **indicative mood**. For instance:

• “I ate breakfast at 3 o’clock.”

• “We are going swimming this afternoon.”

• “Will they be there tonight?”

When discussing an unreal, hypothetical, or desired situation, we use what’s known as the **subjunctive mood**. This is usually marked by putting the verb in the past tense, as in:

• “I wish it **was/were*** Saturday.”

• “If I **had** a million dollars, I **would** move to the Bahamas.”

(*Traditionally, the verb *be* always conjugates to *were* in the subjunctive mood, regardless of the subject of the sentence. However, it is becoming common in modern English to use *was* if the subject is singular.)

When we make direct commands to someone, we use what’s known as the **imperative mood** to form **imperative sentences**. They have no subject (it is implied), and the verb is in the **base** or **bare infinitive** form. For example:

• “**Close** that window!”

• “**Sit** down, please.”

Voice

Voice has to do with the relationship between a verb and its source of agency—the person or thing performing or controlling the action of the verb. This is usually **the subject** of the sentence or clause, which is known as being in the **active voice**. For instance:

• “He **wrote** the book.”

• “The Millers **are preparing** dinner.”

We can also construct sentences in which the subject of the sentence is **not** the agent of the verb, but rather the **object** of its action. If the agent is identified, it is only in a prepositional phrase at the end of the sentence. This is known as **passive voice**. For example:

• “The book **was written** (*by him*).”

• “Dinner **was prepared** (*by The Millers*).”

Grammatical Person

Grammatical **person** refers to whether the subject is the speaker or writer (first person), someone being directly addressed (second person), or a person or thing that is being spoken or written about (third person). Each of these can be either singular or plural.

Almost all verbs are conjugated a specific way only if the subject is in the third person, is singular, and is in the present tense. We do so by adding an “-s” or “-es” to the end of the verb, as in:

• “I *walk* everywhere.” (first-person singular)

• “She/he/it ***walks*** everywhere.” (third-person singular)

The exception to this is the verb *be*, which has several unique conjugations for grammatical person and tense. For example:

• “I **am** outside.” (first-person singular, present tense)

• “She/he/it **is** outside.” (third-person singular, present tense)

• “I/she/he/it **was** outside.” (first/third-person singular, past tense)

• “You/we/they **are** outside.” (first/second/third-person plural, present tense)

• “You/we/they **were** outside.” (first/second/third-person plural, past tense)

Speech

Speech refers to the quotation of or reference to something said or written by someone else. When we say exactly what someone said (known as **direct speech** or **direct quotation**), we use quotation marks, as in:

• Mary said, **“I want to have another baby,”** which took him by surprise.

When we are only paraphrasing or summarizing what someone said, it is known as **reported** or **indirect speech** and we do **not** use quotation marks. For example:

• Mary told me that **she hadn’t been serious**.

Declension

While conjugation only deals with the inflection of verbs, **declension** covers the inflection of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

Declension of nouns

Generally, we only *decline* nouns to mark **plurality**—that is, whether there is more than one person, place, or thing being discussed. We usually do so by adding an "-s" or "-es" to the end of the noun, as in *books, watches, toys, cars,* etc. There are a few other spelling patterns that apply, and there are a number of **irregular plurals** that do not follow any conventions at all—go to the section on **Plurals** to learn more.

We can also decline certain nouns to reflect **gender**, as in *prince* (masculine) vs. *princess* (feminine). However, the majority of nouns in English are **not** inflected for gender.

Declension of pronouns

For the most part, only **personal pronouns** are subject to inflection. We decline personal pronouns based on grammatical **person**, **number**, **gender**, and **case**. The pronouns *who* and *whoever* can also be declined to *whom* and *whomever* to reflect the **objective case**; however, this is becoming less common in everyday speech and writing.

The table below provides a quick breakdown of the various personal pronouns. (**Reflexive pronouns**, though not technically a type of personal pronoun, are so closely related in form that they have been included as well.) Continue on to the **Declension** chapter or go to their individual sections in the chapter on **Personal Pronouns** to learn more about how they are formed and when they are used.

Person	**Number**	**Gender**	**Subjective Case**	**Objective Case**	**Posse Deter**
First Person	Singular	Masculine/feminine	I	Me	My
First Person	Plural	Masculine/feminine	We	Us	Our
Second Person	Singular/Plural	Masculine/feminine	You	You	Your

Third Person	Singular	Feminine	She	Her	Her
Third Person	Singular	Masculine	He	Him	His
Third person	Singular	Neuter	It	It	Its
Third person	Plural	Neuter (Gender Neutral)	They	Them	Their

Declension of adjectives and adverbs

We decline both adjectives and adverbs in the same way to create **comparative** and **superlative** forms. As the name suggests, comparative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare two people or things. Superlative adjectives and adverbs, on the other hand, identify someone or something with the highest (or lowest) degree of a certain attribute.

We inflect these modifiers by adding the suffix “-r” or “-er” to form the comparative degree, and “-st” or “-est” to form the superlative degree. Collectively, these are known as the **degrees of comparison**. For example:

Degrees of Comparison - Adjectives	Degrees of Comparison - Adverbs
“My cat has **sharp** claws.”	“I like to drive **fast**.”
“His cat has **sharper** claws than mine.”	“My sister drives **faster** than me.”
“Their cat has the **sharpest** claws of them all.”	“My dad drives the **fastest** in our family.”

For some modifiers, we simply add the words *more/less* or *most/least* rather than changing the adjective or adverb itself.

To learn the specific rules that govern the declension of adjectives and adverbs, go to the Degrees of Comparison section for **Adjectives** or **Adverbs**.

Regular and Irregular Inflection

Inflection is usually determined by clear, consistent rules or patterns. This is known as **regular inflection**. All the examples we've looked at so far have been according to regular inflection.

However, there are also many instances of **irregular inflection**, in which the way the word changes is completely unique and does not follow (or seem to follow) any predetermined rules.

For instance, irregular inflection occurs with many of the **plurals** of nouns. Words like *children* or *mice* are irregular plural forms of *child* and *mouse*.

It also occurs with adjectives and adverbs when we decline them for the comparative and superlative forms. For example, the adjective *good* becomes *better* (comparative) and *best* (superlative), which are also the inflected forms of the adverb *well*.

Some adverbs that are formed from adjectives are also irregular—*well*, for instance, is the irregular adverb form of the adjective *good*.

Verbs are the most notorious for their irregular inflection, which is defined as having past tense and past participle forms that a) are different from one another, and b) have different spellings than the usual "-d" or "-ed" endings. For instance, the past tense of the verb *sing* is *sang*, while its past participle is *sung*.

Go to the section **Regular and Irregular Inflection** in this chapter to learn more about these tricky exceptions.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the purpose of inflection?

a) To modify a word with other words in order to create a new meaning
b) To change the form of a word in order to create new meaning
c) To create words that form the subject of the sentence
d) To create words that act as the objects of verbs

2. Which of the following is **not** something we conjugate verbs for?

a) Tense
b) Mood
c) Gender

d) Person

3. What is the most common reason **personal pronouns** are inflected?

a) To establish the gender of the pronoun
b) To establish the plurality of the pronoun
c) To establish the grammatical person of the pronoun
d) To establish the grammatical case of the pronoun
e) All of the above
f) None of the above

4. The **subjunctive mood** can be used to express which of the following?

a) Wishes
b) Statements of facts
c) Direct commands
d) All of the above

5. Which of the following is the term for inflection that does **not** follow predictable rules or patterns?

a) Improper inflection
b) Inexact inflection
c) Irregular inflection
d) Implied inflection

Conjugation

Definition

Conjugation refers to the way we **inflect** (change the form of) verbs to create particular meanings.

When we discuss conjugating verbs, we usually refer to ways in which we change a verb in order to reflect grammatical **tense**, but we also conjugate verbs to reflect **aspect**, **mood**, **voice**, **person**, and **speech**.

We'll very briefly look at the ways verbs are conjugated below. Continue on to the individual sections in this chapter to learn more about each.

Tense

Grammatical **tense** refers to the conjugation of a verb to reflect its place in time—that is, when the action occurred.

There are technically only two grammatical tenses in English: the **past tense** and the **present tense**. Verbs in their basic form inherently describe the present time, and they can be conjugated into a unique form that describes the past.

Using **auxiliary verbs** and verb **participles**, we can also create the **continuous** (or **progressive**) **tenses**, the **perfect tenses**, and the **perfect continuous** (or **perfect progressive**) **tenses**. These are technically different **aspects** of tense, but they are commonly included among the verb tenses.

English has no future tense in the strict sense (there is no unique verb form to denote future action). Nevertheless, we commonly refer to several structures that are used for future meaning as belonging to the **future tense**.

We'll look at a couple of examples of each verb tense below, but each section has more information on how they are formed and used.

Present Tense

Present Simple Tense

- "I **go** to work every day."
- "He **works** in finance."
- "I **don't go** out very often."
- "**Do** you **eat** breakfast every morning?"
- "They **are** hungry."

Present Continuous Tense

- "John **is sleeping** at the moment."
- "**Am** I **wearing** the right uniform?"
- "Jack **isn't coming** to the movie with us."
- "**Are** you still **reading** that book?"
- "We**'re flying** to Spain tomorrow."

Present Perfect Tense

- "I **have lived** in Italy for many years."

- “She **has been** here since 8 o’clock.”
- “**Have** you **been** here since this morning?”
- “We **haven’t been** to the movies in a long time.”
- “**Have** you **seen** my jacket anywhere?”

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

- “I**’ve been writing** for over an hour.”
- “How long **have** you **been writing**?”
- “They **haven’t been living** in Spain for very long.”
- “She’s tired because she**’s been working** a lot.”
- “That bag looks new. **Have** you **been shopping**?”

Past Tense

Past Simple Tense

- “She **worked** in finance before this job.”
- “We **lived** in China for six years after I **graduated** from college.”
- “They **didn’t watch** the movie last night.”
- “I **went** to the park yesterday.”
- “I **was** their accountant at the time.”

Past Continuous Tense

- “I **was reading** a book when they arrived.”
- “What **were** you **talking about when I arrived?”**
  “She was worrying we wouldn’t be able to afford the wedding.”
- “I **wasn’t feeling** well.”
- “**Were you sleeping** when I called?”

Past Perfect Tense

- “The movie **had already ended** when I turned on the TV.”
- “I was sad to leave the house I **had lived** in for so many years.”
- “Until this morning, I **had never been** on a plane.”

- “**Had** you ever **been** on a tractor before working on our farm?”
- “I **hadn’t eaten** Parmesan cheese before going to Italy.”

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

- “When I arrived at the bus stop, the other people there **had been waiting** for nearly an hour.”
- “We **hadn’t been talking** for very long before she had to leave.”
- “My eyes were tired because I **had been working** on the computer.”
- “**Had** she **been living** in Italy for a long time?”
- “He **had been feeling** unwell, so he went to lie down.”

Future Tense

The most common constructions of the **future tenses** use the **modal auxiliary verb** *will* or the verb phrase *be going to*. We can also use the modal verb *shall* to create the future tense, but this is generally reserved for more formal or polite English, and it is not very common in everyday speech and writing, especially in American English.

Future Simple Tense

- “The Queen **will be** in Rome tomorrow.”
- “She **won’t do** her homework.”
- “**Will** they **be** late?”
- “I **am going to wash** my hair after dinner.”
- “**Are** you **going to mow** the lawn today?”

Future Continuous Tense

- “I**’ll be flying** to Boston tomorrow, so I can’t come to lunch.”
- “People **are going be consuming** even more natural resources by the year 2030.”
- “**Is** she **going to be working** from home now?”
- “I**’m not going to be living** in New York for much longer.”
- “You shouldn’t call their house now; they **will be sleeping**.”

Future Perfect Tense

- “By October we **will have lived** in this house for 20 years.”
- “After this next race, I **will have completed** 10 triathlons.”
- “You **will have heard** by now that the company is going bankrupt.”
- “**Will** they **have read** the memo ahead of the meeting?”
- “Why are you going to the airport so early? Her flight **will not have arrived** yet.”

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

- “She**’ll have been waiting** for nearly an hour by the time we arrive.”
- “I **will have been living** in this country for 10 years this November.”
- “**Will** they **have been looking** through our tax returns for the last few years?”
- “How **will** he **have been coping** on his own for all these years?”
- “He **won’t have been sleeping** for very long, but I have to wake him up.”

Aspect

Grammatical **aspect** is often confused with **tense**. While **tense** is concerned with when an action, state of being, or event occurs (past, present, or future), aspect is concerned with how it occurs in time.

We use aspect with tense to reflect each construction of a verb in relation to time. When we form the **present continuous tense**, for instance, we are actually using a specific **aspect** of the present tense. It is through aspect that we understand whether an action takes place at a single point in time, during a continuous range of time, or repetitively.

Perfective and imperfective aspect

The **perfective aspect** is used when we draw attention to an action as a whole, summarizing it. The perfective aspect may occur in past, present, or future actions and events. For example:

• “I **ate** dinner.”

• “I **swim** like a fish.”

• “We **will help** you tomorrow.”

The **imperfective aspect**, on the other hand, is used to draw attention to the action as having an internal structure (rather than as a whole, complete action)—for example, an action that is in progress at the moment of speaking or which happened habitually in the past, as in:

• “I **was washing dishes** when she came through the door.”

• “We used to go traveling a lot.”

Aspects of verb tenses

Each verb tense has four aspects, or temporal structures: the *simple*, the *perfect*, the *continuous*, and the *perfect continuous*. These coincide with the different verb tenses we looked at above.

Aspects of the present tense

Aspect	Structure	Examples
Simple	Subject + present verb	“I **go** shopping on Tuesdays.” “She **runs** fast.”
Perfect	Subject + *have/has* + past participle	“I **have eaten** here before.” “She **has lived** here for a long time.”
Continuous	Subject + *is/are* + present participle	“We **are cooking** dinner.” “He **is singing** a song.”
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *have/has* + *been* + present participle	“He **has been thinking** about it.” “I **have been taking** an art class.”

Aspects of the past tense

Aspect	Structure	Examples

Simple	Subject + past verb	“I **went** shopping on Tuesday.” “She **ran** fast.”
Perfect	Subject + *had* + past participle	“I **had eaten** there before.” “She **had lived** here for a long time.”
Continuous	Subject + *was/were* + present participle	“We **were cooking** dinner.” “He **was singing** a song.”
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *had* + *been* + present participle	“He **had been thinking** about it.” “I **had been taking** an art class.”

Aspects of the future tense

Aspect	Structure	Examples
Simple	Subject + *will/be going to* + infinitive	“I **will go** shopping on Tuesday.” “She **is going to run** fast.”
Perfect	Subject + *will have* + past participle	“I **will have eaten** before arriving.” “She **will have lived** here for a long time.”
Continuous	Subject + *will/be going to* + be + present participle	“We **are going to be cooking** dinner.” “He **will be singing** a song.”
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *will/would* + *have* + been + present participle	“He**’ll have been thinking** about it.” “I **would have been taking** an art class.”

Mood

Grammatical **mood** refers to the way in which a verb is used to express certain meaning by the speaker or writer—that is, to express what is actually the case or what is unreal or hypothetical, or to command or request something to be done in the future.

There are three main grammatical **moods**: the **indicative mood**, the **subjunctive mood**, and the **imperative mood**.

Indicative mood

The **indicative mood** expresses facts, statements, opinions, or questions. It is used to form **declarative sentences** (i.e., statements or declarations) or **interrogative sentences** (i.e., questions). For example:

• “She **graduated** last year with a doctorate in neuroscience.”

• “He **isn’t taking** his exam at the new testing center.”

• “**Are** you **going to give** your speech tomorrow?”

Subjunctive Mood

The **subjunctive mood** uses specific verb constructions to describe hypothetical or non-real actions, events, or situations, such as wishes, suggestions, or possible outcomes that depend on certain conditions.

For example:

• “I wish I **didn’t have to go** to work.” (wish)

• “I recommend that she **study** harder next time.” (suggestion)

• “**If I had been more prepared**, I would have passed that test.”

Imperative Mood

We use the **imperative mood** when we form **imperative sentences**, such as direct orders, commands, or general instructions.

When we make an imperative sentence, we use the infinitive form of the verb (without *to*), and, uniquely, we omit the subject of the verb.

For example:

• “Turn off the light before you leave.”

• “Go to bed!”

• “Please close the door.”

• “Pay attention!”

Voice

Grammatical **voice** describes the relationship between the verb and the subject (also known as the *agent*) in a sentence.

There are two main types of voice: **active voice** and **passive voice**. A third type called **“middle” voice** also exists, but it is less common.

Active Voice

A verb is in the **active voice** when the agent of the verb (the person or thing that performs the action specified by the verb) is also the subject of the sentence.

For example:

• “The boy **sang** a song.” (*the boy* is the agent of the verb *sang*)

• “I **am watching** a movie.” (*I* is the agent of the verb *am watching*)

• “Vivian **writes** well.” (*Vivian* is the agent of the verb *writes*)

Passive Voice

A sentence uses the **passive voice** when the subject is acted upon by the verb. The object of the verb’s action becomes the subject of the sentence, while the *agent* of the action (if there is one) is identified by the preposition *by*. For example:

• “A famous piano piece **will be performed** *by Angie* tomorrow night.”

• “His new book **has already been read** *by thousands of people*.”

• “The light bulb **was patented** in 1880.” (no agent)

“Middle” Voice

The **“middle” voice** describes a type of voice in which the agent performs the verb’s action on itself. Verbs in the middle voice are often followed by **reflexive pronouns**. For example:

• “*My girlfriend* always **checks** herself in the mirror before we go out.”

• “*The dog* **bit** itself on the tail.”

“Middle” voice can also be used to describe some **intransitive verbs** that act upon their agents. For example:

• “The **lasagna *cooked*** in the oven for several hours.”

• “The **bicycle *broke*** without warning.”

Grammatical Person

Grammatical person refers to the degree of involvement of a participant in an action, event, or circumstance. There are three degrees of grammatical person: **first person** (the speaker), **second person** (someone being spoken to), and **third person** (anyone/anything not being directly addressed).

The vast majority of verbs only conjugate for **third-person singular** subjects (e.g., *he, she,* and *it*) by taking the suffix “-s” or “-es,” as in:

• “I *eat* pasta.” (first-person singular)

• “We *eat* pasta.” (first-person plural)

• “You *eat* pasta.” (second-person singular/plural)

• “She/he/it ***eats*** pasta.” (third-person singular)

• “They *eat* pasta.” (third-person singular)

However, the verb *be* is unique in that it has **five different** conjugations according to the grammatical person of its subject and the **tense** of the verb.

• “I **am** happy.” (first-person singular, present tense)

• “I **was** happy.” (first-person singular, past tense)

• “We **are** happy.” (first-person plural, present tense)

• “We **were** happy.” (first-person plural, past tense)

• “You **are** happy.” (second-person singular/plural, present tense)

• “You **were** happy.” (second-person singular/plural, past tense)

• “She/he/it **is** happy.” (third-person singular, present tense)

• “She/he/it **was** happy.” (third-person singular, past tense)

• “They **are** happy.” (third-person plural, present tense)

• “They **were** happy.” (third-person plural, past tense)

To learn more about the way that other verbs conjugate for the third-person

singular, go to the section on **Grammatical Person**

Speech

Grammatical **speech** refers to how we report what another person said, which affects the conjugation of the verbs that are used. We almost always use **reporting verbs** (such as *say, tell*, or *ask*) to form grammatical speech.

There are two primary types of speech: **direct speech** and **reported speech** (also known as **indirect speech**). There are also two other sub-categories, known as free **indirect speech** and **silent speech**.

Direct speech

Direct speech, sometimes known as **quoted speech**, refers to the direct quotation of something that someone else said.

Because the quotation happened in the past, we put the reporting verb into the **past simple tense**, but we don't change the verbs used within the quotation.

When used in writing, we indicate the quoted speech with **quotation marks** (**" "**), and we usually set it apart with one or two commas (unless we are quoting a fragment that blends in with the overall sentence). For example:

• John *said*, **"I'll never live in this city again."**

• Mary *told* him, **"I want to have another baby,"** which took him by surprise.

• John *said* he feels **"really bad"** about what happened.

(There are a number of other nuances surrounding punctuating that occur when we use direct speech in certain circumstances, as well as if we are writing in **American English** or **British English**. Continue on to the section dealing with **Speech** to learn more.)

Reported (Indirect) Speech

In many instances, we merely paraphrase (or restate) what someone said, rather than directly quoting them. This is known as **reported** or **indirect speech**.

In reported speech, we do not use quotation marks. According to conventional rules, we must also shift the paraphrased information one degree into the past. If a statement was originally made in the **present simple tense**, for instance, we would shift it to the **past simple tense**. For example:

Non-reported sentence	Verb shift	Reported speech
I live in Germany.	**present simple tense** shifts to **past simple tense**	**He said *he lived*** in Germany.
I was a carpenter before I moved here.	**past simple tense** shifts to **past perfect tense**	**She said that *she had been*** a carpenter before she moved here.
He is writing a letter to our friend.	**present continuous tense** shifts to **past continuous tense**	**She told us *he was writing*** a letter to our friend.
She was sleeping when you called.	**past continuous tense** shifts to **past perfect continuous tense**	**He told me *you had been sleeping*** when I called.

However, in modern English, this rule is not always observed, and the meaning of your sentence would usually not be affected if you didn't shift the tense. To learn more about how we change (or do not change) the tense and wording of sentences, go to the section on **Reported Speech**.

Free Indirect and Silent Speech

Free indirect speech is used to indicate the thoughts or mental processes of a character, usually in the form of a rhetorical question. We do not use reporting verbs or quotation marks. For example:

• He had no money, no job, and no friends. **How had his life arrived to such a desperate point?**

Silent speech refers to something that is said internally (i.e., *silently*) by someone to him- or herself. We still use reporting verbs, but we can use either quotation marks or italics to indicate the silent speech, or nothing at all—it is up to the writer's preference. For example:

• **"I'm never coming back to this town again,"** he murmured to himself.

• She thought, ***What a beautiful country.***

• **It will be quiet around here when the kids go to college,** Dan thought.

Conjugation vs. Declension

Remember that conjugation is the specific term used for the inflection of verbs—no other part of speech is conjugated. For any kind of word that goes through inflection (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs), we use the term **declension**. Head to that section to learn more.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** something we conjugate verbs for?

a) Tense
b) Mood
c) Gender
d) Person

2. Which of the following types of conjugation describes **when** the action of a verb takes place in time?

a) Tense
b) Mood
c) Person
d) Speech
e) Voice

3. Which of the following types of conjugation describes the **relationship** between the verb and the agency of the verb's subject?

a) Aspect
b) Mood
c) Person
d) Speech
e) Voice

4. The **subjunctive mood** can be used to express which of the following?

a) Wishes
b) Suggestions
c) Hypotheticals

d) All of the above

5. Grammatical tense is used in conjunction with which other type of conjugation to describe a verb's relationship with **time**?

a) Mood
b) Aspect
c) Person
d) Speech
e) Voice

Tense

Definition

Grammatical **tense** refers to the conjugation of a verb to reflect its place in time—that is, when the action occurred.

There are technically only two grammatical tenses in English: the **past** and the **present**. Verbs in their basic form inherently describe the present time, and they can be conjugated into a unique form that describes the past. We can then use **auxiliary verbs** and verb **participles** to create different **aspects** of the past and present tenses, which describe if an action is or was continuous, or if it began at an earlier point in the past.

However, verbs do **not** have a specific conjugated form to reflect the future, and, for this reason, English is considered not to have a true future tense.

Nevertheless, although English has no future tense in the strict sense, we commonly refer to several structures that are used for future meaning as belonging to the "future tense." The most common of these structures begin with *will* or *be going to*. For the sake of consistency, we will be referring to such constructions as the **future tense** in this chapter.

Summary of the Main Tenses

Below, we'll provide a very brief summary of each of the variations of the present, past, and future tenses. Go to the individual sections to learn more about each variation.

The Present Tense

Present Simple Tense

The present simple tense (also called the **simple present**) is used to express habits, facts, and timetables.

Structures of the present simple tense

Affirmative: The base form of the verb. It is usually conjugated for the third-person singular by adding "-s" or "-es" to the end of the verb (except for **irregular verbs**).

Question: Use the **auxiliary verb** *do* (or *does* for the third-person singular) before the main verb.

Negative: Use *do not* (contracted as *don't*) or *does not* (contracted as *doesn't*) before the main verb.

Examples:

- "I **go** to work every day."
- "He **works** in finance."
- "I **don't go** out very often."
- "**Do** you **eat** breakfast every morning?"
- "The sun **rises** in the East."
- "The sun **doesn't** rise in the West."
- "The train **leaves** at 9:30 tomorrow morning."
- "It **doesn't leave** from platform 12."
- "**Does** the train for Detroit **leave** at 9 AM tomorrow?"

With the verb *be*

The **linking verb** *be* has three different conjugations for grammatical person in the present tense: *am* (first-person singular); *are* (first-person plural, second person, and third-person plural); and *is* (third-person singular). *Be* does not need *do* when making questions or negative statements in the present simple tense.

Affirmative: "I **am** from the United States."

Question: "**Is** he **Canadian**?"

Negative: "They **are not** British."

Present Continuous Tense

The present continuous tense (also called the **present progressive tense**) is used for something in progress at the moment of speaking; it describes something that is happening in the present moment and also for expressing future arrangements. It can only be used with **action verbs**.

Structures of the present continuous tense

Affirmative: The **auxiliary verb** *be* plus the **present participle** of the main verb. We conjugate *be*, rather than the main verb, for grammatical person.

Question: Invert *be* with the subject of the sentence.

Negative: Use *not* after auxiliary *be* (contracted as *isn't* or *aren't*; *am not* is not normally contracted) before the present participle of the main verb.

Examples:

Present moment

Affirmative: "John **is sleeping** at the moment."

Question: "**Am** I **wearing** the right uniform?"

Negative: "Jack **isn't coming** to the movie with us."

Present moment

Affirmative: "The managers **are working** on the new project."

Question: "**Are** you still **reading** that book?"

Negative: "I **am not living** in New York anymore."

Future arrangement

Affirmative: "We**'re flying** to Spain tomorrow."

Question: "**Are** you **meeting** Tom for lunch on Wednesday?"

Negative: "They**'re not having** the party on Saturday anymore."

Present Perfect Tense

The present perfect tense (sometimes called the **present perfect simple tense**) is used to give general information about something that happened at an indefinite

point in the past. We also use the present perfect with the prepositions *for* and *since* when we speak about something that started in the past and is still true now.

Structures of the present perfect tense:

Affirmative: The **auxiliary verb** *have* plus the **past participle** of the main verb. *Have* conjugates as *has* for the third-person singular.

Question: Invert *have/has* with the subject of the sentence.

Negative: Use *not* after *have/has* (often contracted as *haven't*/*hasn't*) before the past participle of the main verb. We can also use *never* instead of *not*.

Examples:

- "I **have lived** in Italy for many years."
- "She **has been** here since 8 o'clock."
- "**Have** you **been** here since this morning?"
- "We **haven't been** to the movies in a long time."
- "I**'ve lost** my pen."
- "**Have** you **seen** my jacket anywhere?"
- "She **hasn't been** in work for a few weeks."
- "I **have seen** this movie already."
- "**Have** you ever **tried** Indian food?"
- "She **has never flown** on an airplane before."

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

We use the present perfect continuous tense (also called the present perfect progressive tense) to talk about that which began in the past and is still happening in the present. We often use it to emphasize the length of time that has passed while something is happening. We can also use it to talk about something that has been happening lately or only finished very recently. It can only be used with **action verbs**.

Structures of the present perfect

continuous tense

Affirmative: The auxiliary verb *have* (or *has* with third-person singular subjects) + *been* + the present participle of the main verb.

Question: Invert *have/has* with the subject of the sentence.

Negative: Use *not* after *have/has* (often contracted as *haven't*/*hasn't*) before the past participle of the main verb.

Example:

- "I**'ve been writing** for over an hour."
- "How long **have** you **been writing** for?"
- "They **haven't been living** in Spain for very long."
- "She's tired because she**'s been working** a lot."
- "That bag looks new. **Have** you **been shopping**?"
- "He **hasn't been sleeping** a lot lately."

The Past Tense

Past Simple Tense

We use the past simple tense to express finished actions. It is often used with an expression of past time to give more complete information.

Structures of the past simple tense

Affirmative: The past-tense conjugation of the verb. This is generally accomplished by adding "-d" or "-ed" to the end of the verb, but there are many specific forms for **irregular verbs**.

Question: Use *did* (the past tense of the **auxiliary verb** *do*) before the main verb. *Did* does not conjugate differently for third-person singular.

Negative: Use *did not* (often contracted as *didn't*) before the main verb.

Examples:

- "She **worked** in finance before this job."
- "We **lived** in China for six years after I **graduated** from college."
- "They **didn't watch** the movie last night."
- "I **went** to the park yesterday."

- “**Did** he **wake up** early yesterday morning?”
- “I **didn’t go** to the supermarket this morning.”

With the verb *be*

The **linking verb** *be* has two different conjugations for grammatical person in the past tense: *was* (first-person and third-person singular) and *were* (first-person plural, second person, and third-person plural). *Be* does not need *did* when making questions or negative statements in the present simple tense.

Affirmative: “I **was** their accountant at the time.”

Question: “**Were** you in the military?”

Negative: “He **was not** serious.”

Past Continuous Tense

The past continuous tense (also called the **past progressive tense**) is used for something in progress at a certain moment in the past. It can only be used with **action verbs**.

Structures of the past continuous tense

Affirmative: *Was* or *were* (the past tense of the auxiliary verb *be*) followed by the **present participle** of the main verb.

Question: Invert *was/were* with the subject.

Negative: Add *not* after *was/were* (often contracted as *wasn’t*/*weren’t*).

Examples:

- “I **was reading** a book when they arrived.”
- “What **were** you **talking about when I arrived?”**
  “She was worrying we wouldn’t be able to afford the wedding.”
- “I **was not feeling** well.”
- “**Were you sleeping** when I called?”
- “My ex-husband **was always leaving** dirty dishes in the sink.”
- “I guess things **weren’t improving**.”

Past Perfect Tense

The past perfect tense expresses the idea that something occurred before another action in the past. It can also show that something happened before a specific time in the past.

Structures of the past perfect tense

Affirmative: *Had* (the past tense of the auxiliary verb *have*) + the **past participle** of the main verb.

Question: Invert *had* with the subject of the verb.

Negative: Add *not* after *had* (often contracted as *hadn't*). We also often make the past perfect negative by using the word *never* instead of *not*.

Examples:

- "The movie **had already ended** when I turned on the TV."
- "I was sad to leave the house I **had lived** in for so many years."
- "Until this morning, I **had never been** on a plane.
- "**Had** you ever **been** on a tractor before working on our farm?"
- "I **hadn't eaten** Parmesan cheese before going to Italy."
- "I **hadn't ever ridden** on a rollercoaster before going to the amusement park yesterday."

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

The past perfect continuous tense (also called the **past perfect progressive tense**) is used to express something that began and was in progress until a moment in the past or until another past action occurred.

Structures of the past perfect continuous tense

Affirmative: *Had* + *been* + the **past participle** of the main verb.

Question: Invert *had* with the subject of the verb.

Negative: Add *not* after *had* (often contracted as *hadn't*).

Examples:

- “When I arrived at the bus stop, the other people there **had been waiting** for nearly an hour.”
- “How long **had** you **been standing** there before they let you in?”
- “We **hadn’t been talking** for very long before she had to leave.”
- “I saw that it **had been raining** outside.”
- “My eyes were tired because I ***had been*** **working** on the computer.”
- “***Had*** she ***been*** **living** in Italy for a long time?”
- “He ***had been*** **feeling** unwell, so he went to lie down.”

The Future Tense

The most common constructions of the **future tenses** use the **modal auxiliary verb** *will* or the verb phrase *be going to*. We can also use the modal verb *shall* to create the future tense, but this is generally reserved for more formal or polite English, and it is not very common in everyday speech and writing, especially in American English.

Future Simple Tense

We use the future simple tense to describe an intended action, make a prediction, state future facts, make promises, or offer to do something.

Structures of the future simple tense

Affirmative: The modal verb *will* or the verb phrase *be going to* + the base form of the verb. If using *be going to*, we must conjugate *be* to reflect grammatical person in the present tense (*is*, *am*, or *are*).

Question: Invert the subject with *will* or *be*.

Negative: Add *not* after *will* (often contracted as *won’t*) or between *be* and *going*.

Examples:

- “The Queen **will be** in Rome tomorrow.”
- “I **will definitely arrive** on time.”
- “He**’ll help** you with that heavy suitcase.”
- “She **won’t do** her homework.”
- “**Will** they **be** late?”

- “I **am going to wash** my hair after dinner.”
- “We **aren’t going to join** the gym after all.”
- “I think it**’s going to rain** tomorrow.”
- “**Are** you **going to mow** the lawn today?”

Future Continuous Tense

The future continuous tense (also known as the **future progressive**) is used to describe an unfinished action occurring in the future. This action can either begin in the future, or it can already be in progress in the present and continue into the future. The future continuous can only be used with **action verbs**.

Structures of the future continuous tense

Affirmative: The modal verb *will* or the verb phrase *be going to* + the auxiliary verb *be* + the **present participle** of the main verb. If using *be going to*, we must conjugate *be* to reflect grammatical person; we do **not** conjugate *be* before the present participle, however.

Question: Invert the subject with *will* or *be*.

Negative: Add *not* after *will* (often contracted as *won’t*) or between *be* and *going*.

Examples:

- “You shouldn’t call their house now; they **will be sleeping**.”
- “I**’ll be flying** to Boston tomorrow, so I can’t come to lunch.”
- “People **are going be consuming** even more natural resources by the year 2030.”
- “We **won’t be leaving** until the evening.”
- “**Is** she **going to be working** from home now?”
- “I**’m not going to be living** in New York for much longer.”
- “**Will** you **be graduating** this year?”

Future Perfect Tense

We use the future perfect tense to say that something will finish or complete at a

specific point in the future, often indicating how long something will have been happening once a future moment in time is reached. We can also use the future perfect to make a prediction that something has or should have happened in the past.

Structures of the future perfect tense

Affirmative: The modal verb *will* + the auxiliary verb *have* + the **past participle** of the main verb. We can also use *be going to* instead of *will*, but it is less common with the future perfect tense.

Question: Invert the subject with *will*.

Negative: Add *not* after *will* (often contracted as *won't*).

Examples:

- "By October we **will have lived** in this house for 20 years."
- "After this next race, I **will have completed** 10 triathlons."
- "You **will have heard** by now that the company is going bankrupt."
- "**Will** they **have read** the memo ahead of the meeting?"
- "Why are you going to the airport so early? Her flight **will not have arrived** yet."
- "How long **will** you **have worked** there before your maternity leave begins?"

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

Like the future perfect, we use the **future perfect continuous tense** (also known as the **future perfect progressive tense**) to indicate how long something has been happening once a future moment in time is reached; the emphasis is on the continual progression of the action. It can also be used to indicate the cause of a possible future result. We can only use the future perfect continuous with **action verbs**.

Structures of the future perfect continuous tense

Affirmative: The modal verb *will* + the auxiliary verb *have* + *been* + the **present participle** of the main verb. We can also use *be going to* instead of *will*, but it is

less common with the future perfect continuous tense.

Question: Invert the subject with *will*.

Negative: Add *not* after *will* (often contracted as *won't*). However, it is not very common to make negative constructions of the future perfect continuous tense.

Examples:

- "She**'ll have been waiting** for nearly an hour by the time we arrive."
- "I **will have been living** in this country for 10 years this November."
- "He's not going to have any energy for the kids because he**'ll have been working** so hard this week."
- "**Will** they **have been looking** through our tax returns for the last few years?"
- "How **will** he **have been coping** on his own for all these years?"
- "He **won't have been sleeping** for very long, but I have to wake him up."

Indicative Mood vs. Subjunctive Mood

All of the above tenses that we've looked at have been in what's called the **Indicative Mood** (also known as the **Realis Mood**), which is used to talk about what is factual or really happening.

There is also another mood in English called the **subjunctive mood**, which deals with things that are not objective facts, such one's state of mind, opinions, beliefs, intentions, desires, and so on. It is one of the **Irrealis Moods**, so called because they deal with what is not objectively real.

The subjunctive mood has all of the tenses that the indicative mood deals with, but it is used in much more specialized circumstances. When we talk about verb tense in this chapter, we will be focusing on the **indicative mood**; to learn about the subjunctive mood and its tenses, go to the section on the **Irrealis Moods** in the chapter about **Grammatical Mood**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. How many grammatical tenses does English **technically** have?

a) one
b) two
c) three
d) four

2. Identify the tense form that is made using the following structure:
Had + *been* + the **past participle** of the main verb

a) Present continuous tense
b) Past perfect tense
c) Present perfect tense
d) Past perfect continuous tense

3. Which of the following sentences uses the **future simple tense**?

a) “John goes for a walk every morning.”
b) “The train is leaving tomorrow at 10 AM.”
c) “Her flight is going to arrive a little later than expected.”
d) “I will be working for my Uncle this summer.”

4. Which of the following sentences uses the **present perfect tense**?

a) “I have lived in this town my entire life.”
b) “She had been staying with a friend for a few weeks.”
c) “We’ll have worked something out by the time you get here.”
d) “They have been saying the same thing for years.”

5. Which of the following is **not** used to create the **future tense**?

a) will
b) shall
c) do
d) be going to

Present Tense

Definition

The **present tense** is mostly used to identify the action of a verb as taking place in the present time. However, depending on which way we form the present

tense, it can also be used to describe things that happened in the past, or even certain events that are planned to happen in the future.

There are four forms of the present tense that can accomplish these tasks. We will give a brief summary of each below, but go to the appropriate section to learn about them more in-depth.

Present Simple Tense

The **present simple tense** is used to describe that which is done habitually, that which is generally true, that which is always the case, or that which is scheduled to happen. It is made up of only the basic form of the verb: the infinitive (+ *-(e)s* if used with the third-person singular). It is called "simple" because it does not rely on any modal or auxiliary verbs to accomplish its meaning.

Examples:

• "I come from Berlin."

• "The train leaves at 2 PM."

• "He has breakfast every morning."

• "We like ice cream."

Present Continuous Tense (Progressive)

The **present continuous** or **present progressive tense** is used to speak about actions that are currently happening. It can also be used to describe actions or events that are planned for the future, but which are not definitively fixed in time.

We create the present continuous tense by using the **present participle** (*-ing* form) of the "main" verb after the present-tense form of the auxiliary linking verb “be.” The present participle creates the **continuous** forms of verbs, which is where "present continuous" gets its name.

Examples:

• "She is running for president next year."

• "They are not watching television."

• "We are eating ice cream."

• "Are you reading that book?"

Present Perfect Tense

Present perfect tense (sometimes called the **present perfect simple tense** is used to talk about things that happened sometime in the past, but which are not given a specific time or date.

We form the present perfect by using the present tense of the auxiliary verb "*have*" (or "*has*," if used with third-person singular pronouns) along with the *past participle* of the "main" verb. Using forms of an auxiliary verb (such as "have") together with the past participle of the main verb is called the **perfect aspect** in English, which is where the "present perfect" gets its name. (To learn more about the *perfect* and other aspects, see the chapter on **Aspect**.)

Examples:

• "I have seen that movie already."

• "She's been to Prague."

• "He has lost his keys."

• "Jenny's lived in Dubai for 10 years!"

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

The present perfect continuous is used in a very similar way to the present perfect simple tense. It is used to talk about that which began in the past and is still happening in the present, with an emphasis on the continued action and/or the amount of time it is taking. We can also use it to talk about something that is only temporary, has been happening lately, or only finished very recently.

The **present perfect continuous tense** (sometimes called the **present perfect progressive tense**) is formed by using the present tense of the auxiliary verb "*have*" (or "*has*," if used with third-person singular pronouns) along with "been" (the *past participle* of the linking verb "be") and the present participle (-*ing* form) of the "main" verb.

Examples:

• "I have been living in New York City."

• "We have been walking for four hours!"

• “They have been working in the shop for 10 years."

• “Bill has been coming into work late a lot.”

• "I'm so sweaty because I have been exercising."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What can the present tense be used to describe?

a) Things are happening in the present moment in time.
b) Things that happened at an unspecified time in the past.
c) Things that will happen in the future.
d) Things that began in the past and are still happening now.
e) A & C
f) B & D
g) All of the above
h) None of the above

2. Which form of the present tense is used to describe a habit or general truth?

a) Present Simple
b) Present Continuous
c) Present Perfect
d) Present Perfect Continuous

3. Which of the following is **not** in the present tense?

a) I hear that he is living in Saudi Arabia.
b) They haven't been talking for years.
c) She had been spending some time with her father.
d) He's left the kids with their nanny.

4. What form(s) of present tense does the following sentence use?
"I can't believe that he has lost his keys again!"

a) Present Simple
b) Present Continuous
c) Present Perfect
d) Present Perfect Continuous
e) A & B

f) A & C
g) A & D

Present Simple Tense

Definition

The **present simple tense** (also called the **simple present tense**) is used when we speak about habits, general facts, and timetables. However, just because something is *true* does not necessarily mean it takes the present simple tense, nor does something have to be occurring in the present moment in time for it to be in the present simple tense.

It is called the present "simple" because its basic form consists of one word only—that is, it does not require an **auxiliary verb** to achieve its meaning.

Most verbs in the present simple tense are in the same form as the infinitive verb. However, if it is in the **third-person singular form**, then it usually takes the ending *-(e)s*.

For example:

• "I **live** in London." (Fact: I live permanently in London.)

• "Hans **comes** from Berlin." (Fact: Hans is originally from Berlin.)

• "Mary **has** breakfast every morning." (Habit)

Now let's see how the form and meaning of the verbs change if we add the auxiliary verb "be:"

• "I **am living** in London." (Still a fact, but it now highlights that I am only living in London temporarily—this wasn't always the case, and it might change in the future.)

• "Hans **is coming** from Berlin." (Hans is currently travelling from Berlin.)

• "Mary **is having** breakfast." (Mary is currently in the process of eating breakfast.)

These are examples of the **present continuous** tense. As you can see, their meaning is altered in comparison to those in the **present simple** tense. (To learn more about this tense, please refer to the chapter section on **Present Continuous Tense**.)

Present simple can also be used for future events that are fixed to happen, such as in timetables. For example:

• “The train **leaves** at 7 PM.”

This is a fixed timetable where the present simple is used to indicate a future event. We can also say: “We leave for Berlin tomorrow at 7 PM,” as the speaker sees this as a fixed event similar to a timetable.

Normally we use **stative verbs** (also called **state verbs**) to express a fact. Here are some examples of common stative verbs:

- **Like**
- **Dislike**
- **Love**
- **Enjoy**
- **Hate**
- **Have**
- **Know**
- **Need**
- **Want**
- **Seem**

Of course, some **action verbs** (also called **dynamic verbs**) used for habits can also be seen as a state or general truth. For example:

• “I **play** tennis.” (State/fact/general truth)

• “I **play** tennis *every week*.” (Habit)

However, verbs with a stative meaning cannot be used to indicate habit. For example:

✔ “I know John.” (correct – state/fact)

✖ “I know John *every week*.” (incorrect – can’t be expressed as a habit)

Some stative verbs can also function as action verbs in different contexts:

• “I **enjoy** soup.” (Stative verb—expresses a state/fact.)

• “I **enjoy** soup once in a while.” (Action verb—expresses a habit. “Enjoy” in this sense means to actively consume.)

We also use the present simple with the **zero conditional**, which means something is always true. For example:

• “If you **drop** an egg, it **breaks**.” (Any egg will break if it is dropped.)

Present simple can be used in a variety of sentence formations, such as **positive**,

negative, **interrogative**, and **negative interrogative**. We'll briefly explain each and provide examples with the present simple tense.

Positive sentences

Simply put, positive sentences indicate what **is** the case, as opposed to what is not. In the present simple tense, they look like this:

• "I **jog** every day."

• "He **lives** in Chicago."

• "Dogs **bark**, while cats **meow**." (Third-person plural.)

• "Janet **writes** songs for a living."

Negative sentences

The opposite of a positive sentence, a negative sentence describes what is **not** (or **no longer**) the case. We form these by adding the auxiliary verb *do* (or *does* in the third-person singular) and the word *not* after the subject of the sentence. These can also be contracted to *don't* or *doesn't*. For example:

• "I **don't jog** every day."

• "He **doesn't live** in Chicago anymore."

• "Dogs **do not meow**, and cats **do not bark**."

• "Janet **does not write** many songs these days."

Interrogative sentences

Interrogative sentences ask a question. They are marked by the question mark punctuation ("?") at the end instead of a period. Simple interrogative questions also use the auxiliary verb *do* (or *does* in the third-person singular), but before the subject instead of after. Generally speaking, it is uncommon to use a first-person subject in an interrogative sentence in the present simple.

• "**Do** you **jog** every day?"

• "**Does** he still **live** in Chicago?"

• "**Do** dogs **bark**, or **do** cats?" (The second "bark" is implied.)

• "**Does** Janet **write** songs anymore?"

Negative interrogative sentences

Negative interrogative sentences also ask a question, but they imply that the speaker expects the answer to be (or believes the answer *should* be) “yes.” We form these by adding the auxiliary verb *do/does* before the subject of the sentence and the word *not* after the subject. Again, these can be contracted to *don’t* or *doesn’t*; if they are, the contraction comes before the subject:

• “**Do** you **not jog** every day?”

• “**Does** he **not** still **live** in Chicago?”

• “**Don’t** dogs normally **bark**?”

• “**Doesn’t** Janet **write** songs for a living?”

Unlike the interrogative sentences, **negative interrogative sentences** are much more likely to be used in the first-person, with *do* and *not* typically contracted:

• “**Don’t** I look **good** in this dress?”

(For more information about different types of sentences, go to the chapter about **Sentences** in the part of the guide on **Syntax**.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following sentences is **not** in the present simple tense?

a) “I walk home each day.”
b) “He always reads good books.”
c) “She will talk to her mother at 5 o’clock.”
d) “I go jogging every morning.”

2. The following sentence is in present simple tense. What **kind** of sentence is it?
“Does he not have a car of his own?”

a) Interrogative sentence.
b) Positive interrogative sentence.
c) Negative sentence.
d) Negative interrogative sentence.

3. What kind of verb (usually) cannot be used to indicate **habit**?

a) Stative verbs.

b) Action verbs.
c) Passive verbs.
d) Sense verbs.

4. Which of the following sentences **is** in the present simple tense?
a) “We are leaving tomorrow on the 10 AM bus.”
b) “We will leave tomorrow on the 10 AM bus.”
c) “We leave tomorrow on the 10 AM bus.”
d) “We are going to leave tomorrow on the 10 AM bus.”

Present Continuous Tense (Progressive)

Definition

We create the present continuous tense by using the **present participle** (*-ing* form) of the verb after the present-tense form of the **auxiliary verb** *be*.

Unlike the **present simple tense**, which is used to express things that are **always** the case or are at a fixed time in the future, we use the **present continuous** (also called the **present progressive**) **tense** to speak about actions that are currently happening, whether generally or at the exact moment of speech. It can also be used to describe actions or events that are planned for the future (but are not definitively fixed in time, such as a timetable).

Actions happening at the moment of speech

The most common occurrence of the present continuous is when someone or something is performing an action at the very moment being described. In this case, the object of the verb is usually in the presence of or very near to the speaker. For example:

• “I **am going** home now.”

• “He **is crying** because of the movie.”

• “We **are heading** to the park.”

• “It **is raining** outside.”

Actions happening currently, but not at the moment of speech

The present continuous can also indicate something that is currently happening but which is not at the exact moment of speech. It generally refers to something that the person or thing is currently engaged in doing that is taking place continuously over a longer period of time, but which is not (necessarily) permanent. For example:

• “John **is working** in telemarketing.”

• “She is **running** for president.”

• “I **am living** in London.”

Actions or events planned for the future

Like the present simple tense, the present continuous can also describe future events. However, unlike the present simple, it describes that which someone is **planning** or **expecting** to do, as opposed to that which is at a fixed point in time in the future. The formation of the verb does not change to reflect this; rather, information from the rest of the sentence informs the future intention.

• “She **is running** for president *next year*.”

• “I **am taking** my driving test *after the Christmas break*.”

• “We **are watching** a movie *later*.”

With adverbs

We can also add **adverbs** relating to time between *be* and the present participle to specify or clarify *when* or *how frequently* something happens or occurs.

• “I **am *already* leaving**.” (I am leaving sooner than I expected.)

• “She **is *still* living** next door.” (She continues to live next door, perhaps longer than was expected.)

The adverb *always*

There is also a special usage when the adverb *always* is used between *be* and the present participle. Rather than literally meaning that the action *always* happens (as you might expect), it instead means that that action *very often* happens. We use this as a means of adding hyperbolic emphasis to how frequently something happens or occurs, and it usually implies that the action or event is questionable or undesirable to some degree. For example:

• “My husband **is *always* leaving** dirty dishes in the sink!”

• “The used car I bought **is *always* breaking** down.”

• “You **are *always* losing** your phone!”

Negative sentences

A negative sentence in the present continuous describes what is **not** currently happening. We form these by adding the word *not* after the auxiliary verb *be*. For second-person, third-person, and first-person plural (but not first-person singular), *be* and *not* can also be contracted.

For example:

• “I **am *not* watching** the movie.”

• “He **is *not* crying**.”

• “You **aren’t leaving** until the house is clean.”

• “She **isn’t going** home for Thanksgiving this year.”

✖ “I **amn’t reading** that anymore.” (incorrect)

Not can also be replaced with the **adverbial phrase** *no longer* to indicate that someone or something *was* doing something, but that is not the case now. For instance:

• “She **is *no longer* living** in New York.”

Interrogative sentences

Interrogative (question) sentences in the present continuous tense are formed by reversing the verb *be* and the subject. If adverbs are used to clarify or specify the time, they come before the main verb or at the end of the sentence.

• “**Is** she **sleeping**?”

• “**Are** you **seeing** this?”

• “**Are** they **going** home *already*?”

• “**Is** it *still* **raining** outside?”

The present continuous can also be used with the **question words** *who, what, where when*, *why*, and *how*:

• “*When* **is** she **taking** the exam?”

• “*What* **are** you **watching**?”

• “*Why* **is** he **leaving**?”

• “*Who*’**s talking**?”

• “*How* **are** they **getting** to the station?”

Negative interrogative sentences

Negative interrogative sentences also ask a question, but they imply that the speaker expects (or expected) something to be the case. They can be used to express surprise if something is no longer happening.

We form these by inverting *be* and the subject, and then adding the word *not* after the subject. Again, *be* and *not* can be contracted; if they are, the contraction comes before the subject. This can serve to make the sentence sound less formal and stuffy. And adverbs can still be used to specify or clarify time. For example:

• “**Is** she ***not*** **painting** *anymore*?”

• “You want to play outside? ***Isn’t*** it **raining**?

• “Wait, ***aren’t*** they *still* **dating**?

Like the negative sentence, *no longer* can be used instead of *not*. Just note that you do not use other adverbs in this case:

• **Are** Tim and John *no longer* **living** together?

• **Is** it *no longer* **raining** outside?

Negative interrogative sentences in the present continuous can also be used with the **question words** *why* and *how*. Again, it expresses the speaker’s surprise (and sometimes dismay) that something is not the case:

• “*Why* **is** she **not leaving** today?”

• “*How* **are** you **not watching** the match on TV?”

• “*Why* **are** we **not abandoning** this foolish enterprise?”

• “It’s the middle of December. *How* **is** it **not snowing** yet?”

(For more information about different types of sentences, go to the chapter on **Sentences** in the part of the guide on **Syntax**.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which auxiliary verb is used in the **present continuous** tense?

a) Do
b) Will
c) Be
d) May

2. Which of the following sentences is in the present continuous tense?

a) “She will walk home alone.”
b) “She walks home alone.”
c) “She has walked home alone.”
d) “She is walking home alone.”

3. In the present continuous tense, which **question word** or **words** can be used in negative interrogative sentences?

a) Who
b) Where
c) Why
d) How
e) A & B
f) B & D
g) C & D
h) All of the above
i) None of the above

4. In which grammatical person (first person, second person, third person) is it **not** correct to contract “be” with “not”?

a) First-person singular
b) First-person plural
c) Second person
d) Third-person singular

e) Third-person plural

5. What **kind** of action is the following sentence describing?
“My brother William is always talking about his great political ambitions.”

a) An action happening at the moment of speech.
b) An action or event planned for the future.
c) An action happening currently, but not at the exact moment of speech.
d) An action that happens very often, especially something questionable or undesirable.

6. Which of the following questions is **not** in the present continuous tense?

a) “Is she still living in San Francisco?”
b) “Will we be seeing you tonight?”
c) “Aren’t we meeting them later?”
d) “Sorry, John is working right now.”

Present Perfect Tense

Definition

The **present perfect tense** (sometimes referred to as the **present perfect simple tense**) is formed by using the present tense of the auxiliary verb *have* (or *has*, if used with third-person singular pronouns) along with the *past participle* of the “main” verb. Despite its name, the present perfect is used to give general information about something that happened in the past (anytime “before now”), but which did not occur at a definitive point in time.

For example:

• “I *have seen* that movie already.”

• “She *has been* to Prague.”

• “*They’ve decided* where they want to go for their honeymoon.”

• “*John’s lied* to us too many times.”

Present Perfect vs. Past Simple

The present perfect tells us about something that occurred at some indefinite period in the past. However, if something happened at a specific point in time in

the past (“last night,” “two years ago,” “yesterday,” etc.), then we must use the **past simple tense**.

For example:

✖ “I have seen *Titanic* on TV last night.” (incorrect)
✔ “I **saw** *Titanic* on TV last night.” (correct)

✖ “She’s been to Prague when she was a little girl.” (incorrect)
✔ “She **went** to Prague when she was a little girl.” (correct)

If the focus moves to *when*, then we cannot use the present perfect anymore because the attention shifts to that particular point in time.

When we say “I have seen *Titanic*,” we are giving general information about something that happened anytime “before now.” The focus is on the fact that “I saw *Titanic*” and not on *when* I saw it.

The same applies to the second example from above:

• **Present perfect**: “She**’s been** to Prague.” (Generally, at some point in her lifetime.)

• **Past simple**: “She **went** to Prague when she was a little girl.” (We say *when* because the exact point in time is specified.)

True in the past and still true now

In English, we use the present perfect simple with the prepositions *for* and *since* when we speak about something that started in the past and is still true now. *For* is used to specify the duration of time leading up to the present; *since* clarifies the point in time at which something began. Let’s look at some examples:

• “I can’t believe Jenny **has lived** in Dubai *for 10 years*!”

• “He**’s had** that car *since he was in high school*.”

• “We**’ve known** each other *(for) our whole lives*, but we**’ve only been** friends *since 2006*.”

Even though a point in time is being specified in these cases, we still use the present perfect because the information in the sentence is **still true now**. The “for” and “since” join the past situation to a present one. If we were to use the past simple tense for any of the above, “for” would change to mean the duration of the event before it *finished*, and we would be unable to use “since” at all:

• “I can’t believe Jenny **lived** in Dubai for 10 years!” (Jenny no longer lives in Dubai.)

• “He **had** that car in high school.” (He owned it then, but does not now.)

• “We **knew** each other for our whole lives, but we only **became** friends in 2006.” (The two people are no longer acquainted; perhaps the other person is no longer living.)

Present Perfect vs. Present Perfect Continuous Tense

There is another, very similar tense that is used to talk about something that has been happening in the past and which is still happening now. It is called the **present perfect continuous** (or **progressive**) **tense**, and it is used to emphasize the *action* of the sentence (as opposed to the *result*).

It is formed by using *have/has* along with *been* (the past participle of *be*) and the *present participle* of the main verb. For example:

• “I **have been writing** many letters.” (This emphasizes the action of writing, in which the speaker is still engaged.)

This is slightly different from “I have written many letters” (present perfect), which emphasizes the result of many letters having been completed.

In some cases, either the present perfect or present perfect continuous can be used with almost no difference to the meaning of the sentence:

• “I can’t believe Jenny **has lived** in Dubai for 10 years!” (*present perfect*)

• “I can’t believe Jenny **has been living** in Dubai *for 10 years*!” (*present perfect continuous*)

However, though quite similar to present perfect simple, the usages of present perfect continuous *can* be a bit different. See the chapter section **Present Perfect Continuous Tense** to learn more.

Before now or not long ago

Let’s compare “I lost my keys” with “I’ve lost my keys.”

Taken on its own, the first sentence is less correct because we are expecting the speaker to say when he or she lost the keys; for example, “I lost my keys **yesterday**.”

“I lost my keys” *can* be correct on its own, but only if it answers a question.

For example:

• A: “Why are you late?”

• B: “(Because) I lost my keys.”

Otherwise, if there is no question or no specification of time, we say: “I’ve lost my keys.” This carries the meaning that the keys were lost just before now or not long ago.

Let’s take a look at another example:

• A: “Would you like a coffee?”

• B: “No, thanks, *I’ve had* one.”

This refers to not long ago. We don’t say *when* because the time is not important —we understand that the person had the coffee a short while ago. Again, if the time *is* being specified, then you have to put the sentence in past simple tense (i.e., “No, thanks, I **had** one an hour ago”).

Here are some more examples:

• “I’m not hungry, **I’ve had** lunch.”

• “**He’s taken** the dog to the park.”

• “She **has left** the kids with her sister.”

Remember, when the time becomes more important than the fact or the event, we need to use the past simple tense:

• **Present perfect**: “I**’ve had** lunch.” (Meaning just now or not long ago.)

• **Past simple**: “I **had lunch** at 12 o’clock.” (Referring to exactly *when* the speaker had lunch.)

It is incorrect to say: “I’ve had lunch at 12 o’clock.”

Negative sentences

You can also make the present perfect negative by simply adding *not* (or, in certain uses, *never*) between *have/has* and the main verb:

• “I **have *never* seen** *Titanic*.”

• “I’m so hungry; I ***haven’t* had** lunch yet!”

• “He **has *not* been** home since he finished high school.”

• “I regret that we**’ve *never* traveled** to Paris.”

Interrogative sentences

If an interrogative (question) sentence is in the present perfect tense, the subject and the auxiliary verb *have* are inverted. For example:

• "**Have** you **seen** this movie?"

• "**Has** she **heard** any news?"

• "**Have** they **started** the movie yet?"

Negative interrogative sentences

Negative interrogative sentences also ask a question, but they imply that the speaker expected the answer to be (or believes the answer *should* be) "yes." Negative interrogative sentences in the present perfect have the same form, simply with the negative word (usually *not*, but also *never*) placed after the subject.

• "**Have** you ***never*** **seen** this movie?"

• "**Has** she ***not*** **heard** any news?"

Not can also come after *have/has*, but it is almost always contracted:

• "**Haven't** they **started** the movie yet?"

• "***Hasn't*** his license **expired**?"

However, *never* cannot be used in this way.

With a question word

Interrogative sentences using question words (*who, what, where, when, why, which*, and *how*) maintain the same structure. *Have/has* can also be contracted with the question word:

• "*When* **have** you **been** to Italy?"

• "*Where* **has** she **gone**?"

• "***What've*** they **done**?"

They can also be negative, but then they are straightforward questions of who, what, where, when, why, which, or how something is **not** the case:

• "*Which* book **have** you ***not*** **read**?"

• "*Why* ***haven't*** you **eaten** your dinner yet?"

have got and has got

There is one tricky phrase that defies the normal form: *have/has got*. We would expect it to be in the present perfect, because it is in the form *have/has* plus the past participle of *get*. However, even though it is in the present perfect tense in *form*, in *meaning*, *have got* is actually in the present tense. It is used to indicate possession, in nearly the same manner as the verb *have* (especially in more informal speech or writing); *got* simply adds a certain level of emphasis to the possession.

For example, the following pairs of sentences mean almost exactly the same thing.

• "I **have got** three classes on Monday."
• "I **have** three classes on Monday."

• "I hear she**'s got** lots of money."
• "I hear she **has** lots of money."

• "You**'ve got** a lot of nerve coming here."
• "You **have** a lot of nerve coming here."

However, we can never use *have got* interchangeably with *have* when it is used to describe an action. For example:

✔ "I **have** breakfast every morning." (correct)

✖ "I**'ve got** breakfast every morning." (incorrect)

To create the past perfect *meaning* of *get*, we use its *other* past participle —***gotten***. We use this form to describe a *process*, such as receipt or acquisition, or some other action. For example:

• "I **have gotten** word that my father is ill."

• "**He's gotten** a lot of positive feedback about his play."

• "Those dang kids **have gotten** a Frisbee stuck in our tree again."

Note, however, that *have/has gotten* is **not** used to describe possession:

• "I hear she **has gotten** lots of money." (Implies acquisition or receipt of lots of money, rather than outright possession.)

Gotten is almost exclusively used in American English. It very rarely used in British English, where *have got* **is** sometimes used as the past perfect (informally). One such example is:

• "You**'ve got** taller." (British English)

• "You**'ve gotten** taller." (American English)



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Regardless, *have/has got* and *have/has gotten*, though correct, are often seen as being less formal or professional sounding, so depending on what you're writing, you may be better off rewording the sentence to avoid the phrases altogether.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following sentences uses the **present perfect tense**?

a) "I worked in the factory for a few months before I quit."
b) "She has been living with her father until recently."
c) "I hear he has left his wife."
d) "I had written to her years ago, but I never expected a response."

2. Which preposition is used with the present perfect to talk about something that was true in the past and is still true now?

a) For
b) In
c) At
d) Since
e) A & B
f) A & D
g) B & D

3. When is the present perfect **not** used?

a) For something that happened just before now.
b) For something that happened at a specific point in time in the past.
c) For something that was true in the past and is still true now.
d) For something that happened at some general time in the past.

4. Which **auxiliary verb** is used to form the present perfect tense?

a) Have
b) Be
c) Can
d) Do

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

Definition

The **present perfect continuous tense** (sometimes called the **present perfect progressive tense**) is formed by using the present tense of the auxiliary verb *have* (or *has*, if used with third-person singular pronouns) along with *been* (the *past participle* of the auxiliary verb *be*) and the present participle (*-ing* form) of the "main" verb. For example:

• "I **have been living** in New York City."

The present perfect continuous is very close in meaning to how we use the **present perfect tense**. However, there are some key differences that distinguish when and how the present perfect continuous is preferable.

Generally, we use the present perfect continuous to talk about that which began in the past and is still happening in the present; the focus is on something that continues to happen, as opposed to something which happened (finished) sometime in the past. We can also use the present perfect continuous to emphasize the length of time that has passed while something is happening, or that something is only temporary. We can also use it to talk about something that has been happening lately or only finished very recently.

That which began in the past and continues in the present

The present perfect continuous is often used to talk about something that began happening in the past (anytime "before now") and which is still happening (unfinished) in the present. We usually specify the duration of time involved, especially using the prepositions "for" or "since." Sometimes we can use different adverbials; sometimes we don't have to specify the duration at all. For example:

• "I have been living in New York City."

• "I have been living in New York City *for three years*."

• "I have been living in New York City *since I was 18*."

• "I have been living in New York City *all my life*."

In each of the above examples, it is understood implicitly that the speaker *still* lives in New York City; the only thing that changes is the duration of time. In this usage, the present perfect continuous is nearly identical in meaning to the

present perfect tense, and, indeed, most of these examples would make perfect sense either way:

• “I *have lived* in New York City for three years.”

• “I *have lived* in New York City since I was 18.”

• “I *have lived* in New York City all my life.”

The only sentence that changes in meaning is the very first example: to say “I have lived in New York City” without any further elaboration gives the impression that the speaker used to live there, but no longer does.

This distinction between something being completed as opposed to still happening is important, because it highlights when you might choose to use the present perfect continuous instead of the present perfect simple in certain instances.

Let’s look at the very first example again, but this time using a different adverbial:

✔ “I have been living in New York City *while I finish my Ph.D.*” (correct)

✖ “I have lived in New York City *while I finish my Ph.D.*” (incorrect)

We can see that this sentence does not make sense at all in the present perfect simple tense, because the adverbial “while I finish my Ph.D.” requires the action to still be taking place. In cases like this, we must use the present perfect continuous tense to get across the meaning correctly.

This distinction can also be particularly useful when we are giving a response to someone:

• Person A: “Let's take the longer trail when we're hiking back down.”

• Person B: “But we *have walked* for three hours!” (*present perfect*)

• Person B: “But we **have been walking** for three hours!” (**present perfect continuous**)

We can see that the response is more appropriate in the present perfect continuous, because it lays emphasis on the continuous action of walking. It also puts emphasis on the amount of time that the speaker has been doing something.

Emphasizing length of time

The present perfect continuous is especially useful for putting emphasis on the length of time that has passed while something is happening. This is particularly true when the meaning of the sentence could otherwise be expressed in the

present perfect simple. Here are some examples:

• “They *have studied* for three weeks for this exam.” (*present perfect*)
• “They **have been studying** for three weeks for this exam.” (**present perfect continuous**)

• “The girl *has worked* for five hours.” (*present perfect*)
• “The girl **has been working** for five hours.” (**present perfect continuous**)

The difference between these is slight, but noticeable. In both sets of examples, the present perfect continuous puts the emphasis on how long the action has taken, as well as the fact that it is still happening. The present perfect is simply reporting the completed result and how long it took.

Let’s look at another example:

• “He *has talked* on the phone for almost an hour.”

• “He **has been talking** on the phone for almost an hour.”

The first sentence is merely reporting how long the person was talking. With the present perfect continuous, the focus naturally shifts to the fact that an hour is a rather long period of time—and that he might continue talking for even longer!

That which is happening temporarily

Another subtle difference between the two tenses is that the present perfect is better at indicating that something is permanent, while the present perfect continuous is better at suggesting something is only temporary. For example:

• “I *have worked* in the shop for three years.”

• “I **have been working** in the shop for three years.”

The first sentence simply reports the length of time the speaker has been working in the shop. It does not suggest that he or she intends to stop working there at any point. The second sentence, however, makes the situation sound much less permanent. We can see the difference more clearly if we add a bit more information:

• “I *have worked* in the shop for three years, *but I hope to find something else soon*.”

• “I **have been working** in the shop for three years, *but I hope to find something else soon*.”

The first sentence sounds less natural than the second, because the new information specifically relates to the situation being a temporary one. In this case, the present perfect continuous is preferable.

That which has been happening lately or finished very recently

The present perfect continuous can also be used to express that which has been happening lately, but is not necessarily happening at the present moment in time. For example:

• “Bill **has been coming** into work late a lot.”

• “Don't you think Mary **has been spending** too much time on the computer lately?”

It can also be used without an adverbial to indicate that something was happening until only recently:

• “My neighbors are angry because my dog **has been barking**.”

• “Sorry I'm so sweaty! I**’ve been exercising** all morning.”

The action is not taking place at the exact moment of speech (in which case we would just use the **present simple tense**), but we can infer that it had been happening until very recently.

Negative sentences

Present perfect continuous sentences can be made negative by using the word *not*. It appears after *have/has*, and the two can be (and very often are) contracted.

• “I **have *not* been writing** much recently.”

• “She ***hasn't* been trying** to find work since her divorce.”

• “I need to get up earlier, because I ***haven't been making*** it to work on time lately.”

We generally do not use *never* with the present perfect continuous.

Interrogative sentences

Like the present perfect tense, an interrogative (question) sentence in the present perfect continuous has the subject and the auxiliary verb *have* inverted. For example:

• “Where **have** you **been living** lately?”

• “**Has** she **been feeling** OK?”

• “Why **have** you **been lying** to me?”

We can also make negative interrogative sentences in the present perfect continuous by adding *not* between the subject and *been*. We can also contract *have/has* and *not*:

• “***Haven't*** you **been writing** a new book?”

• “**Has** she ***not*** **been feeling** well?”

• “Why ***haven't*** they **been working** on their homework?”

As we see in the first example, the meaning of the question can become rhetorical, implying that the speaker expected the answer to be “yes.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. The past participle of which **auxiliary verb** is used to form the present perfect continuous tense?

a) Have
b) Be
c) Can
d) Do

2. The **main** verb of the present continuous tense is in what form?

a) Present participle
b) Past participle
c) Continuous participle
d) Future participle

3. Which of the following is something the present perfect continuous tense can be used for? (Choose the answer that is **most** correct.)

a) Talking about something that is always the case.
b) Talking about something that finished sometime in the past.
c) Talking about something that began in the past and is still happening.
d) Talking about something that is happening right now.

4. Which of the following sentences uses the **present perfect continuous** tense?
a) “I am writing to my sister in New England.”
b) “She has spoken to her boss in the hopes of getting a raise.”
c) “The train usually arrives at 3 PM, but it was late yesterday.”
d) “I have been leaving earlier than usual this week.”
e) “He hasn't seen the results of the test yet.”

Past Tense

Definition

The **past tense** is used to describe or indicate an action that began in the past. Depending on how we form the past tense, it might describe actions that happened or were completed in the past, were occurring at the same time as something else in the past, or continued to happen until or near the present time.

There are four forms of the past tense that can accomplish these tasks. We will give a brief summary of each below. To learn more about each of them, you can go to the appropriate section.

Past Simple Tense

The **past simple tense** (also called the **simple past tense**, or simply the **past simple**) is used to express completed actions. It is known as the past *simple* because it does not require any auxiliary verbs to complete its meaning; its structure is simply the past-tense form of the verb. The past simple tense only uses the **auxiliary verb** *did* when it is used in a question or becomes negative.

Examples

• “I **went** to the park yesterday.”

• “I ***did not*** **eat** the cookie.”

• “I **called** my sister over an hour ago, but she **didn’t call** back.”

• “**Did** they **mow** the lawn yet?”

• “What **did** you **wear** last night?"

Past Continuous Tense

Also called the **past progressive**, the **past continuous tense**, is used to describe

something that was in progress at a certain moment in the past and either finished in the past or continued until the present moment.

It is called the *past continuous* because it uses the past tense of the auxiliary verb *be* (*was* or *were*) followed by the **present participle** of the main verb (which is used to describe an action that is or was *continuously* happening).

Examples

• "We **were working** on our assignment when our parents came home."

• "The phone rang as they **were leaving**."

• "She **was still writing** her thesis at 2 o'clock in the morning."

• "My roommates **were fighting** all the time, so I decided to move out."

• "His memory **was fading** as he got older."

• "Sorry I'm so muddy; I **was working** in the garden."

Past Perfect Tense

The **past perfect tense** expresses the idea that something occurred before another action in the past. It can also show that something happened before a specific time in the past. To form the past perfect, we use *had* (the past tense of the auxiliary verb *have*) + the **past participle** of the main verb.

Because we use the past perfect to highlight two separate points in the past, we often use the conjunctions *before, when, because, until*, or *by the time* to specify the order in which they occurred in time.

Examples:

• "The film **had already ended** when I switched on the TV."

• "Unfortunately, he **had left** his keys in the house when he left."

• "The construction **had been going** quite smoothly before the earthquake."

• "I **hadn't dreamed** of living in Ireland before I visited the country."

• "**Had** you ever **ridden** on a tractor before working on the farm?"

• "What **had** you **done** that forced you to move abroad?"

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

The **past perfect continuous tense** (also called the **past perfect progressive tense**) is used to describe an action that began and was still in progress in the past before another past action started.

We usually use the present perfect continuous tense to emphasize the duration of the past action before the second action or event occurred. We can also use it to talk about a past action that caused or resulted in a past event or situation.

To form the past perfect continuous, we use *had been* + the **present participle** of the main verb.

Examples

• "We **had been waiting** for a long time before the bus finally came."

• "I ***had been*** **working** on the ranch for more than half my life when I retired."

• "I**'d been cleaning** all day, so I was too tired to go out last night."

• "She ***had been*** **traveling** around Europe when she heard about her mother's illness."

• "He ***hadn't been*** **feeling** well, so he went to lay down."

• "I was covered in mud as I***'d been*** **digging** in the back yard."

• "He needed to study harder, because he ***hadn't been*** **doing** very well on his exams."

• "Where ***had*** you ***been*** **staying** at the time of the incident?"

The Subjunctive Mood

So far, we've seen examples of the past tense being used to describe what did or did not actually happen. This is known as the **Indicative Mood**.

However, we can also use the past tense to describe hypothetical scenarios, conditions, and desires—this is known as the **subjunctive mood**, one of the **Irrealis Moods** in English.

Expressing Wishes

We generally use one of the past tenses to describe a wish or desire for a hypothetical alternative, even if it is for something in the present or the future.

For example:

• "I wish it **weren't** Monday."

• “I wish I **hadn’t agreed** to work on Sunday.”

• “We both wish you **weren’t moving** to Europe for college.”

Conditional Sentences

We can also use the different past tenses to create **conditional sentences**, which describe possible (but unreal) outcomes based on hypothetical conditions. For example:

• “If I **won** the lottery, I would buy a new house.”

• “If you **were** older, you could stay up as late as you want.”

• “If I **didn’t live** in London, I could never speak English so well.”

• “If she **had been** there, she could have helped you.”

• “What might you have done **had** you **known** the truth?”

• “**Had** you **been listening**, you would have heard that the report was needed on Monday.”

• “I might have lost my job if my brother **hadn’t been working** in the head office at the time.”

Go to the sections related to the **subjunctive mood** if you want to learn more about using the past tense to describe hypothetical actions, events, and situations.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **cannot** be described by one of the past tenses?

a) An action that began in the past and will continue into the future
b) An action in the past that was interrupted by another past action
c) An action that began and ended in the past
d) Things that began in the past and continued until the present moment
e) A & D
f) None of the above

2. Which form of the past tense is used to indicate the **cause** of a past result?

a) Past simple tense
b) Past continuous tense
c) Past perfect tense
d) Past perfect continuous tense

3. Which of the following sentences uses one of the past tenses?

a) “I regret to inform you that I shall be submitting my resignation soon.”
b) “They’ve been trying to get a loan.”
c) “She had been spending some time with her father.”
d) “He’ll have been working in this factory for nearly 30 years next March.”

4. Which form of the past tense does the following sentence use?
"I hadn’t considered her as a possible candidate for the job."

a) Past simple tense
b) Past continuous tense
c) Past perfect tense
d) Past perfect continuous tense

5. When do we use the past tense to describe a wish or desire?

a) For things happening in the past
b) For things happening in the present
c) For things happening in the future
d) All of the above

Past Simple Tense

Definition

The **past simple tense** (also called the **simple past tense**, or simply the **past simple**) is used to express completed actions. We often use the past simple with an adverb or adverbial phrase that specifies a time from the past, such as *yesterday, last year, an hour ago,* etc.

Structure

This tense is known as the past *simple* because, like the **present simple tense**, it does not require any auxiliary verbs to complete its meaning; its structure is simply the **subject** + the past tense form of the verb.

For example:

• "**I *went*** to the park."

The speaker's action of going to the park has been completed. The verb *go* is therefore put in the simple past tense, *went*.

However, we do not know anything about *when* the action was completed. We often add adverbs or adverbial phrases that provide additional information about past time, which can be placed at the beginning or end of the sentence. If appearing at the beginning of the sentence, these adverbs are often set apart by commas (although this is not necessary if the information is only one or two words). However, this information can't come between the subject and the verb, and it usually does not come between the verb and any information that is necessary to complete the verb's meaning (such as its **direct object** or an **adverbial complement**). For example:

✔ "**I *went*** to the park <u>yesterday</u>." (correct)
✔ "<u>Yesterday</u> **I *went*** to the park." (correct)
✔ "<u>Yesterday</u>, **I *went*** to the park." (correct)
✖ "**I** <u>yesterday</u> ***went*** to the park." (incorrect)
✖ "**I *went*** <u>yesterday</u> to the park." (incorrect)

In more stylized writing, however, adverbials relating to time will *sometimes* come between a verb and its complement, which gives them extra emphasis in the sentence. For example:

• “**I *wrote*** over an hour ago to my sister, but have yet to hear a reply.”

Notice that the tone becomes much more formal and the sentence sounds a bit more convoluted. In most cases, it is best to avoid this structure.

Types of sentences

Positive (affirmative) sentences

The types of past simple tense sentences we’ve looked at so far have all been examples of **positive sentences**, also known as **affirmative sentences**. These tell the reader what *did* happen. We can also create negative, interrogative, and negative interrogative sentences in the past simple tense; however, the structure of the sentence changes slightly in each case.

Negative sentences

In contrast to positive sentences, negative sentences in past simple tense tell the reader what *did not* happen. To form negative sentences in the past simple tense, we must use the auxiliary verb *did* (the past tense of *do*) together with *not* before the main verb of the sentence. The main verb, meanwhile, goes back to present simple tense, which is the infinitive form of the verb without *to*. For example:

• “I ***did not*** **eat** the cookie.”

• “She ***didn’t*** **enjoy** the movie.”

• “He ***didn’t*** **have** to leave so early.”

Interrogative sentences (questions)

Like negative sentences, we have to use the auxiliary verb *did* to make **interrogative sentences** (sentences that ask questions) in the past simple tense. In this case, however, *did* comes before the subject, rather than the verb.

We can see this construction more clearly if we compare affirmative vs. interrogative constructions:

• Affirmative: “**I *went*** to the park.”
• Interrogative: “***Did*** **you *go*** to the park?”

• Affirmative: “**Janet *saw*** a great movie on Friday.”
• Interrogative: “***Did*** **Janet *see*** a movie on Friday?”

• Affirmative: “**They *mowed*** the lawn already.”

• Interrogative: “***Did* they *mow*** the lawn yet?”

With question words

We can also use question words (such as *who/whom*, *what*, *where*, etc.) before *did* if we are asking for specific information. For example:

• “*Who/whom* **did** you **see**?”

• “*What* **did** you **wear** last night?"

• “*When* **did** they **arrive**?”

Additionally, we can use *who* without the auxiliary *did* in interrogative sentences in the past simple tense. In this case, it is functioning as an **interrogative pronoun** and acts as the subject of the sentence. Because we no longer need *did* to complete the sentence’s meaning, we use the past tense of the main verb once again.

• “*Who* **went** to the movie with you?”

• “*Who* **left** their wallet behind?”

Negative interrogative sentences

Negative interrogative sentences also ask a question, but they imply that the speaker expects the answer to be (or believes the answer *should* be) “yes.” We form these by adding the auxiliary verb *did* before the subject of the sentence and the word *not* after the subject. *Did* and *not* are very often contracted, in which case *didn’t* comes before the subject:

• “***Didn’t*** you **go** to Europe last year?”

• “**Did** Jessie ***not*** **try** the cake **we baked** for her?”

• “**Did** I ***not*** **tell** you to clean your room an hour ago?”

• “***Didn’t*** he **say** he was leaving in the morning?”

Other types of sentences

The types of sentences we’ve covered above are the most common uses of the past simple tense. However, there are a couple of other ways we can use the past simple to express specific meanings.

Emphatic *did* – the past emphatic

tense

There is another way that we can form a positive sentence in the past simple tense. It is known as the **past emphatic tense**, and it is formed by using *did* before the main verb, which is in present tense. It is the same construction as negative sentences in the past simple tense, except that we leave out the word *not*.

This form places special emphasis on the *fact* that something happened in the past, which is usually used as a means of explanation or to convince someone of something. For example:

• “But I’m telling you, **I *did* clean my room** when you asked me to!”

• “John was in a sorry state last night. I suppose **he *did* have a lot to drink**.”

We can hear the emphasis that is placed on the word *did* in these sentences if we read them aloud, and it is this stress that creates the explanatory intonation in the text.

Using the past simple tense for hypotheticals (the subjunctive mood)

If we are expressing a wish or desire, we usually use the past tense; for a present wish, we use the past simple.

For example:

• “I wish it **weren’t/wasn’t** Monday.”

• “I wish I **didn’t have to** go to work.”

This is an example of what’s called the **subjunctive mood** in English, which is used for expressing things that are hypothetical or not objectively factual. To learn more about how the past simple tense is used in this way, see the section on **subjunctive mood** under the chapter on **Mood**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What do we **primarily** use the past simple tense for?

a) To express what will happen
b) To express what did happen

c) To express what did not happen
d) To express what should have happened

2. In which of the following types of sentences do we need the auxiliary verb ***did*** to make the past simple tense?

a) Negative sentences
b) Interrogative sentences
c) Positive sentences
d) A & B
e) B & C

3. Select the sentence below that is **correct**:

a) “I knew where to go.”
b) “He didn’t studied hard enough.”
c) “But I did washed the dishes!”
d) “I wish it isn’t raining.”

4. Where does the auxiliary verb *did* appear in an **interrogative sentence** that does **not** use question words?

a) Immediately before the main verb
b) Immediately after the main verb
c) Immediately before the subject
d) Immediately after the subject

5. Which of the following sentences is **not** in the past simple tense?

a) “He found a way of keeping possession of the house.”
b) “We didn’t travel to Rome after all.”
c) “Well, you can be sure that he does have a solution in mind.”
d) “Did he not know that we were coming?”

Past Continuous Tense

Definition

Also called the **past progressive**, the **past continuous tense** is used to describe something that was in progress at a certain moment in the past.

It is called the *past continuous* because it uses the past tense of the auxiliary verb *be* (*was* or *were*) followed by the **present participle** of the main verb (which is used to describe an action that is or was *continuously* happening).

Structure

To form the past continuous, we order the sentence like this: subject + **was/were** + **present participle of main verb**.

For example:

• "I **was *working***."

• "She **was *reading*** a book."

These sentences are both complete, but they give very little information. Often, the past continuous tense is used with additional information to convey a more complete story about what surrounded a continuous action or event.

Functions of the past continuous

There are a number of functions for which we use the past continuous tense in speech and writing. Let's look at some examples of these various functions.

Before and after another action or event happened

• "We **were busy working** on our assignment when our parents came home."

• "I **was watching** the lovely sunset as a flock of birds soared by."

Interrupted by another action or event

• "He **was having** the most wonderful time on the beach when the weather suddenly turned awful."

• "As they **were leaving**, the phone rang."

Before and after a certain time

• "Two years ago, I **was working** at a bar in New York City."

• “She **was still up writing** her thesis at 2 o’clock in the morning.”

For a certain length of time (whether specific or undefined)

• “My head **was throbbing**.” (undefined length of time)

• “You **were eating** that sandwich for an hour!” (specific length of time)

Repeatedly and frequently

• “My parents **were fighting** all the time when I decided to leave.

• “I **was often worrying** we wouldn’t be able to afford the wedding in the months leading up to it.”

A source of irritation

We can also indicate that things that happened repeatedly were a source of irritation by using the **adverbs of frequency** *always* or *constantly*, as in:

• “My ex-husband **was *always* leaving** dirty dishes in the sink.”

• “The old boss **was *constantly* berating** employees over silly issues.”

To show development, growth, or other change(s) over time

• “Things **were changing**; there was no denying that.”

• “I thought her condition **was improving**, but I guess not.”

• “His memory **was fading** as he got older.”

Narrating a story or describing an atmosphere

• “As they walked into the sunshine, the birds **were singing** and the breeze **was softly blowing**.”

• “I **was working** in a New York City bar when all of this took place.”

Sentence types

All of the examples above have used the past continuous in **positive sentences**. As with the other tenses, we can use the past continuous in negative, imperative, and negative imperative sentences, with slight changes in structure as a result.

Negative sentences

To make a sentence negative in the past continuous, we simply add "not" between the auxiliary verb (*was/were*) and the present participle of the main verb. *Not* is often contracted with the auxiliary verb to make *wasn't/weren't*.

For example:

• "I ***was not*** **feeling** well."

• "The kids ***weren't*** **sleeping** when we got home."

• "She ***wasn't*** **working** for two years after the baby was born."

Interrogative sentences (questions)

To form an interrogative sentence (i.e., one that asks a question) in the past continuous tense, simply invert the subject with the verb.

For example:

• Positive: "**I *was* sleeping** when you called."
• Interrogative: "***Were you sleeping*** when I called?"
• Positive: "**They *were* watching** a movie last night."
• Interrogative: "***Were* you watching** a movie last night?"

• Positive: "**She *was* working** on her thesis at the time."

• Interrogative: "***Was* she working** on her thesis at the time?"

Negative interrogative sentences

Negative interrogative sentences also ask a question, but they imply that the speaker expects the answer to be (or believes the answer *should* be) "yes." We form these by adding the word *not* after the subject. *Was/were* and *not* are very often contracted into *wasn't/weren't*, in which case they both come before the subject:

• "***Was* she *not* looking** for a new place to live?"

• “***Weren’t* you watching** a movie last night?”

• “***Wasn’t* he keeping** track of the inventory?”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **auxiliary verbs** is used to form the past continuous tense?

a) can
b) do
c) be
d) will

2. What *form* of the **main verb** is used in the past continuous tense?

a) present participle
b) past participle
c) future participle
d) infinitive form

3. Which of the following sentences is in the past continuous tense?

a) “I had been watching a movie when they walked in.”
b) “He knew a lot of people who had seen the movie.”
c) “She was waiting to hear from her sister in New York.”
d) “I am certainly trying to find a solution.”

4. Which of the following sentences is **not** in the past continuous tense?

a) “I was always trying to find the best opportunities.”
b) “They left without saying goodbye.”
c) “Weren’t we looking for something just like this?”
d) “Sure, he’s doing his best, but is it good enough?”

Past Perfect Tense

Definition

The **past perfect tense** expresses the idea that something occurred before another action in the past. It can also show that something happened before a

specific time in the past.

Consider these two sentences, for instance:

• “When she arrived at the airport, she realized she **dropped** her passport.”

• “When she arrived at the airport, she realized she **had dropped** her passport.”

She arrived at the airport in a moment in the past, but the moment she dropped her passport happened before this past moment. Because the first sentence only uses the **past simple tense**, it sounds as if both moments happened at the same time in the past, and the sentence becomes confusing. By using the **past perfect tense** in the second sentence, we are able to distinguish that one event happened earlier than the other.

Structure

To form the past perfect tense, we use *had* (the past tense of the auxiliary verb *have*) + the **past participle** of the main verb.

Because we use the past perfect to highlight two separate points in the past, we often use the conjunctions *before, when, because, until*, or *by the time* to specify the order in which they occurred in time.

An action or event before another action or event

If we are highlighting that the action or event in the **past perfect tense** came before *another* action or event, this second verb is often (but not always) in the ***past simple tense***. For example:

• “When I *turned on the TV*, the film **had ended**.”

• “I **had dreamed** of living in Ireland even before I *visited* the country.”

• “She *was sad when she left* the house she **had lived in** for so many years.”

• “Unfortunately, he **had not taken** his keys before he *left* the house.”

Notice that the past perfect can appear in a sentence either before or after a later action or event. Regardless of its position, the past perfect always refers to an earlier time.

This is especially important to remember when using the conjunction *when*, because it will help distinguish between events that happened simultaneously in the past and events that happened sequentially. For example, consider these two

subtly (but distinctly) different sentences:

• “Mary *cooked* dinner when the kids *came* home.”

• “Mary **had cooked** dinner when the kids *came* home.”

In the first sentence, it sounds like Mary started cooking at the same time as the kids arrived home. By using the past perfect in the second sentence, it is made clear that Mary had already cooked dinner before the kids arrived.

Omitting the past perfect

The past perfect is not always necessary, however, when we use the conjunctions *before* or *after* to link two clauses of past events. This is because these two words already specify an order of time. If this is the case, both verbs can be in the past simple tense. For example:

• “I **packed** a bag of snacks before I *left* for the airport.” (correct)

• “I **had packed** a bag of snacks before I *left* for the airport.” (correct, but not necessary)

Although not absolutely necessary, the past perfect still gives a greater sense of time than the past simple alone. The first sentence above is completely correct and easy to understand. The second sentence is equally correct, but it lets us know that the earlier event did not happen *immediately* before the later one. In this particular example, it gives the impression that the speaker had the foresight to pack a bag of snacks, rather than simply doing so just before he or she left for the airport.

This distinction is subtle, and its impact on the sentence is somewhat minor, but using the past perfect tense in this way creates a more rich and nuanced meaning.

An action or event before a specific point in time

If we are talking about a past perfect action that came before a certain point in time in the past, then we use an adverbial prepositional phrase to specify exactly *when* we are talking about.

For example:

• “*Until that afternoon*, she **had never considered** living abroad.”

• “The construction **had gone** quite smoothly *before the earthquake*.”

• “I **had expected** to be married *by this morning*.”

• “I **hadn’t used** a hammer *before working in construction*.”

(Note that, in the last example, “working in construction” acts as the object of the preposition *before*. *Working* is a gerund in this case, so it does not have to be in the past simple tense, as with the other verbs we examined in the previous section.)

Other types of sentences

All of the above sentences are either **positive sentences** (also known as **affirmative sentences**) or **negative sentences**—as we can see, the negative sentences are formed by simply inserting *not* or *never* between *had* and the past participle of the main verb.

However, there is another way we can construct negative sentences in the past perfect. We’ll briefly look at how this is used, and then we’ll examine the other types of sentences that can be made in the past perfect tense.

Negative sentences – alternative construction

Most of the time, we make the past perfect negative by simply adding *not* or *never* after the auxiliary verb *had*.

If we want to emphasize that something never happened before a given time, event, or action in the past, we can also place the word *never* before the verb *had*. In this case, both *never* and *had* come before the subject of the clause. For instance:

• “***Never had* I felt** so alive.”

• “***Never had* she imagined** that love like this could exist.”

If we want to add even more emphasis, we can also include the word *before* between *never* and *had*, as in:

• “***Never before had* she seemed** so beautiful to him.”

Such sentences are much more literary in style—they typically would not be found in academic, professional, or colloquial speech or writing. Because of this literary usage, the construction is also primarily used with **stative verbs** (e.g.

feel, imagine, appear) as opposed to **action verbs**. For example, the statement "never before had I run so far" sounds rather over-embellished or hyperbolic.

Finally, you may have noticed that none of the above sentences include another action, event, or point in time to which the past perfect is referring. This again is due to the literary usage of such a construction. In such cases, the past perfect often alludes to something that has already been mentioned elsewhere in the narrative.

Interrogative sentences (questions)

To form interrogative sentences (sentences that ask questions) in the past perfect, the auxiliary verb *had* again comes before the subject, which is then followed by the past participle of the main verb. Most of the time, we use the word *ever* before the main verb to ask if something had happened or been the case at any time before something else. It is usually constructed with the conjunction or preposition *before*.

For example:

• "***Had* you ever been on** a tractor *before starting work on the farm*?"

• "*Before the war*, **had you ever considered** living abroad?"

Negative interrogative sentences

Negative interrogative sentences also ask a question, but they imply that the speaker expects the answer to be (or believes the answer *should* be) "yes." We form these by adding the word *not* or *never* after the subject.

Had and *not* are very often contracted, in which case *hadn't* comes before the subject.

Negative interrogative sentences in the past perfect are not very common in everyday speech and writing. Like the alternative use of *never* that we looked at above, it would be more common to hear them in a story or narrative. For example:

• "I began to panic. It was nearly midnight. ***Hadn't* the train arrived yet**?"

Negative interrogative sentences in the past perfect might also occur if someone is asking another person a question about a story they are telling. For example:

• Person A: "It was nearly midnight by the time I got home, with still more work ahead of me."

• Person B: “***Hadn’t* you at least gotten** close to finishing by then?”

• Person A: “No, I was barely even halfway done!”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. We use the past tense of which **auxiliary verb** to form the past perfect?

a) be
b) will
c) have
d) do

2. Which of the following is **not** something we use the past perfect tense to describe?

a) An action or event before a specific point in time
b) An action in the past that was happening until recently
c) An action or event before another action or event
d) A hypothetical situation in the past that might have led to a different outcome

3. Which of the following types of sentences is *more likely* to be found in **literary writing** when it is in the past perfect tense?

a) Negative interrogative
b) Conditional
c) Positive
d) Interrogative

4. Which of the following sentences is in the past perfect tense?

a) “I had been hitchhiking for miles before someone picked me up.”
b) “I have seen some weird things out here on the road.”
c) “Unfortunately, I hadn’t eaten before I left home that day.”
d) “I felt awful by the time I finally got home.”

5. Which of the following is **not** in the past perfect tense?

a) “Had she ever been in this bar before today?”
b) “He hadn’t seen her when he first came in.”
c) “Never before had he met someone so interesting.”
d) “He had a strong hope that they would meet again.”

Past Perfect Continuous Tense Definition

The **past perfect continuous tense** (also called the **past perfect progressive tense**) is used to describe an action that began and was still in progress in the past before another past action started. In contrast to the **past perfect tense**, which describes a past action that finished before the second action started, the past perfect continuous emphasizes the continuous progress of that action.

We usually use the present perfect continuous tense to emphasize the duration of the past action before the second action or event occurred. We can also use it to talk about a past action that caused or resulted in a past event or situation.

To form the past perfect continuous, we use *had been* + the **present participle** of the main verb. It is nearly identical in structure to the **present perfect continuous tense**, except that the **modal auxiliary verb** *have* is now in the past tense. For example:

• "We **had been waiting** for a long time when the bus finally came."

• "My little sister **had been sitting** very quietly, but then she started to cry."

• "I**'d been cleaning** all day, so I was too tired to go out last night."

Like the **past continuous tense**, the past perfect continuous is generally only used with **action verbs**, not **stative verbs**.

Using the Past Perfect Continuous

Actions interrupted in the past

The most common use of the past perfect continuous tense is to describe an action that was in progress in the past before another past action or event occurred. When the second action happens, it interrupts and marks the completion of the first one. For example:

• "I ***had been*** **teaching** English in Tokyo when the earthquake hit."

• "They***'d been*** **living** in New York before she got the job in Washington, D.C."

• "She ***had been*** **traveling** around Europe when she heard about her mother's illness."

Past durations of time

When we use the past perfect continuous tense in this way, we often describe the **duration** of the continuous past action. The meaning is very similar to the **present perfect continuous tense** in this way. However, whereas the present perfect continuous describes an action that was happening up until the present moment, the past perfect continuous highlights an action that was finished when another action or event in the past occurred. Consider, for example, these two sentences:

• "She ***has been*** **waiting** for over an hour for him to arrive." (present perfect continuous tense)
• "She ***had been*** **waiting** for over an hour for him to arrive." (past perfect continuous tense)

The meaning of both sentences is quite similar. However, in the first sentence, *she* began waiting an hour ago in the past, and is still waiting; in the second sentence, *she* began waiting an hour ago in the past, but the waiting was completed, either when he arrived or when she decided to stop waiting.

Here are some other examples using the future perfect continuous tense:

• "I ***had been*** **working** on the ranch for more than half my life when I retired."

• "She ***had been*** **studying** Japanese for four years by the time she moved to the country."

• "When the teacher came back, we ***had been*** **reading** for half an hour."

Cause of past results

We can also use the past perfect continuous to indicate that the continuous action that finished in the past was the cause of a condition, situation, or event in the past. Used in this way, the past continuous action was not interrupted by a second action or event. For example:

• "She was very sweaty because she ***had been*** **running** for nearly an hour."

• "I didn't have any energy to play with the kids because I ***had been*** **working** so hard all the week."

• "I could tell you ***had been*** **swimming** all morning because you looked like a prune!"

We can also use the past perfect continuous in this way without an expression of

duration, as in:

• “He ***had been*** **feeling** unwell, so he went to lay down.”

• “I was covered in mud as I ***had been*** **digging** in the back yard.”

Past continuous vs. Past perfect continuous

We can use the **past continuous tense** in a similar way to show causation, but the difference is that the past continuous describes an action that finished just now or very recently, while the past perfect continuous describes an action that may have finished further in the past. For example:

• “My eyes were tired because I ***was*** **working** on the computer.” (past continuous)
The action finished just now or very recently.

• “My eyes were tired because I ***had been*** **working** on the computer.” (past perfect continuous)
The action likely finished at a point further in the past.

With action verbs

Because it describes continuous, dynamic action, the past perfect continuous can only be used with **action verbs**; it cannot be used with **stative verbs** (such as **linking verbs** or **verbs of the senses**), which describe non-continuous actions. For stative verbs, we can only use the **past simple** or **past perfect** tenses. For example:

✔ “We **were** married for 10 years before we had kids.” (correct—past simple tense)
✔ “We ***had*** **been** married for 10 years before we had kids.” (correct—past perfect tense)
✖ “We ***had been*** **being** married for 10 years before we had kids.” (incorrect—past perfect continuous tense)

✔ “By the next morning, it all **seemed** like just a bad dream.” (correct—past simple tense)
✔ “By the next morning, it all ***had*** **seemed** like just a bad dream.” (correct—past perfect tense)
✖ “By the next morning, it all ***had been*** **seeming** like just a bad dream.”

(incorrect—past perfect continuous tense)

Other types of sentences

So far we've only looked at **affirmative** sentences—**declarative sentences** that describe an action that **did** happen. Let's look at some of the other types of sentences we can make with the past perfect continuous.

Negative sentences

Sentences in the past perfect continuous tense can be made negative by using the word *not* after *had*; the two words are often contracted into *hadn't*. For example:

• "I didn't mind her coming over; I ***hadn't been*** **getting** much work done anyway."

• "She ***hadn't been*** **living** there for very long before she had to move back home."

• "He needed to study harder, because he ***hadn't been*** **doing** very well on his exams."

We generally do not use *never* with the past perfect continuous tense.

Interrogative sentences

When we make questions with the past perfect continuous tense, the subject and the auxiliary verb *had* are inverted. For example:

• "Where ***had*** you ***been*** **working** at the time of the incident?"

• "***Had*** she ***been*** **living** in Italy for a long time?"

• "Why ***had*** they ***been*** **telling** me I was doing a good job if they were planning on firing me?"

We can also make interrogative sentences negative by adding *not* between the subject and *been*, or we can contract *had* and *not* into *hadn't*:

• "***Hadn't*** you ***been*** **writing** a novel before you got this job?"

• "***Had*** he ***not been*** **feeling** well at the time?

• "You had plenty of money, so why ***hadn't*** you ***been*** **paying** your bills?"

As we see in the first example, a negative interrogative question can sometimes be used rhetorically, implying that the speaker expects the answer to be "yes."

Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences describe a hypothetical action or outcome that might happen if a certain condition is or was met. Conditional sentences that use the past perfect continuous tense are known as **third conditionals**, which establish a hypothetical situation in the past followed by a hypothetical outcome that did not really happen.

There are two ways we can use the past perfect continuous to form conditional sentences. We can either use the normal form in a conditional clause that begins with *if*, or we can invert *had* with the subject to create a conditional clause, which adds a bit more formality to the tone of the sentence.

For example:

• "If I ***had still been*** **living** there when the earthquake hit, I probably would have lost everything I owned."
• "We would have gone hiking on Saturday if it ***hadn't been*** **snowing** in the mountains."

• "***Had*** you ***been*** **listening**, you would have heard that the report was needed on Monday."
• "I could have lost my job ***had*** my brother ***not been*** **working** in the head office at the time."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What form of the **main verb** is used to create the past perfect continuous tense?

a) infinitive
b) base form
c) present participle
d) past participle

2. Which of the following is a function of the past perfect continuous tense?

a) To describe how long something had been happening by a specific point in the past
b) To indicate the cause of a past result
d) To indicate a continuous action that began in the past and continues into the future

d) To indicate a continuous action that finished in the present
e) A & B
f) B & C
g) C & D

3. Where does *not* appear in a **negative sentence** in the past perfect continuous tense?

a) After the subject
b) After *had*
c) After *been*
d) After the present participle of the main verb

4. Which of the following uses the past perfect continuous tense to form a **conditional sentence**?

a) “Had you been waiting for long before your brother arrived?”
b) “I hadn’t been studying for more than an hour when they closed the library.”
c) “Had we been digging just a few feet from here, we would have hit a gas line.”
d) “He had been living in Rome for eight years, so he spoke perfect Italian.”

5. Which of the following types of verbs **cannot** be used in the past perfect continuous tense?

a) action verbs
b) stative verbs
c) factitive verbs
d) conditional verbs
e) A & B
f) B & C
g) C & D

Future Tense (Approximation)

Definition

Grammatically speaking, there are no **future tenses** in the English language; verbs do not inflect (conjugate) a certain way to reflect future actions. There are really only **aspects of the future tense**—that is, ways of expressing the future

using other grammatical elements and constructions.

To talk about other future events or actions, we use different sentence constructions to achieve a future point of view. This is most often accomplished by using the **modal auxiliary verb** *will* or the verb phrase *be going to*. These constructions make up what are commonly referred to as the **future tenses**.

Future Simple Tense

The future simple tense is used in a few different ways to describe things that have not happened yet—it can be used to predict something, to make promises, to describe a future fact, to describe unplanned actions, or to offer to do something.

The simplest way we create the future simple tense is by using *will*/*be going to* + the base form (the **infinitive** without *to*) of the main verb of the sentence. For example:

• "I ***will*** **walk** to work."

• "The president ***will*** **be** in Portland tomorrow."

• "Don't worry, I**'m going to pay** for the coffee."

• "I **am going to** drive to work tomorrow, if you want a ride."

Future Continuous Tense

The **future continuous tense** (also known as the **future progressive**) is used to describe an unfinished action occurring in the future; this action can either begin in the future, or it can already be in progress in the present and continue into the future. We can also use the future continuous tense to make predictions about an action we think will still be happening in the future.

To form the future continuous, we usually use *will*/*be going to* + the **auxiliary verb** *be* + the **present participle** of the main verb. For example:

• "I **will be running** 10 miles tomorrow."

• "This is your captain speaking; the plane **will be landing** *in 10 minutes*."

• "We **are going to be buying** our own house *soon*."

• "They**'ll be sleeping** by the time we return home."

• "In 10 years, people **are going to be consuming** even more natural resources."

Future Perfect Tense

We use the **future perfect tense** to say that something will finish or complete at a specific point in the future. We also often include durations of time to indicate how long something has been happening once a future moment in time is reached.

In addition, we can use the future perfect tense to make a present prediction about something that we believe has or should have happened in the past.

The most common way we create the future perfect tense is by using *will* + *have* + the **past participle** of the verb. For example:

• "This June, I ***will have*** **lived** in New York for four years."

• "You ***will have*** **heard** by now that the company is going bankrupt."

• "She***'ll have*** **slept** for the whole day if she doesn't get up soon!"

(We can also use *be going to* instead of *will*, but this construction is less common and cannot be used to make a present prediction about a past action.)

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

Like the **future perfect tense**, we use the **future perfect continuous tense** (also known as the **future perfect progressive tense**) to indicate how long something has been happening once a future moment in time is reached, emphasizing the continuous nature of the action. It can also be used in this way to indicate the cause of a possible future result.

The most common way we create the future perfect continuous tense is by using *will* + *have been* + the **present participle** of the verb. For example:

• "By June, I ***will have been*** **living** in New York for four years."

• "She's going to miss half the day because she***'ll have been*** **sleeping** for so long!"

• "By the time I get there, she ***will have been*** **waiting** for over an hour."

• "I ***will have been*** **working** on this ranch for more than half my life when I turn 40."

• "I'm not going to have any energy to play with the kids because I***'ll have*** **been working** so hard this week."

(Like the future perfect tense, we can also use *be going to* instead of *will*, but this

construction is less common.)

Using *shall*

In addition to *will* and *be going to*, the modal verb *shall* can also be used to form each of the future tenses. Although *will* is generally preferred in modern English (especially American English), using *shall* adds an additional degree of politeness or formality to the sentence sometimes lacking with *will* or *be going to*.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **cannot** be described by the future tenses?

a) Things that began in the past and will continue into the future
b) Things that we believe have already happened
c) Things that are going to happen in the future
d) Things that began in the past and continued until the present moment
e) A & C
f) B & C
g) None of the above

2. Which form of the future tense is used to indicate the cause of a possible future result?

a) Future simple tense
b) Future continuous tense
c) Future perfect tense
d) Future perfect continuous tense

3. Which of the following sentences does **not** use one of the future tenses?

a) “I regret to inform you that I shall be submitting my resignation soon.”
b) “They’re going to see if they can get a loan.”
c) “She had been spending some time with her father.”
d) “He’ll have been working in this factory for nearly 30 years next March.”

4. Which form of the future tense does the following sentence use?
“I won’t be coming here ever again!”

a) Future simple tense

b) Future continuous tense
c) Future perfect tense
d) Future perfect continuous tense

Future Simple Tense

Definition

English verbs do not have unique forms for the future tense; instead, we use different sentence constructions to describe actions that will occur in the future. There are two ways we do this for the **future simple tense**.

The simplest way we create the future simple tense is by using the **modal verb** *will* + the bare infinitive (without *to*) of the main verb of the sentence, as in, "I **will walk** to work."

We can also form the future simple tense by using *be going to* + the bare infinitive of the main verb, as in "I **am going to walk** to work." However, the usages of this construction are slightly different.

For now, we will focus on *will* constructions; a little later on, we'll look at how *going to* can be used to create subtle differences in meaning.

Uses of the future simple tense – *will* constructions

The future simple tense can be used in a few different ways to describe things that have not happened yet. The structure of the sentence does not change, though, so we generally rely on context or other parts of the sentence to create these differences in meaning.

To predict something

Example:

• "I think it **will rain** today."
This is a prediction; it may be based on fact (i.e., because there are dark storm clouds), or perhaps on current, less tangible evidence (i.e., it "feels" like rain is coming).

• "Our team **will win** the game."

This is also a prediction, which may or may not be based on facts or past experience. We often use the future simple tense for simple predictions that are based on desires.

To make promises

Example:

• “I **will definitely come** to the party. You have my word.”
• “I**’ll wash** the dishes later.”
Neither of these is a prediction; each is an assurance that something is going to happen. The adverb *definitely* in the first sentence solidifies this promise, while *later* in the second sentence lets the reader/listener know when the dishes will be washed.

To describe a future fact

Example:

• “The president **will be** in Portland tomorrow.”

• “I **will drive** to work tomorrow, if you want a ride.”

These are neither predictions nor promises, but rather are factual statements of thing that are going to happen.

Unplanned actions or decisions

We can also use the future simple when we decide to do something at the moment of speaking, rather than something that was already planned or decided.

For example:

• Person A: “There’s no milk left.”
• Person B: “I **will get** some the next time I’m out.”

• Person A: “The TV isn’t working, so you won’t be able to watch the football game.”
• Person B. “I**’ll just read** a book instead.”

To offer to do something

Example:

Imagine you see your neighbor coming out of the supermarket carrying two

heavy shopping bags. You might say:

• “I**’ll help** you. Give me one of the bags and I **will carry** it for you.”

If your friend is low on money when you are both out at a coffee shop, you might say:

• “Don’t worry, I**’ll pay** for the coffee.”

Negatives

We can achieve strong negative meanings for most of the above uses by adding *not* or *never* to *will*, as in:

• “Our team **will never win** the game.” (negative prediction)

• “I **won’t wash** the dishes later.” (negative promise; also used for refusals)

• “He **won’t drive** to work tomorrow.” (negative future fact)

However, we generally don’t put unplanned decisions or offers in the negative with the *will* construction, because the sentence ends up describing a negative promise, a refusal, or a negative future fact:

• “I**’ll never read** a book.” (negative promise)

• “I **won’t pay** for the coffee.” (refusal or negative fact)

Interrogative sentences (questions)

To form questions in the future simple tense, we simply move *will* before the subject of the sentence. For example:

• “**Will** it **rain** today?” (question of a prediction)

• “**Will** you **come to the party**?” (question of an intention, promise, or assurance)

• “**Will** the president **be** in Portland tomorrow?” (question of a future fact)

• “**Will** you **get** some milk the next time you are out?” (an unplanned request, phrased as a question)

We can also use *shall* instead of *will* in questions when making offers, as in:

• “**Shall** I **carry** that bag for you?”

• “**Shall** I **get** some milk the next time I’m out?”

This makes the question more formal and polite.

Going to constructions

In several of the cases we looked at above, we can use *be going to* in place of *will*.

For example:

• “I think it **is going to rain** today.”

• “I **am going to come** to the party.”

• “The president **is going to be** in Portland tomorrow.”

Going to for intended future actions

Unlike the *will* construction, we do not use *going to* to describe unplanned decisions or offers; instead, we use this construction to express intended, pre-planned actions, as in:

• Person A: “There’s no milk left.”
• Person B: “I**’m going to get** some the next time I’m out.”

• Person A: “I don’t have any cash.”
• Person B: “Don’t worry, I **am going to pay** for the coffees.”

This is also the case if we use *going to* in one of our previous examples that described a future fact:

• “I**’m going to** drive to work tomorrow, if you want a ride.”

When we used the *will* construction, we were describing something that is considered a concrete fact; now, however, it expresses a planned intention. We can see this in other examples as well:

• “She**’s going to play** soccer later.” (She has already decided that this is what she wants to do later.)

• “He **is going to make** a cake for us tomorrow.” (This is his plan of action.)

We can also use *going to* when something is certain or very likely to happen, but not in the immediate future.

For example:

• “Look at those black clouds. It**’s going to rain**.” (This is very likely due to the evidence of the weather.)

• “My mama told me that she**’s going to have** a baby.” (This is a certainty, but it will not happen right away.)

• “Hurry up! We**’re going to be** late.” (This is also evident and very likely. Although it will happen soon, it will not happen immediately.)

Finally, children often use the *going to* construction when they speak about what they want to be when they grow up, as in:

• “When I grow up, I**’m going to be** a police officer.” (At this moment, that is what I intend to be.)

Interrogative sentences using *going to*

To form interrogative sentences in the future simple tense using the *going to* construction, we simply put the linking verb *be* before the subject of the sentence. This is also the case if we use question words. For example:

• “**Are** you **going to see** Jennifer later?”

• “**Is** it **going to rain**?”

• “***What* are** you **going to say** to him?”

• “***Where* are** they **going to stay**?”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which **modal auxiliary verb** is commonly used to create the future simple tense?

a) can
b) do
c) will
d) would

2. What is the **main** function of the *going to* construction (as compared to the *will* construction)?

a) To express intended action
b) To express certainty in predictions
c) To express an unplanned decision
d) To make a refusal

3. What is the following sentence describing?
“I’ll drive to the airport to pick you up, if you like.”

a) A prediction
b) An unplanned action
c) A future fact
d) An offer

4. What **other** auxiliary verb can be used **instead** of *will* in interrogative sentences in the future simple tense?

a) can
b) shall
c) would
d) going

5. Which construction would we **most likely** use to describe something that is certain or very likely to happen, but not in the immediate future?

a) will + bare infinitive
b) be going to + bare infinitive
c) Either A or B
d) Neither A nor B

Future Continuous Tense

Definition

The **future continuous tense** (also known as the **future progressive**) is used to describe an unfinished action occurring in the future. This action can either begin in the future, or it can already be in progress in the present and continue into the future.

Structure

As with all so-called future tenses, English verbs do not inflect into a unique "future form"—rather, we must use auxiliaries and participles in other tenses to describe future events or actions.

To form the future continuous, we use *will be* **or** *is/are going to be* + the **present participle** of the main verb.

For example:

• "I **will be running** 10 miles tomorrow."

• “He **is going to be leaving** the company soon.”

Much of the time, either construction may be used with no appreciable difference in the meaning of the sentence. However, as with the **future simple tense**, we sometimes use the *will be* construction for actions or events that are more certain to happen, whereas the *going to be* construction can be used to imply an *intended* action or event.

Using the future continuous tense

The future continuous is primarily used in three ways:

1. To say that something will be in progress from a certain moment in the future.

2. To predict that something will be in progress at some point in the future (i.e., not starting at a specific time).

3. To describe something that is expected or predicted to continue happening from the present for an uncertain amount of time into the future.

Let’s look at examples of each of these uses.

From a certain point in the future

In this usage, we describe something that will definitely be happening in the future—that is, it is not a prediction or an expectation. Because it is a certainty, we often reference specific points in time.

For example:

• “This is your captain speaking; the plane **will be landing** *in 10 minutes*.”
This means that it will begin to land progressively starting 10 minutes from now.

• “Please make your way to checkout counters, as the store **will be closing** *in five minutes*.”
This means that in five minutes’ time, the store will begin to close.

• “I just wanted to let you know that I**’ll be arriving** in Milan *on Saturday*.”
In this example, the action of *arriving* will begin on Saturday.

We can also use more vague references in time, so long as they are not too vague or too far in the future. For instance:

• “I need to get this report finished, as the boss **is going to be leaving** *shortly*.”
The progressive future action is going to begin happening (it is not a prediction), but the time frame is not exact.

We can see, however, that this can easily turn into a prediction when we use vague time references:

• “We **will be buying** our own house *soon*.”

• “Our kids **are going to be leaving** for college *eventually*.”

Predictions of future actions

The future continuous is often used to predict actions that we think or presume will be happening at an uncertain or generic point in the future.

• “Don’t call Paul after 7 PM; he**’ll be having** dinner.”
We predict that this will be in progress at some point after 7 o’clock.

• “In 10 years, people **are going to be consuming** even more natural resources.”
We predict this to be in progress at a certain point in the future. Even though a specific time is referenced, it is far enough in the future that we can assume this isn’t a certainty.

• “By the time we arrive home, they**’ll be sleeping**.”
Again, we predict this action will be in progress at a future point (when we arrive home); we have reason to believe this, but it is not an absolute certainty.

In progress now and into the future

We can also use the future continuous to predict that an event or action is currently happening, and that it will continue for an uncertain amount of time into the future. For example:

• “Don’t call the house now, as John **will be sleeping**.”
We predict this to be in progress now, and that it will continue to be happening in the near future.

If we want to describe something that is definitely happening now and will (or is expected to) continue to happen in the future, we use the adverb *still* after *will* or before *going*. For instance:

• “I’m so behind on this assignment. The sun is going to rise and I **will *still* be working** on it.”

• “No matter who is elected, we**’re still going to be dealing** with the effects of the recession for years to come.”

Types of sentences

So far, we've looked at examples of positive sentences using the future continuous tense. As with the other tenses, we can also form negative, interrogative, and negative-interrogative sentences.

Negative sentences

We form the negative of the future continuous by adding **not** after *will* or before *going* in the sentence. (*Will* and *not* are often contracted to *won't*.)

We form the negative to achieve the opposite meaning of all the uses we've looked at so far. For example:

• "Contrary to our previous announcement, the store **will not be closing** in five minutes." (negative certainty of a future action)

• "Don't bother trying to get a hold of Paul after 7; he **won't be taking** calls then." (negative prediction of a future action)

• "I may be behind on this assignment, but I **am not going to be working** past 5 o'clock." (negative intention of allowing a current action to progress into the future)

Interrogative sentences (questions)

We create questions in the future continuous by inverting *will* or *be* with the subject. This is also the case if we use question words—*what*, *where*, *when*, *etc*. (An exception is the word *who*, which becomes the subject of the sentence but remains at the beginning.)

We most often use interrogative sentences in the future continuous tense to politely inquire about information:

• "**Will** you **be joining** us after dinner?"

• "***What* will** they **be doing** in Mexico?"

• "***Who* is going to be performing** at the concert?"

Negative interrogative sentences

Negative interrogative sentences also ask a question, but they imply that the speaker expects the answer to be (or believes the answer *should* be) "yes." Again, in the future continuous, this is done to create a polite inquiry.

We form these by using the interrogative form we looked at above, and adding the word *not* after the subject. However, this is considered a formal construction

—more often in modern English, *will* and the forms of *be* are contracted with *not* to create *won't, isn't,* or *aren't,* all of which come before the subject.

• "**Will** you ***not*** **be joining** us after dinner?" (more formal, but less common)

• "***Won't*** we **be leaving** after the concert?" (less formal, but more common)

• "**Is** he ***not*** **going to be studying** for an exam?" (more formal, sometimes used for emphasis)

• "**Aren't** you **going to be working** next week?" (less formal, but more commonly used)

We do not use question words with negative interrogative sentences in the future continuous tense.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which auxiliary verb is often used to create the future continuous tense?

a) will
b) be
c) have
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) All of the above

2. Which of the following is **not** a usage of the future continuous tense?

a) To say that something will be in progress from a certain moment in the future.
b) To say that something will end sometime in the near future.
c) To predict that something will be in progress at some point in the future.
d) To describe something that is happening in the present and will continue into the future.

3. What form does the **main** verb take in the future continuous tense?

a) Infinitive
b) Past participle
c) Present participle
d) Present tense

4. Which of the following sentences uses the future continuous tense?

a) “I told him we will be coming home on Saturday.”
b) “She said she'll work weekends while Mike is out sick.”
c) “They said they would be arriving at 8 PM.”
d) “I'm traveling to France next week.”

5. Which of the following sentences **does not** use the future continuous tense?
a) “I'm sure he'll be trying as best he can to be there tomorrow.”
b) “That no-good snitch is going to be sleeping with the fishes by the morning.”
c) “She told him she would be working at the warehouse this week.”
d) “I heard Daniel is going to be moving to Canada soon!”

Future Perfect Tense

Definition

We use the **future perfect tense** to say that something will finish or be completed at a specific point in the future. We also often include durations of time to indicate how long something has been happening once a future moment in time is reached.

In addition, we can use the future perfect tense to make a present prediction about something that we believe has or should have happened in the past.

The most common way we create the future perfect tense is by using the **modal auxiliary verb** *will* + *have* + the **past participle** of the verb. For example:

• “This June, I ***will have*** **lived** in New York for four years.”

• “You ***will have*** **heard** by now that the company is going bankrupt.”

• “She***’ll have*** **slept** for the whole day if she doesn’t get up soon!”

Functions of the Future Perfect

Actions completed in the future

We often use an adverbial expression of a future point in time with the future perfect tense to describe when an action will be completed or accomplished. This adverbial phrase can occur either before or after the future perfect verb. For example:

• “With the way you’re spending money, you ***will have*** **gone** through your

savings in less than a month."

• "After this next race, I ***will have*** **completed** 10 triathlons."

Future spans of time

The future perfect tense is often used to indicate a point in the future at which a certain action or situation will have been happening for a given length of time. For example:

• "It's hard to believe that by next month we***'ll have*** **been** married for 10 years."

• "I ***will have*** **worked** on this ranch for more than half my life when I turn 40."

As we can see above, the adverbial phrase expressing the **duration** of time ("for 10 years," "for more than half my life") usually comes after the future perfect tense construction. The expression of the future **point** in time (the point at which the duration is accomplished) can appear either before or after the future perfect tense.

Present predictions of past actions

We also use the future perfect for a present prediction of something we believe has already happened in the past. If we include adverbials related to time, we generally include expressions related to the **present time** rather than the future. For example:

• "You ***will have*** **seen** on page 18 how to set up the computer."

• "Your mother ***will have*** **left** the dentist's by now."

• "At this stage, everyone ***will have*** **heard** the rumors already."

Other sentence types

Negative sentences

To describe something that will **not** be completed at a point in the future, we make the future perfect tense negative by adding *not* after the modal verb *will* (usually contracted as *won't*). For example:

• "Why are you going to the airport so early? Her flight ***will not have*** **arrived** yet."

• "At this rate, I ***won't have*** **finished** half of the work I need to get done by

tomorrow.”

Interrogative sentences

We can ask whether an action will be complete in the future by inverting *will* with the subject, as in:

• “***Will*** they ***have*** **read** the memo ahead of the meeting?”

• “***Will*** you ***have*** **had** something to eat before you arrive?”

We can also ask about specific aspects of a future action by using different question words or phrases. Remember, we still invert *will* with the subject in this case:

• “What ***will*** we ***have*** **learned** from such tragic events as these?”

• “Who ***will have*** **prepared** the notes for the seminar?”

• “How much money ***will*** we ***have*** **spent** trying to get this car working?”

• “How long ***will*** you ***have*** **worked** there before your maternity leave begins?”

Other constructions

Although we most commonly use the modal verb *will*, there are two other ways we can form the future perfect tense: *be going to* and *shall*.

Be going to

Be going to can only form the future perfect tense when it is used to describe an action that finishes in the future—in this way, it is interchangeable with *will* in meaning.

We usually contract *be* with the subject when we use *be going to*. For example:

• “She***’s going to have*** **won** nine championship titles by the time she’s 25.”

• “If you keep reading at that pace, you***’re going to have*** **finished** the book before the rest of the students.”

However, using *be going to* can sometimes result in an awkward construction, and it is not as common as *will*. We also **cannot** use the *be going to* construction when talking about something that we predict to have happened in the past.

Shall

We can also use the modal verb ***shall*** instead of *will* to form the future perfect tense in formal speech or writing. Unlike *be going to*, we can use *shall* for all uses of the future perfect. For example:

• "By next spring, I ***shall have*** **lived** on my own for nearly a decade."

• "The students ***shall have*** **finished** their evaluations this time next week."

• "You ***shall have*** **heard**, no doubt, the unflattering remarks made about my character."

However, this creates a very formal tone that is not common in modern English; as a result, *will* + *have* + past participle remains the most common construction of the future perfect tense.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **modal auxiliary verbs** is used to create the future perfect tense?

a) would
b) may
c) will
d) can

2. Which of the following is **not** a function of the future perfect tense?

a) To say that something will be completed or achieved at a specific point in the future
b) To indicate how long something will have been occurring by a specific point in the future
c) To make a present prediction about something that happened in the past
d) To indicate a continuous action that began at a specific point in the future

3. How does the structure of the future perfect tense change in an **interrogative sentence**?

a) *will* inverts with the subject
b) *have* inverts with the subject
c) *will* inverts with a question word
d) *have* inverts with a question word

4. For what purpose can we use *shall* instead of *will* to form the future perfect tense?

a) To make the sentence a question
b) To make the sentence more formal
c) To make a present prediction about something that happened in the past
d) To indicate an intention to do something in the future

5. When are we **not** able to use *be going to* instead of *will* to form the future perfect tense?

a) When saying that something will be completed or achieved at a specific point in the future
b) When indicating how long something will have occurred by a specific point in the future
c) When making a present prediction about something that happened in the past

Future Perfect Continuous Tense Definition

Like the **future perfect tense**, we use the **future perfect continuous tense** (also known as the **future perfect progressive tense**) to indicate how long something has been happening once a future moment in time is reached. It can also be used in this way to indicate the cause of a possible future result.

The most common way we create the future perfect continuous tense is by using the **modal auxiliary verb** *will + have been +* the **present participle** of the verb. For example:

• "By June, I ***will have been*** **living** in New York for four years."

• "She's going to miss half the day because she***'ll have been*** **sleeping** for so long!"

Using the Future Perfect Continuous

The future perfect continuous tense is used in a very similar way to the **future perfect** to describe the duration of a completed future action. They both carry the same meaning when used in this way, but the future perfect continuous emphasizes the continuous nature of the action. Consider, for example, these two sentences:

• “By the time I get there, she ***will have*** **waited** for over an hour.” (future perfect tense)
• “By the time I get there, she ***will have been*** **waiting** for over an hour.” (future perfect continuous tense)

The meaning is technically the same in both examples above; however, the second sentence stresses the fact that *she* was continuously waiting during the future period *by the time I get there*. The change in meaning is subtle, but it adds greater depth to the sentence. Here are some other examples using the future perfect continuous tense:

• “I ***will have been*** **working** on this ranch for more than half my life when I turn 40.”

• “She***’ll have been*** **studying** Japanese for four years by the time she graduates.”

• “When the teacher comes back, we***’ll have been*** **reading** for nearly two hours.”

With action verbs

Because it describes continuous, dynamic action, the future perfect continuous can only be used with **action verbs**; it cannot be used with **stative verbs** (such as **linking verbs** or **verbs of the senses**), which describe non-continuous actions. For stative verbs, we can only use the future perfect tense instead. For example:

✔ “Next month we***’ll have*** **been** married for 10 years.” (correct)
✖ “Next month we***’ll have been*** **being** married for 10 years.” (incorrect)

✔ “By tomorrow morning, this all ***will have*** **seemed** like just a bad dream.” (correct)
✖ “By tomorrow morning, this all ***will have been*** **seeming** like just a bad dream.” (incorrect)

Cause of future results

We can also use the future perfect continuous to indicate that the continuous action that finishes in the future will be the cause of something in the future. For example:

• “I bet he’ll be hungry because he ***will have been*** **studying** straight through lunch.”

• “I’m not going to have any energy for the kids because I***’ll have been*** **working**

so hard this week.”

• “You’re going to look like a prune since you ***will have been*** **swimming** all afternoon!”

Other sentence types

Negative sentences

To describe something that will **not** be completed over a certain span of time into the future, we make the future perfect continuous tense negative by adding *not* after the modal verb *will* (usually contracted as *won’t*). For example:

• “Why are you bringing your book to the airport? We ***won’t have been*** **waiting** for very long before her plane arrives.”

• “He ***will not have been*** **working** here for very long if he is fired over this incident.”

However, it’s not very common to make negative constructions of the future perfect continuous tense.

Interrogative sentences

We can ask whether an action will be completed in the future after a certain duration by inverting *will* with the subject, as in:

• “***Will*** they ***have been*** **searching** for us for very long?”

• “***Will*** she ***have been*** **working** in Japan for the whole time she’s lived there?”

We can also ask about specific aspects of a future action by using different question words or phrases. Remember, we still invert *will* with the subject in this case:

• “Who***’ll have been*** **writing** the notes for the class while the teaching assistant is absent?”

• “How long ***will*** you ***have been*** **working** there before your maternity leave begins?”

Other constructions

Although we most commonly use the modal verb *will*, there are two other ways we can form the future perfect continuous tense: *be going to* and *shall*.

Be going to

Be going to is interchangeable with *will* in meaning when we make the future perfect continuous tense. However, using *be going to* can sometimes result in a wordy, awkward construction, and it is not as common as *will*.

We usually contract *be* with the subject when we use *be going to*. For example:

• "She***'s going to have been*** **working** for nearly 18 hours by the time she's finished with her shift tonight."

• "I***'m going to have been*** **reading** this book for nearly six months if I don't finish it soon!"

Shall

We can also use the modal verb ***shall*** instead of *will* to form the future perfect continuous tense in more formal speech or writing. For example:

• "By next spring, I ***shall have been*** **living** on my own for nearly a decade."

• "The students ***shall have been*** **reading** their books for the entire period."

• "You ***shall have been*** **hearing**, no doubt, the unflattering remarks made about my character.

However, this creates a very formal tone that is not common in modern English. Among the three options available, *will* is the most common way to construct of the future perfect continuous tense.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What form of the **main verb** is used to create the future perfect continuous tense?

a) infinitive
b) base form
c) present participle
d) past participle

2. Which of the following is a function of the future perfect continuous tense?

a) To indicate how long something will have been occurring by a specific point in the future

b) To indicate the cause of a future result
c) To make a present prediction about something that happened in the past
d) To indicate a continuous action that began at a specific point in the future
e) A & B
f) B & C
g) C & D

3. Where does *not* appear in a **negative sentence** in the future perfect continuous tense?

a) After *will*
b) After *have*
c) After *been*
d) After the present participle of the main verb

4. Which of the following is the **most common** way to form the future perfect tense?

a) *be going to have been* + the present participle of the main verb
b) *will have been* + the present participle of the main verb
c) *shall have been* + the present participle of the main verb
d) Each is equally common

5. Which type of verb **cannot** be used in the future perfect continuous tense?

a) action verb
b) factitive verb
c) conditional verb
d) stative verb
e) A & B
f) B & C
g) C & D

Aspect

Definition

Aspect is a grammatical element that has to do with how an action, state of being, or event as described by a verb relates to time. Aspect is often confused with **tense**. While **tense** is concerned with <u>when</u> the action, state of being, or

event occurs (past, present, or future), **aspect** is concerned with how it occurs in time. It is through aspect that we understand whether an action takes place at a single point in time, during a continuous range of time, or repetitively.

Sometimes aspect is conveyed by a sentence's structure, through a combination of particles, verbs, and verb phrases; other times, sentence structure may be used for more than one aspect, so we rely on the overall sentence to understand its temporal meaning.

Perfective and imperfective aspect

The most common distinction made regarding aspect is between the **perfective** and **imperfective** aspects. While other languages mark the difference by using two separate verb forms, English does not.

The **perfective aspect** can be conveyed through a variety of verb structures. It is used when we draw attention to an action as a whole, summarizing it. The perfective aspect may occur in past, present, or future actions and events. For example:

• "I **ate** dinner."

• "I **swim** like a fish."

• "I **have** never **been** there before."

• "We **will help** you tomorrow."

The **imperfective aspect**, on the other hand, is used to draw attention to the action as having an internal structure (rather than as a whole, complete action). Like the perfective, this is the case regardless of *when* the event occurs.

One instance of the imperfective is when we relate an action that is considered to be in progress at the moment of speaking (or at the time of another event). This is usually conveyed through the **continuous aspect**. For example:

• "I was washing dishes when she came through the door."

We also use the imperfective when we describe actions or events as occurring repetitively, either now or in the past:

• "We used to go traveling a lot."

• "John runs five miles every day."

This is known as the **habitual** aspect.

Aspects of verb tenses

Traditionally, each verb tense is said to have four aspects, or temporal structures: the *simple*, the *perfect*, the *continuous*, and the *perfect continuous*. These traditional aspects of the tenses do not always coincide with theory on perfective aspect and imperfective aspect—it should be remembered that certain structures may express perfective aspect in some cases and imperfective aspect in others, depending on the intended meaning.

Aspects of the present tense

The present tense is used for repeated actions, and for actions occurring or having a result in the present. The different aspects of the present tense can be found in the table below:

Aspect	Structure	Examples
Simple	Subject + present verb	"I **go** shopping on Tuesdays." "She **runs** fast."
Perfect	Subject + *have/has* + past participle	"I **have eaten** here before." "She **has lived** here for a long time."
Continuous	Subject + *is/are* + present participle	"We **are cooking** dinner." "He **is singing** a song."
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *have/has* + *been* + present participle	"He **has been thinking** about it." "I **have been taking** an art class."

Usually, the simple and the perfect aspects match up with the perfective aspect in grammatical theory. However, as mentioned, this is not always the case. It could be argued in this case that the simple aspect of the present tense actually corresponds with the imperfective aspect, since it is usually used to convey habitual acts, as in:

• “I go to school every day.”
• “We go shopping on Saturdays.”

Aspects of the past tense

Like the present, the past tense also has four traditional aspects, which can be found in the table below:

Aspect	Structure	Examples
Simple	Subject + past verb	"I **went** shopping on Tuesday." "She **ran** fast."
Perfect	Subject + *had* + past participle	"I **had eaten** here before." "She **had lived** here for a long time."
Continuous	Subject + *was/were* + present participle	"We **were cooking** dinner." "He **was singing** a song."
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *had* + *been* + present participle	"He **had been thinking** about it." "I **had been taking** an art class."

The simple and perfect simple tenses generally correspond with the perfective aspect, while the continuous and perfect continuous correspond with the imperfective aspect. Again, these do not always match up along clear lines, and we should consider what the verb phrase conveys overall to decide whether the sentence has perfective or imperfective aspect.

Aspects of the future tense

Although English does not have an inflected verb form for *future tense*, there are several structures that we use to convey future meaning, namely *will/would/be going to* + verb. The different aspects of these structures are found in the table:

Aspect	Structure	Examples

Simple	Subject + *will/would/be going to* + infinitive	"I **will go** shopping on Tuesday." " She **is going to run** fast."
Perfect	Subject + *will have* + past participle	"I **will have eaten** before arriving." "She **will have lived** here for a long time."
Continuous	Subject + *will/would/be going to* + be + present participle	"We **are going to be cooking** dinner." "He **will be singing** a song."
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *will have/would have/be going to* + *have* + been + present participle	"He**'ll have been thinking** about it." "I **would have been taking** an art class."

Again, the simple and perfect aspects generally correspond with perfective aspect in the future, while the continuous and perfect continuous structures correspond with the imperfective.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In grammar, **aspect** is concerned with _____ .

a) *when* events occur on a timeline
b) *how* events occur on a timeline
c) *why* events occur on a timeline

2. The **perfective aspect** is used when we view an action as _____.

a) a whole
b) a part
c) a continuous event
d) a habitual event

3. The **imperfective aspect** is used when we view an action as _____.

a) habitual
b) in progress
c) a whole
d) A & B
e) all of the above

4. Which of the following sentences conveys the **continuous** aspect?

a) “I went to the doctor on Tuesday.”
b) “She’s going to take me on a vacation.”
c) “They’ve been watching that TV all day.”
d) “We haven’t seen that movie yet.”

5. Which of the following sentences uses the **perfect** aspect?”

a) “I was reading.”
b) “He went home.”
c) “She is eating.”
d) “They have gone home.”

Perfective and Imperfective Aspect

Definition

Aspect is a grammatical term that has to do with how an action, state of being, or event unfolds in relation to time. The greatest distinction is made between the **perfective** aspect, which focuses on actions and events as whole elements, and the **imperfective** aspect, which deconstructs how an event is structured and located in time.

While other languages may mark the difference with an inflected verb form, English instead relies on a combination of particles, verbs, verb phrases, and lexical clues to determine whether the overall meaning of the action is perfective or imperfective.

Perfective aspect

The **perfective aspect** highlights actions, states, or events as a whole, presenting the actions from an outside perspective as complete, bounded events.

The perfective aspect is encountered in all of the tenses—past, present, and future—but it is easiest to illustrate in the past. For example:

• “I **went** to the supermarket yesterday.” (**past simple tense**)

• “She **sang** in the choir.” (past simple tense)

• “We **had eaten** already.” (**past perfect tense**)

In all of the above examples, the action is presented as a complete event in the past. We are simply told that the event occurred, with no clues as to *how often* the actions happened or *how long* they took.

As mentioned, the perfective aspect also occurs in other tenses. For example:

• “I **have** a dog.” (**present simple tense**)

• “She**’ll be** there soon.” (**future simple tense**)

• “They **will have finished** by then.” (**future perfect tense**)

Imperfective aspect

The **imperfective aspect**, on the other hand, is used when we focus on the internal structures of an action, state, or event as it relates to time, such as being

continuous or habitual (repeating). Again, this has nothing to do with *when* the event occurs, and, as with the perfective, there is no separate verb form in English for the imperfective aspect.

Instead, it is expressed through different grammatical structures, which change depending on what we are saying about the temporal structure of the action.

We sometimes classify these structures as the **continuous aspect** and the **habitual aspect**, both of which are subclasses of the imperfective.

Continuous Aspect

The **continuous aspect**, also called the **progressive aspect**, is a subclass of the imperfective that emphasizes the *progressive* nature of the verb, looking at it as an incomplete action in progress over a specific period of time.

The continuous aspect does not indicate the duration of the action, nor how often it occurs. It simply shows that the action or event is in progress, either at the time of speaking, or at the time that another event occurs. It can be used with the past, present, and future tenses, and it is usually conveyed using a form of the verb *be* + the present participle. For example:

Past

• "I **was talking** to my mother when you called."
• "They **had been living** here for a long time when they moved."

Present

• "I**'m cooking** dinner at the moment, so I'll have to call you back."
• "She**'s been playing** outside with her friends all day."

Future

• "He**'ll be sleeping** by 10 o'clock, hopefully."
• "Next month we**'ll have been living** in New York City for 10 years."

It should be noted that **stative verbs** do not normally occur using the *be* + present participle structure. For example, you could not say "I **am knowing** John a long time" or "She **is appearing** unwell."

Other constructions

There is disagreement over whether structures using *be* + the present participle are the only structures that depict the continuous aspect. It is often argued, for example, that the past simple often conveys the continuous aspect. For example:

• “I **stayed** up all night.”

• “We **were** outside for hours.”

Others would argue that since it is the additional information in the examples above (*all night* and *for hours*) that gives the continuous aspect to the sentence as a whole, the verb phrases themselves should not be considered to convey continuous aspect.

Habitual Aspect

The **habitual aspect**, like the continuous aspect, is also a subclass of the imperfective aspect. It is used when an action occurs repetitively and (usually) predictably. English only has two *marked* ways of expressing habitual aspect: *would + base form of the verb* (the infinitive without *to*) and *used to + base form of the verb*. When we use these structures, we imply that the action occurred habitually in the past, but does not anymore. For example:

• “When I was young I **used to walk** to school.”

• “When I was young I **would walk** to school.”

Although the meaning in the two examples above is the same, *used to* and *would* are not always directly interchangeable. For example, *used to*, standing alone, conveys habitual aspect, but *would* doesn’t. Observe what happens if we remove the time marker *when I was young*:

• “I **used to walk** to school.”

• “I **would walk** to school.”

When we remove *when I was young* from the examples, the example using *used to* retains its habitual aspect, but the example with *would* doesn’t. Since *would* can also be used in conditional constructions, we need to include a time marker to clarify when it is being used for the habitual past.

In addition, while *used to* can be used with both **action verbs** and **stative verbs**, *would* can only be used with **action verbs**. For example:

✔ “When I was young, I **used to love** movies.” (correct)

✖ “When I was young, I **would love** movies.” (incorrect)

Other constructions

Although *used to + base form* and *would + base form* are the only structures that *explicitly* mark habitual aspect, we often use other verb tenses to convey it as

well. For example, we often use the present simple tense to indicate habitual actions, as in:

• “I **go** to school every day.”

• “She **attends** karate class on Sundays.”

• “They **work** six days a week.”

However, other verb tenses can be used with an implied habitual aspect. For example:

• “I **walked** to school every day for 10 years.” (past simple tense)

• “I **had lived** in the same town my whole life before I decided to move to Tokyo.” (past perfect tense)

• “She **has eaten** the same sandwich for lunch for as long as I’ve known her.” (present perfect tense)

When the habitual aspect is unmarked, as above, it is often accompanied by a time marker that clarifies how often the action occurs, such as *every day, on Sundays, six days a week*, etc.

Future habits

English does not have an explicit habitual aspect marker for the future either. Most often, we use the future simple tense along with a time marker to indicate habit. For example:

• “I **will work** extra shifts every evening until I save enough money.”

• “I **will go** for a run every day after school this year.

• “We **will eat** fruit and cereal every morning next month.”

As with the alternate constructions of the perfective aspect, there is disagreement over whether unmarked verb forms can be considered to express habitual aspect, since it may simply be the additional information in the sentence that expresses the habitual meaning, rather than the verb phrases themselves.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following sentences conveys the **perfective aspect**?

a) “I have eaten breakfast already.”
b) “I’ve been eating breakfast.”

c) “I was eating breakfast.”
d) “I used to eat breakfast in the late morning.”

2. Which of the following sentences conveys the **imperfective aspect**?

a) “He finished his homework.”
b) “He had already finished his homework.”
c) “He will finish his homework later.”
d) “He’s finishing his homework.”

3. Which of the following sentences conveys the **habitual aspect**?

a) “I attended a ballet lesson.”
b) “I want to attend ballet lessons.”
c) “I used to attend ballet lessons.”
d) “I will attend a ballet lesson.”

4. Which of the following sentences uses the **continuous** aspect?

a) “I used to watch a lot of TV.”
b) “I watched a lot of TV yesterday.”
c) “I will watch TV later.”
d) “I’ve been watching a lot of TV.”

5. Which of the following sentences is incorrect?

a) “I used to like sweets when I was little, but now I don’t.”
b) “I liked sweets when I was little, but now I don’t.”
c) “I would like sweets when I was little, but now I don’t.”
d) A & C

Aspects of the Present Tense

Definition

The **present tense** is combined with four traditional **aspects** to form the structures that are known as the **present simple**, the **present continuous** (or **present progressive**), the **present perfect**, and the **present perfect continuous**. Although these structures are generally taught as individual “tenses” of verbs, they are actually a combination of the present tense and aspect. While the **tense**

tells us when the action takes place in relation to time (in this case, the present), the added ***aspect*** gives us information about how the event takes place in time.

Present Simple

The **present simple** structure is used to express facts and habits that are true in the present time. It is formed using the **bare infinitive** (the base form of the verb), or, in the case of the third person singular, the bare infinitive + "-s". For example:

• "We **love** Thai food."

• "James **swims** on Sundays."

• "We **study** at the library every day."

Present Continuous

The **present continuous** is the combination of the present tense with the continuous aspect. It is used for actions that are either in progress at the moment of speaking, or will be in progress in the near future. It is formed using the present form of the verb *be* (*are, am,* or *is*) + the present participle. For example:

• "They**'re playing** outside." (in progress now)

• "Can I call you back? I**'m driving**." (in progress now)

• "We**'re eating** dinner with my in-laws tonight." (in progress in the future)

The continuous aspect is not usually used with **stative verbs**. For example, we cannot say "I am knowing John many years" or "She is seeming sad."

Present Perfect

The **present perfect** is the combination of the present tense and the perfect aspect. It is used for actions or states that began in the past but have an effect on or relevance to the present, stressing the completion of the action. It is formed using *have/has* + the **past** participle. For example:

• "She**'s** already **eaten**."

• "We**'ve seen** this movie."

• "I**'ve had** a bad cold this week."

Present Perfect Continuous

The **present perfect continuous** is the combination of the continuous and perfect aspects with the present tense. It is used for actions that began in the past and continue to have relevance in the present. The main difference between it and the present perfect aspect is that the present perfect continuous aspect emphasizes the progress of the action instead of its completion. Like the present continuous, it is typically only used with **action verbs**, not with stative verbs. The present perfect continuous is formed using *have/has* + *been* + the **present** participle. For example:

• "We **have been waiting** for a long time."

• "My little sister **has been sitting** very quietly."

• "I**'ve been cleaning** all day."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is in the **present simple** form?

a) went
b) have been
c) goes
d) going

2. Which of the following is in the **present perfect** form?

a) saw
b) have seen
c) sees
d) seeing

3. Which of the following is in the **present perfect continuous** form?

a) has been going
b) had been going
c) had gone
d) goes

4. Which of the following is in the **present continuous** form?

a) sang
b) have sung
c) singing

d) been singing

5. Which of the following structures is used for **facts that are true at the moment of speaking**:

a) present simple
b) present continuous
c) present perfect
d) present perfect continuous

5. Which of the following sentences stresses the **completion** of an action that occurred in the past but has relevance to the present?

a) “She buys everything we need.”
b) “She’s been buying everything we need.”
c) “She bought everything we need.”
d) “She has bought everything we need.”

Aspects of the Past Tense

Definition

The **past tense** is combined with four traditional **aspects** to form the structures that are known as the **past simple**, the **past continuous** (or past progressive), the **past perfect**, and the **past perfect continuous**. Although these structures are generally taught as individual “tenses” of verbs, they are actually a combination of the past tense and aspect. While the **tense** tells us when the action takes place in relation to the time (in this case, the past), the added ***aspect*** tells us how the event takes place in time.

Past Simple

The **past simple** structure is used to express actions and events that were completed at a given moment in the past. Whether the occurrence is of short or long duration, the simple aspect emphasizes its completion. The past simple is formed by adding “-d” or “-ed” to the end of **regular verbs**, but the past form of **irregular verbs** must be memorized. For example:

• “They **live*d*** next door to us for years.” (regular)

• “I **lock*ed*** myself out of the house this morning.” (regular)

• “We ***went*** to a private school when we were young.” (irregular)

Past Continuous

The **past continuous** is the combination of the past tense with the continuous aspect. It emphasizes the progress of an action that occurred in the past, rather than its completion. It is often used for actions that are interrupted by other actions, and it is formed using the past form of the verb *be* (*was/were*) + the present participle. For example:

• “They **were playing** outside when their father arrived.”

• “I’m sorry I didn’t answer the phone; I **was driving** when you called.”

• “We **were eating** dinner when my in-laws told us the good news.”

The past continuous usually occurs only with **action verbs**, not with **stative verbs**. For instance, we cannot say “I was knowing John many years” or “She was seeming sad.”

Past Perfect

The **past perfect** is the combination of the past tense with the perfect aspect. It is used for actions or states that began and were completed before another action in the past took place. It is formed using *had* + the past participle. For example:

• “She **had** already **eaten** when she arrived.”

• “We **had seen** the movie, but we watched it again.”

• “I**’d had** a bad cold that week, but I went on my vacation anyway.”

Past Perfect Continuous

The **past perfect continuous** is the combination of the continuous and perfect aspects with the past tense. It is used for actions that took place before another past action. The main difference between it and the past perfect structure is that the past perfect continuous emphasizes the progress of the action instead of its completion. It is also used to emphasize the action’s strong effect on another moment in the past. Like the past continuous, the past perfect continuous is generally only used with action verbs, not stative verbs. It is formed using *had* + *been* + the present participle. For example:

• “We **had been waiting** for a long time when the bus finally came.”

• “My little sister **had been sitting** very quietly, but then she started to cry.”

• “I**’d been cleaning** all day, so I was too tired to go out last night.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is in the **past simple** form?

a) sang
b) have sung
c) sing
d) singing

2. Which of the following is in the **past perfect** form?

a) was
b) had been
c) is
d) being

3. Which of the following is in the **past perfect continuous** form?

a) had been doing
b) has been doing
c) had done
d) does

4. Which of the following structures is used to emphasize general **completion** in the past?

a) past continuous
b) past simple
c) past perfect
d) past perfect continuous

5. Which of the following sentences emphasizes the **progress** of a past action that occurred before another action in the past?

a) “She sang in a band.”
b) “She had been singing in a band at that point.”
c) “She sings in a band.”
d) “She has sung in a band.”

Aspects of the Future Tense

Definition

Although English has no future tense in the strict sense (i.e., it has no verb form specific to future meaning), we commonly refer to several structures that are *used* for future meaning as belonging to the " **future tense**." The most common of these structures begin with *will* or a form of the verb *be + going to*. For example:

• "I **will** go with you."

• "I **am going to** send you an email."

While these verb markers tell us that the action takes place in the future, it is the *aspect* of the verb that tells us *how* the event will be temporally structured. The combination of the future marker and the aspect results in the verb structures that we usually call the **future simple**, the **future continuous** (or future progressive), the **future perfect**, and the **future perfect continuous**.

For the purpose of clarity, our example sentences will all use *will*, but it should be remembered that, in each of the examples, we can replace *will* with another **modal verb** of future meaning (*shall, might, would, could,* etc.) or with a form of *be + going to*.

Future Simple

The **future simple** structure is the combination of the future tense and the simple aspect. The future simple is used to express actions and events that will occur at a given moment in the future. The simple aspect emphasizes the action or state as a whole. The structure is formed using *will* + the base form of the verb (the infinitive without *to*). For example:

• "We **will go** to a private school when we are older."

• "They **will move** next door to us soon."

• "I **will be** famous in the future."

Future Continuous

The **future continuous** structure is the combination of the future tense with the continuous aspect. It is used to express actions and events that will be in

progress at a given moment in the future. The future continuous is formed using *will* + be + the present participle. For example:

• "They **will be playing** outside when their father arrives."

• "I won't answer my phone later because I**'ll be driving**."

• "We **will be eating** dinner at 7 o'clock."

Like other structures that reflect the continuous aspect, it is usually only used with **action verbs**, not with **stative verbs**. For example, we couldn't say "I will be knowing John later" or "She will be seeming sad this evening."

Future Perfect

The **future perfect** is the combination of the future tense and the perfect simple aspect. It is used to express actions and events that will be completed at a given moment in the future. It is formed using *will* + *have* + the past participle. For example:

• "She **will have eaten** before she arrives."

• "We **will have seen** that movie already."

• "I **will have spent** a lot of money after this weekend's festivities."

Future Perfect Continuous

Finally, the **future perfect continuous** is the combination of the perfect and continuous aspects with the future tense. It is used to emphasize that an action will be in progress until a given moment in the future, at which time the action will stop. Like the future continuous, it is typically not used with **stative verbs**, but only with action verbs. It is formed using *will* + *have* + *been* + the present participle. For example:

• "We **will have been waiting** for a long time when the bus finally comes."

• "My little sister **will have been sitting** quietly for an hour when the movie finishes."

• "I **will have been cleaning** all day when you arrive, so I'll be too tired to go out."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is in the **future simple** form?

a) sing
b) will have sung
c) will sing
d) will be singing

2. Which of the following is in the **future perfect** form?

a) will watch
b) will have watched
c) will be watching
d) will have been watching

3. Which of the following is in the **future perfect continuous** form?

a) will have been doing
b) will have done
c) will be doing
d) will do

4. Which of the following structures is used to emphasize an action that will be **in progress** at a particular moment in the future?

a) future simple
b) future continuous
c) future perfect simple
d) future perfect continuous

5. Which of the following sentences emphasizes the **completion** of a future action before another action in the future?

a) “She’ll have been doing all her work.”
b) “She’ll be doing all her work then.”
c) “She’ll do all her work.”
d) “She’ll have done all her work by then.”

Mood

Definition

Grammatical **mood** refers to the way in which a verb is used to express certain

meaning by the speaker or writer. In linguistics, moods are broken down into two main categories: **realis moods** (expressing what is real or true) and **irrealis moods** (expressing what is unreal, hypothetical, or untrue).

Realis moods (the indicative mood)

The **indicative mood** is a type of grammatical **mood** used to express facts, statements, opinions, or questions. It is the only **realis mood** used in English.

This mood is used in all verb tenses to form **declarative sentences** (i.e., statements or declarations) or **interrogative sentences** (i.e., questions). For example:

• "She **graduated** last year with a doctorate in neuroscience." (declarative sentence in the past simple tense)

• "He **is taking** his exam at the new testing center." (declarative sentence in the present continuous tense)

• "**Are** you **going to give** your speech tomorrow?" (interrogative sentence in the future simple tense)

The indicative mood is the most commonly used grammatical mood in English.

Irrealis Moods

The term **irrealis** means "unreal," and it refers to grammatical moods that reflect what is not actually the case.

There are two irrealis moods in English: the **subjunctive mood** and the **imperative mood**.

Subjunctive Mood

The **subjunctive mood** refers to verbs that are conjugated a certain way to describe hypothetical or non-real actions, events, or situations. This is in comparison to the **indicative mood**, which is used to express factual, non-hypothetical information.

We most commonly use the subjunctive mood to express wishes; to express commands, suggestions, requests, or statements of necessity; or to describe hypothetical outcomes that depend on certain conditions.

For example:

• "I wish I **didn't have to go** to work." (wish)

• “He demanded that they **leave** the room at once.” (command)

• “I recommend that she **study** harder next time.” (suggestion)

• “I ask that the audience **be** completely silent during the demonstration.” (request)

• “It’s necessary that we **be** vigilant to avoid another disaster.” (statement of necessity)

• “**If I had been more prepared**, I would have passed that test.” (hypothetical condition)

There are very specific ways we conjugate verbs to create the **subjunctive mood**; continue on to that section to learn more.

Imperative Mood

Although we can use the subjunctive mood to express commands or requests, it is becoming less common in modern English. Instead, we usually use the **imperative mood** to form **imperative sentences** when we want to issue direct orders, commands, or general instructions. It is considered an irrealis mood because the action being demanded has not actually happened (and might not happen).

When we make an imperative sentence, we use the infinitive form of the verb (without *to*), and we omit the subject of the verb.

For example:

• “Turn off the light before you leave.”

• “Go to bed!”

As you can see, there are no subjects in the sentences above.

However, we do often use a **noun of address** (also called a **vocative**) instead, which is a noun or noun phrase used to address the person to whom the command is directed. For example:

• “John, please turn out that light.”

• “Stand up, Janet.”

• “Be quiet, sir!”

• “You there, pay attention!”

To learn more about how we form and use sentences in the imperative mood, see the section **Imperative Sentences** in the chapter on **Sentences**.

Other moods

The three true moods in English are the indicative, the subjunctive, and the imperative.

However, there are two sub-categories that are sometimes described as moods in different grammar guides: the "**emphatic mood**" and "**infinitive mood**." While we do not consider them to be discrete grammatical moods in this guide, they are worth mentioning for general reference.

Emphatic mood

The "**emphatic mood**" refers to the use of the **auxiliary verb** *do* to add emphasis to a verb that would otherwise not require an auxiliary.

We usually use emphatic *do* to stress the fact that something is the case.

For example:

• "Yes, I **do** know that we are meeting your parents tonight."

• "Well, she **does** have a Ph.D., after all."

We can also use *do* to add emphasis to demands or requests, as in:

• "**Do** be careful, John."

• "Oh, **do** be quiet!"

However, the use of *do* in such imperative sentences is now rather formal and old fashioned.

Infinitive mood

The "**infinitive mood**" merely refers to a verb being put into its **infinitive form**—that is, the base form with the particle *to*. For example:

• "**To be** loved is a wonderful thing."

In this case, the infinitive *to be* forms the infinitive phrase *to be loved*, which is used as a noun and the subject of the sentence.

Infinitives have a variety of functions in a sentence, but none of them is as a true verb, which is why we do not consider the so-called "infinitive mood" as belonging to any of the true grammatical moods in English.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following moods is used to describe what is true or real?

a) Indicative mood
b) Subjunctive mood
c) Imperative mood
d) A & C
e) B & C

2. Which of the following moods is used to describe what is unreal, hypothetical, or desired?

a) Indicative mood
b) Subjunctive mood
c) Imperative mood
d) A & C
e) B & C

3. Which of the following kinds of sentences can be made using the **indicative mood**?

a) Declarative sentences
b) Conditional sentences
c) Interrogative sentences
d) Imperative sentences
e) A & C
f) B & D

4. Identify the grammatical mood used in the following sentence:
"I wish I were in Spain right now, instead of at home."

a) Indicative mood
b) Subjunctive mood
c) Imperative mood
d) Emphatic mood

5. Which of the following is **not** one of the true grammatical moods?

a) Indicative mood
b) Subjunctive mood
c) Imperative mood

d) Emphatic mood
e) Infinitive mood
f) A & B
g) C & E
h) D & E

Indicative Mood

Definition

The **indicative mood** is a type of grammatical **mood** used to express facts, statements, opinions, or questions. It is the sole **realis mood** in English (as opposed to the **irrealis moods**).

This mood can be used in the past, present, or future tense and in a **declarative sentence** (i.e., a statement) or an **interrogative sentence** (i.e., a question). For example:

• "She **graduated** last year with a doctorate in neuroscience." (declarative sentence in the past indicative)

• "He **is taking** his exam at the new testing center." (declarative sentence in the present indicative)

• "**Are** you **going to give** your speech tomorrow?" (interrogative sentence in the future indicative)

The indicative mood covers a wide breadth of sentence structures and verb tenses, and it is more commonly used than the **imperative** and **subjunctive** moods (the two **irrealis moods** in English).

Function

Indicative-mood verbs function in many tenses and forms. The following sections contain explanations for and various examples of declarative and interrogative sentences in the **past indicative, present indicative**, and **future indicative**.

Past indicative

Verbs in the **past indicative** describe things that have happened or are believed to have happened at some point in the past.

Declarative sentences in the past indicative

In declarative sentences in the past indicative, the **past simple tense** and **past perfect tense** describe something that finished in the past, whereas the **past continuous tense** and **past perfect continuous tense** describe a continuous action originating in the past. For example:

• “Verne **left** his house and **headed** to the airport.” (past simple tense)

• “We **had lived** in Singapore for three years before returning to America.” (past perfect tense)

• “She **was looking** online for a solution to her homework problem.” (past continuous tense)

• “I **had been studying** philosophy at the time, but my real interest was in Japanese literature.” (past perfect continuous tense)

Interrogative sentences in the past indicative

Interrogative sentences in the past indicative may use the past tense to inquire about a past action or event. For example:

• “**Did** you **finish** the movie without me?” (past simple tense)

• “**Had** the candidate successfully **completed** the internship at the time?” (past perfect tense)

• “Where **were** they **training** for their race?” (past continuous tense)

• “Who **had** she **been spending** her time with when all this happened?” (past perfect continuous tense)

Present indicative

The **present indicative** describes things that are happening, are about to happen, or are believed to be happening.

Declarative sentences in the present

indicative

In declarative sentences in the present indicative, the **present simple tense** and **present continuous tense** describe habits or things occurring in the present or near future, whereas the **present perfect tense** and **present perfect continuous tense** describe experiences or things originating in the past and continuing into the present. For example:

• “She **brings** her own lunch to work every day.” (present simple tense)

• “The cashier **is counting** the customer’s change.” (present continuous tense)

• “I **have visited** every major theme park in the world.” (present perfect tense)

• “They **have been staying** with my parents while the repairs are finished.” (present perfect continuous tense)

Interrogative sentences in the present indicative

Interrogative sentences in the present indicative may use the **present tense** to inquire about a current or closely occurring action or event. For example:

• “What kinds of books **do** you normally **read**?” (present simple tense)

• “What **is** Mae **doing** right now?” (present continuous tense)

• “**Have** you **heard** that new song on the radio yet?” (present perfect tense)

• “Where **have** you **been working** these days?” (present perfect continuous tense)

Future indicative

The **future indicative** describes things that will happen or things that it is believed will happen. The ***future tense*** in English is not a unique verb inflection (in comparison to the present and past tenses), but is approximated using the form *will* or *be going to* + the main verb.

Declarative sentences in the future indicative

Declarative sentences in the future indicative use the future tense to describe things that will or are likely to occur at a future time. For example:

• "I **will try** to be more patient with children." (will)

• "Eugene **is going to compete** in a skiing competition next week." (be going to)

Interrogative sentences in the future indicative

Interrogative sentences in the future indicative use the future tense to inquire about a future action or event. For example:

• "**Will** they **arrive** on time?" (will)

• "What **are** you **going to write** about for your thesis?" (be going to)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. The indicative mood can be used to express which of the following?

a) statements
b) opinions
c) questions
d) facts
e) All of the above

2. Which of the following sentences uses the **past indicative**?

a) "Jude is preparing breakfast for the guests."
b) "Have you ever been to Egypt?"
c) "The child was complaining about her missing toy."
d) "I won't be able to take time off from work."

3. Which of the following sentences uses the **present indicative**?

a) "She'll be busy at summer camp from June to August."
b) "He usually goes for a jog in the afternoon."
c) "Were you at the movie theater last night?"
d) "The two best friends hadn't seen each other in years."

4. Which of the following sentences uses the **future indicative**?

a) “Casey suffers from terrible migraines.”
b) “They spent all day yesterday exploring the museum.”
c) “Is he going to attend college or take a year off?”
d) “What country are you moving to with your family?”

Subjunctive Mood

Definition

The **subjunctive mood** refers to verbs that are used to describe hypothetical or non-real actions, events, or situations. This is in comparison to the **indicative mood**, which is used to express factual, non-hypothetical information.

We most commonly use the subjunctive mood to express desires or wishes; to express commands, suggestions, requests, or statements of necessity; or to describe hypothetical outcomes that depend on certain conditions.

Using the Subjunctive Mood

Verbs do not have different forms to express the subjunctive mood in English. Instead, they are **conjugated** a certain way depending on the meaning we wish to achieve.

Expressing Wishes

When we a wish for something to be true, we conjugate the verb one degree into the past to create the subjunctive mood. For example:

• Indicative mood: “It’s Monday. I have to go to work.”

• Subjunctive mood: “I wish it **weren’t** Monday. I wish I **didn’t have to go** to work.”

(Notice that the verb *be* always conjugates to **were** in the subjunctive mood, regardless of whether it refers to a singular or plural noun.)

See the full section on **Expressing Wishes** to learn more about conjugating wishes in different tenses.

Expressing Commands, Suggestions, Requests, and Statements of Necessity

When we express actions that we demand, suggest, or request that someone else take, or describe something that must be the case, we use the base form of the verb—that is, the infinitive form without the word *to*.

For example:

• “He demanded that they **leave** the room at once.” (command)

• “I recommend that she **study** harder next time.” (suggestion)

• “I ask that the audience **be** completely silent during the demonstration.” (request)

• “It’s necessary that we **be** vigilant to avoid another disaster.” (statement of necessity)

The biggest difference between the subjunctive and indicative mood in this case is that the verb does not change according to who is taking the action. For instance, it is *she **study**, the audience **be***, and *we **be*** in the subjunctive, while it would be *she **studies**, the audience **is***, and *we **are*** in the indicative mood.

Note that when we issue direct demands using **imperative sentences** (as in, “Do your homework!” or “Please close the window.”), we are no longer using the subjunctive mood—instead, we are using what’s known as the **imperative mood**.

Conditional Sentences

Conditional sentences are used to describe hypothetical scenarios that require a certain condition or conditions to be met. They use what’s known as the **conditional mood** and are generally constructed using *if* to identify the conditions that must be met.

There are four “degrees” of conditionals, all of which vary in structure and meaning. We’ll give a brief synopsis of the different conditionals below; see the section on **Conditional Sentences** to learn more about how they are formed and used.

Zero Conditional

The zero conditional is used to talk about something that is generally true. For instance:

• “If you throw a ball in the air, it comes back down.” (Always true: A ball will come back down every time you throw it in the air.)

First Conditional

The first conditional is very similar in structure to the zero conditional, except that we now use the **future simple tense** (*will* + bare infinitive) to describe a probable or intended result of the condition. For example:

• “If I see him, I **will** tell him.”

• “If I win the lottery, I **will** buy a new house.”

Second Conditional

We use the second conditional to speak about a hypothetical situation or outcome resulting from the condition. Unlike the first conditional, we generally use the second conditional to talk about things that cannot or are less likely to happen.

To create the second conditional, we use the **past simple tense** after the *if* clause, followed by *would, could* or *might* + the bare infinitive for the result of the condition. For example:

• “If you had a phone, you **could call** me every day.”

• “If I were older, I **might stay up** all night long.”

Third Conditional

Third conditionals are used to establish a hypothetical situation in the past, followed by a hypothetical outcome that did not really happen—typically, the outcome is the opposite of what actually happened.

To form the third conditional, we use the **past perfect tense** for the *if* conditional clause, and *would/could/should/might have* + the **past participle** of the verb for the hypothetical outcome.

• “**If I had been more prepared**, I would have passed that test.”

• “If I **hadn’t overslept**, I **wouldn’t have been late** for work.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** something we use the subjunctive mood to express?

a) A wish

b) Commands, suggestions, requests, and statements of necessity
c) Conditionals
d) Factual, non-hypothetical information

2. How are verbs conjugated to express **wishes** in the subjunctive mood?
a) Shifted one tense into the future
b) Shifted one tense into the past
c) Into the base form of the verb
d) Into the infinitive form of the verb

3. How are verbs conjugated to express **commands** in the subjunctive mood?
a) Shifted one tense into the future
b) Shifted one tense into the past
c) Into the base form of the verb
d) Into the infinitive form of the verb

4. Which of the following words is used to indicate a **conditional** sentence?
a) if
b) were
c) will
d) wish

5. Which of the following sentences is in the subjunctive mood?
a) “I’m going out for a walk later.”
b) “It’s really important that you be still during the procedure.”
c) “Please don’t be so noisy!”
d) “She will be studying tonight, so she can’t come to baseball practice.”

Subjunctive Mood - Expressing Wishes

Definition

One of the most straightforward ways of using the **subjunctive mood** is when we want to describe a wish for something to be different than it is or was. We

generally construct these sentences using the word *wish*, followed by the verb of the desired action.

Creating the subjunctive mood

When we express wishes, we create the subjunctive mood by moving the main verb of the sentence one tense back in the past. We'll look at some examples of these tense shifts below, but here is a quick reference to remember how each tense moves back in the past:

- present simple tense —> past simple tense
- present continuous tense —> past continuous tense
- present perfect tense —>past perfect tense
- present perfect continuous tense —>past perfect continuous tense

- past simple tense —> past perfect tense
- past continuous tense —> past perfect continuous tense
- past perfect tense —>past perfect tense (no further shift possible)
- past perfect continuous tense —>past perfect continuous tense (no further shift possible)

Present tense wishes

As we can see above, for a wish about a situation in the present, we use the **past tense** equivalent of the verb:

• Situation: "It's Monday. I have to go to work." (present simple tense)

• "I wish it **weren't** Monday. I wish I **didn't have to go** to work." (past simple tense)

Conjugating *be* in the subjunctive mood

You might be more inclined to say "I wish it **wasn't** Monday," because this sounds like the natural subject-verb agreement resulting from "It is Monday." However, the verb *be* always conjugates to **were** in the subjunctive mood, regardless of whether it refers to a singular or plural noun.

Although it is becoming increasingly common to use *was* in everyday writing

and speech, you should always use ***were*** when talking about wishes or desires, especially in formal, professional, or academic contexts.

Be is the only verb that conjugates irregularly to reflect the subjunctive mood for wishes and desires. For all other verbs, we simply move them back one tense in the past as normal.

For example:

• Situation: “I can’t speak French, but would like to.”

• Desire: “I wish I **spoke** French.”

When we use **auxiliary verbs**, we move these back a tense instead of the main verbs:

• “I wish I ***could*** **speak** French.”

We can also use the subjunctive mood within the same sentence as verbs in the **indicative mood**:

• “I *can’t speak* French, but **I wish I *could***.”

Examples of other present tense wishes

• Situation: “It *is raining* outside.” (present continuous tense)
• Desire: “I wish it **weren’t raining**.” (past continuous tense)

• Situation: “He *has lived* in New York City his whole life.” (present perfect tense)
• Desire: “He wishes he **had lived** somewhere else at some point.” (past perfect tense)

• Situation: “My assistant *has been organizing* the filing cabinet.” (present perfect continuous tense)
• Desire: “I wish he **had been working** on something more important.” (past perfect continuous tense)

Past tense wishes

For past wishes, we go back in the past one tense further. For instance:

• Situation: “I’ll miss my appointment because I *left* the house late.” (past simple tense)
• “I wish I **had left** the house earlier.” (past perfect tense)

As with the present tense, we can also have sentences that use both the indicative mood and the subjunctive mood. For instance:

• “I *forgot* to set an alarm; I wish I **hadn’t**.”

Examples of other past tense wishes

• Situation: “I *was living* in Canada when I met you.” (past continuous tense)
• Desire: “I wish I **had been living** in America when I met you.” (past perfect continuous tense)

• Situation: “He *had started* smoking again.” (past perfect tense)
• Desire: “They all wished he **hadn’t started** smoking again.” (past perfect tense—no further shift possible)

• Situation: I *had been working* outside when you called. (present perfect continuous tense)
• Desire: “I wish I **hadn’t been working** outside when you called.” (past perfect continuous tense)

Wishes about others’ behavior

When we talk about someone’s continued behavior that we wish were different, we either use *would* + the desired verb, or simply the past tense of the verb.

For example:

Your son is always leaving his clothes lying around the bedroom floor.
• “I wish he **would pick up** his clothes off the floor when I asked him to.”
or
• “I wish he **picked up** his clothes off the floor when I asked him to.”

Your mother always whistles when she is in the house.
• “I wish she **wouldn’t whistle** in the house like that.”
or
• “I wish she **didn’t whistle** in the house like that.”

In the examples above, both constructions of the subjunctive are acceptable, though the *would* construction is more conventional. If we want to imply that we find a certain behavior annoying, we tend to use the *would* construction.

If only instead of *wish*

To express a desire that is more fanciful, unrealistic, or that we consider to be

ideal, we can use *if only* instead of *I wish* to add more emphasis to the desire. (Note that the subjunctive verb still goes back one tense in the past.)

For example:

• “I hate being cold all the time. **If only** I **lived** in a hot country.”

• “**If only** I **were** rich—I would spend my whole life traveling.”

• “We’re spending two weeks in the French alps next month; **if only** I **could ski**!”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which verb conjugates **irregularly** when describing wishes in the subjunctive mood?

a) can
b) will
c) be
d) have

2. For a situation in the present perfect tense, what verb tense would we use for a wish in the subjunctive mood?

a) present perfect continuous tense
b) past simple tense
c) past continuous tense
d) past perfect tense

3. Which of the following sentences is **correctly** conjugated for a wish in the subjunctive mood?

a) “I wish I weren’t short.”
b) “I wish I wasn’t short.”
c) “I wish I won’t be short.”
d) “I wish I’m not short.”

4. Which of the following phrases can be used instead of *wish* to describe an ideal or fanciful desire?

a) if so
b) if only

c) if possible
d) if hopefully

5. Which auxiliary verb can we use when we express a desire about someone else's behavior in the subjunctive mood?

a) will
b) would
c) could
d) should

Voice

Definition

Voice, also known as **diathesis**, is a grammatical feature that describes the relationship between the *verb* and the *subject* (also known as the *agent*) in a sentence. More specifically, voice describes how the verb is expressed or written in relation to the agent.

There are two main types of voice: **active voice** and **passive voice**. A third type of voice called **"middle" voice** also exists but is less commonly used. Here are some examples of the three types of voice:

• "She **wrote** a novel." (active voice)

• "The house **was purchased** by an elderly couple." (passive voice)

• "The cat **licked** itself." ("middle" voice)

Active voice

A verb is in the **active voice** when the agent of the verb (the person or thing that performs the action specified by the verb) is also the subject of the sentence. The active voice is the most common type of voice in both spoken and written English, and is generally considered to be the **default voice**.

Not all active-voice verbs are required to take an *object*. Any object present, however, must come after the verb (which always comes after the agent). For example:

• "The boy **sang** a song." (with an object, *a song*)

• "I **am watching** a movie." (with an object, *a movie*)

• “Vivian **sings** well.” (without an object)

Passive voice

A sentence uses the **passive voice** when the subject is acted upon by the verb. Passive-voice sentences are structurally opposite to active-voice sentences, with the object (now the subject* of the sentence) coming before the verb and the verb coming before the agent of the action. A passive-voice verb is used in the past participle form preceded by the auxiliary verb *be*, and the preposition *by* is inserted before the agent to form a **prepositional phrase**. For example:

• “*Angie* **will perform** a famous piano piece tomorrow night.” (active voice)
• “A famous piano piece **will be performed** *by Angie* tomorrow night.” (passive voice)

• “*Thousands of people* **have already read** his new book.” (active voice)
• “His new book **has already been read** *by thousands of people*.” (passive voice)

(*When converting a sentence from active to passive, the original *object* becomes the new *subject* due to its position at the beginning of the sentence. At the same time, the *agent* changes into the object of a *prepositional phrase*.)

Unlike active-voice, passive-voice sentences **do not** require agents. If an agent is unknown or irrelevant, you may eliminate the prepositional phrase containing the agent. For example:

• “The light bulb was patented **by Thomas Edison** in 1880.” (with agent)
• “The light bulb was patented in 1880.” (without agent)

• “The wedding venue has been decided on **by the bride and groom**.” (with agent)
• “The wedding venue has been decided on.” (without agent)

“Middle” voice

The term **“middle” voice** describes a type of voice that is a combination of sorts between the active and passive voices. The middle voice is not clearly defined in the English language; that is, it does not have a verb form specific to it. It does, however, contain several odd or irregular verb usages that are said to correspond most closely with the middle voice of other languages.

In most “middle”-voice sentences, the agent performs the verb’s action on itself. To compensate for the lack of a middle-voice verb form, these verbs are

typically followed by a **reflexive pronoun**. For example:

• “My girlfriend always **checks** herself in the mirror before we go out.”

• “The dog **bit** itself on the tail.”

“Middle” voice can also be used to describe some **intransitive verbs**. These verbs syntactically appear active (*agent + verb*) but function more similarly to verbs in the passive voice. In other words, the agent is being acted upon (like the passive voice) despite its position in front of the verb (as in the active voice). For example:

• “The **lasagna *cooked*** in the oven for several hours.” (The verb *cook* is acting upon the agent *lasagna*.)

• “The **bicycle *broke*** without warning.” (The verb *break* is acting upon the agent *bicycle*.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following voices is typically regarded as the **default voice**?

a) passive voice
b) active voice
c) “middle” voice
d) none of the above

2. Which of the following choices contains the **correct** word order for an **active-voice sentence**?

a) agent – verb – object
b) verb – agent – object
c) agent – verb – reflexive pronoun
d) subject – verb – prepositional phrase

3. Which of the following choices contains the **correct** word order for a **passive-voice sentence**?

a) agent – verb – object
b) verb – agent – object
c) agent – verb – reflexive pronoun
d) subject – verb – prepositional phrase

4. Which of the following sentences uses the **“middle” voice**?

a) “Her parents had chosen the school she would attend.”
b) “I was blinded by a bright light.”
c) “He threw a birthday party for himself.”
d) “All of our food burned.”

Active Voice

Definition

The **active voice** is a type of grammatical **voice** in which the *subject* of a sentence is also the **agent** of the verb—that is, it performs the action expressed by the verb. In active-voice sentences, the agent always comes before the verb. For example:

• “*My friend* **bought** a new car.” (*My friend* performed the action *bought*.)

• “*She* **enjoys** watching movies.” (*She* performs the action *enjoys*.)

• “*Barney* **is talking** to his sister.” (*Barney* is performing the action *talking*.)

A *direct object* is not always required for active-voice verbs. When an object is included, however, it must come directly after the verb. For example:

• “*I* **am drinking** some tea.” (with a direct object, *some tea*)

• “*The boy* **hid** his report card from his parents.” (with a direct object, *his report card*)

• “*Dr. Johnson* **will speak** at the convention.” (without a direct object)

When to use the active voice

Typically, the active voice is preferable to the **passive voice**, as it requires fewer words and expresses a clearer relationship between the verb and its agent. The active voice is generally thought of as the **default voice** in spoken and written English.

The following sections contain circumstances in which you should always try to use the active voice over the passive voice.

When there is no direct object

Because passive-voice sentences require direct objects (which are turned into

subjects when converted from active to passive voice), sentences without direct objects must be active. For example:

• "*That man* **has painted** for more than 40 years."

• "*We* **departed** immediately after the grand finale."

• "*The kids* **chatted** for several minutes."

We can see how these sentences cannot be put in the passive voice, because there is no direct object to become the subject. Take, for instance, the first sentence:

• "For more than 40 years, **has been painted** *by the man*." (**What** has been painted?)

It no longer makes any sense when structured in the passive voice, so it must remain active.

When the agent is important

The active voice is commonly used to emphasize the importance of an agent in a sentence. By using the active voice, we can highlight an agent's *responsibility* for or *involvement* with a particular action. The examples below demonstrate the differences between an **important agent** (active voice) and an **unimportant agent** (passive voice):

• "*The employees* **drink** lots of coffee before work every day." (active voice—describes the employees in relation to the act of drinking coffee)
• "Lots of coffee **is drunk** *by the employees* before work every day." (passive voice—describes the act of drinking coffee in relation to the employees)

• "*Sir Isaac Newton* **discovered** gravity more than 300 years ago." (active voice—emphasizes Newton's responsibility for the discovery of gravity)
• "Gravity **was discovered** *by Sir Isaac Newton* more than 300 years ago." (passive voice—emphasizes the discovery of gravity over Newton's involvement)

When the agent is known or relevant

You should always use the active voice if an agent is identifiable or contains information that is relevant to the rest of the sentence. For example:

• "**Shawn stole** a menu from the restaurant." (The speaker knows or is familiar with Shawn.)

• "**A veterinarian found** an abandoned puppy by the road." (The speaker knows

that it was a *veterinarian* who found the puppy and believes the information is relevant.)

• "**Dr. Li opened** *the hospital* in 1989." (The speaker knows the name of the person who started the hospital and the information is relevant to the conversation.)

On the other hand, when an agent is unknown or irrelevant, we usually switch to the passive voice and eliminate the agent altogether. For example:

• "A menu **was stolen** from the restaurant."

• "An abandoned puppy **was found** by the road."

• "The hospital **was opened** in 1989."

When expressing an authoritative tone

The active voice may also be used to stress the authority of an agent. This authoritative tone is a strategy commonly used in copywriting, advertising, and marketing in order to convince consumers of the beneficial effects of a product or service. It may also be used to establish a command or to more strongly emphasize an agent's responsibility for an action. For example:

• "Brushing your teeth at least twice a day **is recommended** *by dentists*." (passive voice)
• "*Dentists* **recommend** brushing your teeth at least twice a day." (active voice—emphasizes the authority of the *dentists*)

• "All of your broccoli **must be eaten** *by you* before dessert is served." (passive voice)
• "*You* **must eat** all of your broccoli before dessert is served." (active voice—emphasizes your responsibility to eat your broccoli)

When the agent is an ongoing topic

Agents that can perform multiple actions may be treated as **topics**. Making an agent an ongoing topic places emphasis on that agent instead of the actions it performs. When an agent acts as a topic, it usually remains the primary *subject* in most active-voice sentences used to describe or refer to it. This can be seen most prominently in works of fiction, in which protagonists typically perform numerous actions throughout a story.

For example, look at how the passage below describes a fictional protagonist named Caroline:

"*Caroline* **jumped** back and gasped. *She* **was** afraid of spiders and **despised** the feeling of their silky webs on her skin. But *she* **knew** it was time to face her fears. Sighing and brushing herself off, *Caroline* slowly **continued** down the path toward the hill."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In the following active-voice sentence, which word is the **agent** of the verb?
"Damien built a bookshelf with his own two hands."

a) built
b) bookshelf
c) Damien
d) hands

2. Which of the following active-voice sentences does **not** contain a **direct object**?

a) "She reads a chapter from her book before bed every night."
b) "Mom already made plans for the weekend."
c) "The tornado caused severe damage to the neighborhood."
d) "Tomorrow night I will be dining with my friends."

3. In which of the following cases should you always use the **active voice**?

a) When the agent is known or relevant
b) When the agent is an ongoing topic
c) When there is no direct object
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

4. Which of the following sentences uses the **active voice**?

a) "The town was founded over 400 years ago."
b) "The father surprised his children by bringing home a kitten."
c) "Her car has been missing since last week."
d) "I will be visited by my grandfather tomorrow."

Passive Voice

The **passive voice** is a type of grammatical **voice** in which the *subject* is acted upon by the *verb*. In passive-voice sentences, the subject is the **receiver of the action** (i.e., what would be the *direct object* in an **active-voice** sentence). For example:

• "The concert **was attended** by many young people." (The subject *the concert* receives the action of *attended*.)

• "The necklace **is being made** by a child." (The subject *the necklace* receives the action of *being made*.)

Passive-voice verbs are always preceded by the auxiliary verb *be* and are in their **past participle** forms. While the receiver of the action comes before the verb, the person or thing performing the action (known as the *agent*) comes after the verb and is preceded by the preposition *by* to form a **prepositional phrase**. For example:

• "The lights **were turned off** *by the janitor*." (*The lights* is the subject, but *the janitor* performs the action *turned off*.)

• "Final exams **will be taken** *by students* on Friday." (*Final exams* is the subject, but *students* performs the action *taken*.)

• "Letters to Santa **are sent** *by children* every year." (*Letters to Santa* is the subject, but *children* performs the action *sent*.)

Converting the active voice into the passive voice

You may only convert a sentence from the active voice into the passive voice if there is a **direct object**. As we've seen, this direct object becomes the *subject* in the passive voice. For example:

• "*A high school track and field star* **won** the race." (active voice)
• "The race **was won** *by a high school track and field star*." (passive voice)

• "*Local businesses* **are handing out** pamphlets near the mall." (active voice)
• "Pamphlets **are being handed out** *by local businesses* near the mall." (passive voice)

If an active-voice sentences does **not** contain a direct object, it **cannot** be

converted into the passive voice, as the sentence will lack coherency without a subject. For example:

• "*The kids* **are playing** outside." (active voice)
• "**Is being played** *by the kids* outside." (**What** is being played by the kids?)

Converting the passive voice into the active voice

You may only convert a sentence from the passive voice into the active voice if there is an identifiable **agent** of the verb. In the active voice, this agent becomes the *subject*. For example:

• "This blanket **was knitted** *by my grandmother*." (passive voice)
• "*My grandmother* **knitted** this blanket." (active voice)

• "The deer **was being chased** *by a bear*." (passive voice)
• "*A bear* **was chasing** the deer." (active voice)

If a passive-voice sentences does **not** contain an agent, it **cannot** be converted into the active voice, as the sentence will lack coherency without a subject. For example:

• "The Great Pyramid of Giza **was constructed** more than 4,000 years ago." (passive voice)
• "**Constructed** the Great Pyramid of Giza more than 4,000 years ago." (**Who** constructed the Great Pyramid of Giza?)

When to use the passive voice

The passive voice is less commonly used than the active voice because it is wordy and often lacks clarity; however, there are several cases in which using the passive voice may be necessary or preferable.

The following sections contain various circumstances in which you might wish to use the passive voice instead of the active voice.

When the receiver of the action is important

The passive voice may be used to emphasize the importance of the receiver of

the action. (In contrast, the active voice typically emphasizes the importance of the *agent*.) The examples below demonstrate the differences between an **important receiver of the action** (passive voice) and an **important agent** (active voice):

• "The school dance **will be organized** *by the science teachers* this year." (passive voice—emphasizes the *activity* in relation to the organizers)
• "*The science teachers* **will organize** the school dance this year." (active voice—emphasizes the *organizers* in relation to the activity)

• "She **is always being praised** *by her parents*." (passive voice—emphasizes *she* in relation to *her parents*)
• "*Her parents* **are always praising** her*." (active voice—emphasizes *her parents* in relation to *her*)

(*When the pronoun *she* is converted into an object, it becomes *her*.)

When the agent is unknown, irrelevant, or implied

Occasionally, the agent of an action may be unknown or irrelevant to the rest of a sentence, or it may already be heavily implied through the action or receiver of the action. In these cases, the agent may be eliminated altogether (which can only be done with the passive voice—**not** the active voice). For example:

• "My missing wallet **was returned** to a lost-and-found." (unknown agent—we don't know who returned the missing wallet)

• "A popular play **is being performed** at the local theater." (irrelevant agent—the names of the performers are irrelevant)

• "Bathing suits **are usually sold** in the summer months." (implied agent—we can assume that the agent is *clothing stores* or something similar)

When softening an authoritative tone

Because the passive voice places less emphasis on the *responsibility of the agent* and more emphasis on the *receiver of the action*, we can use the passive voice to express commands in a softer, less authoritative tone than those expressed through the active voice. For example:

• "*Inexperienced mountaineers* **should not attempt** Mount Everest." (active voice—emphasizes inexperienced mountaineers' responsibility to avoid the

mountain)
• “Mount Everest **should not be attempted** *by inexperienced mountaineers*.” (passive voice—emphasizes the difficulty or danger of the mountain)

If the agent is clearly implied, it may be eliminated for the sake of conciseness:

• “*You* **need to finish** this project by tomorrow.” (active voice)
• “This project **needs to be finished** *by you* by tomorrow.” (passive voice with agent)
• “This project **needs to be finished** by tomorrow.” (passive voice without agent)

When expressing a professional, neutral, or objective tone

Various forms of writing, including scientific reports and instruction manuals, use the passive voice to express a professional, neutral, or objective tone. Typically, the receiver of the action functions as the primary **topic** throughout the text. The agent is usually removed due to irrelevance or to avoid a sense of subjectivity. For example:

• “The experiment **was conducted** over the course of two weeks.”

• “Once Part A **has been inserted** into Part B, tighten the screws with a screwdriver.”

• “Adverse reactions to the medication **should be assessed and treated** *by a medical professional*.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In the following passive-voice sentence, which group of words is the **receiver of the action**?
“The large monument was erected by the construction crew last spring.”

a) the large monument
b) was erected
c) by the construction crew
d) last spring

2. Which of the following passive-voice sentences does **not** contain an **agent** of

the verb?

a) “The homework assignment was completed last Thursday.”
b) “Frank was struck by lightning.”
c) “Her poem will be read aloud by her teacher.”
d) “This desk was assembled by my aunt.”

3. Which choice **correctly** converts the following active-voice sentence into the **passive voice**?
“You should congratulate your sister on her academic achievement.”

a) “Your sister should congratulate on her academic achievement.”
b) “Your sister should be congratulated on her academic achievement.”
c) “Your sister should congratulate on her academic achievement by you.”
d) “Your sister on her academic achievement should be congratulated.”

4. In which of the following cases should you use the **passive voice**?

a) When softening an authoritative tone
b) When the agent is important
c) When expressing a neutral or professional tone
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) All of the above

5. Which of the following sentences uses the **passive voice**?

a) “You can get to Vienna from Salzburg by train.”
b) “The elementary school is by the park.”
c) “I learned Korean by watching dramas.”
d) “This scarf was crocheted by my friend.”

Middle Voice

Definition

The so-called **middle voice** is an approximate type of grammatical **voice** in which **the subject** both performs and receives the action expressed by the verb. In other words, the subject acts as both the **agent** and the **receiver** (i.e., the **direct object**) of the action. For example:

• “*He* **injured** himself playing rugby.” (*He* is the agent and *himself* is the receiver of the action.)

• “*The cat* **is scratching** itself.” (*The cat* is the agent and *itself* is the receiver of the action.)

Middle-voice verbs follow the same syntactic structure as in the **active voice** (*agent + verb*), but function semantically as **passive-voice** verbs. As a result, the middle voice is described as a combination of the active and passive voices.

Because there is no verb form exclusive to the middle voice, it is often categorized as the active voice since it uses the same verb structure in a sentence. The following examples highlight the similarities between the two:

• “*Some snakes* **have tried to eat** inedible things.” (active voice)
• “*Some snakes* **have tried to eat** themselves.” (middle voice)

• “*The man* accidentally **hit** his face.” (active voice)
• “*The man* accidentally **hit** himself in the face.” (middle voice)

How to identify the middle voice

We can distinguish the middle voice from the active voice by determining whether there is a **reflexive pronoun** after the verb (in the direct object position) or an **intransitive verb** acting upon the agent.

When the direct object is a reflexive pronoun

Because the agent is also the receiver of the action in the middle voice, we can clarify this connection by inserting a reflexive pronoun after the verb. The reflexive pronoun assumes the role of the **direct object** and indicates that the agent is acting upon itself. For example:

• “*The child* **warmed** herself by blowing into her hands.” (*Herself* is a reflexive pronoun that refers to *the child*.)

• “*Small dogs* tend to **hurt** themselves when playing with bigger dogs.” (*Themselves* is a reflexive pronoun that refers to *small dogs*.)

Many middle-voice verbs are **transitive verbs** and therefore require a direct object in the form of a reflexive pronoun. Without a reflexive pronoun, the receiver of the action becomes unclear, and the sentence loses coherence. For example:

• “*The child* **warmed** by blowing into her hands.” (**What** or **whom** did the child warm?)

• “*Small dogs* tend to **hurt** when playing with bigger dogs.” (**What** or **whom** do small dogs tend to hurt?)

Reusing the agent instead of adding a reflexive pronoun will affect the coherence of the sentence or even change its meaning altogether:

• “*The child* **warmed** the child by blowing into her hands.” (implies *the child* warmed a different child)

• “*Small dogs* **tend to hurt** small dogs when playing with bigger dogs.” (implies *small dogs* tend to hurt other small dogs)

Likewise, using a **personal pronoun** instead of a reflexive pronoun will change or confuse the meaning of the verb’s action:

• “*The child* **warmed** her by blowing into her hands.” (implies *the child* warmed a different child)

• “*Small dogs* **tend to hurt** them when playing with bigger dogs.” (indicates an unspecified object of the verb *hurt* other than *small dogs*)

However, there do exist certain verbs for which the reflexive pronouns are implied and may therefore be eliminated. For example:

• “*My father* **is shaving** himself in the bathroom.” (with the reflexive pronoun *himself*)
• “*My father* **is shaving** in the bathroom.” (without reflexive the pronoun)

• “*She* always **stretches** herself before doing yoga.” (with the reflexive pronoun *herself*)
• “*She* always **stretches** before doing yoga.” (without reflexive the pronoun)

When the verb is intransitive and acting upon the agent

Certain **intransitive verbs** can be used to modify an agent (usually an inanimate object) that is also the receiver of the action. In the middle voice, this type of verb does **not** take a reflexive pronoun (or any direct object). For example:

• “*My sister’s lunch* **is cooking** on the stove.” (*Cook* is an intransitive verb indicating **what** is being cooked.)

• “*This car* **doesn’t drive** smoothly anymore.” (*Drive* is an intransitive verb

indicating **what** is being driven.)

• "*Her engagement ring* **broke** in half." (*Break* is an intransitive verb indicating **what** is being broken.)

However, active-voice verbs can also be intransitive and are expressed identically to middle-voice verbs. For example:

• "*The boy* **laughed** when he heard the joke." (*Laugh* is an intransitive verb indicating **who** is laughing.)

• "*Someone* **is crying** in the hallway." (*Cry* is an intransitive verb indicating **who** is crying.)

You can determine whether an intransitive verb is in the active voice or the middle voice by changing the verb into the **passive voice**. Doing so will convert the intransitive verb into a *transitive verb* and the agent into the *receiver of the action*. If the meaning of the sentence stays roughly the same, it is in the middle voice. If the meaning changes dramatically or lacks coherence, it is in the active voice. For example:

• "*My sister's lunch* **is cooking** on the stove." (original)
✔ "My sister's lunch **is being cooked** on the stove." (passive voice)

Because *cook* can be converted into a transitive verb in the passive voice without altering the meaning of the original sentence, the original sentence must be in the **middle voice**.

Here is another example:

• "*The boy* **laughed** when he heard the joke." (original)
✖ "The boy **was laughed** when he heard the joke." (passive voice)

When converted into the passive voice, the original sentence loses coherence; therefore, it must be in the **active voice**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the **correct** word order for a middle-voice sentence?

a) agent – verb – reflexive pronoun
b) subject – verb
c) subject – reflexive pronoun – verb
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) None of the above

2. Which of the following sentences is in the **middle voice**?

a) “Brianna wants to see the world for herself.”
b) “The mountain appeared vaster than the sky itself.”
c) “I can’t contain myself when I’m excited about something.”
d) “Children are encouraged to play by themselves.”

3. Which of the following sentences is in the **active voice**?

a) “He can never control himself when he’s angry.”
b) “Edmund is shaving in the upstairs bathroom.”
c) “What’s cooking for dinner tonight?”
d) “You should always stretch your muscles before exercising.”

4. Which of the following sentences is **not** in the middle voice?

a) “The child exhausted her by playing too many games.”
b) “The man saw himself in the mirror.”
c) “Joanna entertained herself by whistling.”
d) “The employees dedicated themselves to their work.”

Speech

Definition

Grammatical **speech** refers to how we report something another person said. Depending on how we do this, we sometimes have to **inflect** (change the form of) the verbs that we use.

Speech is usually divided between two types: **direct speech** and **reported speech** (also known as **indirect speech**). There are also other sub-categories of speech, which we’ll look at a little later in this section.

Reporting verbs

Both direct and indirect speech use what are known as **reporting verbs**, the most common of which are *say* and *tell*. When we use *tell*, we need to use another person’s name or a **personal pronoun** as an **indirect object**. Other reporting verbs include *ask, instruct, explain, mention, suggest, claim,* and many more.

Direct Speech

Direct speech refers to the direct quotation of something that someone else said. It is sometimes known as **quoted speech**. Because the quotation happened in the past, we put the reporting verb into the **past simple tense**, but we don't change the verbs used within the quotation. We also punctuate sentences in a certain way when we use direct speech in writing.

Punctuating direct speech

When used in writing, we indicate the quoted speech with **quotation marks**. (Note that American English uses **double quotation marks** (**" "**), while British English typically uses **single quotation marks** (**' '**).)

If we are quoting an entire sentence, we set it apart with one or two commas. For example:

• John *said*, **"I'll never live in this city again."**

• Mary *told* him, **"I want to have another baby,"** which took him by surprise.

• The other day, my daughter *asked*, **"Mommy, why do I have to go to school, but you don't?"**

However, if we are quoting a fragment of speech that is used as an integral part of the overall sentence, then no commas are used. We still use reporting verbs in the past tense, though. For instance:

• John *said* he feels **"really bad"** about what happened.

Direct speech before a reporting verb

We can also put direct speech before the reporting verb. Again, we usually use a comma to separate the quoted text from the unquoted text, as in:

• **"I can't wait to see daddy,"** my son *said*.

However, if a **question mark** or **exclamation point** is used in the direct speech, then we do **not** use a comma:

• **"Where are we going?"** *asked* Sally.

• **"This is going to be great!"** Tom *exclaimed*.

End punctuation — American vs.

British English

In American English, a period or comma used at the end of direct speech always appears within the quotation marks.

In British English, however, if the quotation ends in a period or comma, it is usually placed outside the quotation mark, as in:

• The CEO *said*, **‘This is a great day for the company’.**

• **‘I want to be a doctor when I grow up’,** Susy *told* us yesterday.

Note that if a quoted sentence ends in a question mark or exclamation point that belongs to the quotation, it will appear within the quotation marks. If the question mark or exclamation point belongs to the **overall** sentence (that is, it isn’t actually part of the quotation), it will appear outside the quotation marks. This is the same in **both** American and British English. For example:

• Samantha *asked*, **“How long will it take to get there?”**

• But I don’t want to just **‘see how things go’!**

Using multiple sets of quotation marks

If a sentence already uses quotation marks, then we have to differentiate between the quoted speech and the rest of the sentence. If we are using double quotation marks, then we have to put the quoted speech in single quotation marks; if it is in single quotation marks, then the quoted text is put into double quotation marks. The rest of the punctuation in the sentence does not change. For example:

• “They told us, **‘We don’t have the budget for more staff.’**”

• ‘The prime minister is reported to have said that he is **“in disagreement with the president’s remarks”,** which prompted a quick response from the White House.’

Reported Speech (Indirect Speech)

When we tell other people what someone else told us without directly quoting that person, it is called **reported speech**. (It is also sometimes known as **indirect speech** or **indirect quotation**.)

We still use **reporting** verbs in reported speech, but we no longer use quotation

marks because we are reporting a version of what was said. We also do not use commas to set the reported speech apart, though we often (but not always) introduce it with the word *that*. For example:

• Janet *said* **she would go to the station herself**.

• He *told* us **that he wanted to be alone**.

Shifting verb tense in reported speech

The conventional grammar rule when using reported speech is to shift the **verb tense** one degree into the past. This is because we usually put the reporting verb in the past tense (*I **asked**, she **said**, they **told** us, he **suggested***, etc.), so the speech that is being reported must shift back as well. In the table below, we'll look at the way sentences in various tenses are shifted in reported speech according to this convention:

Non-reported sentence	Verb shift	Reported speech
I live in Germany.	**present simple tense** shifts to **past simple tense**	**He said *he lived*** in Germany.
I was a carpenter before I moved here.	**past simple tense** shifts to **past perfect tense**	**She said that *she had been*** a carpenter before she moved here.
He is writing a letter to our friend.	**present continuous tense** shifts to **past continuous tense**	**She told us *he was writing*** a letter to our friend.
She was sleeping when you called.	**past continuous tense** shifts to **past perfect continuous tense**	**He told me *you had been sleeping*** when I called.
I have been to Paris four times.	**present perfect tense** shifts to **past perfect tense**	**She said *she had been*** to Paris four times.
The film *had ended* when *I*	No shift in the first verb, because there is no tense further in the past.	**He said the film *had ended*** when

switched on the TV.	The second verb shifts from **past simple tense** to **past perfect tense**.	*he'd switched* on the TV.
When she finally arrived, *I had been waiting* for over two hours.	No shift, as there is no tense further in the past.	**He said he *had been waiting*** for over two hours when she finally arrived.
I will call you tomorrow.	The **modal verb** *will* shifts to its past-tense version, *would*.	**He told me that *he would call*** me tomorrow.

It should be noted, though, that it is quite common to keep the verb tense the same in modern English. This is especially true in cases in which the reporting verb remains in the present tense, or when the thing being reported is still currently true. To learn more about such nuances, continue on to the **Reported Speech** section.

Other categories of speech

While **direct** and **reported speech** are the two main forms of grammatical speech, there are two other sub-categories that we use: **free indirect speech** and **silent speech**.

Free Indirect Speech

Free indirect speech (also known as **free indirect discourse**) is used to indicate the thoughts or mental processes of a character; as such, it is most commonly found in prose writing. It is most often used in the form of a question, rhetorically asking something about the character's situation.

We do not use reporting verbs to introduce or indicate free indirect speech, and, like **reported speech**, it is used without quotation marks. For example:

• He had no money, no job, and no friends. **How had his life arrived to such a desperate point?**

• Janet had just learned that she needed to give a speech to the entire school in less than an hour. **What was she going to do?**

Silent Speech

Silent speech refers to a direct quotation that is said internally (i.e., *silently*) by someone to him- or herself. We still use reporting verbs, and we often apply the exact same punctuation rules to silent speech that we use in **direct speech**. For instance:

• **“I’m never coming back to this town again,”** he murmured to himself.

• She thought, **“What a beautiful country.”**

It is equally common, however, to use silent speech without quotation marks (although we still use commas in the same way). To make the quotation stand out from the rest of the text, some writers will use *italics* to indicate silent speech. Note that, if the reporting verb appears before the silent speech, we generally do **not** capitalize the first word if we don’t use quotation marks. For example:

• **It will be quiet around here when the kids go to college,** Dan thought.

• She asked herself, *how am I going to get out of this one*?

Whether you choose to use quotation marks, italics, or nothing at all is entirely a matter of personal preference when it comes to silent speech—the important thing is to be consistent.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What type of speech is used to indicate an **exact quotation** by someone else?

a) Direct speech
b) Reported speech
c) Free indirect speech
d) Silent speech

2. What type of speech is used to indicate an **internal quotation** by someone?

a) Direct speech
b) Reported speech
c) Free indirect speech
d) Silent speech

3. What is the **conventional** rule for conjugating verbs in **reported speech**?

a) Shift the verb one tense into the future
b) Shift the verb one tense into the past
c) Always use the past simple tense
d) No verb shift is necessary.

4. In **American English**, when does the end punctuation in quoted speech appear **within** the quotation marks?

a) Only if it is a comma or period
b) Only if it is a question mark or exclamation point
c) Never
d) Always

5. Identify the type of speech used in the following sentence:
He knew he had to find someone to cover his shift at work, but who would be free this late on a Saturday?

a) Direct speech
b) Reported speech
c) Free indirect speech
d) Silent speech

6. Identify the type of speech used in the following sentence:
She said had seen the movie already, but she would go again if I wanted to see it with her.

a) Direct speech
b) Reported speech
c) Free indirect speech
d) Silent speech

Reported Speech (Indirect Speech)

Definition

When we tell other people what someone else told us, it is called **indirect speech** or **reported speech**. We use **reporting verbs** to introduce the information that was spoken previously.

Reporting verbs

The most common so-called “reporting verbs” are *say* and *tell*. When we use *tell*, we need to use another person’s name, or a **personal pronoun** representing him or her, as an **indirect object**.

For example:

✖ “She said **me** she was late for the appointment yesterday.” (incorrect)
✔ “She said she was late for the appointment yesterday.” (correct)

✖ “She told she was late for the appointment yesterday.” (incorrect)
✔ “She told **me** she was late for the appointment yesterday. (correct)

Remember, the personal pronouns are *me, you, him, her, it, us,* and *them*. We can also change the indirect object and use a person’s name, as in “She told **Mark** she was late for the appointment yesterday.”

Other reporting verbs include *ask, instruct, explain, mention, suggest, claim*, and many more. Although we will focus on *say* and *tell* in this article, let’s see some examples that employ other reporting verbs:

• “He **asked** if *I could come in early tomorrow*.”

• “She **explained** that *she was only joking*.”

• “I merely **suggested** that *we should go home early*.”

Shifting grammatical tense in indirect speech

The conventional grammar rule is to go back a tense when you report to another person what someone said to you. This is because we usually put the reporting verb in the past tense (*I asked, she said, they told us, he suggested*, etc.), and so the speech that is being reported must shift back as well.

In modern English, though, it is quite common to keep the verb tense the same. This is especially true in cases where the reporting verb remains in the present tense and/or that which is being reported is still currently true.

Let’s have a look at each verb tense and examine how the sentence changes when speech is reported.

Present simple tense

Direct speech: “*I live* in Germany.”

Reported Speech: “**He said *I lived*** in Germany.”

But because the reported speech is still true, it is often left in the present simple tense:

• “**He told them *I live*** in Germany.”

Past simple tense

Direct speech: “*She was* a carpenter before she moved here.”

Reported speech: “**She said *she had been*** a carpenter before she moved here.”

With the past tense, the general rule is to move it back a tense to the past perfect tense. However, for action verbs in the past tense, it is much more common for the reported speech to remain in the past tense:

• “*She went* to the supermarket this morning.”

• “**I told him *she went*** to the supermarket this morning.” ***or***:

• “**I said *she had gone*** to the supermarket this morning.”

Present continuous tense

Direct speech: “*He is writing* a letter to their friend.”

Reported speech: If he is writing the letter at the exact moment it is reported to another person, we generally say either:

• “**She <u>says</u> *he is writing*** a letter to their friend.” ***or***:

• “**She <u>said</u> *he is writing*** a letter to their friend.”

If the reported action happened some time before it was reported, we shift the reported speech back one tense to the **past continuous**, as in:

• “**She told us *he was writing*** a letter to their friend.”

Past continuous tense

Direct speech: “*You were sleeping* when I called.”

Reported speech: “**He said *you were sleeping*** when I called.”

In modern English, it is very common to maintain the past continuous tense in the reported speech. However, the conventional grammar rule is to change the reported tense to the past perfect continuous tense, as in:

• “**He told me *you had been sleeping*** when I called.”

Present perfect tense

Direct speech. “*I have been* to Paris four times.”

Reported Speech: “**She told me *she has been / had been*** to Paris four times.”

When reporting an action in the present perfect, it is common to either maintain the tense in reported speech, or to shift it back to the past perfect. However, if the reported speech is used in contrast to another event or action in the past, then the past perfect must be used. For example:

• “**She said *she had been*** to Paris four times before she met Tom.”

Past perfect tense

Direct speech: “The film *had ended* when I switched on the TV.”

Reported speech: “**He said the film *had ended*** when *he’d switched* on the TV.”

Reported speech in the past perfect remains the same, as there is no other tense beyond the past perfect. The other element of the sentence (“when I switched on the TV”) conventionally goes into the past perfect tense as well.

However, it is also common for this to remain in the past simple in reported speech, as in:

• “**He told me the film *had ended*** when he switched on the TV.”

Past perfect continuous tense

Direct speech: “When she finally arrived, I had been waiting for over two hours.”

Reported speech remains the same, as there is no tense beyond the past perfect continuous:

• “**He said he *had been waiting*** for over two hours when she finally arrived.”

Future simple tense

Direct speech: “*I will call* you tomorrow.”

In reported speech, *will* goes back a tense and becomes *would*:

• “**He said *he would call*** me tomorrow.”

It is also common for the future simple to remain in the same tense in reported

speech, especially if what was reported happened very recently. For example:

• Person A: “What did Barry say just now?”

• Person B: “**He said/says *he will call*** me tomorrow.”

Special cases

Can

Direct speech: “I *can swim*.”

In reported speech, as with *will*, *can* moves back a tense and becomes *could*:

• “**She told me *she could swim***.”

Must

Direct speech: “*I must* go.”

In reported speech, *must* can either remain in the simple present, or else take the past tense of *have to* in reported speech, as in:

• "**She said *she had to*** go.”

or:

• “**She told me *she must*** go.”

Modal auxiliary verbs

If we use the modal auxiliary verbs *should*, *would*, *could*, *may*, *might*, or *ought to*, then direct speech and reported speech are always the same.

For example:

Direct speech: “*You should take* an aspirin.”
Reported speech: “**She said *I should take*** an aspirin.”

Direct speech: “*I would phone* him if I had his number.”
Reported speech: “**She told me *she would phone*** him if she had his number.”

Direct speech: “They *could stay* another day if you want.”
Reported speech: “**They said *they could stay*** another day if I wanted.”

Direct speech: “*I might/may be* late.”
Reported speech: “**I told them *I might/may be*** late.”

Reporting the negative

Where we put the negating *not* or *never* depends on what is negative in the reported speech: the speech being reported or the report itself. Both cases are simple to structure.

Reporting negative speech

When we report negative *speech*, we simply use the reporting verbs and tense shifts that we've looked at already. For example:

Direct speech: "*I did not buy* a car." (negative past tense)

Reported speech: "**He said *he hadn't bought*** a car." (shifts to the negative past perfect)

However, as with reporting speech in the positive past simple, it is common in modern English to leave the reported speech in the negative past simple, as in:

• "**He said *he didn't buy*** a car."

Reporting negative commands

There are two general ways to report imperative speech that was in the negative: we either use *not to* before the verb of a reported clause without a subject, or else use *was/were not to* before the verb of a reported clause with a subject. (We often contract *was/were* with *not* in this construction.) For example:

Direct speech: "Don't speak."

Reported speech:

• "**He said *not to speak***."

• "**He said *I wasn't to speak***."

• "**I told you *we were not to speak***."

Giving negative reports

When we are giving a *negative report* of quoted speech, we typically use the negative past tense of the reporting verb:

Direct speech: "*She is studying* for a test."

Reported speech: "**She didn't say *she was studying*** for a test."

If we want to put the report further in the past, we can also use the negative past perfect, as in:

• "**She <u>hadn't said</u> *she was studying*** for a test."

Using infinitives to report imperatives, requests, and advice

When we report orders, requests, or advice, we can use the infinitive form of the verbs that the other person has said.

Imperatives (orders)

Direct speech: "Stand up straight!"

Reported speech: "**The teacher said *to stand up straight***."

Requests

Direct speech: "Can you take me to the airport, please?"

Reported speech: "**He asked me *to take him*** to the airport."

Advice

Direct speech: "You should study a bit harder next time."

Reported speech: "**She advised me *to study*** a bit harder."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the **conventional** rule for the verb tense of speech that we report?

a) It stays the same as the original tense
b) It shifts back one tense in the past
c) It shifts forward one tense in the future
d) It is always in the past simple tense

2. What does the reporting verb *tell* require that the verb *say* does not?

a) a direct object
b) a direct subject

c) an indirect object
d) an indirect subject

3. Which verbs **always** remain in the same tense when they are reported?
a) reporting verbs (other than *suggest* and *advise*)
b) modal auxiliary verbs (other than *can* and *will*)
c) linking verbs (other than *seem* and *feel*)
d) action verbs (other than *say* and *go*)

4. Which verb form is uniquely used to reporting commands, requests, and advice?
a) infinitive
b) past perfect
c) future simple
d) present participle

5. Which of these is **not** a reporting verb?
a) advise
b) say
c) suggest
d) speak

6. Complete the following sentence with the appropriate tense according to **conventional** grammar rules:
Direct speech: “I have seen that movie already.”
Reported speech: “He said he _____ that movie already.”
a) saw
b) has seen
c) had seen
d) having seen

Grammatical Person

Definition

Grammatical person refers to the degree of involvement of a participant in an

action, event, or circumstance. There are three degrees of grammatical person: **first person** (the speaker), **second person** (someone being spoken to), and **third person** (anyone/anything not being directly addressed). The grammatical person of a clause's subject (a noun or pronoun) will affect how we conjugate the verb of that clause.

The vast majority of verbs only conjugate for **third-person singular** subjects (e.g., *he*, *she*, and *it*) by taking the suffix "-s" or "-es."

However, the verb *be* is unique in that it has **five** conjugations according to the grammatical person of its subject and the **tense** of the verb.

Non-*be* Verbs

When to conjugate for person

Every verb in English (except **modal auxiliary verbs**) conjugates for grammatical person. However, this conjugation only occurs in one specific instance: if the subject is **singular** and in the **third person**, and if the verb is in the **present simple tense**. If this is the case, we most often conjugate the verb by adding "-s" or "-es" to the end. In the first or second person in the present simple tense, we simply use the **base form** (bare **infinitive**) of the verb. For example:

• "I *want* a soda." (first-person singular, present simple tense)
• "You *want* a soda." (second-person singular, present simple tense)
• "She ***wants*** a soda.) (third-person singular, present simple tense)
• "They *want* a soda.) (third-person plural, present simple tense)

Note that this conjugation does **not** occur with the **past** or **future simple tenses**:

• "I *wanted* a soda." (first-person singular, **past simple tense**)
• "You *wanted* a soda." (second-person singular/plural, **past simple tense**)
• "She *wanted* a soda.) (third-person singular, **past simple tense**)

• "I *will want* a soda." (first-person singular, **future simple tense**)
• "You *will want* a soda." (second-person singular/plural, **future simple tense**)
• "She *will want* a soda." (third-person singular, **future simple tense**)

Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs combine with the main verb of a clause to create a unique, specific meaning. There are three **primary auxiliary verbs** that can all conjugate to reflect tense and person: *do*, *have*, and *be*.

We use the verb *do* as an auxiliary when we want to ask questions or to make verbs negative. In the present tense in the third-person singular, we conjugate *do* into *does*. For example:

• "*Do* you *want* any ice cream?" (second-person singular/plural)
• "***Does*** he *want* any ice cream?" (third-person singular)

• "They *don't want* any ice cream." (third-person plural)
• "She ***doesn't*** *want* any ice cream." (third-person singular)

The auxiliary verbs *have* and *be* are used to create the **perfect, continuous**, and **perfect continuous** forms of the past and present tenses. The main verb in these tenses will not conjugate for person, but, in certain cases, the auxiliary verbs **can**.

The **present perfect** and **present perfect continuous tense** both use the present-simple tense form of the auxiliary verb *have*, which conjugates as *has* in the third-person singular. For example:

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

• "I *have been working* a lot lately." (first-person singular)
• "You *have been working* a lot lately." (second-person singular/plural)
• "He ***has*** *been working* a lot lately." (third-person singular)
• "They *have been working* a lot lately." (third-person plural)

Present Perfect Tense

• "I *have eaten* too much food." (first-person singular)
• "You *have eaten* too much food!" (second-person singular/plural)
• "The dog ***has*** *eaten* too much food!" (third-person singular)
• "The dogs *have eaten* too much food!" (third-person plural)

The **present continuous** and **past continuous tenses**, on the other hand, use the verb *be* as an auxiliary verb, and it conjugates in several ways according to person and tense:

Present Continuous Tense

• "I ***am*** *running* out of time." (first-person singular)
• "We ***are*** *running* out of time." (first-person plural)
• "You ***are*** *running* out of time." (second-person singular/plural)
• "He ***is*** *running* out of time." (third-person singular)
• "They ***are*** *running* out of time." (third-person plural)

Past Continuous Tense

• "I ***was*** *running* out of time." (first-person singular)

• “We ***were*** *running* out of time.” (first-person plural)
• “You ***were*** *running* out of time.” (second-person singular/plural)
• “He ***was*** *running* out of time.” (third-person singular)
• “They ***were*** *running* out of time.” (third-person plural)

We’ll examine all the ways *be* can conjugate a little bit later in this section.

Spelling conjugated verbs

As we’ve seen already, some verbs take “-s” or “-es” to conjugate for third-person singular subjects, depending on how they are spelled. Let’s look at the rules that guide which kinds of verbs take which endings.

Add “-s”

The vast majority of verbs simply take the suffix “-s” onto the end of their base form, as in:

Base form	Third-person singular
I play	she play**s**
they break	it break**s**
we buy	he buy**s**
you write	the author write**s**
I bake	my father bake**s**
they lie	he lie**s**

Add “-es”

There are some verbs that already end in a **sibilant** sound (a sound like a hiss or buzz) created by the endings “-ss,” “-z,” “-x,” “-sh,” “-ch,” or “-tch.” Adding “-s” to the end would just elongate that sound in an odd way, so we add the suffix “-es” instead so that the sound is distinguished. For example:

Base form	Third-person singular

they catch	she catch**es**
we mix	it mix**es**
I hush	he hush**es**
we pass	he pass**es**
they quiz	the teacher quizz**es**
I approach	she approach**es**

We also *usually* add the “-es” suffix to verbs ending in a **consonant** + “-o,” as in:

Base form	**Third Person Singular Present Tense**
I go	he go**es**
we do	she do**es**
they forgo	he forgo**es**
they veto	the committee veto**es**
I lasso	the rancher lasso**es**
you undo	he undo**es**

However, verbs ending in a **vowel** + “-o” (such as *moo*, *boo, woo*, or *radio*) simply take the “-s” ending (*moo**s**, boo**s**, woo**s**, radio**s***). *Solo* is unique in that it ends in a consonant + “o,” yet it also only takes “-s” for the third-person singular (*solo**s***).

Change “y” to “i” and add “-es”

If a verb ends in a **consonant** followed by “-y,” we conjugate by changing “y” to “i” and *then* adding “-es.” (Note that if “y” is preceded by a **vowel**, as in *play, buy, stay*, etc., then we simply add “-s” as usual.)

Base form	**Third-person singular**

they cry	he cr**ies**
we try	she tr**ies**
they scurry	it scurr**ies**
the dogs bury	he bur**ies**
I fly	the pilot fl**ies**
I spy	she sp**ies**

Conjugating *be*

The verb *be* is known as a **highly irregular** verb due to the huge variation in how it conjugates for tense and person. Below are all the possible conjugations of the verb—**eight** forms in total!

Grammatical person	Base form	Past Tense Singular	Past Tense Plural	Past Participle	Present Tense Singular	Present Tense Plural	P
n/a	**be**			**been**			**b**
first person		I **was**	we **were**		I **am**	we **are**	
second person		you **were**	you **were**		you **are**	you **are**	
third person		he/she/it **was**	they **were**		he/she/it **is**	they **are**	

Be, like the verbs *have* and *do*, can be both an **auxiliary verb** or the **main verb** of a clause. As we saw above, when *be* functions as an auxiliary, it is used to create the **past continuous** and **present continuous tenses**; when it functions as a main verb, it is called a **linking verb**, meaning it connects a subject to a description rather than expressing a dynamic action.

We've already seen examples of *be* functioning to create the continuous tenses;

now let's look at some examples of how it functions as a **linking verb**.

• "I **am** 32 years old."

• "**Were** you cold last night?"

• "It **was** very rainy in Ireland."

• "John **is** in the other room."

• "She **is** a bully."

• "They **are** *a lost cause*."

Note that we don't conjugate *be* into its past and present **participles** to reflect grammatical person; instead, they are used when *be* is functioning as the **main verb** in the perfect or continuous tenses. For example:

• "I *have* **been** *unwell* lately." (**present perfect tense**)

• "You *are* **being** silly." (**present continuous tense**)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the only type of verb that does **not** conjugate for grammatical person?

a) Auxiliary verbs
b) Modal auxiliary verbs
c) Linking verbs
d) Stative verbs

2. Which of the following is **not** a suffix used to conjugate non-*be* verbs for grammatical person?

a) -re
b) -s
c) -es
d) -ed
e) A & D
f) B & C

3. Which of the following does the verb *be* conjugate for?

a) First-person singular present tense
b) Second-person singular past tense

c) Third-person singular present tense
d) Third-person plural past tense
e) A & C
f) B & D
g) All of the above

4. Which of the following do **all** verbs (except modal verbs) conjugate for?

a) First-person singular present tense
b) First-person singular past tense
c) Third-person singular present tense
d) Third-person singular past tense

5. Which of the following is **not** a conjugation of *be*?

a) has
b) was
c) is
d) am

Declension

Definition

Declension collectively refers to the **inflection** (change in form) of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs to reflect certain aspects of how they are used in a sentence. Declension stands in contrast to **conjugation**, which refers specifically to the inflection of **verbs**.

Nouns

The declension of nouns reflects two things: **plurality** and **gender**.

Plurals

Nouns are declined primarily to reflect **number**. A noun in its basic form is inherently singular, so we must inflect it when there is more than one.

The most common way to do this is to add the suffix “-s” to the end of the noun, as in *book**s***, *dog**s***, *table**s***, etc.

However, certain nouns take “-es” at the end instead, and many **irregular** plurals defy any sort of spelling guidelines at all. Continue on to the section on **plurals** to learn more about the various spelling rules and irregularities when writing about multiple nouns.

Gender

In English, nouns are generally gender neutral. While it is very common to inflect nouns for gender in the romance languages (such as French, Italian, and Spanish), inflection for gender has all but disappeared in modern English (except for **personal pronouns**, as we’ll see).

However, there are still a few English nouns that still **do** inflect for gender. The most common of these take an “-ess” ending to reflect feminine (female) gender. For example, *count* (male) vs. *count**ess*** (female), or *prince* (male) vs. *princ**ess*** (female).

Continue to the section describing the inflection of nouns for **gender** to learn more about when and how we spell the few remaining gender-specific noun forms.

Personal Pronouns

Pronouns are used for a wide range of purposes, but we only inflect a relatively small portion of them—**personal pronouns**. However, other than the **conjugation of verbs**, personal pronouns are the most heavily inflected part of speech in English, changing form to reflect **case, gender, number**, and **person**. **Reflexive pronouns**, though not technically an example of declension, are so similar to personal pronouns that we will also consider them within this group.

Case

Personal pronouns change form to reflect the subjective case, the objective case, and the possessive case.

Subjective Case

When a personal pronoun is acting as the **subject** of a verb (that is, it is the person or thing doing the action), it is said to be in the subjective case. For instance:

• “**I** know that **she** said that.” (Both pronouns are subjective, as both are agents

of their respective actions.)

• “**He** told *her* to be quiet.” (Here, only *he* is in the subjective case; *her*, the recipient or “object” of his action, is in the **objective** case.)

Objective Case

A personal pronoun is in the **objective case** when it is a *direct* or *indirect object* of a verb, or else if it is the **object of a preposition**. For example:

• “I can’t believe he fired **you**.” (*You* is the direct object of the verb *fire*.)

• “Please send **them** a thank you card.” (*Them* is the indirect object of the verb *send*.)

• “You can’t say that *to **me***!” (*Me* is the object of the preposition *to*; together they form the **prepositional phrase** *to me*.)

Possessive (Genitive) Case

As the name implies, the possessive case changes the inflection of a personal pronoun to mark possession. **Possessive determiners** function grammatically like adjectives, modifying a noun or nouns. For example:

• “**My** dad’s glasses went missing.” (*My* is a possessive determiner that shows the relation of *dad* to the speaker.)

• “He said it was **his** computer.” (*His* is a possessive determiner that modifies *computer*.)

Possessive pronouns are personal pronouns in the possessive case that have the grammatical function of nouns. For example:

• “I can see **mine** through the window!”

• “Jenny seems pretty sure that the book is **hers**.”

Gender

Personal pronouns are only inflected for gender when they are in the third person and singular—first-person and second-person pronouns (singular or plural) and third-person plural pronouns remain gender neutral. Here are the gendered pronouns in English:

Third-person feminine singular: *she, her, hers, herself*

Third-person masculine singular: *he, him, his, himself*

The third-person singular can also be **neuter**. This is used when a personal pronoun represents a thing or an animal. Animals can sometimes take gendered personal pronouns if they are pets or domesticated animals; otherwise, they take the third-person neuter form:

Third-person neuter singular: *it, its, its own, itself*

Remember, when there are multiple people or things, we use the ungendered forms of *they*:

Third person plural: *they, them, their, theirs, themselves*

Person

Grammatical person refers to the perspectives of the personal pronouns used to identify a person in speech and text—that is, it distinguishes between a speaker (first person), an addressee (second person), and others beyond that (third person).

First person

First-person pronouns tell what is directly happening to the speaker or narrator:

Singular: *I, me, my, mine, myself*

Plural: *we, us, our, ours, ourselves*

Second person

We use the second-person pronouns to indicate those who are being addressed directly by the speaker:

Singular/Plural: *you, you, your, yours, yourself (singular), yourselves (plural)*

Third person

Third person is used to talk about someone or something that is not the speaker and is not being directly addressed:

Feminine singular: *she, her, hers, herself*

Masculine singular: *he, him, his, himself*

Neuter singular: *it, its, its own, itself*

However, when there are multiple people or things, we use the un-gendered forms of *they*:

Third person plural: *they, them, their, theirs, themselves*

Number

Personal pronouns, unlike nouns, have various specific inflections depending on whether they are singular or plural. For the most part, only the **first-person** and **third-person** personal pronouns have plural forms; the only plural **second-person** pronoun is the reflexive pronoun *yourselves*.

There are no rules or guidelines for how we change the personal pronouns for number because doing so affects all the other forms; we simply have to memorize their various forms.

Person	**Number**	**Gender**	**Subjective Case**	**Objective Case**	**Posse Deter**
First Person	Singular	Masculine/feminine	I	me	my
First Person	Plural	Masculine/feminine	we	us	our
Second Person	Singular/Plural	Masculine/feminine	you	you	your
Third Person	Singular	Feminine	she	her	her
Third Person	Singular	Masculine	he	him	his
Third person	Singular	Neuter	it	it	its
Third person	Plural	Neuter / gender neutral)	they	them	their

Reflexive Pronouns and intensive

pronouns

Reflexive and **intensive pronouns** are identical in appearance, formed by adding "-self" or "-selves" to the pronouns *my, our, your, her, him, it, them*, or *one* (an indefinite pronoun).

Reflexive pronouns are used when someone or something is both the subject and the object of the same verb. When this happens, the reflexive verb is used as the object of the verb to represent the person or thing; a reflexive pronoun can never be used as the subject of a verb.

For example:

• "I wish you could hear **yourselves** right now!"

• "She admitted to **herself** that she was wrong."

• "The vole hides **itself** beneath the ground for safety."

• "The players have really outdone **themselves** today!"

• "One should strive to better **oneself** every day."

Intensive pronouns look identical to reflexive pronouns, but they are used to add emphasis to a person's (or thing's) role in an action. For example:

• "I told them **myself** that the report would be finished on time."

• "You need to do the work **yourselves**, or you will never learn the material."

• "The president **herself** will be speaking at the ceremony."

Reflexive and intensive pronouns are not typically considered inflections of personal pronouns. However, because they are formed from other pronouns, we have grouped them together here with the other types of personal pronoun declension.

Adjectives

Adjectives are inflected when we want to form comparisons between two people or things (**comparative adjectives**), or to identify the person or thing with the highest degree of a characteristic among a group (**superlative adjectives**).

For instance:

• "Mike is **strong**." (adjective)

• "I am **stronger** than him." (comparative adjective)

• “Jeff is the **strongest** of all of us.” (superlative adjective)

The progression of inflection for adjectives is known as the **degrees of comparison**. The spelling rules that dictate how each degree is formed depend on how the base form (known as the positive degree) of the adjective is spelled.

Adjective spelling	How to modify	Positive degree	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
One syllable, ending in a consonant preceded by one vowel.	Add “-er” for comparative degree or “-est” for superlative degree. Double final consonant.	big	big**ger**	big**gest**
One syllable, ending in a consonant preceded by two vowels or another consonant.	Add “-er” for comparative degree or “-est” for superlative degree. Do **not** double final consonant if preceded by one vowel.	strong	strong**er**	strong**est**
One syllable, ending in an “e”	Add “-r” for comparative degree or “-st” for superlative degree.	large	large**r**	large**st**
Two syllables, ending in a “y”	Replace “y” with “i” and add “-er” for comparative degree or “-est” for superlative degree.	happy	happ**ier**	happ**iest**
Three or more syllables, or two syllables **not** ending in	Add the words *more* or *less* before the adjective to make them comparative, or *most/least* to	clever	**more/less** careful	**most/least** careful

"y"	make them superlative.			

There are several exceptions to these rules, however, especially when using **irregular adjectives**. Go to the section on **Degrees of Comparison** in the **Adjectives** chapter to learn more.

Adverbs

We can also inflect adverbs when we want to compare the degree to which two actions are performed (**comparative adverbs**), or to identify the highest degree of how an action is performed. (**superlative adverbs**).

For example:

• “Susan runs **fast**.” (adverb)

• “Janet runs **faster** than Susan.” (comparative adverb)

• “Betty runs the **fastest**.” (superlative adverb)

The progression of inflection for adverbs is known (like adjectives) as the **degrees of comparison**. Again, the spelling rules that dictate how each degree is formed depend on how the base form (known as the positive degree) of the adverb is spelled.

Adverb spelling	How to modify	Positive degree	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
One syllable, ending in a consonant	Add “-er” for comparative degree or “-est” for superlative degree.	fast	fast**er**	fast**est**
One syllable, ending in an “e”	Add “-r” for comparative degree or “-st” for superlative degree.	late	late**r**	late**st**
Adverbs ending in a “y”	Add the words *more* or *less* before the adverb to make it comparative, or *most/least* to make it	carefully	more/less carefully	most/least carefully

	superlative.			

There are many **irregular adverbs** that go against the rules we just looked at. Go to the section on **degrees of comparison** in the **Adverbs** chapter to learn more how their comparative and superlative degrees are formed.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following do **not** undergo grammatical declension?

a) nouns
b) pronouns
c) adjectives
d) verbs
e) adverbs

2. What is the most common reason **nouns** are inflected?

a) To establish the gender of the noun
b) To establish the plurality of the noun
c) To establish the grammatical person of the noun
d) To establish the grammatical case of the noun
e) All of the above
f) None of the above

3. What is the most common reason **personal pronouns** are inflected?

a) To establish the gender of the pronoun
b) To establish the plurality of the pronoun
c) To establish the grammatical person of the pronoun
d) To establish the grammatical case of the pronoun
e) All of the above
f) None of the above

4. How are adjectives *most commonly* inflected to create the **comparative degree**?

a) By adding the suffix “-er”
b) By adding the suffix “-est”
c) By adding the suffix “-es”

d) By adding the suffix “-s”

5. Which adverbs do not adhere to the spelling rules when inflecting for the comparative and superlative degree?

a) One-syllable adverbs ending in an “e”
b) Adverbs formed from adjectives
c) Irregular adverbs
d) Adverbs of manner

Plurals

Definition

Plurals of nouns are used to indicate when there is more than one person, place, animal, or thing.

The normal method for making nouns plural is to add an “-s” at the end of the noun.

For example:

- one boy – two boys
- one girl – two girls
- one pen – two pens
- one pencil – two pencils
- one prize – two prizes
- one price – two prices

If a noun ends in “-s,” “-x,” “-z,” or with a cluster of consonants, such as “-sh,” “-ch,” or “-tch” (as in “watch”), we add “-es” to render it plural.

For example:

- one coach – two coaches
- one witch – two witches
- one dish – two dishes
- one box – two boxes
- one bus – two buses
- one kiss – two kisses
- one waltz – two waltzes

Words ending in “-y”

When the noun ends in a “-y” and it is preceded by a consonant, we change “y” to “i” and add “-es.”

For example:

- one country – two countries
- one city – two cities
- one gallery – two galleries
- one baby – two babies
- one lady – two ladies
- one reality – two realities
- one fly – two flies
- one butterfly – two butterflies

However, when a word ends in a “-y” preceded by a *vowel*, then we simply add an “-s” as usual:

- one toy – two toys
- one play – two plays
- one key – two keys
- one guy – two guys

Irregular plurals

There are some nouns that are irregular. They do not adhere to spelling rules, and so these need to be memorized.

Here are the most common ones:

- one man – two men
- one woman – two women
- one person – two people*
- one mouse – two mice
- one goose – two geese
- one child – two children
- one tooth – two teeth
- one foot – two feet

(*Persons is also a plural form of person, but in modern English it is usually reserved for more formal, bureaucratic, or legal language, as in, “Any such *persons* found to guilty of shoplifting will be prosecuted.”)

Be aware that irregular plural nouns cannot be made plural *again*; that is, you cannot have *childrens*, or *feets*. However, *people* is an exception—it can be pluralized as *peoples* in some cases.

Adding “-ves” vs. “-s”

With some nouns that end in “-f,” “-fe,” or “-lf,” we replace the endings with “-ves” to make them plural. Below is a list of some common examples:

- one life – two lives
- one wife – two wives
- one loaf – two loaves
- one leaf – two leaves
- one knife – two knives
- one thief – two thieves
- one calf – two calves
- one half – two halves
- one wolf – one wolves

However, many other words that end in “-f,” “-fe,” or “-lf” are simply made plural with an “-s” on the end. Here are some common examples:

- one chief – two chiefs
- one brief – two briefs
- one safe – two safes
- one gulf – two gulfs
- one belief – two beliefs
- one roof – two roofs

And yet some other words can receive either “-ves” **or** “-s,” such as:

- one handkerchief – two handkerchiefs – two handkerchieves
- one hoof – two hoofs – two hooves
- one scarf – two scarfs – two scarves

Unfortunately, there is no steadfast rule for which words will receive a “-ves” ending, an “-s” ending, or both—they are irregular and have to be memorized.

Words ending in “-ff” or “-ffe”

Words ending in “-ff” or “-ffe,” on the other hand, have straightforward plural forms: we simply add “-s” to the end, as in:

- one cliff – two cliffs
- one bailiff – two bailiffs
- one giraffe – two giraffes
- one gaffe – two gaffes

Words with the same plural and singular forms

We also have some nouns that remain the same in singular and plural.

For example:

- one fish – two fish*
- one sheep – two sheep
- one bison – two bison
- one aircraft – two aircraft

*Note that *fish* can also be pluralized as *fishes*. However, it is more common for this “-es” form to be used in reference to more than one kind of fish, as opposed to multiple fish in general.

Uncountable nouns

Although similar in nature to the above nouns, **uncountable nouns** refer to things that cannot be divided into individual units, and that therefore **cannot** be made plural at all.

For example:

- rice
- butter
- milk
- advice
- news

To quantify them, we need to use a unit of measure, such as *one pound of rice, a*

bottle of milk, a piece of advice, etc.

The rules surrounding these can be quite complex, so see the section on **Uncountable Nouns** to learn more.

Words from Latin or Greek

There are also nouns taken from Latin or Greek that maintain their original forms in the plural. However, as we'll see, some of these words have begun shifting towards more conventional plural forms, in addition to their original spellings.

For example:

- index – indices (indexes is now also acceptable)
- appendix – appendices (appendixes is now also acceptable)
- fungus – fungi
- criterion – criteria
- nucleus – nuclei
- syllabus – syllabi
- focus – foci
- cactus – cacti (cactuses is now also acceptable)
- thesis – theses
- crisis – crises
- phenomenon – phenomena

Non-Existent Plural Adjectives

In many languages, especially languages deriving from Latin, adjectives become plural when they are used to describe plural nouns. However, in English, adjectives are **never** made plural.

For example:

✖ "Two *blues pens*." (incorrect)
✔ "Two *blue pens*." (correct)

✖ "*Roses* are *reds*." (incorrect)
✔ "*Roses* are *red*." (correct)

✖ "Several *10-years-old boys*." (incorrect)
✖ "Several *10-year-olds boys*." (incorrect)

✔ “Several 10-year-old boys.” (correct)

As you can see, it is always the noun that is pluralized, and never the adjective.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the correct plural form of the noun *batch*?

a) batchs
b) batches
c) batchies
d) batch

2. For words ending in “-f,” “-fe,” or “-lf,” in what instances do we replace the endings with “-ves” to make them plural?

a) always
b) never
c) Only if the endings are preceded by a vowel
d) We have to memorize when to do so

3. When a word ends in a consonant + “y,” how is the word made plural?

a) By replacing the “y” with “-ies”
b) By replacing the “y” with “-es”
c) By adding “-s” to the end of the word
d) No change necessary

4. How can an **uncountable noun** be made plural?

a) Its singular form is the same as its plural form
b) It cannot be made plural
c) By using its original Latin or Greek ending
d) We have to memorize how to do so

5. Which of the following sentences is **incorrect**?

a) “There are a number of missing persons following the disaster.”
b) “Many men and women sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.”
c) “There are many different childrens trying to find their parents.”
d) “The roofs of several houses have collapsed in the last half hour.”

Gender in Nouns

Definition

In modern English, nouns are generally only **declined** (inflected) to create **plurals**. There are, however, still some instances in which nouns are declined to show masculine or feminine **gender**.

Conveying gender in English nouns

In many other languages, especially the Romance languages (such as French, Spanish, and Italian), a large number of nouns are coded as being either feminine or masculine.

This used to be the case in Old English as well, but in modern English only certain nouns that describe a person who performs an action are inflected for gender. This is usually achieved by changing the end of the word to a feminine suffix, such as “-ess,” “-ine,” and “-trix.” Words are less commonly changed to specifically reflect masculine gender, but the few that do use the suffixes “-er” or “-or.”

Making a noun feminine

Of the nouns that decline to mark gender, most do so to indicate the noun as being feminine. However, even this practice is becoming less common in modern English.

“-ess”

The most common suffix used to mark feminine nouns is “-ess.” It is used primarily to identify a professional, noble, royal, or religious title of a woman. For example:

- steward**ess**
- waitr**ess**
- actr**ess**
- abb**ess**
- count**ess**
- duch**ess**

- princ**ess**

The use of “-ess” to distinguish females working in a certain profession is beginning to wane, giving way to the basic masculine form (*actor* is becoming more common to refer to both males and females) or a non-gendered alternative (*flight attendant* is now preferred to either *steward* (m) or *stewardess* (f)).

However, gendered titles of royalty, nobility, and religiosity are still common in modern English.

“-ette”

The other suffix most commonly recognized as being a feminine marker is “-ette,” due largely to its use in the term *suffrag**ette***, the name given to supporters and advocates of women’s suffrage in the early 20th century (especially in Britain).

Two other words commonly distinguished as feminine using this suffix are *bachelorette* (a young unmarried woman, used especially in the context of “bachelorette parties”) and *brunette* (a girl or woman with brown hair), both of which terms are still widely used in modern English today.

Other than the above examples, though, “-ette” is more commonly used to refer to non-gendered items that are small or diminutive, such as *cigarette, kitchenette, novelette, launderette, cassette,* and so on.

Other feminine suffixes

Other than “-ess” and “-ette,” the only extant suffixes that exist to signify femininity are “-ine,” used to form *heroine* (from *hero*), and “-trix,” which almost only appears in old-fashioned or legalistic terms, such as *aviatrix* (from *aviator*), *executrix* (from *executor*), or *mediatrix* (from *mediator*).

Making a noun masculine

Nouns that are, were, or can be distinguished between feminine and masculine genders are often masculine in their basic form. These tend to end in “-er” or “-or” to denote someone who performs the action of a verb. For example:

- act**or**
- clean**er**
- lawy**er**

- execution**er**
- execut**or**
- aviat**or**
- bachel**or**

Increasingly in modern English, the distinction of the above terms as being solely or inherently masculine is fading away, and the terms refer to anyone—regardless of gender identity—who performs such an action or role.

Uniquely, there is one word that is inherently feminine that can take the suffix "-er" to become masculine: we make the inherently feminine word *widow* (meaning a woman whose spouse had died) masculine by adding "-er"—*widow**er*** (a man whose spouse has died).

Nouns with inherent gender identity

There is a relatively small amount of nouns in English that are inherently gendered because they describe members of the male or female sex; they do not use suffixes to alter the meaning of an existing word. Most commonly, they are terms describing familial, social, or sometimes royal titles.

Below is a list of common (but by no means exhaustive) examples:

Feminine	Masculine
queen	king
girl	boy
bride	groom (less commonly, *bridegroom*)
mother	father
wife	husband
madam	sir
lady	gentleman
witch	wizard

Animal names

We also have specific gendered words to identify male and female members of animal types. Although some are dependent on the use of suffixes (for instance, a female lion is a *lion**ess***), many are totally unique words specific to that gender. Here are a few common examples:

Animal type	Feminine	Masculine
horses	mare	stallion
deer	doe	buck
pigs	sow	boar
chickens	hen	rooster
sheep	ewe	ram

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is used to **change** a noun to reflect gender in English?

a) a prefix
b) a suffix
c) pronunciation
d) syllable stress
e) A & C
f) B & D

2. Which of the following is **most commonly** used to indicate a **feminine** noun?

a) -ette
b) -ine
c) -trix
d) -ess
e) A & B
f) C & D

3. Which of the following is **most commonly** used to indicate a **masculine** noun?

a) -er
b) -or
c) -ed
d) -ing
e) A & B
f) C & D

4. Which of the following nouns identifies for gender **without** using a gendered suffix?

a) madame
b) actress
c) widower
d) brunette

Regular and Irregular Inflection

Definition

Inflection, the way we change a word's form to reflect things like tense, plurality, gender, etc., is usually governed by consistent, predictable rules. This is known as **regular inflection**.

For example, we usually create the **past simple tense** of verbs by adding "-d" or "-ed" (as in *hear**d*** or *walk**ed***, which also function as the verbs' **past participles**), and we normally create **plurals** by adding "-s" or "-es" to the ends of nouns (as in *dog**s***, *cat**s***, *watches*, etc.).

However, there are many instances in which the way a word is inflected doesn't seem to follow any rules or conventions at all—this is known as **irregular inflection**. For example, the past simple tense of the verb *go* is *went* (rather than *goed*, as regular inflection would suggest), and its past participle is *gone*.

Irregular inflection affects nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and (most commonly) verbs.

Plurals of Nouns

Although nouns are largely uninflected in English (remaining the same

regardless of case, gender, or person), we do still inflect them to indicate **plurals**—that is, when there is more than one of something.

Regular plurals

As we noted above, the standard way to inflect a noun for plurality is to add “-s” or “-es.” Occasionally we have to make a slight alteration to the spelling of the word to accommodate this inflection (for example, when the noun ends in a “-y” and it is preceded by a consonant, we change “y” to “i” and add “-es”), but these are still considered regular because there is a standard rule that they follow. Here are some examples of regular nouns and their plural counterparts:

Regular noun	Plural form
boy	**boys**
book	**books**
box	**boxes**
beach	**beaches**
lady	**ladies**
city	**cities**

Irregular plurals

However, there are a large number of nouns that have **irregular** plural forms that defy this convention. These are completely unique words that do not follow any rules or conventions for how they are spelled. Here are some of the most common irregular nouns:

Irregular noun	Plural form
person	**people/persons***
mouse	**mice**
goose	**geese**

child	**children**
foot	**feet**
man	**men**
woman	**women**

(*Persons is also a plural form of person, but in modern English it is usually reserved for more formal, bureaucratic, or legal language, as in, “Any such **persons** found to be guilty of shoplifting will be prosecuted.”)

There are many other unique, irregular ways that nouns are pluralized. To learn more, go to the section on **Plurals** in the chapter dealing with **Declension**.

Adjectives

Adjectives inflect when we change them into their **comparative** and **superlative** forms. **Comparative adjectives** are used to compare a quality between two nouns, while **superlative adjectives** identify a noun with the highest (or lowest) degree of an attribute among a group.

Regular adjectives

We generally form the comparative degree by adding the suffix “-er” to the end of the adjective, or by adding the words *more* or *less* before it.

To form the superlative degree, we either add “-est” to the end of the adjective or add the word *most* or *least* before it.

We sometimes have to change the spelling of the adjective slightly to accommodate the addition of the suffix, but the rules for when this is necessary are straightforward and consistent.

The shift from a basic adjective to its comparative or superlative forms is known as the **degrees of comparison**. Let’s look at how this is accomplished with regular adjectives:

Adjective	Comparative degree	Superlative degree	Spelling rule
			With one-syllable adjectives, add “-er” or “-est” and double the final

big	**bigger**	**biggest**	consonant if preceded by one vowel.
strong	**stronger**	**strongest**	The final consonant is **not** doubled if it is preceded by two vowels or another consonant.
large	**larger**	**largest**	If the adjective ends in an “e,” then you only need to add “-r” or “-st.”
happy	**happier**	**happiest**	If an adjective has one or two syllables and ends in “-y,” we replace “y” with “i” and add “-er” or “-est.”
beautiful	**more/less beautiful**	**most/least beautiful**	For adjectives that have three or more syllables, or adjectives that have two syllables and *do not* end in “-y,” use the words *more/less* or *most/least*.

Irregular adjectives

The vast majority of adjectives follow the above conventions when forming the comparative or superlative degrees. However, there are a few adjectives that are irregular and have unique forms that do not conform to any spelling conventions. Because of this, they must all be memorized.

Irregular adjective	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
fun	**more/less fun**	**most/least fun**
bad	**worse**	**worst**
well (healthy)	**better**	**best**
good	**better**	**best**
far	**farther/further**	**farthest/furthest**

little (amount)	**less**	**least**
many/much	**more**	**most**

To learn more about how comparative and superlative adjectives are formed, go to the **Degrees of Comparison** section of the **Adjectives** chapter.

Adverbs

Regular adverbs

A large number of adverbs are formed from adjectives. The standard way of doing this is by adding “-ly” to the end of the adjective. Sometimes the adjective’s spelling needs to be altered slightly to accommodate this, but the rules of doing so are fairly straightforward. Here are some common examples:

Adjective	Regular adverb	Spelling rule
beautiful	**beautifully**	Adjective + “-ly”
enthusiastic	**enthusiastically**	If the adjective ends in “-ic,” it will change to “-ically.”
happy	**happily**	If the adjective ends in a “-y,” it will change to “-ily.”
terrible	**terribly**	If the adjective ends in “-le,” the ending is dropped and is replaced with “-ly.”
due	**duly**	If the adjective ends in “-ue,” the “e” on the end is dropped and is replaced with “-ly.”

Irregular adverbs

Although the majority of adverbs follow the above rules when they are formed from adjectives, there are a number of irregular adverbs that go against the conventions. Much of the time, irregular adverbs have the same spelling as their

adjectival counterparts, but there are no clues in the adjectives' spelling as to when this is the case; like all irregular inflections, they just have to be memorized. Below are some of the most common irregular adverbs.

Adjective	Irregular adverb	Sources of confusion
fast	**fast**	*Last* becomes *lastly*, but *fast* becomes *fast*.
hard	**hard**	*Hardly (ever)* is an adverb of frequency, meaning "almost never."
straight	**straight**	
lively	**lively**	*Lively* still exists as an adverb in phrases like *step lively*; however, it is more often used in the adverbial prepositional phrase *in a lively manner*.
late (tardy)	**late**	*Lately* is a different adverb that means "recently."
daily	**daily**	**Adverbs of frequency** that relate to units of time have the same form as both adjectives and adverbs.
early	**early**	
friendly	no adverb	Can only be used in the adverbial prepositional phrase *in a friendly manner.*
timely	no adverb	Can only be used in the adverbial prepositional phrase *in a timely manner.*
good	**well**	*Well* is the adverbial form of *good*; it can also function as a **predicative adjective** meaning "healthy."

Go to the section on **Regular and Irregular Adverbs** in the **Adverbs** chapter to learn more about how adverbs are formed from adjectives.

Irregular Degrees of Comparison

Just like adjectives, adverbs also have **comparative** and **superlative degrees**,

which are used to compare actions among people or things. They are formed in the same way, by adding “-er” or *more/less* for **comparative adverbs** or “-est” or *most/least* for **superlative adverbs**.

However, there are some adverbs that have irregular comparative and superlative forms. We can’t rely on the irregular adverbs we looked at above, either, because many of those adverbs are ***regular*** in how they inflect to become comparative or superlative. As always, we just have to commit them to memory:

Irregular adverb (positive degree)	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
badly	**worse**	**worst**
early	**earlier**	**earliest**
far	**farther/further**	**farthest/furthest**
little	**less**	**least**
well	**better**	**best**

Verbs

Verbs present the greatest challenge when it comes to learning about regular and irregular inflection. A huge variety of verbs are irregular, which means they have **past simple tense** and **past participle** forms that defy the normal conventions. That means that every irregular verb has three unique conjugations that must be memorized. In addition, the verb *be* is known as being **highly irregular**, because it has **six** irregular conjugations in addition to its base and present participle form —***eight*** in all!

We’ll briefly look at the rules for conjugating regular verbs and then look at some common irregular verbs below. You can learn more by going to the section **Regular and Irregular Verbs** in the chapter on **Verbs** in **Parts of Speech**.

(Note that all verbs, whether regular or irregular, conjugate the same way to form **present participles**, taking “-ing” at the end of the base form. Because of this, we won’t include the present participle form in the breakdowns below.)

Conjugating regular verbs

The majority of verbs take the ending “-d” or “-ed” to their base form (the infinitive of the verb without *to*) to create **both** the **past simple tense** and **past participle**. There are some instances in which the verb’s spelling must change slightly to accommodate this, but these rules are straightforward and consistent. Here are some common regular verb inflections:

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
play	**played**	**played**
bake	**baked**	**baked**
listen	**listened**	**listened**
approach	**approached**	**approached**
gather	**gathered**	**gathered**
climb	**climbed**	**climbed**
chop	**chopped**	**chopped**
copy	**copied**	**copied**
panic	**panicked**	**panicked**

Conjugating irregular verbs

Irregular verbs do not have spelling rules that we can follow to create the past simple tense and past participles. This means that the only way of knowing how to spell these forms is to memorize them for each irregular verb individually. Here are a few common examples:

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
see	**saw**	**seen**
grow	**grew**	**grown**
give	**gave**	**given**
think	**thought**	**thought**
throw	**threw**	**thrown**
drive	**drove**	**driven**
ride	**rode**	**ridden**
run	**ran**	**run**
swim	**swam**	**swum**
sit	**sat**	**sat**

Conjugating *be*

As we mentioned above, the verb *be* is unique among verbs for having a huge variety of conjugations. Not only does it have irregular inflections for the past simple tense and past participle, but it also has specific forms depending on **plurality** and **grammatical person** (first person, second person, and third person). The table below shows a breakdown of all the different ways we conjugate *be*.

Grammatical person	Base form	Present Tense Singular	Present Tense Plural	Present Participle	Past Tense Singular	Past Tense Plural	P
n/a	**be**			**being**			**b**
first person		I **am**	we **are**		I **was**	we **were**	
second person		you **are**	you **are**		you **were**	you **were**	
third person		he/she/it **is**	they **are**		he/she/it **was**	they **were**	

Learning irregular inflection

As we've seen, words that inflect in irregular ways are, unfortunately, unpredictable by nature. Because there are no patterns for how they are formed, it can be very difficult to learn them.

The best way to learn irregular words is to pay close attention when you are reading—if a word looks like it has an unusual spelling compared to other words that are used in the same way, then it is probably an irregular inflection. In these cases, look up the word in a good dictionary and make a note of how it is used, then try to remember it for next time.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In which of the following does irregular inflection **not** occur?

a) Adjectives
b) Adverbs
c) Pronouns
d) Verbs

2. What is the most common way of forming **regular** adverbs from adjectives?

a) Adding “-ly” to the end of the word
b) Adding “-er” to the end of the word
c) Adding “-est” to the end of the word
d) Adding “-s” to the end of the word

3. What is the most common way of forming **regular superlative adjectives**?

a) Adding “-ly” to the end of the word
b) Adding “-er” to the end of the word
c) Adding “-est” to the end of the word
d) Adding “-s” to the end of the word

4. When do regular and irregular verbs conjugate **differently**?

a) When forming the past simple tense
b) When forming the past participle
c) When forming the present participle
d) A & B
e) B & C
d) None of the above

5. Which of the following sentences is **incorrect**?

a) “There are a number of missing persons following the disaster.”
b) “Many men and women sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.”
c) “There are many different childrens trying to find their parents.”
d) “The roofs of several houses have collapsed in the last half hour.”

6. Which of the following is a **correct** conjugation of the verb *be*?

a) is
b) was
c) been
d) are

e) A & B
f) C & D
g) All of the above
h) None of the above

Syntax

Definition

Syntax refers to the ways in which we order specific words to create logical, meaningful sentences. While the **parts of speech** are all the different types of words that we can use, **syntax** is the set of rules, patterns, or processes by which we can put them together.

Because English is such a flexible language, it can be difficult to understand all the specific nuances that govern these rules and patterns. However, we have some basic building blocks that help us identify the hierarchy of how the language is structured.

We'll briefly look at the parts that make up this hierarchy of structure. Go to the individual sections to learn more about each.

The Hierarchy of Grammatical Structure

Subjects and Predicates

The basis of all syntax really begins with the **subject** and the **predicate**, both of which are required to form a complete and logical statement. **The subject** is the person or thing that performs or controls an action in a sentence, while **the predicate** describes that action.

Put in the simplest terms, the subject is at least a noun (or a pronoun *representing* a noun), while the predicate is at least a verb. However, the subject can also include any words that add meaning to the noun or pronoun, such as **determiners** or other **modifiers** (adjectives, adverbs, or phrases acting like them).

Take, for example, the following sentence:

• "**My father** drives a car to work each day."

The subject here is not just *father* (the noun), but also the determiner *my*. This specifies which *father* is controlling the action of the verb *drives*.

Likewise, the predicate includes any words that add meaning to the verb, such as

modifiers, **objects**, or **complements**. Let's look at that sentence again:

• "My father **drives a car to work each day**."

Here, the predicate is the entire phrase *drives a car to work each day*. In addition to the verb *drives*, it also contains the phrases *a car* (the direct object of the verb), *to work* (a prepositional phrase that modifies the verb), and *each day* (an adverbial phrase that also modifies the verb).

Modifiers

Modifiers are words, **phrases**, or even **clauses** that add descriptive meaning to another word; they are categorized as being either **adjectives** or **adverbs**.

Modifiers can appear anywhere in a sentence, and they can be a part of either the subject or the predicate. For example:

• "The **red** car went **too fast**."

In this sentence, we have three modifiers. The adjective *red* is modifying the noun *car* and is part of the subject. The adverb *too* is an **intensifier** modifying the adverb *fast*; together, they modify the verb *went* as an **adverbial phrase**.

The modifier *red* in this sentence is known as an **adjunct**, because it does not provide essential information to the sentence; if we were to remove it, the meaning would not change in any significant way.

The adverbial phrase *too fast*, on the other hand, is essential to the meaning of the sentence. Without the phrase, it would read "The red car went." This is still a complete sentence, but the intended meaning is completely changed. Modifiers that are necessary to the meaning of the sentence are known as **complements**, and they are always part of the **predicate**.

Phrases

Phrases are groups of two or more words that do not contain both a subject and a predicate. They are formed when a determiner, modifier, or complement is used to describe or complete the meaning of another word. It is also common for a phrase to be made up of smaller phrases. For example:

• "**The bright red car** is mine."

The subject *the bright red car* is all a single phrase. It is considered a **noun phrase** with the noun *car* at its root (sometimes referred to as the "head" noun). The phrase is also made up of the determiner *the* and the **adjective phrase**

bright red (the adjective *red* plus its own modifier, the adverb *bright*).

Likewise, the predicate of the sentence, *is mine,* is a **verb phrase** made up of the verb *is* and the possessive pronoun *mine*.

Because phrases can be part of both the subject and the predicate, they are often a constituent part of **clauses**.

Clauses

All of the information contained in the subject and the predicate function together to form a **clause**. As such, all clauses are, by definition, a group of two or more words containing both a subject and a predicate. Depending on its structure, a clause can be either **dependent** or **independent**.

A **dependent clause** (also called a **subordinate clause**) is unable to stand on its own. It is marked by certain kinds words (commonly called **dependent words**) that connect it to an independent clause, which it relies on to have a complete, logical meaning.

Independent clauses, on the other hand, are able to function as sentences on their own. They do **not** depend on the information from other clauses to be considered complete.

Take these two examples:

• “when they were younger”

• “Mark and Betty often traveled together”

Both examples have a subject—*they* in the first example and *Mark and Betty* (a compound subject) in the second—and a predicate—*were younger* and *often traveled together*.

However, the first example is a dependent clause because of the word *when*. This **subordinating conjunction** tells the reader that more information is required for a complete thought.

The second example, on the other hand, is an independent clause—it has everything in it that the reader needs to know. We must always have at least **one** independent clause when we are forming a **sentence**.

Sentences

A **sentence** is considered the most complete unit of syntax in English. It is always made up of at least one independent clause, and, because of this, it

always contains a subject and a predicate.

A sentence that only contains a single independent clause is known as a **simple sentence**, such as our example from earlier:

• "Mark and Betty often traveled together."

We can also attach a dependent clause to the beginning or end of an independent clause to add more information or elaborate upon the meaning of the sentence. This forms what's known as a **complex sentence**, as in:

• "**Mark and Betty often traveled together** *when they were younger*." ***or:***

• "*When they were younger,* **Mark and Betty often traveled together**."

It's also common to join two or more independent clauses together, either by using a **coordinating conjunction** and a **comma**; a **conjunctive adverb**, a comma (usually), and a semicolon; or just a **semicolon**. These are known as **compound sentences**. For example:

• "**Mark and Betty often traveled together**, and **they have been to many different countries**."

• "**Mark and Betty often traveled together**; as a result, **they have been to many different countries**."

• "**Mark and Betty often traveled together**; **they have been to many different countries**."

If we link a complex sentence to a simple sentence or another complex sentence, we form what's called a **compound-complex sentence**:

• "**Mark and Betty often traveled together *when they were younger***, and **they have been to many different countries**."

In addition to the four categories of structure (simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex), there are several categories of sentences based on their purpose. We'll look at those more closely in the chapter on **Sentences**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the function of **the subject** of a sentence?

a) To identify the person or thing performing an action
b) To describe an action that a person or thing performs
c) To identify the person or thing receiving the action of a verb
d) To describe another word in a sentence

2. Which of the following must a clause **always** contain?

a) A modifier
b) A subject
c) A predicate
d) A & C
e) B & C

3. True or false: Modifiers can only appear as part of the predicate.

a) True
b) False

4. Which of the following types of clauses can function alone as sentences?

a) Dependent clauses
b) Noun clauses
c) Independent clauses
d) Adverbial clauses

5. Which of the following types of sentences can be made of one independent clause and one dependent clause?

a) Simple sentences
b) Compound sentences
c) Complex sentences
d) Compound-complex sentences

Subjects and Predicates

Sentences must always include both a **subject** and a **predicate**.

The **subject** of a clause or sentence is the noun (a person, place, or thing) that performs, controls, or is responsible for the action of a verb.

The predicate is made up of at least one **finite verb**, the action of which is performed or controlled by the subject.

The Subject

The subject usually appears before its verb and is made up of at least one noun, any grammatical element functioning as a noun, or a pronoun standing in place

of a noun.

For example:

Example sentence	Type of subject
"**Computers** can process numbers very quickly."	Noun
"**A boy I know** owns a motorcycle."	Noun phrase
"**Someone** ate my cake!"	Pronoun
"**Swimming** is great exercise."	Gerund

There are several other types of grammatical constructions that can be used as the subject of a sentence or clause, as well as instances in which the subject's position in relation to the verb changes. To learn more, continue on to the next section in this chapter, **The Subject**.

The Predicate

In addition to a **finite verb**, the predicate can also (but does not always) include **participles**, **objects**, **complements**, and **modifiers**. In most cases, the predicate comes after the subject in a sentence or clause, although some parts of the predicate (especially adverbial **modifiers**) can sometimes appear before the subject.

Here are some examples, with the predicate in **bold**:

Example sentence	Parts of the predicate
"I **refuse**."	• *refuse* — intransitive finite verb in the present simple tense
"My family **loves going to the beach each summer**."	• *loves* — transitive finite verb in the present simple tense • *going to the beach* — **gerund** phrase acting as the **direct object** of the verb *loves* • *each summer* — **adverbial phrase** modifying the verb phrase *loves going to the beach*

"**In school** we **are learning about the American Revolution**."	• *in school* — adverbial prepositional phrase acting as a modifier of the **present participle** *learning* • *are* — finite auxiliary verb used with the **present participle** *learning* to create the **present continuous tense** • *learning* — **present participle** (a type of non-finite verb) used with the auxiliary finite verb *are* to form the **present continuous tense** • *about the American Revolution* — **prepositional phrase** functioning as the **direct object** of the **present participle** *learning*

To learn more about forming and identifying the predicate, as well as the various grammatical elements that can be included in it, go to the section in this chapter called **The Predicate**.

The Subject

Definition

The **subject** in a sentence or clause is the person or thing doing, performing, or controlling the action of the verb.

Every sentence requires a subject and a verb to be complete. Without a subject, we would have an action being done by no one or nothing—simply happening on its own, which cannot happen. (The only exception to this is in **imperative sentences**, in which the subject is implied, as in: "Do your homework!")

Subject Forms

Only that which has the grammatical function of a **noun** can be the subject of a clause. This is because it is someone or something that is capable of performing or "controlling" the action of the verb. This function can be performed by each of the following:

- **nouns** – "**Computers** can process numbers very quickly."
- **noun phrases** – "**A boy I know** owns a motorcycle."
- **pronouns** – "**Someone** ate this cake!"
- **gerunds** – "**Swimming** is great exercise."

- **gerund phrases** – “**Traveling the world** has been my lifelong dream.”
- **infinitives** – “**To err** is human; **to forgive** is divine.”
- **infinitive phrases** – “**To fall in love** can be both wonderful and tragic.”
- **noun clauses** – “**Whoever knows the truth** should come forward.”
- **dummy pronouns** – “**There** is nothing we can do for him now.”

Subject Positions

As we can see in the above examples, the subject most typically occurs at or near the beginning of a clause, preceding the main verb that describes the action of the clause (known as the **finite verb**).

Auxiliary questions

When **auxiliary verbs** are used to make questions (**interrogative sentences**) without question words, then the subject comes between the auxiliary verb and the main verb. For example:

• “Is **hiking** your favorite activity?”

• “Did **Mary** come by yesterday?”

• “Have **you** heard this song before?”

Passive voice

The examples we’ve seen so far have been of sentences in the **active voice**, meaning the subject of a clause or sentence is also the agent of the verb’s action.

Sentences in the **passive voice**, however, create a bit of confusion. Structurally, the object of the verb’s action becomes the grammatical subject of the clause, while the “proper” subject (the agent of the action) becomes modifying information. For example:

• “**Jack** is reading the book.” (active voice)

• “The book is being read by **Jack**.” (passive voice)

In the first sentence, *Jack* is both the subject of the sentence and the agent of the verb *is reading*.

In the second sentence, though, *the book* is now the subject of the sentence. The

agent of the verb's action, *Jack*, becomes the object of the prepositional phrase *by Jack*, which modifies the verb *is being read*.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement refers to using certain conjugations of verbs with singular subjects and different conjugations with plural subjects. This happens most noticeably with the verb *to be*, which becomes *is* or *was* with singular subject nouns and *are* or *were* with plural subjects.

For example:

• "My **brother *is*** back from college." (singular present simple tense)
• "The **company *was*** in financial trouble." (singular past simple tense)

• "Many **people *are*** frustrated with the government." (plural present simple tense)
• "The **computers *were*** rather old." (plural past simple tense)

For any other verb, we only need to make a change if it is in the **present simple tense**. For most verbs, this is accomplished by adding an "-s" to the end if it is singular and leaving it in its base form if it is plural. For example:

• "My **father *runs*** his own business." (singular)
• "But his **sons *run*** it when he's away." (plural)

• "The **dog *wags*** his tail when he is happy." (singular)
• "**Dogs** sometimes ***wag*** their tails when they're angry or scared." (plural)

The verbs *have* and *do* also only conjugate for singular subjects in the present simple tense, but they have irregular forms for this: *has* and *does*. For example:

• "The **apple *has*** a mark on it." (singular)
• "All the **apples *have*** marks on them." (plural)
• "My **teacher *does*** not think it's a good idea." (singular)
• "The other **teachers *do*** not mind, though." (plural)

Finally, the modal **auxiliary verbs** (*will, would, shall, should, can, could, might, must*, and *ought to*) do **not** conjugate for singular or plural subjects—they always remain the same. For instance:

• "This **phone *can*** also surf the Internet!" (singular)
• "Most **phones *can*** do that now." (plural)

• "The **president *will*** arrive in Malta next week." (singular)
• "The other **diplomats *will*** arrive shortly after that." (plural)

Subject Pronouns

Pronouns stand in for a person or thing we are speaking about or referring to; they are used to avoid repetition in speech or writing. The **personal pronouns** in the **subjective case**—*I, you, he, she, it, we,* and *they*—can act as substitutes for the subject of the clause or sentence. In this instance, they are known as **subject pronouns**. For example:

• “John is running late, but **he** is almost ready.” (The pronoun *he*, replaces the noun *John* in the clause *he is almost ready*.)

• “The book is on the table. **It** is just over there.” (*The book* is a non-person noun, so it can be substituted with the pronoun *it* in subsequent clauses or sentences.)

The question words *who* and *what* can also act as subject pronouns of the sentence or clause. For example:

• “**Who** is going to the party later?”

• “**What** just happened?”

(These form what are known as **subject questions**; we’ll look at these a little more in depth later on.)

Other pronouns

There are other pronouns in English that can act as the subjects of clauses or sentences. **Indefinite pronouns**, for example, are used in place of nouns without specifying a particular person or thing that is being represented, as in:

• “**Everyone** is waiting for the party to begin.” (The action of *waiting* is being done by *everyone*.”

• “I have five teachers, but only **one** is writing me a recommendation.” (The action of *writing* is being done by *one*.)

• “**Nobody** told me about this.” (The action of *told* was done by *nobody*.)

Common Subject Errors

Because the subject can be so widely varied in English, a number of errors can arise about how to correctly use (or not use) a subject in a sentence. Let’s look at some common errors that occur.

Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

Unfortunately, there are many opportunities for confusion as to when to omit the "-s" when conjugating a verb for subject-verb agreement. Remember: we only need the "-s" when using the present simple tense in affirmative (non-negative) sentences, and when using subjects that are in the third person.

For example:

First person:

✖ "**I *lives*** in Paris." (incorrect)
✔ "**I *live*** in Paris." (correct)

Second person:

✖ "**You *lives*** in Paris." (incorrect)
✔ "**You *live*** in Paris." (correct)

Third person:

✖ "**He *live*** in Paris." (incorrect)
✔ "**He *lives*** in Paris." (correct)

Irregular plurals

Here are some other examples of subject-verb errors with third-person singular and third-person plural:

✖ "**People *lives*** here." (incorrect)
✔ "**People *live*** here." (correct)

✖ "**The children *is playing*** outside." (incorrect)
✔ "**The children *are playing*** outside." (correct)

A person (singular) *lives*, while people (plural) *live*; a child (singular) *is playing*, while children (plural) *are playing*. We can have "one *person*" or "one *child*," but we have "two/three/10/many *people* or *children*."

These are known as **irregular plurals** because they do not follow the normal rule of making a noun plural by adding an "-s" or "-es" to the end. Nevertheless, they still require the correct third-person verb conjugations, as with any other noun.

(See the chapter on **Plurals** to learn more about the spelling rules for regular and irregular plurals.)

Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns can sometimes cause confusion because many seem to be referring to a group of people or things, and so should take third-person plural verbs, when in fact they require third-person singular verbs. For example:

✖ "**Everyone *have*** a television." (incorrect)
✔ "**Everyone *has*** a television." (correct)

The indefinite pronoun *everyone* refers to "each single person." It does not refer to a group, but instead to separate individuals, so it therefore requires a third-person **singular** verb. Other examples that take third-person singular verbs include *no one/nobody, someone/somebody,* and *anyone/anybody*.

Other indefinite pronouns use qualifying information that can make subject-verb agreement confusing. For example:

✖ "**One of my students *have* gone** to England." (incorrect)
✔ "**One of my students *has* gone** to England." (correct)

In instances like this, the auxiliary verb *have* should be conjugated with the indefinite pronoun *one* (singular) instead of *students* (plural)—*one* is functioning as the subject of the sentence, while *of my students* is an adjectival prepositional phrase that describes it. Here's a similar example:

✖ "**Each person *study*** individually." (incorrect)
✔ "**Each person *studies*** individually." (correct)

Because *each* is paired with the word *person*, which it modifies, it implies a group of people. However, like *one*, this subject has to take a third-person singular verb.

Double Subject Error

We must be careful to avoid using a pronoun as a "double" subject in the same clause—we only use a pronoun as a subject when it refers to the subject in a different clause.

For example:

✖ "*My brother* **he** speaks English." (incorrect)
✔ "*My brother* speaks English." (correct)
✔ "*He* speaks English." (correct)

✖ "*My country* **it** is very beautiful." (incorrect)

✔ “*My country* is very beautiful.” (correct)
✔ “*It* is very beautiful.” (correct)

✖ “**This** my car cost me a lot of money.” (incorrect)
✔ “*My car* cost me a lot of money.” (correct)
✔ “*This* cost me a lot of money.” (correct)

Omission of the subject

We occasionally use what’s known as a “ **dummy pronoun**” to function as a subject in a clause. The two dummy pronouns in English are *there* and *it*, and they do not have antecedents the way proper pronouns do. Because they don’t refer to a concrete element semantically, it can seem like they should be omitted in certain circumstances, but we must be careful to always include them where necessary. For example:

✖ “I think is going to rain.” (incorrect)
✔ “I think **it** is going to rain.” (correct)

In the first example, there is no subject before *is*. We always need a subject before the verb. When we talk about the weather, time, speed, distance, or things, we use the dummy pronoun *it* as the subject of the clause.

Here is another example of this kind of error:

✖ “Is anything I can help you with?” (incorrect)
✔ “Is **there** anything I can help you with?” (correct)

In the first example, we do not know **what** the speaker wants to help with, because there is no subject. In this case, we use *there* as the subject to make the sentence complete.

Subject before auxiliary verbs in questions

When we form questions, the subject of the sentence still comes <u>before</u> the main verb. However, if an auxiliary verb is being used to create the question, it’s also important to remember that the subject comes <u>after</u> the auxiliary verb. For instance:

✖ “Where *does work **Mary***?” (incorrect)
✖ “Where ***Mary** does work*?” (incorrect)
✔ “Where *does **Mary** work*?” (correct)

✖ “***You*** *do speak* English?” (incorrect)
✔ “*Do* ***you*** *speak* English?” (correct)

Subject Question Error

In a “**subject question**,” in which the subject is implied by the question, we do **not** usually add the auxiliary verb *do* in the same way as in normal questions. For instance:

• “**What *did* happen** last night?” (less common; only used for emphasis when trying to determine what did happen vs. what did not happen)
• “**What happened** last night?” (much more common)

Since the subject is already in the question, we do not have to use an auxiliary verb.

When we use a subject question in the past simple tense, the verb needs to be used in the past tense too. This is because the auxiliary verb *did*, the past tense of *do*, is absent.

Normal Questions vs. Subject Questions

To better understand this, let’s look at a comparison between a normal question and a **subject question**.

First, let’s look at two statements:

A) I saw Mary.

B) Anne saw me.

If we were asking a question to which sentence A was the answer, it would be a normal question:

• “Who **did** you see?”
• “I saw Mary.”

The subject in the normal question, *you*, corresponds to the subject in the answer, *I*. Since this is a normal question, we use the auxiliary verb, *did*, to form the past tense of the main verb, *see*.

If we were asking a question to which sentence B was the answer, it would be a subject question:

• “Who saw you?”

• “Anne saw me.”

Here, *who*, the question word, is what corresponds to the subject in the response, *Anne*. *You* is the direct object of the verb *saw*, which is put in the past tense because we do not use the auxiliary verb *did*; it corresponds to *me* in the response, which is also the direct object of *saw*.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Where is the subject **usually** placed in a clause?

a) Before an adjective
b) After an adjective
c) Before the main verb
d) After the main verb

2. When does a third-person verb conjugate differently to accommodate the subject?

a) When the subject is singular, in the present simple tense
b) When the subject is plural, in the present simple tense
c) When the subject is singular, in the past simple tense
d) When the subject is plural, in the past simple tense

3. What role does the subject have in a clause or sentence that’s in the **active voice**?

a) It is the person or thing that receives the action of the verb
b) It is the person or thing that does or performs the action of the verb
c) It modifies or describes the action of the verb
d) It modifies or describes the person or thing performs the action of the verb

4. What role does the subject have in a clause or sentence that’s in the **passive voice**?

a) It is the person or thing that receives the action of the verb
b) It is the person or thing that does or performs the action of the verb
c) It modifies or describes the action of the verb
d) It modifies or describes the person or thing performs the action of the verb

5. Which of the following has a clause with a subject that is a **gerund phrase**?

a) “John is swimming on Saturday, which I’m excited to see.”
b) “A lot of people I know are coming to the party.”
c) “Reading by candlelight is thought to be bad for your eyes.”
d) “Seeing eye dogs provide an invaluable service.”

6. Which of the following has a clause with a subject that is a **pronoun**?

a) “Cell phones are way too advanced these days.”
b) “Wherever she lives is where I’m destined to be.”
c) “Several eyewitnesses have placed the suspect at the scene of the crime.”
d) “Everyone is being caught off guard by this new law.”

The Predicate

Definition

Sentences must always include both a **subject** and a **predicate**.

The subject is the noun (a person, place, or thing) that performs, controls, or is responsible for the action of the verb.

The predicate is, essentially, everything in the sentences that follows the subject. It is made up of at least one **finite verb**, the action of which is performed by the subject. In addition, the predicate may (but does not always) include:

• **Participles**, which are used to form the **perfect** and **continuous tenses**;

• Direct and indirect **objects** (if the verb is **transitive**);

• Other **complements** (which include **object complements**, **adjective complements**, and **subject complements**); and

• **Modifiers** (if they are not a part of the subject).

First, let’s look at how we can identify the predicate in a clause or sentence. Later on, we will look more closely at the various parts of the predicate.

Identifying the predicate

In most cases, the predicate comes after the subject in a sentence or clause. It’s possible in simple sentences to have only a subject followed by a **finite verb** (a verb that has a relationship with subject and can **inflect** for grammatical tense). For example:

• "*I* **refuse**."

• "*Dogs* **bark**."

• "*Bees* **sting**."

• "*Cats* **meow**."

In the above examples, the subject (in *italics*) begins the sentences and the predicate (in **bold**) ends them. The predicate, made up of just an **intransitive** verb in the **present simple tense**, contains all the necessary information about the subject to be logical; therefore, each example is considered an independent clause and is a complete sentence.

However, it is much more common for the predicate to contain much more information than just a verb. Let's look at an example of a sentence with a more complex predicate:

Example sentence	Parts of the predicate
"*My family* **loves going to the beach each summer**."	• *loves* — transitive finite verb in the present simple tense • *going to the beach* — **gerund** phrase acting as the **direct object** of the verb *loves* • *each summer* — **adverbial phrase** modifying the verb phrase *loves going to the beach*

Because every element after the subject *my family* is related to the verb *loves*, the entire phrase *loves going to the beach each summer* is considered the predicate.

Note that **adverbs** (which can be single words, **adverbial phrases**, or even **adverbial clauses**) that modify elements of the predicate do not always appear after the subject. It's quite common for certain adverbs to appear at the beginning of a sentence to add emphasis to the information. For example:

Example sentence	Parts of the predicate
"**In school** *we* **are learning about the American**	• *in school* — adverbial prepositional phrase acting as a modifier of the **present participle** *learning* • *are* — finite auxiliary verb used with the **present participle** *learning* to create the **present continuous tense** • *learning* — **present participle** (a type of non-

Revolution.”	finite verb) used with the auxiliary finite verb *are* to form the **present continuous tense** • *about the American Revolution* — **prepositional phrase** functioning as the **direct object** of the **present participle** *learning*

Notice that the adverbial prepositional phrase *in school* is still part of the predicate, even though it appears at the beginning of the sentence before the subject. This is because it modifies the participle *learning*, which is part of the predicate.

Compound predicates

The subject of a clause or sentence must always be performing at least one action, but there are many instances in which it performs more than one action. In such a case, in which the subject is related to two or more finite verbs, the sentence is said to have a **compound predicate**; a predicate composed of one verb is sometimes known as a **simple predicate**.

We usually use **coordinating conjunctions** to link the verbs in a compound predicate. If there are more than two predicate elements, we separate them with commas and use a conjunction before the final one.

For example:

Example sentence	Parts of the compound predicate
“*I* **live in New Jersey but work in New York City**.”	1. *live in New Jersey* 2. *work in New York City* Connected by the coordinating conjunction *but*. They both have the same subject—*I*.
	1. *teaches in the morning* 2. *volunteers in the*

"*My friend Daniel* **teaches in the morning, volunteers in the afternoon, and plays volleyball in the evening**."	*afternoon* 3. *plays volleyball in the evening* Connected by commas and the coordinating conjunction *and*. They all have the same subject—*my friend Daniel*.

Compound subjects

Just as the same subject may have multiple compound predicates, the same predicate may have multiple compound subjects. In the same way, we join multiple subjects with coordinating conjunctions and (if there are more than two subjects) commas. For example:

• "*My brother and I* **go fishing on the weekends**."

• "*John, Mary, and Joe* **went to school together**."

Compound predicates vs. compound sentences

It's important to distinguish a compound predicate from a **compound sentence**. A compound sentences is made up of two independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction; each clause has its own subject. Even if the subjects relate to the same person or thing, there is a *different* predicate for each subject.

For example:

• "*John* **studies at Harvard**, but *he* **also works as a mechanic on the weekend**."

This is a **compound sentence**, which has two independent clauses with two subjects: *John* and *he*. Even though they talk about the same person, each subject has its own unique predicate—it is **not** a compound predicate or a compound subject.

Complex sentences

Complex sentences are composed of an independent clause and one or more **dependent clauses**. Each clause in a complex sentence has a subject, and, again, each subject has its own predicate. For instance:

• "**When** *my father* **is home on the weekends**, *the whole family* **always goes to a movie together**."

The dependent clause has the subject *my father*, and the predicate is *is home on the weekends*. The dependent clause is linked to the independent clause by the subordinating conjunction *when*, which can also be considered part of the dependent clause's predicate. The subject of the independent clause is *the whole family*, and the predicate is *always goes to a movie together*.

Sentences can become increasingly complex, with multiple independent clauses and multiple dependent clauses. Just remember that for every clause with its own subject, there must be at least one corresponding predicate as well.

Parts of the predicate

We've seen where to look to identify the predicate in a sentence. Now let's look more closely at the different elements that can be a **part** of the predicate.

Finite vs. Non-finite Verbs

When we are identifying the predicate in a sentence, we usually look for the **finite verb** that acts as the root of the sentence. The only verbs that can be considered finite are verbs in their base form (the infinitive form without the particle *to*), verbs in their past-tense form, or verbs inflected for the **third-person singular**. (The verb *be*, unique among verbs, also has unique forms to reflect **plurality** (multiple subjects), as well as **first-person** vs. **second and third person**.)

Let's look at the last example from above:

• "**In school** *we* **are learning about the American Revolution**."

The sentence uses the present continuous verb *are learning*. This largely functions as a single unit, with *learning* carrying the most meaning in the sentence. However, *learning* is a present participle, which is considered a **non-finite verb**; the finite verb of the sentence is actually just the **auxiliary verb** *are*. It is an inflection of the verb *be* that denotes a **first person plural** subject (*we*).

Verb forms that are never considered to be finite verbs in a sentence are **gerunds**, **infinitives**, and **participles** (both past and present). Here are a few example sentences to illustrate the difference, with finite verbs in **bold** and non-finite verbs in *italics*:

Example sentence	Finite vs. non-finite verbs
"We **hate** *working* on the farm."	Finite verb: *hate* (present simple tense, first-person plural) Non-finite verb: *working* (gerund)
"John **ran** quickly *to catch* his bus."	Finite verb: *ran* (past simple tense, third-person singular) Non-finite verb: *to catch* (infinitive)
"Susy **lives** in New York City."	Finite verb: *lives* (present simple tense, third-person singular) Non-finite verb: none
"They **were** *being* very difficult."	Finite verb: *were* (past simple tense, third-person plural) Non-finite verb: *being* (present participle)
"We **have** *seen* that movie already."	Finite verb: *have* (present simple tense, first-person plural) Non-finite verb: *seen* (past participle)

Note that gerunds and infinitives are able to function as nouns, so it is possible for them to be **the subject** of a clause rather than part of the predicate. If they appear before the finite verb in a sentence, they are usually acting as the subject. For example:

- "*Working all week* **makes** me so tired."
- "*To err* **is** human."

To learn more about the differences between these two classes of verbs, go to the section **Finite and Non-finite Verbs** in the chapter dealing with **Verbs**.

Objects of verbs

Grammatical **objects** are nouns or pronouns that complete the meaning of verbs or prepositions. The objects of verbs tell us who or what is receiving the action of the verb. They are technically a kind of **complement** (sometimes known as a **verb complement**); however, because they are often so important to the structure of the predicate, they are usually described as a unique, separate part of it.

The object of a verb can either be a **direct object**, meaning it directly receives the action of the verb, or it can be an **indirect object**, meaning it receives the *direct object* of the verb.

Note that only **transitive verbs** take objects.

Direct objects

Direct objects are directly affected by the verbs they complete—that is, the verb's action is happening directly to them. For example:

• "The dog chased **its tail**." (The object *its tail* is receiving the action of the verb *chase*.)

• "Mary reads **a new book** every week." (The object *a new book* is receiving the action of the verb *read*.)

• "I asked **Jonathan** on a date." (The object *Jonathan* is receiving the action of the verb *asked*.)

Indirect objects

An **indirect object**, on the other hand, is the person or thing who receives the direct object of the verb. Indirect objects appear directly between the verb and its direct object.

For example:

• "Please pass **me** *the salt*." (The pronoun *me* is receiving the direct object *the salt*, which receives the action of the verb *pass*.)

• "I sent **the company** *an application* for the job." (The **noun phrase** *the company* is receiving the direct object *an application*, which receives the action

of the verb *sent*.)

Complements

Complements are words or groups of words that are necessary to complete the meaning of another part of the sentence. Unlike **modifiers**, they do not add *supplemental* information—they provide information that is necessary to achieve the intended meaning in the sentence.

In addition to **objects**, there are four other types of complements: **object complements**, **adjective complements**, **adverbial complements**, and **subject complements**. We'll look at some examples of each below, but to learn more about them, continue on to the section covering **Complements**.

Object Complements

An **object complement** is a word or group of words that describes, renames, or completes the direct object of the verb. It can be a noun, adjective, relative clause, infinitive, or gerund.

For example:

• "The committee elected *him* **treasurer**." (The noun *treasurer* renames the object *him*.)

• "All he wanted was to make *his husband* **happy**." (The adjective *happy* describes the object *his husband*.)

• "Do you know *someone* **who can work the printer**?" (The relative clause *who can work the printer* describes the object *someone*.)

• "I didn't expect *you* **to approve**." (The infinitive *to approve* describes a potential action of the object *you*.)

• "We came across *him* **lying in the yard**." (The gerund phrase *lying in the yard* describes the action of the object *him*.)

Adjective Complements

An **adjective complement** is a phrase or clause that provides information necessary to complete an adjective's meaning. Adjective complements almost always appear with **predicative adjectives** (adjectives that appear after linking verbs) and can be **prepositional phrases**, **infinitives** and infinitive phrases, or **noun clauses**.

For example:

• “I am perfectly *content* **on my own**.” (The prepositional phrase *on my own* completes the meaning of the adjective *content*.)

• “We’re just *glad* **to be of service**.” (The infinitive phrase *to be of service* completes the meaning of the adjective *glad*.)

• “We were a little *curious* **why they decided to leave**.” (The noun clause *why they decided to leave* completes the meaning of the adjective *curious*.)

Adverbial Complements

Adverbial complements are adverbs or adverbial elements that are required to complete the meaning of the verb. They always appear after the verb they complement.

For example:

• “The teacher *sent* Tim **home**.” (The **adverbial noun** *home* completes the meaning of the verb *sent*.)

• “Please *put* the book **on the shelf**.” (The adverbial prepositional phrase *on the shelf* completes the meaning of the verb *put*.)

Subject Complements

A **subject complement** is the information that follows a **linking verb** to describe, identify, or rename the subject of the clause. Subject complements can be nouns, pronouns, or adjectives.

Even though they modify the subject, they are dependent on the verb of the clause and thus are part of the predicate.

For example:

• “*Love* is **a virtue**.” (The noun phrase *a virtue* renames the subject *love*.)

• “Her husband took all the credit, but *it* was **she** who did all the work.” (The pronoun *she* re-identifies the subject *it*.)

• “*You* look **nice**.” (The adjective *nice* describes the subject *you*.)

Modifiers

Modifiers are adjectives and adverbs that describe (modify) another part of the sentence. They can appear as part of either the subject or the predicate,

depending on what they are modifying.

Both adjectives and adverbs can be made into phrases and clauses, which function as a whole unit to modify a word (or group of words).

Below, we'll look at some examples of modifiers functioning as part of the predicate (the predicate will be in *italics*, while the modifier will be in **bold**). Go to the section **Modifiers** to learn more about them.

Example sentence	Modifiers	What they modify
"Jonathan ***always*** *brings his* ***favorite*** *toy* ***to school***."	1. *always* — adverb 2. *favorite* — adjective 3. *to school* — adverbial prepositional phrase	1. The verb *brings* 2. The noun *toy* 3. The verb *brings*
"I *work* ***in a restaurant that is often busy***."	1. *in a restaurant* — adverbial prepositional phrase 2. *often* — adverb 3. *often busy* — predicative adjective phrase 4. *that is often busy* — relative clause (also called an adjective clause)	1. The verb *work* 2. The adjective *busy* 3. The subject pronoun *that* 4. The noun *restaurant*
"We *took the* ***bright orange*** *painting* ***in the living room off the wall***."	1. *bright* — adverb 2. *bright orange* — adjective phrase 3. *in the living room* — adjectival prepositional phrase 4. *off the wall* — adverbial prepositional phrase	1. The adjective *orange* 2. The noun *painting* 3. The noun *painting*

		4. The verb *took*

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Where does the predicate **usually** appear in a sentence?

a) Before the subject
b) After the subject
c) After the subject complement
d) A & C
e) B & C

2. What must the predicate **always** contain?

a) A finite verb
b) A non-finite verb
c) A direct object
d) A subject complement

3. Which of the following is used to create a **compound predicate**?

a) A coordinating conjunction
b) A subordinating conjunction
c) Commas
d) A & C
e) B & C

4. Identify the predicate in the following sentence:
"My sister and my brother both like to read."

a) My sister and my brother
b) both like to read
c) like to read
d) to read

5. Identify the **finite verb** in the following sentence:
"I have been working a lot lately."

a) have

b) been
c) working
d) have been working

6. Which part of the predicate tells us who or what is **receiving** the action of the verb?

a) Verbs
b) Object complements
c) Objects
d) Modifiers

7. Which part of the predicate **completes the meaning** of another part of the sentence?

a) Verbs
b) Complements
c) Objects
d) Modifiers

Complements

Definition

Complements are words or groups of words that are necessary to complete the meaning of another part of the sentence. Complements act like **modifiers** to add additional meaning to the word or words they are attached to. However, unlike **adjunct modifiers**, they do not add *supplemental* information—they provide information that is necessary to achieve the intended meaning in the sentence.

Complements, even those that complete the meaning of the subject, are always part of **the predicate**.

Types of Complements

There are five main categories of complements: **objects**, **object complements**, **adjective complements**, **adverbial complements**, and **subject complements**. We'll briefly look at each below. To learn more about them, continue on to their individual sections.

Objects

Grammatical **objects** are nouns or pronouns that complete the meaning of **verbs** and **prepositions**. Depending on what they complete, objects are also sometimes known as either **verb complements** or **prepositional complements**.

There are three types of objects: **direct objects**, **indirect objects**, and **objects of prepositions**.

Direct objects

Direct objects are directly affected by verbs they complete—that is, the verb's action is happening directly to them. For example:

• "The dog *chased* **its tail**."

• "Mary *reads* **a new book** every week."

Indirect objects

An **indirect object** is the person or thing who receives the direct object of the verb.

For example:

• "Please pass **me** *the salt.*"

• "I sent **the company** *an application* for the job."

Objects of prepositions

Prepositions also take objects, connecting them back to another element of the sentence to elaborate on its meaning. Together, the preposition and its object form a **prepositional phrase**. For example:

• "Your backpack is *under* **the table**."

• "I got a ticket *for* **speeding**."

Object Complements

An **object complement** is a word or group of words that describes, renames, or completes the meaning of the direct object of a verb. It can be a noun, adjective, relative clause, infinitive, gerund, or a phrase made from any one of them.

Nouns and noun phrases

When we use nouns as object complements, they serve to rename or re-identify the object of **factitive verbs**. For example:

• “The committee elected *him* **treasurer**.”

• “Mrs. Fields named *her late husband* **the executor of her estate**.”

Adjectives and adjective phrases

Adjectives that function as object complements serve to describe or modify the direct object. Like all object complements, adjectives must follow the direct object they are describing. If they come before it, they are simply acting as **attributive adjectives**, which are not necessary to complete the meaning of the sentence.

• “All he wanted was to make *his husband* **happy**.”

• “The excitement of the day got *the kids* **way too hyper**.”

Relative clauses

Relative clauses are dependent clauses that are introduced by **relative pronouns**. Like adjectives, relative clauses serve to describe the object that they follow; for this reason, they are often called **adjective clauses**.

For example:

• “Do you know *someone* **who can work the printer**?”

• “I hate *the color* **that they painted this room**.”

Infinitives and infinitive phrases

An infinitive or infinitive phrase acts as an object complement by describing the intended or desired action of the direct object. For example:

• “I didn’t expect *you* **to approve**.”

• “She’s forcing *me* **to work this the weekend**.”

Gerunds and gerund phrases

Gerunds generally function as object complements by describing what the direct

object is or was doing (as opposed to infinitives, which describe an act that has not yet been done).

For example:

• “We came across *him* **lying in the yard**.”

• “My mother noticed *the baby* **walking by himself**.”

Adjective Complements

An **adjective complement** (also called an **adjective phrase complement**) is a phrase or clause that provides information necessary to complete an adjective’s meaning. Adjective complements can be **prepositional phrases**, **infinitives** and infinitive phrases, or **noun clauses**.

Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases describe the relationship between the adjectives they complement and the objects of their prepositions.

• “I am perfectly *content* **on my own**.”

• “He felt *alone* **in the world**.”

Infinitives and infinitive phrases

Infinitives and infinitive phrases describe actions that result from or lead to the adjective they complement.

For example:

• “I’m very *happy* **to know you**!”

• “We’re just *glad* **to be of service**.”

Noun Clauses

A **noun clause** is a dependent clause that is able to function grammatically like a noun. It connects the adjective’s meaning to an action by a secondary subject.

• “We were a little *curious* **why they decided to leave**.”

• “I’m *thrilled* **that you are coming to visit**!”

Adverbial Complements

Adverbial complements are adverbs or **adverbial elements** in a clause that are required to complete the meaning of the verb.

Adverbial complements usually describe *location or direction*, and most frequently occur with verbs that indicate *motion*. They always appear after the verb they complement.

If the verb is **intransitive**, the complement will appear directly after the verb; if the verb is **transitive**, the complement will appear after the verb's **direct object**.

For example:

• "The teacher sent Tim **home**."

• "Please put the book **on the shelf**."

Subject Complements

A **subject complement** is the information that follows a **linking verb** to describe, identify, or rename the subject of the clause. A subject complement can either be a predicate noun, a predicate pronoun, or a **predicative adjective**.

Predicate nouns

Predicate nouns serve to rename or re-identify the subject after a linking verb. If the noun is accompanied by any direct modifiers (such as **determiners**, **adjectives**, or **prepositional phrases**), the entire noun phrase acts predicatively.

For example:

• "*Love* is **a virtue**."

• "*Tommy* seems like **a real bully**."

Predicate pronouns

We can also use a **predicate pronoun** after a linking verb to re-identify the subject. This is most common in questions and responses in which the identity of the subject is not known or is being explained. For example:

• Question: "*Who* is **it**?"
• Answer: "*It*'s **me**!"

We can also use predicate pronouns in declarative statements, but this is less common in everyday speech and writing. For instance:

• "*It* was **I** who did this."

• “Her husband took all the credit, but *it* was **she** who did all the work.”

Predicative Adjectives

A **predicative adjective** is an adjective used after a linking verb to describe or modify the subject of the clause. For example:

• “*You* look **nice**.”

• “*He* is very **handsome**.”

When a prepositional phrase follows a linking verb (especially the verb *be*), it functions in the same way as a **predicative adjective** to describe the subject. For example:

• “*The cat* is **in the shed**.” (The prepositional phrase *in the shed* is describing the subject *the cat*.)

• “*I* am **across the street**.” (The prepositional phrase *across the street* is describing the subject *I*.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What kind of complement is used to create a **prepositional phrase**?

a) Object
b) Object complement
c) Adjective complement
d) Adverbial complement
e) Subject complement

2. What kind of complement is used to complete an adjective’s meaning?

a) Object
b) Object complement
c) Adjective complement
d) Adverbial complement
e) Subject complement

3. Which of the following sentences uses a **subject complement**?

a) “We left school early.”
b) “Your future is what you make it.”
c) “I’m a bit anxious about the test tomorrow.”

d) “I want you to work a little harder.”

4. Which of the following sentences uses an **object complement**?

a) “We left school early.”
b) “Your future is what you make it.”
c) “I’m a bit anxious about the test tomorrow.”
d) “I want you to work a little harder.”

5. Identify the **adverbial complement** in the following sentence:
“I have been living in Ireland for six years.”

a) I have
b) been living
c) in Ireland
d) for six years

Objects

Definition

Grammatical **objects** are nouns or pronouns that complete the meaning of **verbs** and **prepositions**. Additionally, almost any group of words that functions as a noun can be an object, such as **noun phrases**, **noun clauses**, **gerunds**, and **infinitives**.

Objects of verbs

The objects of verbs relay information about who or what is receiving the action of the verb. The object of a verb can either be a **direct object**, meaning it directly receives the action of the verb, or it can be an **indirect object**, meaning it receives the *direct object* of the verb.

Note that only **transitive verbs** take objects.

Direct objects

Direct objects are directly affected by the verbs they complete—that is, the verb’s action is happening directly to them. For example:

• “The dog chased **its tail**.” (The object *its tail* is receiving the action of the verb

chase.)

• “Mary reads **a new book** every week.” (The object *a new book* is receiving the action of the verb *read*.)

• “I asked **Jonathan** on a date.” (The object *Jonathan* is receiving the action of the verb *asked*.)

We can identify the direct object by asking the question *Whom?* or *What?* about the verb. The part of the sentence that answers that question is the direct object.

“The dog chased its tail.”	**“Mary reads a new book every week.”**	**“I asked Jonathan on a date.”**
Question: The dog chased *what?*	Question: Mary reads *what?*	Question: I asked *whom?*
Answer: **its tail**	Answer: **a new book**	Answer: **Jonathan**

Indirect objects

An **indirect object** is the person or thing who receives the direct object of the verb. He, she, or it is still affected by the action of the verb, but now this happens *indirectly*. Indirect objects appear directly between the verb and its direct object.

For example:

• “Please pass **me** *the salt*.” (The pronoun *me* is receiving the direct object *the salt*, which receives the action of the verb *pass*.)

• “I sent **the company** *an application* for the job.” (The **noun phrase** *the company* is receiving the direct object *an application*, which receives the action of the verb *sent*.)

Only verbs that express an action being **relayed to** or **done for** another person or thing can take indirect objects. These are called **ditransitive verbs**. (Those that can only take direct objects are called **monotransitive verbs**.)

Indirect objects as prepositional phrases

The indirect object comes immediately before the direct object in a sentence, as

we saw above. However, we can also communicate the same information by placing the indirect object after the direct object in a prepositional phrase using *to* or *for*. We can do this with any indirect object, but it is often preferable when the indirect object is particularly long. For instance:

Indirect Object	Prepositional Phrase
"I sent **my brother** *a letter*."	"I sent *a letter* **to my brother**."
"My father baked **our class** *a batch of cupcakes*."	"My father baked *a batch of cupcakes* **for our class**."
"She teaches **many different students** *mathematics*."	She teaches *mathematics* **to many different students**."

Objects of prepositions

Prepositions also take objects, which work together to create **prepositional phrases**. Generally, a preposition is directly followed by its object. For example:

• "I am looking for **work**." (The noun *work* is the object of the preposition *for*, which creates the prepositional phrase *for work*.)

• "Your backpack is under **the table**." (The **noun phrase** *the table* is the object of the preposition *under*, which creates the prepositional phrase *under the table*.)

• "I got a ticket for **speeding**." (The **gerund** *speeding* is the object of the preposition *for*, which creates the prepositional phrase *for speeding*.)

• "She can study with **whomever she likes**." (The **noun clause** *whomever she likes* is the object of the preposition *with*, which creates the prepositional phrase *with whomever she likes*.)

The Objective Case

We largely do not **inflect** (change the form of) words to reflect whether they are acting as subjects or objects in a sentence. **Personal pronouns**, however, still have a unique form in the **objective case** when they act as objects of verbs or prepositions.

In addition, the pronouns *who* and *whoever* change in the objective case, becoming *whom* and *whomever*; however, this distinction is becoming less

common, with *who* and *whoever* being used in most instances in modern English.

The table below gives a quick breakdown of these different cases and how they are used in a sentence. Notice that the pronouns *you* and *it* are the same for both cases.

Subjective Case	Example sentence	Objective Case	Example Sentence
I	"**I** read a great book recently."	**Me**	"Jeff told **me** about a great book."
We	"**We** went out for ice cream."	**Us**	"Mom took **us** out for ice cream."
You	"**You** said the project was finished!"	**You**	"I told **you** it would be finished next week!"
He	"**He** left for practice already."	**Him**	"I'm waiting for **him** to return from practice."
She	"**She** is writing a play."	**Her**	"The play was written by **her**."
It	"**It** might rain today."	**It**	"I want **it** to stop snowing."
They	"**They** won't like this."	**Them**	"I asked **them** a week ago."
Who	"**Who** told you about our plan?"	**Whom**	"**Whom** have you told about our plan?"
Whoever	"**Whoever** broke this vase is in deep trouble!"	**Whom**	"Study with **whomever** you like."

(To learn more about grammatical case, go to the section on **Personal Pronouns - Case**.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **cannot** function as objects in a sentence?

a) Noun phrases
b) Noun clauses
c) Gerunds
d) Adjective phrases

2. Identify the type of object (in **bold**) in the following sentence:
"I'm going to a football game with **my dad** later."

a) Direct object
b) Indirect object
c) Object of a preposition

3. Where does an indirect object **usually** appear in a sentence?

a) Directly before its verb
b) Between its verb and the direct object
c) Directly after the direct object
d) Anywhere

4. Which of the following pronouns is in the **objective case**?

a) we
b) they
c) I
d) me

Subject Complements

Definition

A **subject complement** is the information that follows a **linking verb** to describe, identify, or rename the subject of the clause. Whereas most verbs describe the action a subject performs, linking verbs describe something about the subject, which is completed by the subject complement.

A subject complement can either be a predicate noun, a predicate pronoun, or a **predicative adjective**.

Predicate nouns

Nouns that follow linking verbs are known as **predicate nouns** (or sometimes **predicative nouns** or **predicate nominatives**). These serve to rename or re-identify the subject. If the noun is accompanied by any direct modifiers (such as **determiners**, **adjectives**, or **prepositional phrases**), the entire noun phrase acts predicatively.

For example:

• "Love is **a virtue**." (The noun phrase *a virtue* follows the linking verb *is* to rename the subject *love*.)

• "Tommy seems like **a real bully**." (The noun phrase *a real bully* follows the linking verb *seems* to rename the subject *Tommy*.)

• "Maybe this is **a blessing in disguise**." (The noun phrase *a blessing in disguise* follows the linking verb *is* to rename the subject *this*.)

Predicative noun clauses

Noun clauses are **dependent clauses** that are able to function grammatically like nouns in a sentence. They most commonly begin with the words *that, how, if*, and the "wh-" words—*what, whatever, where, wherever, when, whenever, why, which, whichever, who, whom, whoever, whomever, whether*, and *whatever*.

Because they behave like nouns, they can perform all the roles that a normal noun would fill in a sentence, including as a subject complement. For example:

• "Japan is **where I want to go most**." (*Where I want to go most* is the predicate noun of the linking verb *is*, renaming the subject *Japan*.)

• "The thing I wish for most is **that people would all just get along**." (*That people would all just get along* is the predicate noun of the linking verb *is*, renaming the subject *the thing I wish for most*.)

• "Politicians are **who create the laws**." (*Who create the laws* is the predicate noun of the linking verb *are*, renaming the subject *politicians*.)

Predicate pronouns

We can also use a **predicate pronoun** after a linking verb to re-identify the subject. This is most common in questions and responses in which the identity of the subject is not known or is being explained. For example:

• Question: “Who is **it**?” (The pronoun *it* follows the linking verb *is* to rename the subject *who*.)
• Answer: “It’s **me**!” (The pronoun *me** follows the linking verb *is* to rename the subject *It*.)

We also commonly use personal pronouns in the **possessive case** predicatively, as in:

• “That’s **mine**.”

• “The computer was **his**.”

• “Victory is **ours**!”

We can also use subjective* personal pronouns in declarative statements, but this is less common in everyday speech and writing, as it tends to make the sentence sound more formal than is usually necessary. For instance:

• “It was **I** who did this.”

• “Her husband took all the credit, but it was **she** who did all the work.”

• “It was **they** who assured us that there would be no problems.”

*The subjective case

When pronouns that are **not** possessive are used predicatively, the conventional rule is to put them in the **subjective case** rather than the **objective case**. Pronouns in the objective case (*me, us, him, her, them, whom*, and *whomever*) should only be used as **direct objects** of verbs or prepositions, not as subject complements.

For example, “it was **I** who did this” is more correct than “it was **me** who did this.”

In conversational English, however, this distinction is much less frequently observed, and you will often hear people using phrases such as “it’s me” or “that was her” in response to questions.

But in writing (especially formal or professional writing), always use the **subjective case** for a personal pronoun if it is functioning as a **subject complement** after a linking verb.

To learn more about using the subjective and objective cases of pronouns, see the section dealing with **Case** in the chapter on **Personal Pronouns**.

Predicative Adjectives

A **predicative adjective** is an adjective used after a linking verb to describe or modify the subject of the clause. For example:

• "You look **nice**."

• "He is very **handsome**."

Here, *nice* describes the subject *you*, while the adjective phrase *very handsome* describes the subject *he*.

Note that adjectives appearing immediately *before* the noun they are describing are known as **attributive adjectives**. For example:

• "The *old* man seems **nice**."

Old is an attributive adjective that describes the subject, *man*. *Nice* also describes *man*, but it is a predicative adjective because it follows the linking verb *seems*.

Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases can either functions as adjectives (modifying nouns or pronouns) or adverbs (modifying verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). When a prepositional phrase follows a linking verb (especially the verb *be*), it is functioning in the same way as a **predicative adjective**, describing the subject (which must be a noun or pronoun). For example:

• "The cat is **in the shed**." (The prepositional phrase *in the shed* is describing the subject *the cat*.)

• "I am **across the street**." (The prepositional phrase *across the street* is describing the subject *I*.)

To learn more about how **Predicative Adjectives** work, go to their section in the chapter on **Adjectives**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is used to **describe** the subject of a clause?

a) Predicate nouns
b) Predicate pronouns
c) Predicative adjectives
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

2. Which of the following is used to **rename** the subject of a clause?

a) Predicate nouns
b) Predicate pronouns
c) Predicative adjectives
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

3. Which of the following sentences uses a **predicative adjective**?

a) “This soup tastes delicious!”
b) “The project was a disaster.”
c) “They are going to sell our beautiful old house tomorrow.”
d) “It was he who sold the company to overseas investors.”

4. What kind of verbs must be used with a subject complement?

a) Action verbs
b) Linking verbs
c) Stative verbs
d) Non-finite verbs

Object Complements

Definition

Sometimes a verb is not complete with only a direct object, especially when that direct object is a person. More information about the object’s relationship with the verb is required to form a complete thought. This additional information is known as the **object complement**.

An **object complement** is a word or group of words that describes, renames, or completes the direct object of the verb; without one, we are left asking *what* about the state or condition of the direct object as a result of the verb.

An object complement can be a noun or noun phrase; an adjective or adjective phrase; a relative clause (also known as an adjective clause); an infinitive or infinitive phrase; or a gerund or gerund phrase.

(In the examples used in this section, the object complements are in **bold** while

the objects they modify or rename are underlined.)

Nouns and noun phrases

When we use nouns as object complements, they serve to rename or re-identify the object of **factitive verbs**. For example:

• “The committee elected him **treasurer**.”

• “Mrs. Fields named her late husband **the executor of her estate**.”

• “The coach made Timothy **team captain**.”

• “The school board appointed her **superintendent**.”

Adjectives and adjective phrases

Factitive verbs also take adjectives and adjective phrases as their object complements. But whereas a noun that functions as an object complement will rename a direct object, an adjective serves to describe or modify the direct object.

Like all object complements, adjectives must follow the direct object they are describing. If they come before it, they are simply acting as **attributive adjectives**, which are not necessary to complete the meaning of the sentence.

• “All he wanted was to make his husband **happy**.”

• “The excitement of the day got the kids **way too hyper**.”

• “We decided to paint my room **bright pink**.”

• “The jury judged the defendant **not guilty**.”

• “She deemed him **worthy of her love**.”

Relative clauses

Relative clauses are dependent clauses that are introduced by **relative pronouns**. Like adjectives, relative clauses serve to describe the noun that they follow; for this reason, they are often called **adjective clauses**.

For example:

• “Do you know someone **who can work the photocopier**?”

• “I hate the color **that they painted this room**.”

• “I found an apartment **that is big enough for both of us**.”

• “He is a friend **whose generosity knows no bounds**.”

Infinitives and infinitive phrases

An infinitive or infinitive phrase acts as an object complement by describing the intended or desired action of the direct object. For example:

• “I don’t expect you ***to approve*** **of my decision**.”

• “She’s forcing me ***to work*** **through the weekend**.”

• “We need you ***to make*** **a few more copies**.”

• “Janet’s father wants her ***to go*** **to Harvard**.”

• “I would like the boss ***to see*** **these reports**.”

• “He persuaded me ***to marry*** **him**.”

• “They taught me ***to work*** **the photocopier**.”

We often also use infinitives as object complements in **reported speech** to express what someone said **to** or asked **of** someone else. For example:

• “He asked me ***to help*** **him**.”

• “She told me **not** ***to answer*** **the phone**.”

Gerunds and gerund phrases

Gerunds generally function as object complements by describing what the direct object is or was doing (as opposed to infinitives, which describe an act that has not yet been done).

For example:

• “We came across him **lying in the yard**.”

• “My mother noticed the baby **walking by himself**.”

• “I can’t believe the bosses caught you **napping**.”

• “We heard their dogs **barking at the wind**.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following do **not** function as object complements?

a) Noun phrases
b) Adjective phrases

c) Adverbial phrases
d) Infinitive phrases

2. Which of the following kinds of verbs requires an object complement?

a) Action verb
b) Factitive verb
c) Stative verb
d) Linking verb

3. Identify the type of object complement (in **bold**) in the following sentence: "They found him **unfit to lead the company**."

a) Noun phrase
b) Adjective phrase
c) Relative clause
d) Infinitive phrase

4. Which of the following sentences uses a **gerund phrase** as an object complement?

a) "They saw me walking on my own."
b) "He wanted me to take him to the airport."
c) "I need an office that has a telephone line."
d) "They appointed me secretary of the meeting."

Adjective Complements

Definition

An **adjective complement** (also called an **adjective phrase complement**) is a phrase or clause that provides information necessary to complete an adjective phrase's meaning. They are most often used with **predicative adjectives*** (adjectives that follow **linking verbs** to describe the subject of the clause).

(*Note: Some grammar guides refer to **predicative adjectives** as being synonymous with **adjective complements**. In this guide, however, an **adjective complement** refers to that which completes the meaning of an *adjective*, while a **predicative adjective** (a kind of **subject complement**) completes the meaning of a *subject*.)

Types of Adjective Complements

Adjective complements can be **prepositional phrases**, **infinitive phrases**, or **noun clauses**.

Prepositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase is comprised of a preposition immediately followed by a noun, pronoun, noun phrase, pronoun phrase, or noun clause. Here are some examples of prepositional phrases acting as adjective complements:

• "I am perfectly content **on my own**." (*On my own* is the complement of the adjective *content*.)

• "He felt alone **in the world**." (*In the world* is the complement of the adjective *alone*.)

• "They seem a little concerned **about the direction we're taking**." (*About the direction we're taking* is the complement of the adjective *concerned*.)

• "She is skilled **at archery**." (*At archery* is the complement of the adjective *skilled*.)

• "The bosses are pleased **with your progress**." (*With your progress* is the complement of the adjective *pleased*.)

Infinitive Phrases

Infinitive phrases are formed from full infinitive verbs (*to* + the base form of the verb) plus any additional objects or modifiers of the verb. (Be careful not to confuse infinitive phrases with prepositional phrases beginning with *to*.)

For example:

• “I’m very happy **to know you**!” (*To know you* is the complement of the adjective *happy*.)

• “We’re just glad **to be of service**.” (*To be of service* is the complement of the adjective *glad*.)

• “They felt relieved **to return home**.” (*To return home* is the complement of the adjective *relieved*.)

• “The crowd seemed impatient **to begin**.” (*To begin* is the complement of the adjective *impatient*.)

Noun Clauses

A **noun clause** is a dependent clause that is able to function grammatically like a noun. Noun clauses begin with the words *that, how, if,* and the “wh-“ words —*what, whatever, where, wherever, when, whenever, why, which, whichever, who, whom, whoever, whomever, whether*, and *whatever*.

• “We were a little curious **why they decided to leave**.” (*Why they decided to leave* is the complement of the adjective *curious*.)

• “I’m thrilled **that you are coming to visit**!” (*That you are coming to visit* is the complement of the adjective *thrilled*.)

• “It’s so wonderful **what he did for those orphans**.” (*What he did for those orphans* is the complement of the adjective *wonderful*.)

• “They’re somewhat unsure **whether this is the right decision**.” (*Whether this is the right decision* is the complement of the adjective *unsure*.)

Modifiers vs. Complements

Adjective complements are similar to but distinct from **modifiers** of adjectives. Both function adverbially, but while adjective modifiers describe or elaborate upon an adjective’s meaning, adjective complements work *with* adjectives to complete their meaning. The meaning of the sentence will not change if the modifier is taken out, whereas some information will be lost or altered if the complement is removed.

• “I am perfectly content **on my own**.” (*Perfectly* is an adverb that modifies the adjective *content*, while *on my own* is a prepositional phrase that complements it.)

• “They seem a little concerned **about the direction we’re taking**.” (*A little* is an adverbial phrase that modifies the adjective *concerned*, while *about the direction we’re taking* is a prepositional phrase that complements it.)

• “I’m very happy **to know you**!” (*Very* is an adverb that modifies the adjective *happy*, while *about the direction we’re taking* is an infinitive phrase that complements it.)

• “We’re just glad **to be of service**.” (*Just* is an adverb that modifies the adjective *glad*, while *to be of service* is an infinitive phrase that complements it.)

• “We were a little curious **why they decided to leave**.” (*A little* is an adverbial phrase that modifies the adjective *curious*, while *why they decided to leave* is a noun clause that complements it.)

• “They’re somewhat unsure **whether this is the right decision**.” (*Somewhat* is an adverbial phrase that modifies the adjective *unsure*, while *whether this is the right decision* is a noun clause that complements it.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following **cannot** be used to form an adjective complement?

a) prepositional phrases
b) infinitive phrases
c) gerund phrases
d) noun clauses

2. Adjective complements usually occur with:

a) attributive adjectives
b) predicative adjectives
c) demonstrative adjectives
d) interrogative adjectives

3. Identify the adjective complement in the following sentence:
“Their huge cabin by the lake is sure to bring in lots of visitors.”

a) huge cabin

b) by the lake
c) in lots of visitors
d) to bring in lots of visitors

Adverbial Complements

Definition

Adverbial complements are adverbs or other adverbial elements in a clause that are required to complete the meaning of the verb.

Like **adverbial adjuncts**, adverbial complements modify the meaning of the verb by providing additional information. However, unlike adjuncts, which can be removed without losing meaning, adverbial complements must be included because removing them would cause the sentence to be incomplete or fundamentally altered in its meaning.

For example:

• “Please keep **still**.”

• “I love living **in New York**.”

If the adverb *still* in the first sentence were removed, it would read “Please keep” and no longer make any sense. If the adverbial prepositional phrase *in New York* were removed from the second sentence, it would read “I love living”—this would still make logical sense, but the original meaning would be completely lost.

Identifying adverbial complements

Adverbial complements always appear after the verb they complement. If the verb is **intransitive**, the complement will appear directly after the verb; if the verb is **transitive**, the complement will appear after the verb’s **direct object**.

The best way to identify whether an adverbial element is a complement or not is to remove it from the sentence. If the sentence no longer makes sense or has a very different meaning, then the adverbial element is a complement.

Example (with adverbial)	Example (without adverbial)	Does the meaning change?
“The teacher sent Tim	“The teacher sent	**Yes**—the adverbial is a

home.”	Tim.”	**complement**.
“She told me the story **quickly**.”	“She told me the story.”	**No**—the adverbial is an **adjunct**.
“Please put the book **on the shelf**.”	“Please put the book.”	**Yes**—the adverbial is a **complement**.
“He wrote a book **in his spare time**.”	“He wrote a book.”	**No**—the adverbial is an **adjunct**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Where does an adverbial complement of an **intransitive verb** appear in a sentence?

a) Before the verb it completes
b) Directly after the verb it completes
c) After an adverbial adjunct
d) After the direct object

2. Where does an adverbial complement of an **transitive verb** appear in a sentence?

a) Before the verb it completes
b) Directly after the verb it completes
c) After an adverbial adjunct
d) After the direct object

3. When can an adverbial complement be removed from the sentence?

a) When it completes a transitive verb
a) When it completes an intransitive verb
c) When the verb also has an adverbial adjunct
d) Always
e) Never

Modifiers

Definition

Modifiers are, quite simply, any word or group of words that modifies (describes or elaborates upon) another element in a sentence. Modifiers can either be **adjectives**, which modify nouns (or sometimes pronouns), or **adverbs**, which modify pretty much everything else (usually verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs). Whether a modifier is an adjective or adverb depends on what it modifies and how it functions in a sentence.

Adjectives

Adjectives have two basic syntactic categories: attributive and predicative.

Adjectives that appear directly before (or sometimes directly after) the noun or pronoun they modify are known as **attributive adjectives**. These can appear anywhere in a sentence.

Predicative adjectives, on the other hand, always appear after the noun they modify, connected to it by a **linking verb**. They are one of the three types of **subject complements**, and they are always part of **the predicate**—hence their name.

Let's compare two examples to highlight this difference:

• "The **black** *dog* is barking."

In this sentence, **black** is an **attributive adjective**. It is part of the noun phrase and is not connected to the noun *dog* by a linking verb. Now let's look at a *predicative adjective*:

• "The *dog* was **black**."

In this sentence, **black** is a *predicative adjective*. It follows *dog*, the noun that it modifies, and is connected to it by the linking verb *was*.

Other categories of adjectives

There is a huge variety of adjectives in English. While many words are adjectival in nature, such as colors (*red*, *black*, *yellow*, etc.), there are also several categories of adjectives that are formed from other sources. The table below will give a brief breakdown of these categories of adjectives, along with some examples. Go to each individual section to learn more.

Category of		**Example**	**Example**

Adjective	Definition	adjectives	sentence
Proper Adjectives	Formed from **proper nouns** to create descriptive words.	*Italian, Shakespearean, Alaskan, Middle Eastern, Nordic*	"He writes in an almost **Shakespearean** style."
Compound Adjectives	Created from two or more words that work jointly to modify the same noun; they always appear before the noun they modify and are usually joined with a hyphen(s).	*top-right, last-minute, sugar-free, record-breaking, expensive-looking*	"I know this is a **last-minute** suggestion, but hear me out."
Demonstrative Adjectives (or **Demonstrative Determiners**)	Used to specify what we are referring to, whether it is singular or plural, and to give more information about its proximity to the speaker.	*this, that, these, those*	"**These** cups are very pretty."
Interrogative Adjectives	Usually used to ask questions about something.	*what, which, whose*	"**Whose** computer is this?"
Nominal Adjectives	Adjectives that perform the function of a **noun** in a sentence. They are preceded by the word *the* and can be found as the **subject** or the **object** of a sentence or clause.	*the best, the strongest, the blue*	"He wants the red car, but I want **the blue**."
Collective	A subgroup of **nominal adjectives**, used to refer	*the rich, the poor, the*	"**The rich**

Adjectives	to a group of people based on a shared characteristic.	*innocent, the French, the Dutch*	should help **the poor**.”

Adjective Phrases and Clauses

In addition to the single-word adjectives we looked at above, we can also use **adjective phrases** and **relative clauses** (also called **adjective clauses**) to modify nouns. We’ll look at both briefly below, but to learn more about how they are formed and used, go to their sections in the chapter on **Adjectives**.

Adjective Phrases

An **adjective phrase** is an adjective and any additional information linked to it that work together to describe a noun or pronoun in a sentence. The adjective around which an adjective phrase is formed is known as the **head word** of the phrase. When the head word is a **participle**, the phrase is known as a **participle phrase**.

For example:

• “You have **a beautiful** voice.”

• “He is **a very good** swimmer.”

• “The helicopters are **controlled remotely**.”

• “I am **perfectly content on my own**.”

• “People **wearied by travel** often stop here to rest.”

• “They felt **relieved to return home**.”

Relative Clauses (Adjective Clauses)

Relative clauses (also known as **adjective** or **adjectival clauses**) are **dependent clauses** that provide descriptive information about a noun or noun phrase. Relative clauses are introduced by either a **relative pronoun** or a **relative adverb**, and the information they provide can either be essential or nonessential to the completeness of the sentence.

• “There’s the woman **who always sits next to me on the bus**.”

• “The book **that I wrote** is being published in January.”

• “The escaped giraffe, **which had been on the loose for weeks**, was finally captured.”

• “The house **where I was born** is a very special place.”

• “I love casual Fridays, **when we get to wear jeans to work**.”

Adverbs

As we learned above, an **adverb** is a word that modifies or describes a verb, adjective, other adverb, or an entire clause. For example:

• “You write **beautifully**.” (The adverb *beautifully* modifies the verb *write*.)

• “He owns the **bright** red car.” (The adverb *bright* modifies the adjective *red*.)

• “She ran **very** quickly to the bus.” (The adverb *very* modifies the adverb *quickly*.)

• “She looked excited, **as if she could jump up and dance at any moment**.” (The adverbial clause *as if she could jump up and dance at any moment* modifies the independent clause *She looked excited*.)

There are many different categories of adverbs, which provide specific kinds of descriptions and which behave slightly differently in a sentence.

The table below provides a quick breakdown of the different categories and how they are used to describe something in a sentence. Go to the section for each individual category to see more examples and learn more about how each one is used.

(Note that most of the examples below are single-word adverbs. However, adverbial phrases—and sometimes adverbial clauses—can also belong to each category.)

Category of Adverb	Definition	Example adverbs	Example sentence
Adverbs of Time	Describe when or for how long something happens or is the case.	*now, tomorrow, yesterday, still, yet, later*	“We are eating **now**.”
Adverbs of	Describe how frequently something happens or is the	*always, usually, sometimes,*	“I **rarely** eat

Frequency	case. A subset of Adverbs of Time.	*often, rarely, daily, weekly, monthly*	breakfast in bed.”
Adverbs of Place	Describe the direction, distance, movement, or position involved in the action of a verb.	*north, everywhere, here, there, forward, downward, up, uphill, behind*	“I absolutely hate running **uphill**.”
Adverbs of Manner	Describe how something happens or how someone does something. Usually formed from adjectives.	*beautifully, wonderfully, slowly, deliberately, happily*	“He walked **slowly** towards the bar.”
Adverbs of Degree	Describe the intensity, degree, or extent of the verb, adjective, or adverb they are modifying.	*undoubtedly, truly, very, quite, pretty, somewhat, fairly*	“I'm **fairly** certain this is correct.”
Adverbs of Purpose	Describe why something happens or is the case. Single-word adverbs are usually **conjunctive adverbs**.	*therefore, thus, consequently, hence*	“We’ve never seen such high numbers. We must **therefore** conclude that the results are not normal.”
Focusing Adverbs	Used to draw attention to a particular part of a clause.	*also, exclusively, just, mostly, notably, primarily*	“They played **mostly** techno music at the party.”
	Used to modify the meaning		

Negative Adverbs	of a verb, adjective, other adverb, or entire clause in a negative way. Used in many of the other categories above.	*no, not, hardly, barely, never, seldom*	"He does **not** work on Mondays."
Conjunctive Adverbs	Used to connect independent clauses and describe the relationship between them.	*comparatively, therefore, also, however, moreover, similarly*	"Jen is terrible at math; **however**, she still likes it."
Evaluative Adverbs	Used by the speaker to comment or give an opinion on something. Evaluative adverbs modify the entire clause.	*apparently, astonishingly, clearly, frankly, obviously, presumably*	"**Clearly**, we're going to have to work harder."
Viewpoint Adverbs	Used to indicate whose point of view we are expressing, or to specify what aspect of something we are talking about. (Many viewpoint adverbs are **adverbial phrases**.)	*personally, in my point of view, according to you, scientifically, biologically*	"**Personally**, I don't believe it's true."
Relative Adverbs	Used to introduce **relative clauses**, when the information relates to a <u>place, time</u>, or the <u>reason</u> an action took place.	*where, when, why*	"I don't know **why** he got angry."
Adverbial Nouns	Nouns or noun phrases that function grammatically as adverbs to modify verbs and certain adjectives, usually specifying time, distance, weight, age, or monetary value.	*tomorrow, an hour, an ounce, five dollars, 25 years*	"I can barely see **a foot** in front of me in this fog."

Adverbial Phrases

An **adverbial phrase** (also known as an **adverb phrase**) is group of words that functions as an adverb in a sentence. These can be adverbs modified by other adverbs, adverbial prepositional phrases, or adverbial infinitive phrases.

For example:

• “The kicker is running ***somewhat*** **slowly** back to the bench. He might be injured.”

• “He performed ***very*** **well** on his exam.”

• “We were playing Frisbee **at the park**.”

• “**After they woke up**, they packed up their things and went on a hike.”

• “Patricia went to the mountains **to go for a hike**.”

• “I’m so happy **to be your friend**.”

Adverbial Clauses

An **adverbial clause**, or **adverb clause**, is a group of words that contains a **subject** and a **predicate** and is used, like a regular adverb, to modify adjectives, verbs, and adverbs.

Adverbial clauses use **subordinating conjunctions** to connect them to **independent clauses**; the way an adverbial clause modifies an element in a sentence depends on the kind of subordinating conjunction used. For example:

• “I will arrive ***when*** **dinner is ready**.” (adverbial clause of time)

• “Peter brings his sunglasses ***everywhere*** **he goes**.” (adverbial clause of place)

• “I admire you ***because*** **you are an inspiration to many people**.” (adverbial clause of time or purpose)

• “They’ll approve your request ***provided*** **you pay the appropriate amount of money**.” (adverbial clause of condition)

• “She looked excited, ***as if*** **she could jump up and dance at any moment**.” (adverbial clause of comparison or manner)

• “***Although*** **she doesn’t have much money**, Wendy often goes traveling.” (adverbial clause of contrast)

Common modifier mistakes

In simple sentences, it is usually easy to understand what a modifier is modifying. However, when we begin adding more information into longer sentences, we must be careful that we make it clear which elements are modifying which parts of the sentence.

If we place a modifier too far away from the thing it describes, it can become a **misplaced modifier**. In some cases, a modifier may be in the correct position for its intended recipient, but too close to another element, making it look like it is describing the wrong thing; this is known as a **squinting modifier**.

We must also make sure that the thing being modified is explicitly stated in the text, otherwise we might be left with a **dangling modifier**.

Misplaced modifiers

A misplaced modifier can occur when we don't place the modifier close enough to the word that it modifies, making its meaning unclear or incorrect. For example:

• "Burton was driving around the countryside while his friend sang songs **slowly**."

Because of its placement in the above sentence, we would presume that the adverb *slowly* is modifying *sang*. If it is meant to modify *driving*, the adverb should be placed directly before or after the verb it's modifying to eliminate this confusion, as in:

• "Burton was **slowly** *driving* around the countryside while his friend sang songs."

or

• "Burton was *driving* **slowly** around the countryside while his friend sang songs."

Here's another example:

• "The **rusted** woman's bicycle made a horrible screeching noise."

Now the sentence is completely incorrect, because, due to its position, *rusted* is modifying *woman* instead of *bicycle*. The sentence should read:

• "The woman's **rusted** *bicycle* made a horrible screeching noise."

With participle phrases

These types of errors often occur with **participle phrases**. Because they can appear in the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence, it is can be easy to misplace the noun or noun phrase they are modifying. For instance:

• "**Terrified after watching a scary movie**, my father had to comfort my little sister."

In the above sentence, the participle phrase *terrified after watching a scary movie* is supposed to modify *my little sister*. However, since *my father* appears closer to the participle phrase, it seems it is the father who is terrified.

The sentence should be rewritten to correct the misplaced modifier. For example:

• "My father had to comfort *my sister*, **terrified after watching a scary movie**."

or

• "**Terrified after watching a scary movie**, *my sister* had to be comforted by my father."

or

• "*My sister*, **terrified after watching a scary movie**, had to be comforted by my father."

Squinting modifiers

Occasionally we use a modifier in the correct technical position, but its meaning can be misconstrued because of another word that is too close to it. This usually happens with adverbials, as they can appear before or after the words they modify. For example:

• "The way he sings **so often** annoys me."

So often seems like it could be modifying either *sings* or *annoys*, because it's technically in the correct position for both. We should rewrite the sentence to make it more clear what is meant:

• "The way he sings **so often** is annoying to me." (modifies *sings*)

or

• "The way he sings annoys me **so often**." (modifies *annoys*)

Dangling modifiers

A dangling modifier occurs when we don't clearly state the noun that is supposed to be modified by the modifying phrase. These are especially common with **participle phrases**. For example:

• "**Walking down the road**, the birds were singing."

Because the sentence does not state who was walking down the road, is seems that it was *the birds*, which is probably not the intended meaning. The sentence needs to include another noun or pronoun being described by the phrase to correct the dangling modifier. For example:

• "**Walking down the road**, I (or *she, he, Mary, the couple*, etc.) heard the birds singing."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following are **not** classified as modifiers?

a) Particles
b) Adjectives
c) Prepositions
d) Adverbs
e) A & C
f) B & D

2. What are the two main syntactic categories of **adjectives**?

a) Attributive and predicative
b) Compound and Comparative
c) Demonstrative and Interrogative
d) Nominal and Collective

3. A **participle phrase** is what kind of modifier?

a) Adverbial phrase
b) Adjective phrase
c) Adverbial clause
d) Adjective clause

4. What introduces a **relative clause**?

a) A relative pronoun
b) A relative adverb

c) A subordinating conjunction
d) A & B
e) B & C

5. What kind of error results from a modifier that is placed **too far away** from the word(s) it modifies?

a) Misplaced modifier
b) Squinting modifier
c) Dangling modifier

6. What kind of error results from a modifier that is placed **between** two words that it **might** modify?

a) Misplaced modifier
b) Squinting modifier
c) Dangling modifier

Adjuncts

Definition

Adjuncts are parts of a sentence that are used to elaborate on or modify other words or phrases in a sentence. Along with subjects, verbs, objects, and complements, adjuncts are one of the five main components of the structure of clauses.

A distinguishing feature of adjuncts is that their removal from sentences does not alter the grammatical integrity and meaning of the sentence. In other words, adjuncts expand on the word or phrase that they are modifying, but their presence is not needed for a sentence to function.

Nouns, adjectives, and adverbs can all be adjuncts. However, adverbial adjuncts are the most complex, so we will examine those in greater detail.

Adverbial adjuncts

Adjuncts are usually adverbs or adverbial phrases that help modify and enrich the context of verbs in the sentence. For example, consider the following sentence:

• “She walked to the park **slowly**.”

In this sentence, the adjunct is the adverb *slowly*, which modifies the verb *walked*. Without this adjunct, the sentence could function on its own and still be grammatically correct. In this case, the sentence would read:

• “She walked to the park.”

There is nothing wrong with this sentence. The reader just doesn’t know at what speed *she* walked to the park. Here are some other examples of sentences with adverbial adjuncts in them:

• “The soccer team played the game **in the rain**.”

• “The bowling ball rolled **quickly** toward the pins.”

• “The man walks by the river **often**.”

In all of these sentences, the adjunct can also be removed without the sentence losing meaning or grammatical correctness.

Types of modification

Adjuncts can be used to modify words in the sentence in a variety of different ways. Typically, when adjuncts are used in a sentence, they expand on the frequency, place, time, degree, reason, or manner of the word or phrase they are modifying. Here are examples of adjuncts being used to modify all of these things:

Frequency

• “**Every day**, the boy played basketball with his friend.”

• “The farmer plowed his field **once a week**.”

Place

• “The tourists went to see the sights **around the city**.”

• “The lakes are beautiful **in North Carolina**.”

Time

• “**At 5:00 PM**, the dog went to see if there was food in his bowl.”

• “The game began **right after school**.”

Degree

• “He jumped **as high as he could**.”

• “**As tall as he was**, he still could not reach the top cabinet.”

Reason

• “The plants grew tall **because they received a lot of sunshine**.”

• “She was good at math **because she practiced a lot**.”

Manner

• “The gazelle ran **gracefully over the field**.”

• “The river flowed **swiftly**.”

Types of adjunct phrases

As we can see in the examples above, both words and phrases can function as adjuncts, and there are several different types of phrases that can be used. Prepositional phrases, noun phrases, and adverb phrases can all be used as adverbial adjuncts.

Here are examples of each type of phrase being used as an adverbial adjunct:

Prepositional phrase

• “The group went swimming **at the beach.**”

Adverb phrase

• “The surfer looked calm, **although the wave looked huge.**”

Noun phrase

• “The grandfather will give his grandson his birthday present **next month.**”

Position of adjuncts

Adjuncts can occur in different sections of the clause; where they are positioned depends on the structure of the sentence. Sometimes it works better to put them

into the initial position, sometimes the middle, and sometimes the final. For example, here are some sentences with adjuncts in different positions:

• “We arrived **at noon**.” (final position)

• “The salmon **quickly** swam.” (middle position)

• “**In the middle of the meadow**, there was a patch of daisies.” (initial position)

Sentences can also have more than one adjunct appearing in different parts of a clause. For example:

• “**At the playground**, the children ran **quickly**.”

In this sentence, both *at the playground*, and *quickly* are adjuncts. Both of these adjuncts modify the clause *the children ran*.

Misplaced modifiers

Another important note about adjuncts is that if they are placed too far away from the word or phrase they are modifying, or too near to another word or phrase, there can sometimes be confusion about what they are modifying. These are known as **misplaced modifiers**. For example, consider this sentence:

• “Reading books **frequently** improves intelligence.”

In this sentence, it is difficult to tell if *frequently* is modifying *reading books* or *improving intelligence*. Placing the adjunct in a better position will improve the clarity of the sentence. For example:

• “**Frequently** reading books improves intelligence.”

Noun Adjuncts and Adjectival Adjuncts

Adjuncts can also be nouns or adjectives. These occur so commonly, though, that they rarely need to be identified. Nevertheless, let’s look at what constitutes noun adjuncts and adjectival adjuncts.

Noun Adjuncts

Noun adjuncts are nouns that are used to modify other nouns. The resulting phrase is called a **compound noun**. For example:

• “The boy played with his **toy** soldier.”

In this sentence, *toy* is the noun adjunct, and it modifies the word *soldier*, creating the compound noun *toy soldier*. The meaning of the sentence would change if we left out *toy*, but the sentence would remain grammatically correct.

Noun adjuncts can also create single-word compound nouns, as in *policeman*, where the word *police* modifies the word *man*.

Adjectival Adjuncts

Adjectival adjuncts are just adjectives that come immediately before the noun they describe. They are more commonly referred to as **attributive adjectives**. They too can be removed without compromising grammatical correctness. Here is an example of an adjectival adjunct:

• "The **white** cat climbed onto the table."

In this sentence, *white* is the adjectival adjunct, and it modifies the word *cat*. Again, leaving it out does not affect the grammar of the sentence. However, if we said, "The cat that is **white** climbed onto the table," the adjective is no longer an adjunct because it is integral to the grammar of the sentence.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is the adverbial adjunct in this sentence?
"The tall man smiled enthusiastically."

a) tall
b) the
b) enthusiastically
d) smiled

2. Which of the following words is the adverbial adjunct in this sentence?
"The two people agreed to meet at the end of the day."

a) agreed
b) two people
c) to meet
d) at the end of the day

3. Which of the following adjuncts correlates to place?

a) in the meadow

b) before noon
c) beautifully
d) often

4. Which of the following adjuncts correlates to manner?
a) at the mall
b) steadily
c) in three days
d) once a week

5. Which of the following adjuncts is a prepositional phrase?
a) slowly
b) quickly
c) at the beach
d) beautifully

6. Where do noun and adjectival adjuncts appear in a sentence?
a) Immediately before the noun they describe
b) Immediately after the noun they describe
c) Before a preposition
d) At the end of a clause

Phrases

Definition

Grammatical **phrases** are groups of two or more words that work together to perform a single grammatical function in a sentence. Unlike **clauses**, phrases do **not** contain both a subject and a predicate (although they sometimes function as one or the other).

Phrases from the parts of speech

Most of the **parts of speech** can be made into phrases by adding information that is directly associated with them.

Below, we'll look at a breakdown of each type of phrase that is formed from a part of speech, including some examples of the various types of phrases and how

each functions in a sentence. To learn more, go to the sections that discuss each type of phrase.

Noun Phrases

A **noun phrase** consists of a noun plus any determiners or modifiers directly related to it. Noun phrases always have the grammatical function of nouns in a sentence.

Noun phrase examples	How they appear in a sentence
• **a book** — determiner *a* + noun *book*	• "I found **a book** I'd like to read."
• **her sweetly smiling child** — determiner *her* + adverb *sweetly* + adjective (present participle) *smiling* + noun *child*	• "She gazed lovingly at **her sweetly smiling child**."
• **the red car** — determiner *the* + adjective *red* + noun *car*	• "**The red car** belongs to me."

Verb Phrases

A **verb phrase** can either be made up of an auxiliary verb and its main verb, ***or*** a verb plus any modifiers, objects, or complements.* Verb phrases are used to form perfect or continuous verb **tenses**, to express **modality**, or as part (or all) of **the predicate**.

Verb phrase examples	How they appear in a sentence
• **am running** — auxiliary verb *am* + present participle *running*	• "I **am running** late." (forms the **present continuous tense**)
• **have completed** — auxiliary verb *have* + past participle *completed*	• "They **have completed** work on the building." (forms the **present perfect tense**)
• **quickly ran to the bus** — adverb *quickly* + verb *ran* + prepositional	• "She **quickly ran to the bus**."

phrase *to the bus*	(forms the predicate)
• **plays the trombone** — verb *plays* + object *the trombone*	• “My brother **plays the trombone**.” (forms the predicate)

*Notes on verb phrases

There are two different definitions of what constitutes a **verb phrase**.

In traditional grammar, a verb phrase is made up of an **auxiliary verb** plus the main verb(s) that follow it. For example:

• “We **were running** late.”

• “I **have been learning** Arabic.”

• “They **will call** you tomorrow.”

More modern theories of grammar, however, define verb phrases as being any main verb (or combination of main and auxiliary verbs) in a clause plus its constituent parts—that is, any **modifiers** or **objects** that complete its meaning. These verb phrases are, according to this definition, what forms (or adds to) **the predicate** of a sentence. For example:

• “My brother **is running late for school again**.”

• “Our teacher **looks tired**; she **must have been up late last night**.”

This guide takes a more all-inclusive approach for the term **verb phrase**. In a situation in which we are analyzing everything that belongs to a certain verb, it will be referred to as a verb phrase. Likewise, when we’re describing the use of auxiliary verbs to create different verb tenses or **modal constructions**, the overall verb that is constructed may also be called a verb phrase.

Adjective Phrases

An **adjective phrase** is made up of an adjective along with any determiners, modifiers, or **adjective complements** that modify or complete the adjective’s meaning. The entire phrase functions as an adjective in a sentence, modifying a noun.

Adjective phrase examples	How they appear in a sentence

• **my favorite** — determiner *my* + adjective *favorite*	• “I brought **my favorite** jacket to school.”
• **wonderfully talented** — adverb *wonderfully* + adjective *talented*	• “The singer was **wonderfully talented**.”
• **alone in the world** — adjective *alone* + adjective complement *in the world*	• “She felt **alone in the world**.”

Adverbial Phrases

An **adverbial phrase** may consist of an adverb plus any determiners and supplemental information, or an adverb plus an **adverb of degree**, or an adverbial prepositional phrase. (Prepositional phrases are so often adverbial that they are commonly included in definitions of adverbial phrases.)

Adverbial phrase examples	How they appear in a sentence
• **once a week** — adverb *once* + noun phrase *a week*	• “My dad swims **once a week**.”
• **too quickly** — intensifier *too* + adverb *quickly*	• “Don't run **too quickly**!”
• **down the street** — adverbial prepositional phrase	• “We walked **down the street**.”

Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases consist of a preposition and its **object**. They most commonly function as adverbs, but they can also be adjectival.

Prepositional phrase examples	How they appear in a sentence
• **on the wall** — preposition *on* + object *the wall*	• “We hung the painting **on the wall**.” (adverbial prepositional phrase)

• **in the driveway** — preposition *in* + object *the driveway*	• “The car **in the driveway** is my dad’s.” (adjectival prepositional phrase)

Gerund Phrases

A **gerund phrase** is formed when a gerund (the “-ing” form of a verb used as a noun) is accompanied by any modifiers and/or objects. The entire phrase functions as a noun, meaning it can be the subject of a clause or an object of a verb or preposition.

Gerund phrase examples	How they appear in a sentence
• **swimming every day** — gerund *swimming* + adverbial phrase *every day*	• “**Swimming every day** is good for your health.”
• **reading books in the dark** — gerund *reading* + object *books* + adverbial prepositional phrase *in the dark*	• “I wouldn't recommend **reading books in the dark**.”

Infinitive Phrases

Infinitive phrases are composed of the infinitive of a verb (the base form + the particle *to*) along with any objects or modifiers associated with it. Infinitives and infinitive phrases can function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs in a sentence.

Infinitive phrase examples	How they appear in a sentence
• **to help one another** — infinitive *to help* + object *one another*	• “We must all try **to help one another**.” (functions as a noun, the direct object of *try*)
• **to stop for today** — infinitive *to stop* + adverbial prepositional phrase *for today*	• “This is a good place **to stop for today**.” (functions as an adjective, modifying the noun *place*)
• **to send my brother a letter** — infinitive *to send* + indirect object	• “I'm going to the post office **to send my brother a letter**.” (functions as an

my brother + direct object *a letter*	adverb, modifying the verb *going*)

Participle Phrases

Like gerunds and infinitives, **participles** are formed from verbs, so **participle phrases** are created when participles are accompanied by any modifiers or objects. Past and present participles (without modifiers or objects) can be used to create different verb tenses, but they can also function as adjectives. **Participle phrases**, however, can only function as adjectives in a sentence.

Participle phrase examples	How they appear in a sentence
• **destroyed in the accident** — past participle *destroyed* + adverbial prepositional phrase *in the accident*	• "My car, **destroyed in the accident**, was taken away by the tow truck."
• **breaking the rules** — present participle *breaking* + object *the rules*	• "Participants **breaking the rules** will be removed from the competition."

Phrases within phrases

As you might have noticed in the examples above, there are many instances in which one type of phrase has one or more other phrases within it. Take the following sentence, for example:

• "The bright orange cat lives in the shed in the garden."

There are actually seven phrases in this sentence. The two primary phrases are the noun phrase *the bright orange cat* (the subject) and the verb phrase *lives in the shed in the garden* (the predicate), and each of these phrases contains one or more smaller phrases. Let's look at a breakdown below:

	The Subject			The Predicate
Contains the noun phrase:	***The bright orange cat***		Contains the verb phrase:	***lives in the shed in the garden***

Contains the adjective phrase:	***The bright orange*** (modifies the noun *cat*)		Contains the adverbial prepositional phrase:	***in the shed in the garden*** (modifies the verb *lives*)
			Contains the noun phrase:	***the shed in the garden*** (object of the preposition *in*)
			Contains the adjectival prepositional phrase:	***in the garden*** (modifies the noun *shed*)
			Contains the noun phrase:	***the garden*** (object of the second preposition *in*)

When we are trying to examine all the parts of an individual sentence, it's important to be able to recognize when one part is (or might be) made up of several other smaller elements.

Absolute Phrases and Appositive Phrases

There are two other types of phrases that we have not looked at yet—**absolute phrases** and **appositive phrases**. These are created from specific parts of speech and have specific functions in a sentence. We'll briefly look at both below. You can continue on to their individual sections to learn more.

Absolute phrases

An **absolute phrase** or **absolute construction** is a grammatically independent group of words that modify or add information to the entire sentence. It is usually made up of a noun or pronoun and a participle, along with any modifiers or objects of the participle.

Absolute phrases usually appear at the beginning or end of a sentence to add descriptive information or provide a final comment on the sentence as a whole.

They can also appear in the middle of the sentence to emphasize the additional information. They are always set apart from the rest of the sentence by **commas** or **dashes**.

For example:

• "**The students having left early**, I decided to catch up on some grading."

• "I hope to get into Harvard next year—**God willing**."

• "The teacher, **her students having left early**, decided to catch up on some grading."

Appositive Phrases

An **appositive phrase** is a noun phrase that serves to describe or rename another noun that appears directly before it in a sentence. Appositive phrases are usually (but not always) **non-restrictive**, meaning they provide information that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, and are separated from the rest of the sentence by one or two commas.

For example:

• "The office, **an old Georgian building**, badly needed repairs."

• "Janet Smith, **a former student of mine**, is joining the faculty next spring."

• "Just meet me at my car, **the old station wagon parked across the street**."

Other appositives

Note that an appositive can also be a **proper noun** that names or identifies a **common noun**. An appositive made up of a proper noun that contains more than one word is not considered an appositive phrase, but rather a single noun construction. For example:

• "My brother **Michael** lives in New York."

• "America's first president, **George Washington**, was born in the colony of Virginia."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following types of phrases can function as a **noun** in a sentence?

a) Noun phrases

b) Infinitive phrases
c) Gerund phrases
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

2. Which of the following can be added to an adjective to create an **adjective phrase**?

a) A noun
b) An adverb
c) A determiner
d) A & B
e) B & C

3. Identify the type of phrase (in **bold**) in the following sentence:
"The bird **flying above us** landed on the tree."

a) Participle phrase
b) Infinitive phrase
c) Gerund phrase
d) Verb phrase

4. What does an **absolute phrase** modify?

a) A noun
b) A clause
c) A sentence
d) A phrase

5. What does an **appositive phrase** modify?

a) A noun
b) A clause
c) A sentence
d) A phrase

Noun Phrases

Definition

Noun phrases are groups of two or more words within a sentence that function grammatically as nouns. They consist of a noun and other words that modify the noun. Some grammarians also consider a single-word noun to be a noun phrase, while more traditional grammars hold that a phrase must be made up of two or more words. In this guide, we define a phrase as being made up of more than one word.

Noun phrases can also have pronouns as their structural base, which we will examine later in this section.

Identifying noun phrases

Noun phrases allow groups of words to function as a noun in the sentence. In this way, nouns can be elaborated upon or modified to add further depth to the sentence without losing their structural role.

The following sentence contains a basic, single-word noun, without any modifiers:

• “Whales swim.”

In this sentence, the word “whales” functions alone as the noun. Because there are no modifiers to create a noun phrase, the reader receives no additional information about “whales.”

The following sentence contains a noun phrase *with* modifiers:

• “He brought *the shovel with the blue handle*.”

In this sentence, “the shovel with the blue handle” is a noun phrase. It collectively acts as a noun while providing modifying words for the head noun, “shovel.” The modifiers are “the” and “with the blue handle.”

Here are some other examples of sentences with noun phrases marked in italics (the primary nouns being modified are underlined):

• “*The tall mountain* was very large.”

• “*The highway at rush hour* can be frantic.”

• “*The oranges that fell from the orange tree* are delicious.”

A good way to test whether or not a phrase is a noun phrase is to replace the phrase with a pronoun and see if the sentence is still grammatically correct. For example, in all three examples provided above, the noun phrase can be successfully replaced with a pronoun:

• “*It* was very large.”

• “*It* can be frantic.”

• “*They* are delicious.”

Noun phrases of varying length

Noun phrases can be as short as two words, or they can be longer and have many words; the number of words in a phrase does not affect its status as a noun phrase, so long as it functions as a noun in the sentence. For example, the following sentences contain one very short noun phrase, and one very long noun phrase:

• “*The man* sat down.”

• “*The forty-five year old man with brown hair and a black shirt* sat down.”

Despite their difference in length, both phrases in italics function as nouns.

Noun phrases within noun phrases

You may have noticed that many of the sentences above contain *multiple* noun phrases. It is very common for a smaller noun phrase to occur within a larger one, acting as part of the modifying information. For instance, the second sentence above actually has **three** noun phrases, two of which are contained within the longer one. Let’s look at the sentence again, this time underlining each noun being modified and putting the smaller phrases in bold.

• “*The forty-five year old <u>man</u> with **brown <u>hair</u>** and **a black <u>shirt</u>*** sat down.”

Here are some more examples of sentences with noun phrases inside of other noun phrases:

• “They passed *an orange <u>bus</u> driven by **a jolly old <u>man</u>** wearing **a lady’s <u>wig</u>*** on the highway.”

• “Please hand me *the <u>book</u> with the **torn <u>cover</u>***.”

Modifiers

Position of modifiers

Sometimes the words that modify the noun come before the noun in the phrase, and sometimes they come after. For example, in the following sentence, the modifiers come before the noun:

• “Dogs often like to chase ***high-flying*** *Frisbees*.”

In this next sentence, the modifiers come after the noun:

• “*Trucks* ***with red stripes and large wheels*** came riding into town.”

The position of modifiers in a noun phrase depends on what *type* of modifier is being used to describe the noun.

Types of modifiers

There are many different types of modifiers that can be used in noun phrases to modify the noun in the phrase. Among these modifiers are *adjectives, articles, participles, possessive nouns, possessive pronouns, determiners, relative clauses, infinitives, participle phrases, prepositional phrases,* and *compound nouns**.

Adjectives, articles, participles, possessive nouns, determiners, possessive pronouns, and compound nouns tend to appear before the noun in a noun phrase. Relative clauses, infinitives, participle phrases, prepositional phrases, and compound phrases tend to appear after the noun in noun phrases.

(*Modifiers are usually considered to be adjectives, adverbs, or other grammatical elements that function as one or the other. For the sake of conciseness in this section, however, we’ll be including items that are not usually classed as modifiers—such as articles and determiners—but still serve to give more meaning to the noun in a noun phrase.)

Here are examples of each type of modifier in a sentence with a noun phrase:

Adjectives

Adjectives modify the noun by expressing a certain quality of the noun:

• “***Bright*** *stars* shine in the sky.”

• “***Big*** *cities* are loud.”

Articles

Articles modify the noun by revealing if the noun is definite or indefinite:

• “***The*** *dog* went to ***the*** *park*.”

• “***A*** *boy* ate ***an*** *apple*.”

Determiners

Determiners are words that reveal the amount of a noun in a sentence:

• “There are ***five*** *bananas*.”

• “***Several*** *iguanas* were on the tree.”

Participles

Participles can be used to directly modify the noun by showing a past or present action that the noun is or was involved in doing:

• “*The* ***galloping*** *gazelle* jumped high.

• “***Boiled*** *water* is very hot.”

Possessive Nouns

Possessive nouns modify the noun by explaining that the noun belongs to someone, something, or some group:

• “*The* ***mail man's*** *truck* was parked.”

• “*The* ***woman's*** *purse* was blue.”

Possessive Determiners

Possessive determiners also indicate possession. However, they indicate possession by using a pronoun instead of a noun:

• “***His*** *wife* brought him ***his*** *forgotten briefcase*.”

• “***Her*** *shoe* was untied.”

Compound Nouns

Compound nouns are created by modifying the head noun with a **noun adjunct** (a word that works together with the noun to give it a different meaning). (There are different kinds of **adjuncts**, which are covered in another section).

Compound nouns can either be one word, two words, or two words joined by a hyphen. In every case, the noun adjunct adds to or changes the meaning of the head noun. The following sentences show an example of each type of compound noun:

• “He ran to the ***dog****house*.”

• “The ***bus*** *station* was busy.”

• “His ***ex****-wife* called him yesterday.”

Relative Clauses

Relative clauses (also known as **adjective clauses** express a quality of the noun just like adjectives do. However, adjective clauses contain a subject and a verb:

• “*The car* ***that drove up the street*** turned left.”

• “*The light* ***that was left on*** was very bright.”

Infinitives

Infinitives modify the noun by providing a verb phrase that helps elaborate on and provide clarification of the noun:

• “He was *the person* ***to contact*** *if you wanted pastries*.”

• “She was *the one* ***to ask***.”

Participle Phrases

Participle phrases modify the noun by providing a group of words with a present or past participle that works like an adjective to modify the noun:

• “*The man* ***waving his hand for a taxi*** was being ignored.”

• “*The geese* ***flying overhead*** formed a V shape.”

Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases are used in noun phrases to provide unique, distinguishing, or specifying information about the noun being modified:

• “*The train* ***at the station*** had twenty-seven cars.”

• “*The snow* ***on the field*** was white.”

• “*A cat* ***with white whiskers*** just walked by.”

Noun Phrases with Pronoun Bases

Although noun phrases primarily have nouns as the base word that is being modified, sometimes these base words can also be pronouns. For example, the following sentences have pronoun base words as opposed to noun base words:

• “***He*** *who walks by the bay at night* may see the moon.”

• “***Someone*** *new* slowly approached the group.”

Nouns phrases as subjects, objects, and complements

Noun phrases can be used in sentences as a subject, object, or complement. The individual sentence will determine how the noun phrase is used. Here are some examples of noun phrases being used as subjects, objects, and complements.

Subject

The subject of a sentence is the noun or noun phrase that is doing the action of the verb:

• “**The green bowling ball** rolled down the lane.”

Object

Objects are the noun or noun phrase that receives the action of the verb. They are the things that something happens to, as opposed to the things causing the action:

• “He rolled **the green bowling ball** down the lane.”

Complement

Complements are words or phrases that are necessary to make the sentence’s subject or predicate complete. Subject complements are words that follow a linking verb and describe the subject of the sentence. Object complements are words that modify the direct or indirect object of the verb. Here are examples of both:

Subject Complement

• “He was **a man who owned green bowling balls**.” (The noun phrase follows the linking verb *was* and modifies the subject *he*.)

Object Complement

• “He painted the bowling ball **a greenish color**.” (The noun phrase follows and modifies the direct object *bowling ball*.)

• “The club elected the man **their president**.” (The noun phrase follows and modifies the direct object *the man*.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following word or words is the noun phrase in this sentence?
“The new shoe laces would be delivered soon.”

a) delivered soon
b) would
c) The new shoe laces
d) be

2. The following sentence contains which type of noun phrase?
“Full moons shine brightly.”

a) article
b) infinitive
c) participle
d) adjective

3. How many noun phrases are there in the following sentence?
“The old man rode his bicycle.”

a) 2
b) 1
c) 3
d) 0

4. Which of the following is **not** a noun phrase?

a) The rock
b) slowly
c) his house
d) the man who saw the sign

5. Which of the following is a noun phrase with an article modifier?

a) blue hat
b) dog that chased cats
c) the car

d) tall building

Adjective Phrases

Definition

An **adjective phrase** is an adjective and any additional information linked to it that work together to describe a noun or pronoun in a sentence. The adjective around which an adjective phrase is formed is known as the **head word** of the phrase.

Some grammar guides consider an adjective functioning by itself to be an adjective phrase, but, in this guide, when we refer to a phrase, we always mean a group of two or more words.

There is also a tendency to combine the terms **adjective phrase** and **adjectival phrase** into a single category, but they are not quite the same. We'll look at this distinction more closely later on in this section.

Attributive vs. Predicative

Adjective phrases can either be **attributive** or **predicative**.

Attributive adjectives occur immediately before or after the noun they modify, as in:

• "You have **a very beautiful** voice."

Predicative adjectives, on the other hand, appear after a **linking verb** to describe the subject of the clause. For example:

• "Your voice is **very beautiful**."

Forming adjective phrases

Any word or words that work in conjunction with an adjective constitute part of an adjective phrase. These are usually made up of **determiners** or **adverbs**. **Prepositional phrases**, **infinitives**, and **noun clauses** can also be used as **adjective complements** to create adjective phrases.

As you will notice in some of examples below, we can also use a combination of different elements together to create more complex adjective phrases.

Determiners

Determiners are used to introduce a noun or noun phrase. There are several classes of determiners: **articles**, **demonstrative determiners**, **possessive determiners**, **interrogative determiners**, **distributive determiners**, **pre-determiners**, **quantifiers**, and **numbers**.

Determiners are able to stand alone to introduce a noun, but when they function with an adjective, they create an adjective phrase. For example:

• "I would like **a large** *soda*, please." (The article *a* forms an adjective phrase with the head word *large* to describe the noun *soda*.)

• "**This green** *pen* belongs to me." (The demonstrative determiner *this* forms an adjective phrase with the head word *green* to describe the noun *pen*.)

• "I've lost **my favorite** *backpack*." (The possessive determiner *my* forms an adjective phrase with the head word *favorite* to describe the noun *backpack*.)

• "**Whose black** *laptop* is this?" (The interrogative determiner *whose* forms an adjective phrase with the head word *black* to describe the noun *laptop*.)

• "The camp gives out welcome packs to **each new** *arrival*." (The distributive determiner *each* forms an adjective phrase with the head word *new* to describe the noun *arrival*.)

• "She's **such a sweet** *girl*." (The pre-determiner *such* forms an adjective phrase with the article *a* and the head word *sweet* to describe the noun *girl*.)

• "**Many vintage** *cars* were parked outside the diner." (The quantifier *many* forms an adjective phrase with the head word *vintage* to describe the noun *cars*.)

• "They own **three gigantic** *yachts*." (The number *three* forms an adjective phrase with the head word *gigantic* to describe the noun *yachts*.)

Adverbs

Adverbs modify adjectives, verbs, and other adverbs. When an adverb is used to modify an adjective, the two work together as an adjective phrase to modify a noun or pronoun. If a **determiner** appears before the adverb, it is also considered part of the adjective phrase.

Adverbs often appear directly before the adjective they modify. For example:

• "He is **a very good** *swimmer*."
Very modifies the adjective *good*; together they modify *swimmer*.

• “**The brightly lit** *room* hurt my eyes.”
Brightly modifies the past participle *lit* (which functions as an adjective); together they modify the noun *room*.

• “*She* is **wonderfully talented**.”
Wonderfully modifies the adjective *talented*; together they modify the pronoun *she*.

However, we can sometimes use adverbs directly after an adjective. This can serve to place emphasis on the relationship between the adjective and the adverb. For example:

• “The *helicopters* are **controlled remotely**.”

In this sentence, *remotely* modifies the past participle *controlled* (which functions as an adjective); together they modify the noun *helicopters*. Because *remotely* appears after *controlled*, it puts extra emphasis on the way in which the helicopters are controlled.

We can see how this emphasis works if we reword the sentence:

• “The *helicopters* are **remotely controlled**.”

The sentence doesn’t lose any literal meaning, but there is now slightly less emphasis on the relationship between *remotely* and *controlled*.

Adjective Complements

An **adjective complement** (also called an **adjective phrase complement**) is a phrase or clause that provides information necessary to complete an adjective phrase’s meaning.

They are most often used with **predicative adjectives** (adjectives that follow **linking verbs** to describe the subject of the clause) and can be **prepositional phrases**, **infinitive phrases**, and **noun clauses**. Sometimes these adjectives are modified by adverbs, which also form part of the full adjective phrase.

Prepositional Phrases

• “I am **perfectly content *on my own***.” (*On my own* is the complement of the adjective *content*, which is modified by the adverb *perfectly*.)

• “He felt **alone *in the world***.” (*In the world* is the complement of the adjective *alone*.)

• “They seem **a little concerned *about the direction we’re taking***.” (*About the*

direction we're taking is the complement of the adjective *concerned*, which is modified by adverbial phrase *a little*.)

Prepositional phrases can also be used with adjectives (often past participles) that are attributive but appear after the noun, as in:

• "People **wearied *by travel*** often stop here to rest."

• "I will not allow a dog **covered *in mud*** into my clean house."

Infinitives

• "I'm **very happy *to know you***!" (*To know you* is the complement of the adjective *happy*, which is modified by adverb *very*.)

• "We're **glad *to be of service***." (*To be of service* is the complement of the adjective *glad*.)

• "They felt **relieved *to return home***." (*To return home* is the complement of the adjective *relieved*.)

Noun Clauses

• "We were **a little curious *why they decided to leave***." (*Why they decided to leave* is the complement of the adjective *curious*, which is modified by adverbial phrase *a little*.)

• "I'm **thrilled *that you are coming to visit***!" (*That you are coming to visit* is the complement of the adjective *thrilled*.)

• "It's **so wonderful *what he does for charity***." (*What he does for charity* is the complement of the adjective *wonderful*, which is modified by the adverb *so*.)

• "They're **somewhat unsure *whether this is the right decision***." (*Whether this is the right decision* is the complement of the adjective *unsure*, which is modified by the adverb *somewhat*.)

Adjective Phrases vs. Adjectival Phrases

The terms **adjective phrase** and **adjectival phrase** are often treated as synonymous terms; however, while they are very similar, they are in fact two different things.

A true adjective phrase contains an adjective as a head word, while an **adjectival**

phrase does not have to—it is any phrase that is functioning as an adjective in a sentence, whether or not it contains an adjective as a head word. Therefore, an adjective phrase can be considered a specific kind of adjectival phrase.

Prepositional phrases, for instance, often function independently as adjectives in a sentence, in which case they follow the noun they are describing. For example:

• "The car **on the lawn** belongs to my brother."

• "Pass me the cup **with the handle**."

• "He wrote a book **about modern economics**."

All three of these examples are **adjectival phrases**—they do not have adjectives as head words. The prepositional phrase in the third example does contain the adjective *modern*, but it is modifying the noun *economics* (the object of the preposition *about*), **not** the noun *book*.

Relative clauses (also known as **adjective clauses**) are also kinds of adjectival phrases. They are introduced by **relative pronouns** and modify a noun in a sentence. For example:

• "The man **whom I met in the bank** was on the same bus as me tonight."

• "It's the nicest thing **that I own**."

• "The song, **which he wrote for his wife**, is beautiful."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following can be used to form an adjective phrase?

a) Determiners
b) Adverbs
c) Infinitives
d) Noun clauses
e) A & B
f) C & D
g) All of the above

2. True or False: An adjective phrase can only be **attributive**.

a) True
b) False

3. Identify what is used to create the adjective phrase (in **bold**) in the following sentence:
"A man **dressed in fine silk** walked through the doors."

a) Adverb
b) Prepositional phrase
c) Infinitive phrase
d) Noun clause

4. Which of the following does an **adjective phrase** require that an **adjectival phrase** does not?

a) A noun as a head word
b) An adjective as a head word
c) A noun to modify
d) An adjective complement

Adverbial Phrases

Definition

An **adverbial phrase** (also known as an **adverb phrase**) is group of words that functions as an adverb in a sentence. That is, it modifies a verb, adjective, adverb, clause, or the sentence as a whole. Adverbial phrases often feature an adverb (known as the head word) being modified by other elements, but not always.

Here are some examples of adverbial phrases:

- very quickly
- in a while
- just a bit
- surprisingly well
- at the fairground
- slightly close
- as soon as possible

Here are some examples of adverb phrases being used in sentences:

• "Shelia rode her bike **very hastily** so she could get home sooner."

• "The farmers worked **like a single unit**."

• “The surf at the beach was coming in **extremely quickly**.”

• “**After they woke up**, they packed up their things and then went on a hike.”

• “He read the restaurant's menu **rather slowly**.”

As you can see, different types of word groups can be used as adverbial phrases.

Types of Adverbial Phrases

Adverbs with mitigators and intensifiers

Adverbial phrases are commonly formed when an adverb’s intensity is being modified by another adverb. These modifying adverbs are known as **mitigators**, which decrease the intensity of the main adverb, and **intensifiers**, which increase its intensity. For example:

• “The kicker is running ***somewhat*** **slowly** back to the bench. He might be injured.” (mitigator)

• “She performed ***very*** **well** on her exam.” (intensifier)

Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases are often used adverbially, though they can also function as adjectives. If the phrase is modifying an adjective, verb, or adverb, it is an adverbial phrase. If it is modifying a noun or a pronoun, it is an **adjectival phrase**.

We’ll look briefly at both uses so the difference is clear.

Adverbial prepositional phrases

• “We were *playing* Frisbee **at the park**.”

In this sentence, the prepositional phrase *at the park* is an adverbial phrase, because it is modifying the verb *playing*.

• “All of the employees were *filled* **with excitement** because they learned that they might get a raise.”

The prepositional phrase *with excitement* modifies the adjective *filled* in this sentence. Therefore it is an adverbial phrase.

Adjectival prepositional phrase

• “The *cat* **on the window sill** was orange and had some white spots.”

• “All the *people* **on the boardwalk** were wearing sunglasses.”

In these examples, the prepositional phrases modify the nouns *cat* and *people*—they are functioning as adjectives and **not** adverbs.

Infinitive phrases

We can also use **infinitives** or **infinitive phrases** as adverbs in a sentence.

Infinitive phrases are groups of words that begin with a verb in the infinitive form (the base form of the verb preceded by the particle *to*) and typically include an object and/or modifiers.

Similar to prepositional phrases, infinitive phrases can act as adverbial phrases if they modify a verb, adverb, or adjective. However, infinitives can also act as noun phrases and adjectival phrases.

Adverbial infinitive phrases

• “The man *brought* his fishing gear **to catch fish in the river**.”

In this sentence, the infinitive phrase *to catch fish in the river* modifies the verb *brought*, so it is functioning adverbially.

• “Patricia *went* to the mountains **to go for a hike**.”

Here, the infinitive phrase *to go for a hike* modifies the verb *went*, so it is also an adverbial phrase.

Adjectival infinitive phrases

• “One of the best *things* **to do if you get lost** is to call for help.”

In this sentence, the infinitive phrase *to do if you get lost* modifies the noun *things*. Since it is modifying a noun, it is an adjectival phrase.

Infinitive noun phrases

• “I like **to go on a walk a couple times a week**.”

Here, the infinitive phrase *to go on a walk a couple times a week* is the **object** of

the verb *like*, so it is acting as a noun.

Purpose of use

Adverbial phrases typically give descriptions of time, location, manner, or reason. They serve to broaden the meaning of the sentence and enhance the context of the verb, adjective, or adverb that they describe.

Time

• "The player *made* the shot **just before the buzzer**."

The adverbial phrase *just before the buzzer* is a description of a time that modifies the verb *made*. It lets you know exactly when the player made the shot.

• "The sun *set* **at around 7:30 PM**."

Here, the adverbial phrase *at around 7:30 PM* describes the time that the sun *set*. Because the phrase uses the compound preposition *at around*, rather than simply *at*, it implies a level of ambiguity about the exact time that the sun set. Subtleties like this help to create descriptions that are more nuanced and rich with meaning.

Location or direction

• "Stuart *ran* five miles **around the track**."

Around the track is an adverbial phrase that establishes a location and direction for the verb *ran*.

• "The large wind turbines *stood* **on top of the hill**."

In this sentence, the adverbial phrase *on top of the hill* tells where the wind turbines *stood*.

Manner

• "The leopard *climbed* the tree **quite gracefully**."

Here, *quite gracefully* describes the manner in which the leopard *climbed* the tree.

• "The figure skater *leapt* **in a beautiful arc**."

The adverbial phrase *in a beautiful arc* describes how the figure skater *leapt*.

Reason or purpose

• “The woman *went* to the store **to get some lettuce**.”

In this sentence, the infinitive adverbial phrase *to get some lettuce* explains the reason why the woman *went* to the store.

• “The hockey team *prepared* **for the championship match**.”

The adverbial prepositional phrase *for the championship match* lets you know the purpose for the team’s preparation.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is an adverbial phrase?

a) quite lazy
b) the great big house
b) quite enthusiastically
d) meander slowly

2. Identify the adverbial phrase in the following sentence.
“Sally threw the football to her friend.”

a) threw the football
b) Sally threw
c) to her friend
d) none of the above

3. Which of the following parts of speech do adverbial phrases **never** modify?

a) Nouns
b) Verbs
c) Adjectives
d) Adverbs

4. Identify the type of adverbial phrase used in the following sentence.
“The group worked late to get the job done early.”

a) Intensifier
b) Infinitive phrase
c) Prepositional phrase

d) Mitigator
e) None of the above

5. Which of the following do adverbial phrases typically **not** describe?

a) Reason or purpose
b) Time
c) Location or direction
d) Possession

Participle Phrases

Definition

Participles are words formed from verbs that can function as adjectives, as gerunds, or to form the **continuous** and **perfect** tenses of verbs. **Past participles** are often (but not always) formed by adding "-d" or "-ed" to the end of the verb, while **present participles** are always formed by adding "-ing" to the end.

When they function as adjectives, participles can form **participle phrases** (sometimes known as **participle clauses**) with any information that modifies or complements them. Because they function as adjectives, participle phrases modify nouns, **noun phrases**, or pronouns in a sentence.

Using participle phrases

We can form phrases using present, past, perfect, and passive perfect participles —each one changes the way the noun is modified. Where they appear in a sentence also impacts the sentence's meaning, as well as the way in which they're punctuated.

Present participle phrases

If we use the present participle in a phrase, we give the phrase an **active** meaning. In other words, the noun being modified is the **agent** of the action expressed by the present participle. For example:

• "**Singing in the shower**, I was oblivious to the doorbell ringing." (*I* was singing.)

• "James, **hiding under the bed**, was completely silent." (*James* was hiding.)

Past participle phrases

If we use the past participle to form an adjectival phrase, the noun being modified is either given a passive role in the action, or else is being described. For example:

• "My car, **destroyed in the accident**, was taken away by the mechanics."

• "My sister, **exhausted after a long day's work**, fell asleep on the sofa."

In the first example, the noun phrase *my car* is not the agent of the action, but is being **acted upon**; it has been *destroyed* by another driver, and so it has a passive role. In the second example, *my sister* is also not the agent of the verb *exhaust*. Instead, *exhausted* is used to describe how she feels.

Perfect participle phrases

When we want to emphasize that one event happened before another, we can use the structure *having + past participle*—this is sometimes known as the **perfect participle**. Perfect participle phrases, like the present participle, designate that the noun being modified is the **agent** of the participle's action. For example:

• "***Having seen* the movie before**, I wouldn't want to see it again."

• "***Having done* so much exercise this morning**, we should eat a big lunch."

• "She was exhausted, ***having stayed up* all night**."

Passive perfect participle phrases

If we want to describe a noun that was passively acted upon in an event that happened before another one, we can use what is known as the **passive perfect participle** (sometimes called the **perfect passive participle**), which is structured as *having + been + past participle*. For example:

• "***Having been dismissed* from class early**, Thomas decided to explore the river by his house."

• "The turkey, ***having been burnt* to a crisp**, was thrown in the garbage."

• "The book is ancient, ***having been written*** nearly 3,000 years ago."

This is similar to how past participle phrases are used, but the emphasis is placed on the first action happening further in the past. And whereas past participle phrases can be used to describe a noun or pronoun, passive perfect participle phrases stress the *action* being done to the noun—they cannot be used to create

simple descriptions. For instance:

✔ “My sister, **exhausted after a long day’s work**, fell asleep on the sofa.” (correct)

✖ “My sister, ***having been exhausted*** **after a long day’s work**, fell asleep on the sofa.” (incorrect)

Sentence Placement

Where a participle phrase appears in a sentence changes the way we punctuate it, as does its importance to the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

Initial position

When a participle phrase occurs in the initial position, it is usually separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma. For example:

• “**Running to the car**, the boy welcomed his father home after three months away.”

• “**Singing in the shower**, I was oblivious to the doorbell ringing.”

• “**Scared**, my sister slept with the light on.”

Middle position

When the phrase occurs in the middle position, and is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should be set apart from the rest of the sentence by two commas. For example:

• “My sister, **exhausted**, has fallen asleep on the sofa.”

• “James, **hiding under the bed**, was completely silent.”

• “The turkey, **having been burnt to a crisp**, was thrown in the garbage.”

If we took the participle phrases out, each of the examples above would still mean the same thing, just with less descriptive detail.

However, if a participle phrase occurs in the middle position and is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should **not** be set apart by commas. For example:

• “The students **finished with their work** may have a break.”

• “Jackets **left behind** will be donated.”

• “Participants **breaking the rules** will be removed from the competition.”

If we took the participle phrases out of *these* examples, we would be left with completely different meanings, as each phrase describes an essential aspect about the noun to set it apart from others. To make it clear that this description is integral to the sentence's meaning, we do not use commas to set it apart.

Final position

If the participle phrase occurs in the final position immediately after the noun that it modifies, it doesn't need a comma. For example:

• "We looked for hours and finally found James **hiding under the bed**."

• "The cat had no interest in the poor dog **wagging its tail**."

• "I was in such a hurry I didn't notice my jacket **left on the table**."

However, when it occurs in final position but **not** immediately after the noun that it modifies, it **does** need a comma. For example:

• "It was obvious he really enjoyed the meal, **having helped himself to more dessert**."

• "My sister cried as she packed up her belongings, **saddened at the idea of moving out of her childhood home**."

• "Most of the puzzle pieces have disappeared, **misplaced after so many years**."

Common mistakes

When we use participle phrases as adjectives, it's important that the noun modified is clearly stated and that the phrase appears as close to it as possible. Otherwise, we run the risk of errors known as **misplaced modifiers** and **dangling modifiers**.

Misplaced modifiers

A **misplaced modifier** can occur when there is more than one noun in the sentence. If we don't place the participle phrase close enough to the noun that it modifies, it may seem that it modifies another noun. For example:

• "**Terrified after watching a scary movie**, *my father* had to comfort my little sister."

In the above sentence, the participle phrase *terrified after watching a scary movie* is supposed to modify *my little sister*. However, since *my father* appears closer to the participial phrase, it seems it is the father who is terrified. The

sentence should be rewritten to correct the misplaced modifier. For example:

• “My father had to comfort my sister, **terrified after watching a scary movie**.”

or;

• “**Terrified after watching a scary movie**, *my sister* had to be comforted by *my father*.”

or;

• “My sister, **terrified after watching a scary movie**, had to be comforted by my father.”

Dangling modifiers

A **dangling modifier** occurs when we don’t clearly state the noun that is supposed to be modified by the participle. For example:

• “**Walking down the road**, the birds were singing.”

Because the sentence does not state who was walking down the road, is seems that it was *the birds*, which is probably not the intended meaning. The sentence needs to include another noun or pronoun being described by the phrase to correct the dangling modifier. For example:

• “**Walking down the road**, I (or *she*, *he*, *Mary*, *the couple*, etc.) heard the birds singing.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Participle phrases have the function of _____ in a sentence.

a) verbs
b) adjectives
c) adverbs
d) nouns

2. Where can a participle phrase appear in a sentence?

a) At the beginning
b) In the middle
c) At the end
d) A & B
e) B & C

f) All of the above

3. Which of the following sentences is punctuated **correctly**?

a) “Anthony, tired of failing his exams, started studying every night after school.”
b) “Anthony tired of failing his exams started studying every night after school.”
c) “Anthony, tired of failing his exams started studying every night after school.”
d) “Anthony tired of failing his exams, started studying every night after school.”

4. Identify what **kind** of participle phrase is used in the following sentence: “Having worked all her life, Susanne was ready to enjoy her retirement.”

a) Present participle phrase
b) Past participle phrase
c) Perfect participle phrase
d) Passive perfect participle phrase

5. When should a participle phrase appearing in the **middle** of a sentence be set apart by commas?

a) When it identifies a noun as an active agent
b) When it is essential to the meaning of the sentence
c) When it is not essential to the meaning of the sentence
d) Always
e) Never

6. What kind of participle phrase indicates a noun that is **acted upon** (not the agent of the participle’s action)?

a) Present participle phrase
b) Past participle phrase
c) Perfect participle phrase
d) Passive perfect participle phrase
e) A & C
f) B & D

Absolute Phrases

Definition

An **absolute phrase** (sometimes known as an **absolute construction**) is a grammatically independent group of words that serves to modify or add information to an entire sentence.

An absolute phrase is usually made up of a **noun** or **pronoun** and a **participle**, along with any modifying information. Because of their unique construction, absolute phrases are more commonly found in descriptive writing, such as prose, than in speech or even in everyday writing.

Using absolute phrases

We generally use absolute phrases at the beginning of a sentence to introduce additional information, or at the end of a sentence to provide a final comment on the sentence as a whole.

Because absolute phrases are considered **parenthetical** (meaning they are not an integral part of the sentence), we always set them apart by **commas** or **dashes**.

For example:

• "**The students having left early**, I decided to catch up on some grading."

• "**The test finished**, Jason heaved a sigh of relief."

• "I hope to get into Harvard next year—**God willing**."

• "She walked out the door, **her head turning for a last look at home**."

It is also possible to use an absolute phrase in the middle of a sentence to highlight or put extra emphasis on the extra information. For instance:

• "The teacher, **her students having left early**, decided to catch up on some grading."

• "I hope—**God willing**—to get into Harvard next year."

Omitting the participle

When a participle of the verb *be* (*being* or **having been**) is part of an absolute phrase, it is very common to omit it altogether. For instance:

• "**All things *being* equal**, I'd rather finish this next week."

• “**All things equal**, I’d rather finish this next week.”
• “I started getting nervous, ***having been*** **alone for so long**.”
• “I started getting nervous, **alone for so long**.”

However, the participle of *be* should not be omitted when doing so might lead to a confusing construction. For instance:

✔ “**That *being* the case**, we should resolve the issue quickly.” (correct)
✖ “**That the case**, we should resolve the issue quickly.” (incorrect)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **usually** found in an absolute phrase?

a) A gerund
b) An infinitive
c) A participle
d) A finite verb

2. Where is an absolute phrase **usually** located in a sentence?

a) At the beginning
b) In the middle
c) At the end
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) All of the above

3. Which of the following is **not** used to separate an absolute phrase from the rest of the sentence?

a) A semicolon
b) A comma
c) A dash
d) Parentheses

4. When can a participle be omitted?

a) When the participle is of an auxiliary verb
b) When the participle is of the verb *be*

c) When the participle does not have a subject
d) Always
e) Never

Appositives

Definition

An **appositive** is a **noun** that serves to describe or rename another noun (or pronoun) that appears directly before it in a sentence.

When an appositive is made up of a **noun phrase**, it is known as an **appositive phrase**.

Proper nouns as appositives

Appositives that are made up of one noun or more without any determiners or modifiers are almost always **proper nouns**, which serve to name **common nouns** that appears before them. For example:

• “Our cat, **Scruffles**, hates being left home alone.” (The proper noun *Scruffles* provides a name for the common noun *cat*.)

• “Your friend **Jack** is here to see you.” (The proper noun *Jack* provides a name for the common noun *friend*.)

• “America’s first president, **George Washington**, was born in the colony of Virginia.”

Appellations

Appellations are additional words added to a person’s name, which generally become capitalized as part of the proper noun. Appellations are not considered appositives in their own right, but they can be used **as** appositives in conjunction with the proper noun. For example:

• “The heir, **Prince William**, is adored by many.” (The proper noun *William* with the appellation *Prince* provides a name for the common noun *heir*.)

• “Italy was invaded by the conqueror **Attila the Hun** in 452.” (The proper noun *Attila* with the appellation *the Hun* provides a name for the common noun *conqueror*.)

Appositive phrases

It is also very common to use **noun phrases** (which consist of a noun accompanied by any determiners and modifiers) as appositives to provide more descriptive identifying information about a noun; these appositive phrases can modify both common and proper nouns. They usually begin with the **articles** *the*, *a*, and *an*. For example:

• "The office, **an old Georgian building**, badly needed repairs." (In the appositive phrase, the head noun *building* is modified by the article *an* and the adjectives *old* and *Georgian*.)

• "Janet Smith, **a former student of mine**, is joining the faculty next spring." (In the appositive phrase, the head noun *student* is modified by the article *a*, the adjective *former*, and the prepositional phrase *of mine*.)

• "Just meet me at my car, **the old station wagon parked across the street**." (In the appositive phrase, the head **compound noun** *station wagon* is modified by the article *the*, the adjective *old*, and the **participle phrase** *parked across the street*.)

While it is most common to use the articles *the, a*, and *an*, we can also use indefinite pronouns (such as *one* or *some*) to begin an appositive phrase, as in:

• "My father, **one of the toughest lawyers in the state**, always wanted me to follow in his footsteps."

• "The scientists, **some of the most respected in their fields**, collaborated on a paper on the dangers of climate change."

Introductory appositive phrases

Appositives most commonly appear directly after the noun they identify, as we have seen in all of the examples so far.

However, we can also place an appositive before a noun when it serves to introduce a sentence. In this case, it does not need to be immediately adjacent to the noun. This adds emphasis to the information the appositive provides. Note that we can only use appositive phrases (as opposed to proper nouns functioning as appositives) at the beginning of sentences. For example:

• "**The only one from her class to graduate with honors**, Ms. Thomson now runs one of the largest businesses in the world."

• "**A true classic**, this book inspired a generation of young readers."

• “**A staunch conservative**, the New York senator has promised to reinvigorate industry in her state.”

Restrictive vs. non-restrictive appositives

Restrictive appositives

Appositives that are necessary for the sentence’s meaning are known as **restrictive appositives**. These are often **proper nouns**, and they are integrated into the sentence without commas. For example:

• “The popular restaurant **Joe’s Place** gets thousands of diners a day.”

Without the information the appositive provides, the sentence would be confusing and the reader would not know *which* restaurant the sentence is referring to. Other times, the sentence would still make logical sense, but the implied meaning changes slightly. Consider, for example, these two sentences:

• “My brother lives in New York.”

• “My brother **Michael** lives in New York.”

Both sentences make sense. However, in the first example, it is implied that the speaker only has one brother, and he lives in New York. In the second example, it sounds like the speaker has specified his brother’s name because he has more than one brother.

We can also use appositive phrases restrictively when we are making a comparison between two descriptions of the same person. For example:

• “Jeremy Jones **the professor** has gained much more praise than Jeremy Jones **the novelist** ever did.”

Non-restrictive appositives

Appositives that are **not** essential to the meaning of the sentence are known as **non-restrictive appositives**. We set non-restrictive appositives apart from the rest of the sentence with commas. For example:

• “Neil Armstrong, **the first person to walk on the moon**, was a pilot in the Korean War.”

• “My hometown, **Denver**, has a fantastic zoo.”

• “**A brilliant and eager student**, he graduated from college at the age of 19.”

In each of the above sentences, there would be no potential misunderstanding or loss in meaning if the appositives were left out.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What types of nouns are used as appositives **without** any modifiers?

a) Common nouns
b) Proper nouns
c) Compound nouns
d) Abstract nouns

2. Which of the following are used to make **appositive phrases**?

a) Noun phrases
b) Noun clauses
c) Adjective phrases
d) Relative clauses

3. Identify the appositive in the following sentence:
“Because of the recession, my son, a software engineer, had to move home when he lost his job.”

a) Because of the recession
b) my son
c) a software engineer
d) had to move home

4. Identify the appositive in the following sentence:
“Ask your sister Mary if she’d like to come to a movie on Saturday.”

a) sister
b) Mary
c) she
d) a movie

5. Appositive **phrases** are most commonly _____.

a) Restrictive
b) Non-restrictive

Clauses

Definition

Clauses are groups of words that contain both a **subject** and a **predicate**.

There are two main types of clauses: **independent clauses**, which can function independently as sentences, and **dependent clauses**, which depend on an independent clause to form a sentence.

We'll briefly cover the various types of clauses below. To learn more about how clauses are formed and used, continue on to each individual section.

Independent Clauses

An **independent clause** (also known as a **main clause**) is a clause that forms a complete, independent thought. It does not require anything else to be considered complete, and so it can stand alone as a sentence.

A single independent clause is known as a **simple sentence**. It contains a subject and a predicate, each of which can have **modifiers**.

For example:

• "I refuse."

• "They like to stay in fancy hotels."

• "The girl in the red jacket ran quickly towards the bus."

• "The Beatles were a great band."

• "I wish it weren't Monday."

In each of the above cases, the independent clause remains able to stand alone as a simple sentence.

Sometimes we form a sentence with two (and occasionally more) independent clauses, which is known as a **compound sentence**. We join the independent clauses together with a comma and a **conjunction** or a semicolon without a conjunction. For example:

• "She wanted to play tennis**, but** he wanted to play basketball."

• "My brother lives in Detroit**;** I wish I lived there."

Dependent Clauses

A **dependent clause** (also called a **subordinate clause**) is a clause that relies on the information from an independent clause to form a complete, logical thought. As such, it cannot stand on its own to form a sentence.

Dependent clauses are usually marked by *dependent words*, such as **subordinating conjunctions**, **relative pronouns**, or **relative adverbs**, which link them to independent clauses in a sentence.

For example:

• "***Whenever* I travel**, *I like to stay in fancy hotels*."

• "*We struck up a great conversation with a person* ***whom* we met on the plane**."

• "*She found it strange* ***that* they like to eat sushi**."

In each of the examples above, the groups of words in **bold** are clauses, because they each have a subject (*I, we,* and *they*) and a predicate (*travel, met on the plane,* and *like to eat sushi*). However, we can also see that they are **dependent clauses** because of their dependent words—*whenever, whom* and *that*. Because of this, they cannot stand alone as a sentence; they depend on the information from the independent clauses (in *italics*) to be logically complete.

Categories of Dependent Clauses

Because dependent clauses must be a part of or attached to an independent clause, they serve a variety of grammatical functions depending on what type of dependent clause we are using. There are three primary categories of dependent clauses: **noun clauses, relative clauses**, and **adverbial clauses**. We'll look at a few examples of each. To learn more about them, continue on to the section **Dependent Clauses**, or to the individual sections for each type of clause.

Noun Clauses

Noun clauses are dependent clauses that function as nouns. Because of this, noun clauses can perform all the roles that a normal noun could play in a sentence, such as **the subject** or the **object** of a verb. For example:

• "***Wherever* we decide to go** is fine with me." (subject of the sentence)

• "I want to see ***what* is available** before I make a purchase." (direct object of the verb *see*)

Relative Clauses

Relative clauses, also called **adjective clauses**, provide descriptive information about a noun. These clauses can either be essential to the sentence (restrictive clauses) or non-essential (non-restrictive clauses). They are introduced by either a **relative pronoun** or a **relative adverb**.

Here are some examples:

• “The man, ***whom*** **I’d heard so much about**, gave an electrifying speech to the crowd.” (non-restrictive clause)

• “The book ***that*** **I wrote** is being published in January.” (restrictive clause)

• “Any student ***whose*** **desk is not clean** will have detention after class.” (restrictive clause)

• “I love casual Fridays, ***when*** **we get to wear jeans to work**.” (non-restrictive clause)

Adverbial Clauses

An **adverbial** or **adverb clause** is used, like a regular adverb, to modify adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and sometimes entire clauses. Adverbial clauses use **subordinating conjunctions** to connect to an **independent clause**. For example:

• “I went to the park ***before*** **my parents woke up**.” (modifies the verb *went*)

• “Animals are cute ***while*** **they’re young**.” (modifies the adjective *cute*)

• “I work better ***when*** **I have total privacy**.” (modifies the adverb *better*)

• “I have loved you ***since*** **the day I met you**.” (modifies the entire clause *I have loved you*)

Omitted subjects in imperative sentences

Every clause in English must have both a subject and a predicate. However, when we form **imperative sentences** to issue commands or requests, the subject is always implied because the sentence is directed at someone specific (either the reader or the person being spoken to). In this case, we never include the subject. For example:

• “Do your homework!”

• “Please open the window.”

• “Let me know when the documents arrive.”

We sometimes include a person’s name to specify who is being addressed, but this is not the same as the subject of the sentence. It is known as a **noun of address** (also known as a **vocative**), which is considered parenthetical and set apart by commas. For instance:

• “**John,** do your homework!”

• “Please open the window**, Mary**.”

• “Let me know when the documents arrive**, sir**.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What kinds of clauses can function as sentences on their own?

a) Independent clauses
b) Dependent clauses

2. Which of the following **cannot** be used to link a dependent clause to an independent clause?

a) Relative pronouns
b) Relative adverbs
c) Subordinating conjunctions
d) Coordinating conjunctions

3. How can two independent clauses be joined to form a **compound sentence**?

a) A comma followed by a subordinating conjunction
b) A semicolon followed by a coordinating conjunction
c) A comma followed by a coordinating conjunction
d) A semicolon
e) A & B
f) C & D

4. In which of the following ways can a dependent clause function grammatically in a sentence?

a) As a noun
b) As an adjective

c) As an adverb
d) All of the above
e) B & C
f) None of the above

5. In what types of sentences is the subject **not** included?

a) Interrogative sentences (questions)
b) Imperative sentences (commands or requests)
c) Declarative sentences (statements)
d) None of the above

Independent Clauses

Definition

An **independent clause** (also known as a **main clause**) is a **clause** that forms a complete, independent thought. Like all clauses, an independent clause contains a **subject** and a **predicate** (which consists of a verb and any related information).

Forming sentences

An independent clause does not require anything else to be considered complete, and so it can stand alone as a sentence. This is known as a **simple sentence**.

For example:

• “I refuse.”

• “The wind blows.”

• “Dogs bark.”

• “Bees sting.”

• “Cats meow.”

In the above examples, the **subject** begins the sentences and the **predicate** ends them. The predicate (in each of these cases made up of just a verb) contains all the necessary information about the subject to be considered logical, so each is considered an independent clause.

The predicate of an independent clause can also contain additional information that modifies the verb. For example:

• “I like to stay *in fancy hotels*.” (**prepositional phrase** used as an adverb)

• “She wanted *to play basketball*.” (infinitive phrase used as the direct object of the verb)

In each of the above cases, the independent clause remains able to stand alone as a simple sentence, despite the addition of qualifying information.

Forming sentences with dependent clauses

A **dependent clause**, on the other hand, relies on the information from an independent clause to form a complete, logical thought. Dependent clauses (also known as **subordinate clauses**) are usually marked by *dependent words*, such as a **subordinating conjunctions** or **relative pronouns**. Here are some examples of dependent clauses:

• “*whenever* I travel” (subordinating conjunction)

• “*whom* we met on the plane” (relative pronoun)

We can see that the clauses above do not express a complete idea—they require independent clauses to be logically complete:

• “*Whenever I travel*, I like to stay in fancy hotels.”

• “We struck up a great conversation with a person *whom we met on the plane*.”

An independent clause that contains or is connected to at least one dependent clause, as we see in the above two examples, forms what is known as a **complex sentence**.

Forming sentences with multiple independent clauses

A sentence formed by two independent clauses is known as a **compound sentence**. For example:

• “She wanted to play tennis**, but** he wanted to play basketball.”

If at least one of those independent clauses contains a dependent clause, then the sentence is considered a **compound-complex sentence**, as in:

• “*Because I love to read*, I like to visit the library**, and** I enjoy going to book stores, too.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is true of **both** independent and dependent clauses?

a) Able to stand alone as a simple sentence
b) Contains a subject
c) Contains a predicate
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

2. Which of the following is true **only** of an independent clause?

a) Able to stand alone as a simple sentence
b) Contains a subject
c) Contains a predicate
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

3. What is a sentence called that is formed from an independent clause and at least one dependent clause?

a) compound sentence
b) dependent sentence
c) complex sentence
d) compound-complex sentence

4. Is the following an independent or a dependent clause? (Capitalization and punctuation have been intentionally left out.)
“he was walking home”

a) independent clause
b) dependent clause

5. Is the following an independent or a dependent clause? (Capitalization and punctuation have been intentionally left out.)
“while I waited for the bus”

a) independent clause

b) dependent clause

Dependent Clauses

Definition

A **dependent clause** (also called a **subordinate clause**) is a clause that relies on the information from an **independent clause** to form a complete, logical thought. As such, it cannot stand on its own to form a sentence.

There are three types of dependent clause: **noun clauses**, **relative clauses** (also called **adjective clauses**), and **adverbial clauses**.

Forming Dependent Clauses

A **clause**, whether it is dependent or independent, always consists of two parts—a **subject** and a **predicate** (though the subject can be implied in certain situations). The predicate consists of a verb or **verb phrase** (a verb and any objects or modifiers relating to it), while the subject consists of a **noun**, a **pronoun**, or a **phrase** containing either.

Dependent clauses are usually marked by *dependent words*, such as **subordinating conjunctions** or **relative pronouns**.

Here are some examples of dependent clauses:

• "*whenever* I travel"

• "*whom* we met on the plane"

• "*that* they like to eat sushi"

We can see that each of the examples above is a clause, because they each have a subject (*I*, *we*, and *they*) and a predicate (*travel*, *met on the plane*, and *like to eat sushi*). However, we can also see that they are dependent, as they do not express a complete idea—they require independent clauses to be logically complete:

• "**Whenever I travel**, I like to stay in fancy hotels."

• "We struck up a great conversation with a person **whom we met on the plane**."

• "She found it strange **that they like to eat sushi**."

Functions of Dependent Clauses

Because dependent clauses must be a part of or attached to an independent clause, they serve a variety of grammatical functions. These vary depending on what type of dependent clause we are using.

Noun Clauses

Noun clauses are dependent clauses that function as nouns. Because of this, noun clauses can perform all the roles that a normal noun would play in a sentence: they can act as **the subject**, a direct or indirect **object**, a **predicate noun**, the object of a **preposition**, or an **adjective complement**. Let's look at an example of each.

The Subject

• "***Wherever* we decide to go** is fine with me." (*Wherever we decide to go* is the subject of the linking verb *is*.)

Direct Object

• "I want to see ***what* is available** before I make a purchase." (*what is available* is the direct object of the verb *see*.)

Indirect Object

• "I'll send ***whoever* is responsible** a strongly worded letter." (*Whoever is responsible* is the indirect object of the verb *send*, and *a strongly worded letter* is the direct object.)

Predicate Noun

• "The thing I wish for most is ***that* people would all just get along**." (*That people would all just get along* is the predicate noun of the linking verb *is*, renaming the subject *the thing I wish for most*.)

Object of a preposition

• "The is the man <u>to</u> ***whom* I owe my life**." (*Whom I owe my life* is the object of the preposition *to*, acting as an adjective to describe the noun *man*.)

Adjective complement

• “I’m thrilled ***that*** **you are coming to visit**!” (*That you are coming to visit* is the complement of the adjective *thrilled*.)

Relative Clauses

Relative clauses are also called **adjective clauses** because they provide descriptive information about a noun or noun phrase. These clauses can either be essential to the sentence (restrictive clauses) or non-essential (non-restrictive clauses).

Relative clauses are introduced by either a **relative pronoun** or a **relative adverb**.

Here are some examples:

• “The man, ***whom*** **I’d heard so much about**, gave an electrifying speech to the crowd.” (*Whom I’d heard so much about* is a non-restrictive clause modifying the word *man*.)

• “The escaped giraffe, ***which*** **had been on the loose for weeks**, was finally captured.” (*Which had been on the loose for weeks* is a non-restrictive clause modifying the word *giraffe*.)

• “The book ***that*** **I wrote** is being published in January.” (*That I wrote* is a restrictive clause modifying the word *book*.)

• “Any student ***whose*** **desk is not clean** will have detention after class.” (*Whose desk is not clean* is a restrictive clause modifying the word *student*.)

• “The house ***where*** **I was born** is a very special place.” (*Where I was born* is a restrictive clause modifying the word *house*.)

• “I love casual Fridays, ***when*** **we get to wear jeans to work**.” (*When we get to wear jeans to work* is a non-restrictive clause modifying the word *Fridays*.)

Adverbial Clauses

An **adverbial** or **adverb clause** is used, like a regular adverb, to modify adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Adverbial clauses use **subordinating conjunctions** to connect to an **independent clause**. For example:

• “I went to the park ***before*** **my parents woke up**.” (*Before my parents woke up* is an adverbial clause that modifies the verb *went*.)

• “She waited on the shore ***until*** **the ship departed**.” (*Until the ship departed* is an adverbial clause that modifies the verb *waited*.)

• “Animals are cute ***while*** **they’re young**.” (*While they’re young* is an adverbial clause that modifies the adjective *cute*.)

• “I work better ***when*** **I have total privacy**.” (*When I have total privacy* is an adverbial clause that modifies the adverb *better*.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is true of **both** independent and dependent clauses?

a) Unable to stand alone as simple sentences
b) Contain a subject
c) Contain a predicate
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

2. Which of the following is true **only** of dependent clauses?

a) Unable to stand alone as simple sentences
b) Contain a subject
c) Contain a predicate
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

3. Which type of dependent clause is able to function as **the subject** of a sentence?

a) relative clause
b) noun clause
c) adverbial clause
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

4. Which type of dependent clause is able to function as a **verb** in a sentence?

a) relative clause
b) noun clause
c) adverbial clause
d) All of the above

e) None of the above

5. Identify the type of dependent clause (in **bold**) in the following sentence:
"I like to wake up **before the sun rises**."

a) relative clause
b) noun clause
c) adverbial clause
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

Noun Clauses

Definition

A **noun clause** is a type of **dependent clause** that is able to function grammatically like a noun in a sentence. As such, it serves to name a person, place, or thing.

Because of this, noun clauses can perform all the roles that a normal noun would fill in a sentence: they can act as **the subject**, a direct or indirect **object**, a **predicate noun**, an **adjective complement**, or the object of a **preposition**.

Forming Noun Clauses

Noun clauses most commonly begin with the words *that, how, if,* and the "wh-" words—*what, whatever, where, wherever, when, whenever, why, which, whichever, who, whom, whoever, whomever, whether*, and *whatever*.

Like all clauses, a noun clause contains a **subject** (sometimes represented by one of the words above) and a **predicate** (a verb and any additional information attached to it).

Below we'll look at some examples of various noun clauses performing the different functions of a noun:

Subjects

The **subject** performs, occupies, or controls the action of the verb.

• "***Wherever* we decide to go** is fine with me." (*Wherever we decide to go* is the subject of the linking verb *is*.)

• “***Which* option is best** remains to be seen.” (*Which option is best* is the subject of the verb *remains*.)

• “***Whoever* wants to go** should sign up with their supervisor.” (*Whoever wants to go* is the subject of the phrasal verb *sign up*.)

• “***That* you act so frivolously with money** shows you aren’t ready to lead this company.” (*That you act so frivolously with money* is the subject of the verb *shows*.)

Objects

Remember that **intransitive verbs** do **not** take direct and indirect objects, so you will only find noun clauses used as the objects of **transitive verbs**.

Direct objects

A **direct object** is a person or thing that directly receives the action of the verb

• “I will enjoy ***whatever* we decide to do**.” (*Whatever we decide to do* is the direct object of the verb *enjoy*.)

• “We’ve decided to go ***wherever* the wind takes us**.” (*Wherever the wind takes us* is the direct object of the verb *go*.)

• “I want to see ***what* is available** before I make a purchase.” (*what is available* is the direct object of the verb *see*.)

• “At this point, we’ll take ***whatever* we can get**.” (*Whatever we can get* is the direct object of the verb *take*.)

Indirect objects

An **indirect object** is a person (or sometimes thing) that receives the **direct object** via the action of the verb. For example:

• “I’ll send ***whoever* is responsible** a strongly worded letter.” (*Whoever is responsible* is the indirect object of the verb *send*, and *a strongly worded letter* is the direct object.)

• “Just pay ***whomever you hire*** $100, as we agreed.” (*Whomever you hire* is the indirect object of the verb *pay*, and *$100* is the direct object.)

• “I will give ***whatever* you propose** my full support.” (*Whatever you propose* is the indirect object of the verb *give*, and *my full support* is the direct object.)

Predicate nouns

Predicate nouns are a subset of a larger category known as **subject complements** (including **predicate pronouns** and **predicative adjectives**), which rename or re-identify the subject after a **linking verb** (usually a form of the verb *be*). For example:

• "Japan is ***where*** **I want to go most**." (*Where I want to go most* is the predicate noun of the linking verb *is*, renaming the subject *Japan*.)

• "The thing I wish for most is ***that*** **people would all just get along**." (*That people would all just get along* is the predicate noun of the linking verb *is*, renaming the subject *the thing I wish for most*.)

• "Politicians are ***who*** **create the laws**." (*Who create the laws* is the predicate noun of the linking verb *are*, renaming the subject *politicians*.)

Objects of prepositions

A preposition is followed by its object to create a **prepositional phrase**, which can function as an adverb or an adjective in a sentence. For example:

• "The is the man to ***whom*** **I owe my life**." (*Whom I owe my life* is the object of the preposition *to*, acting as an adjective to describe the noun *man*.)

• "I ran into a few people from ***where*** **I used to live**." (*Where I used to live* is the object of the preposition *from*, acting as an adjective to describe the noun *people*.)

• "They were angry because of ***what*** **they found out**." (*What they found out* is the object of the compound preposition *because of*, acting as an adverb to describe the adjective *angry*.)

• "She can study with ***whomever*** **she likes**." (*Whomever she likes* is the object of the preposition *with*, acting as an adverb to modify the verb *study*.)

Adjective complements

An adjective complement is a clause or phrase that completes the meaning of a **predicative adjective**. For example:

• "We were curious ***why*** **they decided to leave**." (*Why they decided to leave* is the complement of the adjective *curious*.)

• "I'm thrilled ***that*** **you are coming to visit**!" (*That you are coming to visit* is the

complement of the adjective *thrilled*.)

• “It’s so wonderful ***what* he did for those orphans**.” (*What he did for those orphans* is the complement of the adjective *wonderful*.)

• “They’re unsure ***whether* this is the right decision**.” (*Whether this is the right decision* is the complement of the adjective *unsure*.)

Multiple noun clauses

Because of their various roles, a sentence can have multiple noun clauses functioning in different ways. Take the following sentence, for example:

• “***What* I decide** will determine ***who* gets the promotion**.”

Here, the noun clause *what I decide* is acting as the subject of the sentence, while the clause *who gets the promotion* is acting as the direct object of the verb *determine*.

Here’s another example:

• “***What they want to know*** is ***why* you think this is acceptable**.”

What they want to know is a noun clause acting as the subject, and *why you think this is acceptable* is a predicate noun that renames the subject.

Replacing a noun clause with a pronoun

A noun clause can always be replaced by a single pronoun (such as *you, he, she, it, they, there*, etc.), the same way a normal noun would. If you are uncertain whether a part of a sentence is functioning as a noun clause, try replacing it with a pronoun; if the sentence is still grammatically complete, then the part you replaced is a noun clause. (The only exception to this rule is when a noun clause is used as an **adjective complement**, since a pronoun cannot function this way.)

Let’s try replacing some of the examples we used above with pronouns:

• “***Whoever* wants to go** should sign up with their supervisor.”
• “**They** should sign up with their supervisor.”

• “I want to see ***what* is available** before I make a purchase.”
• “I want to see **it** before I make a purchase.”

• “Just pay ***whomever you hire*** $100, as we agreed.”
• “Just pay **her** $100, as we agreed.”

• “The thing I wish for most is ***that*** **people would all just get along**.”
• “The thing I wish for most is **this**.”

• “She can study with ***whomever*** **she likes**.”
• “She can study with **you**.”

• “***What*** **they want to know** is ***why*** **you think this is acceptable**.”
• “**That** is **it**.”

In each of these examples, the new sentence is still grammatically complete (even if it seems to be lacking information), proving that a noun clause was used in each case.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of a noun clause?

a) Acting as the subject of a sentence
b) Acting as the object of a verb
c) Modifying an adjective, adverb, or verb
d) Following a linking verb to rename the subject
e) Acting as the object of a preposition

2. Which of the following can be used to begin a noun clause?

a) you
b) there
c) it
d) that

3. Identify the function of the noun phrase in the following sentence:
“I wish **that I were taller**.”

a) The subject
b) Direct object of the verb
c) Indirect object of the verb
d) Predicate noun

4. Identify the noun clause in the following sentence:
“The boss, who is away on vacation, should know what was discussed.”

a) The boss
b) who is away on vacation

c) should know what
d) what was discussed

Relative Clauses

Definition

Relative clauses (also known as **adjective clauses** or **adjectival clauses**) are **dependent clauses** that provide descriptive information about a noun or noun phrase. Relative clauses are introduced by either a **relative pronoun** or a **relative adverb**, and the information they provide can either be essential or nonessential to the completeness of the sentence.

Relative Pronouns and Relative Adverbs

Relative pronouns are used to help clarify who or what a sentence is talking about, or else give extra information about the person or thing. Like other pronouns, they have the grammatical function of nouns, and can be either the subject or object of the relative clause. There are five common relative pronouns: *who*, *whom*, *which*, *whose*, and *that*.

Here are some examples of relative clauses introduced by relative pronouns:

• "There's the woman ***who*** **sits next to me on the bus**."

• "The man, ***whom*** **I'd heard so much about**, gave an electrifying speech to the crowd."*

• "The escaped giraffe, ***which*** **had been on the loose for weeks**, was finally captured."

• "The book ***that*** **I wrote** is being published in January."

• "Any student ***whose*** **desk is not clean** will have detention after class."

Relative adverbs, on the other hand, are used when the information relates to a place, time, or the reason an action took place; like many other adverbs, they modify a verb in the sentence. The relative adverbs are *where*, *when*, and *why*.

For example:

• "The house ***where*** **I was born** is a very special place." (*Where* modifies the verb *born*.)

• “I love casual Fridays, ***when*** **we get to wear jeans to work**.” (*When* modifies the verb *wear*.)

• “I don’t know ***why*** **he got so angry**.” (*Why* modifies the verb *get*.)

(*Usage Note: *Whom* is becoming increasingly rare in modern English outside of formal writing or speech. Although it is technically correct to use *whom* when it functions as the object of a clause and *who* when it functions as the subject, it is much more common to use *who* in both cases.)

Restrictive and Non-restrictive Clauses

Clauses that provide essential information are known as **restrictive clauses** (sometimes also called **defining clauses**), while those that provide nonessential information are known as **non-restrictive clauses** (sometimes called **non-defining clauses**). Because non-restrictive clauses are not integral, they are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas.

Restrictive relative clauses

Restrictive relative clauses identify a particular noun, giving us information about it that we need to know in order to understand the speaker’s meaning. Because this type of clause is integral to the sentence, it is not separated by any punctuation. For example:

• “I saw the guy ***who*** **delivers my mail** in town yesterday.”

• “I’ll always remember the river ***where*** **we learned to swim**.”

• “Yesterday was the day ***when*** **I met my husband**.”

• “I sat on the chair ***that*** **has a wobbly leg**.”

• “Do you know the reason ***why*** **the sky is blue**?”

• “She’s the person ***whose*** **daughter goes to Harvard**.”

The restrictive relative clause in each of the sentences above is in **bold**. If we remove the relative clause, we are left with questions about who or what the speaker is referring to:

• “I saw the guy in town yesterday.” (What guy?)

• “I’ll always remember the river.” (What river?)

• “Yesterday was the day.” (What day?)

• “I sat on the chair.” (What chair?)

• “Do you know the reason?” (The reason for what?)

• “She’s the person.” (What person?)

When you remove a restrictive relative clause, the nouns are no longer identifiable and the sentences become logically incomplete.

It is worth noting that the relative pronoun *which* is not used to introduce restrictive relative clauses. However, the authenticity of this rule is often contested, and modern writers very often use *which* and *that* interchangeably with restrictive clauses. If you have any doubts, though, especially in formal or professional writing, then it is better to reserve *which* for non-restrictive clauses.

Non-restrictive relative clauses

Non-restrictive relative clauses give us additional information about a noun that has already been identified, but this information is not essential for the sentence to make sense. Because of this, non-restrictive relative clauses are set apart from the rest of the sentence by commas.

For example:

• “Paris, ***where*** **I spent six months studying**, is the most beautiful city in the world.”

• “The woman down the street, ***whose*** **children are the same age as ours**, invited us over for dinner next week.”

• “I love casual Fridays, ***when*** **we get to wear jeans to work**.”

• “Samantha, ***whom*** **I’ve asked to be my bridesmaid**, is getting married next year.”

• “The senator, ***who*** **is up for re-election next month**, has made a lot of promises to his constituency.”

• “The movie, ***which*** **is my favorite comedy of all time**, is being shown on TV tomorrow night.”

In the examples above, the relative clauses merely give extra information about the nouns; they do not define them. The sentences would still make sense even if the relative clauses were removed, which is how we know that we are dealing with non-restrictive relative clauses. For example:

• “Paris is the most beautiful city in the world.”

• “The woman down the street invited us over for dinner.”

• “I love casual Fridays.”

• “Samantha is getting married next year.”

• “The senator has made a lot of promises to his constituency.”

• “The movie is being shown on TV tomorrow night.”

Note that non-restrictive clauses **cannot** be introduced by the relative pronoun *that* or the relative adverb *why*—these can only introduce restrictive clauses.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following do relative clauses describe?

a) verbs
b) nouns
c) adjectives
d) adverbs

2. Which of the following is used to introduce a relative clause that is clarifying **who or what** the sentence is talking about?

a) relative pronoun
b) relative adverb
c) relative adjective
d) relative determiner

3. What punctuation marks are used to separate **non-restrictive** clauses from the rest of the sentence?

a) semicolons
b) periods
c) parentheses
d) commas

4. Choose the **most** correct relative pronoun or relative adverb to complete the following sentence:
“The company, _____ was acknowledged for its outstanding environmental efforts, more than doubled its profits over the past year.”

a) who

b) whom
c) which
d) that

Adverbial Clauses

Definition

An **adverbial clause**, or **adverb clause**, is a group of words behaving as an *adverb*. Like all clauses, it always contains a **subject** and a **predicate**, and it is used, like a regular adverb, to modify adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. For example:

• “I went to the park **today**.” (*Today* is an adverb that modifies the verb *went*.)

• “I went to the park **before my parents woke up**.” (*Before my parents woke up* is an adverbial clause that also modifies the verb *went*.)

An adverbial clause is a type of **dependent clause**, or **subordinate clause**, that uses a **subordinating conjunction** to connect to the **main clause**. In the previous example, *before* acts as a subordinating conjunction, connecting the adverbial clause *before my parents woke up* to the main clause *I went to the park.*

Function

Subordinating conjunctions have different functions depending on the ideas being modified. We can therefore identify the function of an adverbial clause by looking at the type of subordinating conjunction connecting it to the main clause.

The table below highlights the various functions of some of the most common subordinating conjunctions:

Idea Being Modified	Subordinating Conjunction
Time	when, whenever, while, before, after, since, until, once
Place	where, wherever, everywhere, anywhere
Reason or purpose	because, as, since, so
Condition	if, unless, whether or not, in the event, provided

Comparison or manner	like, as, as… as, as if, the way, than
Contrast	though, although, even though, whereas, even if

Adverbial clauses of time

An adverbial clause of time describes *when* or *for how long* something has occurred or will occur. Possible subordinating conjunctions include *when, whenever, while, before, after, since*, *until*, and *once*. For example:

• "I will arrive ***when*** **dinner is ready**."
• "He said he'll go ***whenever*** **you decide it's time to leave**."
• "Animals are cute ***while*** **they're young**."
• "***Before*** **you leave**, let me give you a kiss."
• "Teachers grade papers ***after*** **the students go home for the day**."
• "I have loved you ***since*** **the day I met you**."
• "She waited on the shore ***until*** **the ship departed**."
• "The bully stopped picking fights ***once*** **he realized it was wrong**."

(*Be careful with the subordinating conjunction *since*, because it is also used with adverbial clauses of reason or purpose, as we will see below.)

Adverbial clauses of place

An adverbial clause of place describes *where* something has occurred or will occur. The most common subordinating conjunctions are *where, wherever, everywhere*, and *anywhere*. For example:

• "Grandma and Grandpa want to go ***where*** **their children live**."
• "I can go ***wherever*** **I want to go**."
• "Peter brings his sunglasses ***everywhere*** **he goes**."
• "Birds create nests ***anywhere*** **they deem suitable**."

Adverbial clauses of reason or purpose

An adverbial clause of reason or purpose describes *why* something has occurred or will occur. Common subordinating conjunctions are *because, as, since*, and

so. For example:

• “I admire you ***because*** **you are an inspiration to many people**.”
• “***As*** **it is raining**, we probably shouldn’t go to the park today.”
• “I’m going outside to play ***since*** **my homework is finished**.”*
• “He went to his room ***so*** **he could be alone**.”

(*Be careful with the subordinating conjunction *since*, because it is also used with adverbial clauses of time, as we saw above.)

Adverbial clauses of condition

Adverbial clauses of condition describe the conditions necessary for specific actions or events to happen. This type of clause usually employs the subordinating conjunctions *if*, *unless*, *whether or not*, *in the event*, and *provided*. For example:

• “***If*** **it snows tonight**, I’m not going to work tomorrow.”
• “Kate can’t attend the school dance ***unless*** **her parents allow it**.”
• “He’s always doing crazy stunts ***whether or not*** **they’re considered safe**.”
• “***In the event*** **of a hurricane**, you must stay inside.”
• “They’ll approve your request ***provided*** **you pay the appropriate amount of money**.”

Adverbial clauses of comparison or manner

An adverbial clause of comparison or manner describes *how* or *in what manner* something occurred or will occur, to what degree something occurred or will occur, or how something compares to something else. Some of the most often used subordinating conjunctions are *like*, *as*, *as … as*, *as if*, *the way*, and *than*. For example:

• “He sings ***like*** **he wants to be a rock star**.”
• “The teary-eyed friends embraced ***as*** **long-lost siblings would**.”
• “The freshly picked flower is ***as*** beautiful ***as*** **it is soft**.”
• “She looked excited, ***as if*** **she could jump up and dance at any moment**.”
• “Lauren walks confidently, ***the way*** **a model struts on a runway**.”
• “Tim is more nervous ***than*** **Rhonda (is)**.”*

(*In colloquial English, the final verb in an adverbial clause of comparison may be omitted. In this case, the sentence would become *Tim is more nervous than*

Rhonda, in which the predicate verb *is* is implied. We also see verb omission in adverbial clauses containing the subordinating conjunctions *before*, *after*, and *as … as*.)

Adverbial clauses of contrast

An adverbial clause of contrast describes something that differs from or contrasts with an idea expressed in the main clause. Commonly used subordinating conjunctions include *though*, *although*, *even though*, *whereas*, and *even if*. For example:

• "***Though* the sun is out**, the wind is very chilly."
• "***Although* she doesn't have much money**, Wendy often goes traveling."
• "I do this job ***even though* I hate it**."
• "Babies look at the world with innocence, ***whereas* adults look at it with experience**."
• "Matt will go to college, ***even if* it means taking out student loans**."

Adverbial clauses vs. adverbial phrases

An **adverbial phrase** is composed of two or more words functioning adverbially. Unlike an adverbial clause, it does not have a subject and a predicate. For example:

• "Try to finish your summer reading list **before *school starts on Monday***." (adverbial clause)

• "Try to finish your summer reading list **before *Monday***." (adverbial phrase)

Additionally, adverbial phrases often use prepositions instead of subordinating conjunctions:

• "I'll send the letters ***in* a minute**."

• "Heather can play tennis ***with* such ease**."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a subordinating conjunction?

a) wherever
b) after

c) until
d) with

2. Which sentence contains an adverbial clause of **place**?

a) “My goal is to travel everywhere my sister has visited.”
b) “When I am alone, I write in my diary.”
c) “George promised he’d come, even if he had to walk the entire distance.”
d) “This soup is as healthy as it is delicious.”

3. Which sentence contains an adverbial clause of **condition**?

a) “Whenever an expensive bill comes in the mail, I complain to my roommate.”
b) “Alex will probably become famous, provided she builds up her portfolio.”
c) “The man smiled and said he’d go wherever the wind took him.”
d) “Although they’re just toddlers, the twins seem very intelligent.”

4. Which sentence contains an **adverbial phrase**, as opposed to an adverbial clause?

a) “Don’t believe him if he says he’s telling the truth.”
b) “Sarah will start her presentation in an hour.”
c) “She’s much taller than he is.”
d) “My uncle tells jokes like he’s a comedian.”

Sentences

Definition

In this chapter, we will look at what comprises a sentence. We will explore the elements used to construct sentences, and what **parts of speech** are used to expand and elaborate on them.

We will focus for now on forming **simple sentences** (sentences that contain only a single independent clause). In the subsections of this chapter, we will explore the different kinds of sentences according to **structure**, **purpose**, and **length**.

The Construction of a Sentence

Clauses

In English, a **clause** almost always consists of two parts—a **subject** and a **predicate**. (This rule is only broken when making **imperative sentences** and **non-finite clauses**.) In traditional English grammar, a predicate is made up of a verb or **verb phrase** (a verb and any objects or modifiers relating to it), while the subject consists of a **noun**, **pronoun**, or a **phrase** containing either.

A sentence, whether short or long, must express a complete idea; and a complete sentence must consist of at least one **independent clause**—that is, a subject and predicate that make a complete thought. Independent clauses are so called because they make sense when they stand on their own. They are also sometimes referred to as "**main clauses**."

For example:

• "I refuse."

• "The wind blows."

• "Dogs bark."

• "Bees sting."

• "Cats meow."

In the above examples, the **subject** begins the sentences and the **predicate** ends them. The predicate (in each these cases made up of just a verb) contains all the necessary information about the subject to be considered logical, so each is considered an independent clause.

A **dependent clause**, on the other hand, relies on the information from an independent clause to form a complete, logical thought. Dependent clauses (also known as **subordinate clauses**) are usually marked by *dependent words*, such as a **subordinating conjunctions** or **relative pronouns**. Here are some examples of dependent clauses:

• "*whenever* (subordinating conjunction) I travel"

• "*whom* (relative pronoun) we met on the plane"

We can see that the clauses above do not express a complete idea—they require independent clauses to be logically complete:

• "*Whenever I travel*, I like to stay in fancy hotels."

• "We struck up a great conversation with a person *whom we met on the plane*."

For more information on independent and dependent clauses, see the chapter on **Clauses**.

Additional Information

Verb phrases add additional information to a sentence. Because verb phrases can be made up of more than one verb, as well as the information relating to those verbs, we can add quite a bit of information into a single sentence. This additional information is used to answer the questions *Why?, What?, What kind?, When?, Where?, How?, How much?,* and *Who/Whom*?

For instance, let's look again at the very first example from above:

• "I refuse."

Now let's add more information to create a verb phrase:

• "I refuse to eat."

Adding the **infinitive phrase** ("to" + the simple form of a verb) explains *What?* about the action of the main verb, "refuse." It is considered the **object** of the verb; together they form a verb phrase, which constitutes the predicate.

We can continue to expand the predicate to include more information:

• "I refuse to eat that awful food."

The modifiers "that" and "awful," together with the noun "food," are the **direct object** of the verb "eat," again answering the question *What?* All together, they form the object of "refuse," providing us with more detailed information about exactly *what* "I" is refusing.

Let's look at some examples where additional information answers various questions about otherwise basic sentences:

• "The wind blows *in the north*." (Identifying *where* the wind blows.)

• "The train leaves *at night*." (Identifying *when* the train leaves.)

• "Electricity costs *a lot*." (Here we state *how much* it costs.)

• "Bees sting people." (Here we state "who" they sting.)

• "Dogs bark when they are hungry, happy, or angry." (Here we state *why or when* they bark.)

• "Cats meow because they want attention." (Here we state *why* they meow.)

We can make sentences even longer by adding more information:

• "Electricity costs a lot during the day in most countries."

Here we have added the answer to three questions:

• *How much?* – “a lot”

• *When?* – “during the day”

• *Where?* – “in most countries”

Further elaboration

Just like the predicate, the subject can be modified and expanded to provide more information in a sentence. Adjectives are the most straightforward means of doing so. For example:

• “*Good friends* are *loyal people*.”

Here, the adjective “good” describes the subject “friends” (a noun); the adjective “loyal” describes “people,” which together form the object of the verb “are.”

In the above sentence we have used adjectives to describe the nouns. They answer the questions:

• *What kind of friends?* “Good friends.”

• *What kind of people?* “Loyal people.”

These are called **noun phrases**. A subject can be comprised of a noun phrase (or phrases). A verb phrase can also *include* noun phrases, as in “are *loyal people*” in the example above.

We can give even more details by adding adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. Remember, an adjective describes a noun whereas adverbs describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. **Prepositional phrases**, on the other hand, can act as either adjectives or adverbs.

Let’s look at an example:

• “*Solar-powered* electricity *rarely* costs much *during the day*.”

Here we use the adjective “solar-powered” to describe the subject noun “electricity.” It answers the question, “What kind of electricity?”

We used “rarely,” which is an adverb of frequency, to describe the verb “cost;” likewise, the prepositional phrase “during the day” is used **adverbially** to describe the verb “costs” and answer the question *When?*

Although “much” can be used as an adverb, it is here used as an **indefinite pronoun** to be the direct object of the verb “cost.” Be careful with “much,” because it can function as a determiner (adjective before a noun), adverb, or pronoun, depending on the sentence.

Let’s look at another example:

• “*Cold* wind *from the Atlantic Ocean* blows *in at night*.”

The adjective “cold” and the prepositional phrase “from the Atlantic Ocean” both modify the subject “wind.”

Compound subjects

A sentence can also have multiple subjects that relate to the same verb; these are known as **compound subjects**. For example:

• “*James* and *Daniel* collaborated on the project together.”

“James” and “Daniel,” joined by the conjunction “and,” are *both* related to the verb “collaborate.” Each subject in a **compound subject** can be modified and expanded in the same ways that we’ve seen already:

• “*My brother* James and *his* colleagues *from India* collaborated on the project together.”

“James” is now modified by “my brother,” while the second subject “colleagues” is modified by “his” and “from India.”

Compound predicates

Likewise, a single subject can take multiple predicates that are joined by a conjunction, such as “and” or “or.” These are called **compound predicates**. For example:

• “Janet *runs*, *swims*, and *cycles*.”

As with compound subjects, we can expand each of the compound predicate verbs individually:

• “Janet runs *in the morning*, swims *in the evening*, and cycles *to and from work*.”

Restructuring the sentence

When forming simple sentences in English, the additional information included with the subject and the predicate can often be reordered. Information modifying the predicate can even appear before the subject, and vice versa.

It helps if we break down each element in the sentence into what question it is answering. Take a look at the sentences below for an illustration of how such

reconstructions might work:

Who?	How?	Where?	When?	When (at what time)?
He goes	by bus	to the movies	every Saturday	at 8 o'clock.

Now let’s reorder the information in the predicate (everything after the verb “goes”):

Who?	Where?	When (at what time)?	How?	When?
He goes	to the movies	at 8 o'clock	by bus	every Saturday.

As you can see, the sentence still makes logical sense, sounds fine, and retains all of the information it had before.

Now let’s restructure it to have part of the predicate come at the *beginning* of the sentence:

When (at what time)?	When?	Who?	Where?	How?
At 8 o'clock	every Saturday	he goes	to the movies	by bus.

It is also possible to have the subject come at the *end* of the sentence, especially when we begin a sentence with “there is/are,” as in the popular English proverb:

• “There is more than one way to skin *a cat*.”

Types of sentences

So far what we have been discussing are known as **simple sentences**, which are made up of a single independent clause and no dependent clauses. Even as we have added a lot of information into the sentences above, each one has remained an independent clause because each one has a subject (or compound subject) and a predicate.

However, there are many different types of sentences, depending on how we order the text, if we use multiple clauses, if we’re asking a question, etc. In the chapter sections below, we’ll begin looking at the various kinds of sentences we can make and how they are formed.

Classifications of Sentences

By Structure

In addition to simple sentences, which we learned about above, sentences classified by structure include:

• **Compound sentences**

• **Complex sentences**

• **Compound-complex sentences**

By Purpose

The purpose of a sentence also determines its classification. The sentences classified by purpose are:

• **Declarative sentences**
• **Interrogative sentences**
• **Exclamatory sentences**
• **Imperative sentences**
• **Negative sentences**
• **Negative interrogative sentences**

By Length

Similar to sentences classified by structure, sentences can also be classified by length:

• **Major/regular sentences**
• **Minor sentences**
• **Word sentences** (also called **sentence words**)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What *must* a sentence contain in order to be complete? (Choose the answer that is **most** correct.)

a) A subject
b) A noun
c) A verb

d) A predicate
e) A & C
f) A & D
g) B & D

2. Which of the following is **not** an independent clause?

a) They will discuss it.
b) Every time my cousin from Cairo visits.
c) I can imagine.
d) He sees her walking.

3. What can a **prepositional phrase** modify in a sentence?

a) The subject.
b) The predicate.
c) Either a subject or a predicate.
d) Neither a subject nor a predicate.

4. Where can a predicate appear in a sentence? (Choose the answer that is **most** correct.)

a) Before the subject
b) After the subject
c) Before and after the subject
e) All of the above

Compound Sentences

Definition

Compound sentences are one of the four main sentence structures. They are made up of at least two **independent clauses** expressing closely related ideas of equal or similar importance that are joined using a comma and a conjunction or just a semicolon. By using compound sentences, we can add variety to our writing and speech and avoid the repetitive sound of multiple simple sentences.

Determining when to form a compound sentence

As mentioned, compound sentences are formed by joining two **independent clauses** that are closely related and of equal or similar value. To determine if two clauses can be joined in a compound sentence, we can ask ourselves three simple questions:

Q1. Does each clause contain a subject and a verb?
Q2. Can each clause stand alone to express a complete thought?
Q3. Are the two clauses closely related and of equal or similar importance?

If the answer to each of the three questions above is “yes,” then we can form a compound sentence. Let’s apply the three questions to an example:

• “**I like** running. **My sister is going to study** in Sweden.”

Q1. Does each clause contain a subject and a verb? **Yes, marked in bold.**
Q2. Can each clause stand alone to express a complete thought? **Yes.**
Q3. Are the two clauses closely related and of equal or similar importance? **No, they have nothing to do with one another.**

Because the answer to question three is “no,” the two clauses above **cannot** be joined as a compound sentence. Let’s try another example:

• “**She wanted** to play tennis. **He wanted** to play basketball.”

Q1. Does each clause contain a subject and a verb? **Yes, marked in bold.**
Q2. Can each clause stand alone to express a complete thought? **Yes.**
Q3. Are the two clauses closely related and of equal or similar importance? **Yes.**

Since the answer to each of the three questions is “yes,” we can form a

compound sentence. This can be done in several ways. For example:

• “She wanted to play tennis**, but** he wanted to play basketball.”

OR

• “She wanted to play tennis**;** he wanted to play basketball.”

OR

• “She wanted to play tennis**; however,** he wanted to play basketball.”

How to form a compound sentence

Once we’ve determined that two ideas can be joined to form a compound sentence, we have to decide *how* to join them. We have several options—we can use a **coordinating conjunction**, a **correlative conjunction**, a **conjunctive adverb**, or a **semicolon**.

Forming a compound sentence using a coordinating conjunction

There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English, which can be remembered using the acronym FANBOYS:

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

When we join two clauses in a compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction, we must choose the one that best fits the relationship that exists between the two clauses. For example:

• “The family moved into the new house**, and** the neighbors welcomed them warmly.” (additional information)

• “She wanted to play tennis**, but** he wanted to play basketball.” (contrasting information)

• “We can go to the movies tonight**, or** we can just hang out at home.” (alternative choice or option)

Punctuation note: When we use a coordinating conjunction to form a compound sentence, it is preceded by a comma, as in the examples above.

Forming a compound sentence using a correlative conjunction

Correlative conjunctions, or **paired conjunctions**, are sets of conjunctions that are always used together. Since they come in pairs, with each conjunction preceding an independent clause, they can join a maximum of two independent clauses together. Some of the most common correlative conjunctions are:

- **either … or**
- **just as … so**
- **neither … nor**
- **not … but**
- **not only … but also**
- **whether … or**

Again, the conjunction that we choose has to do with the relationship between the two clauses. For example:

- "**Neither** does he need to go**, nor** does he want to go." (negates both clauses)
- "**Just as** baseball is loved in America**, so** cricket is loved in England." (indicates that the clauses are similar)
- "**Either** I will pick you up**, or** you'll get a ride home with your father." (indicates two possible choices or outcomes)

Punctuation note: When we use correlative conjunctions, a comma precedes the conjunction that introduces the **second** independent clause, as in the examples.

Forming a compound sentence with a conjunctive adverb

Another common way to form a compound sentence is to use a conjunctive adverb. Some common conjunctive adverbs are:

- **accordingly**
- **as a result**
- **comparatively**

• in fact
• moreover
• nevertheless
• nonetheless
• on the other hand
• otherwise

While coordinating conjunctions can be used to join words, phrases, or independent clauses, *conjunctive adverbs* can only be used to join independent clauses. Conjunctive adverbs are used to indicate a specific relationship between the two independent clauses. For example:

• "Jen hadn't enjoyed the play**; as a result,** she didn't recommend it." (consequence)

• "I absolutely love singing**; on the other hand,** my sister hates it." (contrast)

• "Being a doctor is an exhausting job**; moreover,** you don't earn good money until you've been practicing for many years." (adding stronger information)

(**Punctuation note:** When we use a conjunctive adverb to form a compound sentence, it is preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma, as in the examples above.)

Forming a compound sentence with a semicolon

If the two independent clauses are very closely related and the reader has enough information to understand the relationship between them from the context alone, we can join the clauses using a semicolon without a conjunction. For example:

• "She wanted to play tennis**;** he wanted to play basketball."

• "I made the cake**;** my sister decorated it."

• "We don't eat meat**;** we're vegetarians."

Common Errors

The most common errors that occur with compound sentences are **comma splices** and **run-on sentences**.

Comma splices

A comma splice occurs when we join two independent clauses with a comma. (A comma is **not** strong enough to separate two independent clauses on its own.) For example:

✖ "She wanted to play tennis**,** he wanted to play basketball." (incorrect)

Luckily, the mistake is easy to correct using any of the methods for forming compound sentences that we described above. For example:

✔ "She wanted to play tennis**;** he wanted to play basketball."

✔ "She wanted to play tennis**, but** he wanted to play basketball."

✔ "She wanted to play tennis**; however,** he wanted to play basketball."

Run-on sentences

Run-on sentences can occur when we join two independent clauses without the correct punctuation or conjunction. For example:

✖ "I made the cake however my sister decorated it." (incorrect—missing the proper punctuation)

Again, we can correct the mistake by using any of the methods described in this article:

✔ "I made the cake**; however,** my sister decorated it."

✔ "I made the cake**;** my sister decorated it."

✔ "I made the cake**, and** my sister decorated it."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Compound sentences are made up of two (or more) _____.

a) words
b) phrases
c) dependent clauses
d) independent clauses

2. The two clauses in a compound sentence can be joined using _____.

a) a coordinating conjunction
b) a correlative conjunction
c) a conjunctive adverb
d) a semicolon

e) A, B & C
f) all of the above

3. Which of the following sentences is punctuated **incorrectly**?

a) “I love swimming my brother enjoys hockey.”
b) “I love swimming, but my brother enjoys hockey.”
c) “I love swimming; however, my brother enjoys hockey.”
d) “I love swimming; my brother enjoys hockey.”

4. Complete the following compound sentence with the **correct conjunction**: “He’s a great rock climber; _____ , he’s a terrible skier.”

a) and
b) but
c) however
d) as a result

5. Complete the following compound sentence with the **correct conjunction**: “I don’t mind what we do tonight. We can go bowling, _____ we can see a movie.”

a) and
b) or
c) on the other hand
d) likewise

Complex Sentences

Definition

Complex sentences are one of the four main sentence structures. They are made up of one **independent clause** (or **main clause**) and one or more **dependent clauses** (or **subordinate clauses**). The dependent clause is introduced and linked to the independent clause by a **subordinating conjunction**.

We use complex sentences to indicate a specific relationship between two ideas, and to clarify which of the two is more important. Consider the following example:

• “I went to the supermarket. We were out of milk.”

Although the reader can probably guess that the relationship between the two ideas above is one of cause and effect, that relationship could be specified by combining the two ideas into a complex sentence instead, as in:

• "I went to the supermarket ***because*** *we were out of milk*."

By adding the subordinating conjunction "*because*," we have transformed the previously independent clause "*we were out of milk*" into a dependent clause. It can no longer stand alone, but is *dependent* on the clause that it is now linked to. The relationship between the two ideas is now perfectly clear, and the importance of the independent clause "*I went to the supermarket*" is highlighted.

Using complex sentences

Subordinating Conjunctions

As mentioned, complex sentences are useful because they can indicate a very specific relationship between two ideas. Depending on what relationship we would like to indicate, we choose a specific subordinating conjunction. For example:

• "He's going to pass his test **even if** he doesn't study." (a specific outcome despite a hypothetical action)

• "I watched a movie **while** my friend was shopping." (concurrent events)

• "I will go **as long as** you go with me." (an outcome will occur under a certain condition)

In the examples above, the subordinating conjunctions *even if*, *while*, and *as long as* introduce the dependent clauses and specify their relationship to the independent clauses.

Some of the most common subordinating conjunctions are:

- after
- although
- as
- as soon as
- because
- even if
- in case
- in order that

- providing
- since
- though
- when
- where

Go to the chapter on **Conjunctions** to learn more about how subordinating conjunctions are used in complex sentences.

Structure and punctuation

The order of the independent and dependent clause in a complex sentence is flexible. We can structure complex sentences with the independent clause first, as in:

• "He's going to pass his test ***even if*** *he doesn't study*."

• "I watched a movie ***while*** *my friend was shopping*."

• "I will go ***as long as*** *you go with me*."

The same sentences can be structured with the dependent clause first as well. This results in no change of meaning. For example:

• "***Even if*** *he doesn't study*, he's going to pass his test."

• "***While*** *my friend was shopping*, I watched a movie."

• "***As long as*** *you go with me*, I will go."

Although there are exceptions, note that when the dependent clause is placed first, we generally follow it with a comma, as in the examples above. However, if the independent clause introduces the sentence, we usually do **not** need a comma.

Usage Note

While it's a commonly quoted belief that a sentence should not begin with the word *because*, this is **not** an actual grammatical rule. Sentences can begin with *because* (and any other subordinating conjunction) as long as the sentence is not a **fragment**. For example

✖ "Because we were early." (incorrect)

✔ "Because we were early, we decided to have a coffee." (correct)

As the first sentence is a dependent clause without an independent clause to

complete it, it is considered a **fragment** and must be corrected. However, the second sentence is a complete sentence because the dependent clause is followed by the independent clause "*we decided to have a coffee*."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Complex sentences are usually made up of _____.

a) two independent clauses
b) two dependent clauses
c) an independent clause and a dependent clause

2. The two clauses in a complex sentence are joined using a _____.

a) coordinating conjunction
b) subordinating conjunction
c) conjunctive adverb
d) correlative conjunction

3. Which of the following statements about complex sentences is correct?

a) We never separate the two clauses with a comma.
b) We always separate the two clauses with a comma.
c) We separate the two clauses with a comma if the sentence begins with the independent clause.
d) We separate the two clauses with a comma if the sentence begins with the dependent clause.

4. Which of the following sentences is **punctuated correctly**?

a) "Even though I recognized her, I didn't say hello."
b) "Even though, I recognized her, I didn't say hello."
c) "I didn't say hello even though, I recognized her."
d) "I didn't say, hello even though I recognized her."

5. Which of the following sentences is **punctuated correctly**?

a) "I didn't stop at the store because I didn't think there was anything we needed."
b) "I didn't stop at the store, because I didn't think there was anything we needed."

c) “I didn’t stop at the store because, I didn’t think there was anything we needed.”
d) “I didn’t stop, at the store because I didn’t think there was anything we needed.”

Compound-Complex Sentences

Definition

Compound-complex sentences are one of the four main sentence structures. They are made up of two **independent clauses** (also known as **main clauses**) and one or more **dependent clauses** (or **subordinate clauses**).

Complex vs. Compound Sentences

A compound-complex sentence has to satisfy the conditions we established for both **complex sentences** and **compound sentences**. First, let’s recap both briefly so we understand both sets of conditions that must be met. (More detailed explanations are included in their individual chapter sections.)

After we understand the basics of how these two are formed, we will look at how they fit together to form compound-complex sentences.

Complex Sentences

For a sentence to be considered compound-complex, at least one of the independent clauses must be a **complex sentence** (if it were to stand on its own). That is, it is made up of a dependent clause that is introduced and linked to the independent clause by a **subordinating conjunction**.

We use complex sentences to indicate a specific relationship between two ideas, and to clarify which of the two is more important. Consider the following example:

• “I went to the party next door. I had school the next morning.”

There is an inherent contrast of information between these two clauses. Left separated, the clauses’ relationship is implied, it but comes across rather awkwardly. However, by combining the two ideas into a complex sentence with a subordinating conjunction, this contrast is made more explicit and the sentence as a whole reads much more fluidly:

• “I went to the party next door ***even though*** *I had school the next morning*.”

By adding the subordinating conjunction *even though*, the previously independent clause “*I had school the next morning*” is transformed into a dependent clause. It can no longer stand alone, but is **dependent** on the clause that it is now linked to. The relationship between the two ideas is now perfectly clear, and the importance of the independent clause “*I went to the party next door*” is highlighted.

Compound Sentences

Compound sentences are formed by joining two **independent clauses** that are closely related and of equal or similar importance. To determine if two clauses can be joined in a compound sentence, we can ask ourselves three simple questions:

Q1. Does each clause contain a subject and a verb?
Q2. Can each clause stand alone to express a complete thought?
Q3. Are the two clauses closely related and of equal or similar importance?

If the answer to each of the three questions above is “yes,” then we can form a compound sentence. Let’s apply the three questions to an example:

• “**They wanted** to go to Venice. **I wanted** to see Madrid.”

Q1. Does each clause contain a subject and a verb? **Yes, marked in bold.**
Q2. Can each clause stand alone to express a complete thought? **Yes.**
Q3. Are the two clauses closely related and of equal or similar importance? **Yes.**

Since the answer to all three questions is “yes,” we can form a compound sentence. This can be done in several ways. For example:

• “They wanted to go to Venice**, but** I wanted to see Madrid.” (coordinating conjunction)
OR
• “**Just as** they wanted to go to Venice**, so** I wanted to see Madrid.” (correlative conjunction)
OR
• “They wanted to go to Venice**; however,** I wanted to see Madrid.” (conjunctive adverb)
OR
• “They wanted to go to Venice**;** I wanted to see Madrid.” (semicolon)

Forming a compound-complex sentence

In a compound-complex sentence, we join the complex independent clause to the other independent clause in the same way as for normal compound sentences: with **coordinating conjunctions**, **correlative conjunctions**, **conjunctive adverbs**, or **semicolons**. Take, for example, these two separate sentences:

• "*Because I love to read*, I like to visit the library. I enjoy going to book stores, too."

The first sentence is a complex sentence (the dependent clause is *italicized*); the second one is a standard independent clause. Now let's make them into a complex-compound sentence:

• "*Because I love to read*, I like to visit the library**, and** I enjoy going to book stores, too." (coordinating conjunction)

• "*Because I love to read*, **not only** do I like to visit the library**, but** I **also** enjoy going to book stores, too." (correlative conjunction)

• "*Because I love to read*, I like to visit the library**; additionally,** I enjoy going to book stores." (conjunctive adverb)

• "*Because I love to read*, I like to visit the library**;** I enjoy going to book stores, too." (semicolon)

In each of the examples above, the dependent clause is *italicized*, the independent clauses are underlined, and the means used to join the two independent clauses are in **bold**.

Multiple dependent clauses

Complex-compound sentences can also have more than one dependent clause. For example:

• "*Although I promised I'd study with Ethan*, I'd rather go to the movies with Jim**; nevertheless,** I made a promise, *even if it isn't as much fun*."

• "I got into gymnastics *because of my brother***, but** I got into archery *because of my sister*."

More examples

Let’s look at a few more examples of complex-compound sentences.

• “I wanted to go to a baseball game**, but** my father, *who is a huge ballet fan*, wanted to see *The Nutcracker* instead.”

• “We went to get some dinner *after class was over*; **however,** the food court was already closed.”

• “I will go to the party *as long as Terry is there*; I won’t stay long, though.”

• “*Even though he never studied*, he always passed his tests in high school**, but** I don’t think he’ll be able to pull that off in college *when he has a much harder workload*.”

• “The bank will lend us the money *providing we have something for collateral*, **so** I asked my parents to help, *although I’m not sure they will agree to*.”

• “I never graduated from college; **nevertheless**, I found a great job *because my uncle has a connection in the auto industry*.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. A complex-compound sentence requires **at least one** of which of the following?

a) independent clause
b) dependent clause
c) coordinating conjunction
d) semicolon

2. Which of the following can be used to join the two independent clauses in a complex-compound sentence?

a) coordinating conjunction
b) correlative conjunction
c) conjunctive adverb
d) semicolon
e) All of the above
f) None of the above

3. Which of the following can be used to join a dependent clause to an independent clause in a complex-compound sentence?

a) coordinating conjunction

b) subordinating conjunction
c) conjunctive adverb
d) semicolon
e) All of the above
f) None of the above

4. Identify the **dependent clause or clauses** in the following sentence:
"I'm going to see Shawna at the mall later; you can come with me, though I know you two don't get along."

a) I'm going to see Shawna at the mall later
b) you can come with me
c) though I know you two don't get along
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) A & C

5. Identify the **dependent clause or clauses** in the following sentence:
"Although I've saved up for a few years, I've never been able to afford buying a house, but we should be able to get a mortgage soon, providing my job remains secure."

a) Although I've saved up for a few years
b) I've never been able to afford buying a house
c) we should be able to get a mortgage soon
d) providing my job remains secure
d) A & C
e) B & C
f) A & D
g) B & D

Declarative Sentences

Definition

A **declarative sentence** makes a statement or argument about what is, was, or will be the case. That is, it talks about that which is asserted to be **true**.

Declarative sentences usually end in a **period** (also known as a **full stop**) and are the most ubiquitous type of sentence in English. (If they are expressing a strong

emotion or are forceful in nature, they can also end in an **exclamation point** (“!”), in which case they are sometimes referred to as **exclamatory sentences**.)

They stand in contrast to **interrogative sentences**, which ask a question and end with a question mark (“?”), and **imperative sentences**, which are used to give orders, commands, and general instructions.

Different sentence structures

All four of types of sentence structures—simple, **compound**, **complex**, and **compound-complex sentences**—can be made into declarative sentences. For example:

Simple Sentences

- “I’m walking to the library.”
- “She went to the park yesterday.”
- “I hope to see you soon.”

Compound Sentences

- “She wanted to play basketball, but he wanted to play tennis.”
- “Either I will pick you up tonight, or you can get a ride home with your father.”
- “I’ve always wanted to try riding a jet-ski; however, I’m too worried about my safety.”
- “I’m going to the party later; my friend is the DJ for it.”

Complex Sentences

- “Even though I’m not a fan of Hitchcock, I’ll go with you to see *The Birds*.”
- “I’d be willing to lend you the money providing you can offer collateral.”
- “I waited in line for three hours because I’m such a big fan of his.”

Compound-Complex Sentences

- “We went to Venice, even though they knew I wanted to go to Madrid; nevertheless, we had a great time.”

- “I’ve been saving up for a few years, so we should be able to get a mortgage soon, providing my job remains secure.”
- “I’m going to see Shawna at the mall later; you can come with me, though I know you two don’t get along.”

Different Verb Tenses

Declarative sentences can be formed in any **tense**, so long as the sentence is a statement of what is the case. For example:

Present Tense

- “I always run on Fridays.” (**present simple tense**)
- “I am driving to work now.” (**present continuous tense**)
- “She has worked in this firm for 10 years.” (**present perfect tense**)
- “He has been living in New York all his life.” (**present perfect continuous tense**)

Past Tense

- “I enjoyed that soup.” (**past simple tense**)
- “He was walking the dog at the time.” (**past continuous tense**)
- “They had been in the olive oil business for generations.” (**past perfect tense**)
- “We had been looking for a new style for our music.” (**past perfect continuous tense**)

Future Tense

- “I will work from home tomorrow.” (**future simple tense**)
- “He will be working late tonight, for sure.” (**future continuous tense**)
- “Her flight will have arrived by then.” (**future perfect tense**)
- “We will have been living together for five years this Tuesday.” (**future perfect continuous tense**)

Variations

Not all declarative sentences are straightforward statements of positive fact—

there are a few variations that express slightly different information, while still remaining declarative in nature.

Negative declarative sentences

Negative declarative sentences (or simply **negative sentences**) are declarative sentences whose information is made negative by the word *not* or *never*. All of the different sentence structures and verb tenses that we looked at above can be made negative. For example:

• “I **won’t** be going to the party because I have an exam tomorrow.” (complex sentence – future continuous tense – made negative by *not* (contracted with *will*))

• “I did **not** eat your sandwich.” (simple sentence ¬– past tense – made negative by *not*)

• “Jim is a good guy, but you can **never** rely on him.” (compound sentence ¬– present simple tense – second independent clause made negative by *never*)

Declarative commands and requests

We generally use **imperative sentences** to issue commands or instructions, and **interrogative sentences** to ask questions or make requests. For example:

• “Clean your room.” (imperative sentence)

• “Would you buy me a video game while you’re at the mall?” (interrogative sentence)

However, we can sometimes use declarative sentences to make statements that have the sound of a command or request, and yet are not exactly either one. For instance:

• “You should clean your room.”

• “You could buy me a video game while you’re at the mall.”

Both of these sentences are now in the declarative form, yet both function in a middle ground between a command and a request. Note that the forcefulness of the imperative sentence is lost when it is made declarative, just as the tact and politeness is lost from the interrogative sentence.

Statements of uncertainty

We often use declarative sentences as an indirect way of asking a question about

something that we’re not certain about, expressing what we wish to know as a declarative, factual statement. For example:

• “I was thinking we could see the movie together, if you’re free.”

• "They want to know why you did this.”

Because these kinds of statements are so close in nature and meaning to interrogative sentences, many people end up erroneously putting a question mark at the end of them. However, we must take care not to make this mistake and only use a period with such sentences.

Indirect questions

Indirect questions are very similar to statements of uncertainty, except that they use what is known as **reported speech** (sometimes called **indirect speech**) to relay an interrogative sentence from another person to the listener as a declarative sentence. For example:

• “Dan asked if you are coming to the study session this evening.”

• “She was wondering if you want to get some coffee later.”

• “They told me to ask where you’re going later.”

Declarative questions

Declarative questions are a bit of a unique bridge between declarative sentences and interrogative sentences. They are declarative, yet they end with a question mark; they are used primarily in spoken, informal English and generally have “yes” or “no” as possible responses. For example:

• “You’re firing me?”

• “He wants to drive to the city at this hour?

• “She’s moving to Russia?”

These could technically be considered interrogative sentences because they ask a question and end with a question mark, but, because the actual form of the sentence does not change, they are still very like a declarative sentence. In spoken English, the only way they are marked as questions is by the speaker’s intonation.

1. Which of the following marks of punctuation is used with declarative sentences?

a) question mark
b) exclamation point
c) period
d) interrobang

2. Declarative sentences are used to express which of the following?

a) That which is, was, or will be the case
b) An inquiry or request
c) Excitement or intense emotion
d) Orders, commands, and general instructions

3. In which of the following verb tenses can declarative sentences be used?

a) Present tense
b) Past tense
c) Future tense
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

4. Which of the following sentence structures can be declarative?

a) Simple sentences
b) Compound sentences
c) Complex sentences
d) Complex-compound sentences
e) A & B
f) A, B, & C
g) All of the above

5. Which of the following is a declarative sentence?

a) “Would you like to see a movie with me later?”
b) “Please go wash your hands.”
c) “I was wondering if you’re free after class.”
d) “I’m so excited to see this play!”

Interrogative Sentences

Definition

An **interrogative sentence** is simply a sentence that asks a question—that is, we use it when we *interrogate* someone for information. Interrogative sentences always end with question marks.

Forming interrogative sentences

When we make sentences into questions, we almost always use **auxiliary verbs** that are inverted with the subject. This is known as **subject-verb inversion**. For example:

• "**Are** *you* sleepy?"

• "**Will** *she* be coming to the party later?"

• "**Have** *they* finished their project yet?"

• "**Do** *you* like country or classical music better?"

We can also use **question words** (*who, what, where, when, why,* and *how*) to ask more nuanced questions, but we still use auxiliary verbs and subject-verb inversion. For instance:

• "What **does** *the boss* think about the proposal?"

• "When **will** *we* arrive?"

• "Who **is** coming to the play?"

In this last question, the subject is unknown, so it is represented by the word *who* (which does **not** invert with an auxiliary verb).

Using these constructions, we can create several different kinds of interrogative sentences.

There are four main types of interrogative sentences: **yes/no questions, alternative questions, "Wh-" questions**, and **tag questions**.

Yes/No questions

Yes/No questions are simply questions that can be answered with either "yes" or "no." These are exclusively formed with auxiliary verbs that are inverted with the subject—that is, they do not use question words. For example:

• "Are you registered to vote?"

• "May I borrow your pen?"

• "Do you speak French?"

• “If you miss the deadline for entry, will you still be able to compete?”

• “Is there enough food for everyone?”

Alternative questions

Alternative questions, also known as **choice questions**, are questions that provide a choice among two or more answers. These choices might be explicitly stated in the question (identified by the **coordinating conjunction** *or*), or they might be implied by the context. We usually use inverted auxiliary verbs on their own for these questions, but they can also be formed using certain question words. For example:

• “Do you prefer apple juice or orange juice?”

• “Who won—New York or Boston?”

• “Do you live in the city, or the suburbs?”

• “Do you want cake, pie, or ice cream?”

• “How would you like your steak cooked?” (The implied choices would be *rare, medium,* or *well done*.)

“Wh-” questions

“Wh-” questions (or **question word questions**) are questions that seek information by posing a question with a "wh-" question word (*who*, *what, where, when, why,* and *how*). These questions seek an open-ended answer that can be short or long, simple or complex—there is no expectation about how the person might respond.

Here are some examples:

• “**Who** is your favorite author?”

• “**What** is the capital of England?”

• “**When** will you be finished with this project?”

• “**Where** are you going for your summer vacation?”

• “**Why** haven’t you responded to Karen’s invitation yet?”

• “**How** did you get here?”

Tag questions

Tag questions are formed by adding a question as a “tag” onto the end of a **declarative sentence**. This “tag” is usually made of at least an auxiliary verb inverted with a subject, though it is sometimes just a single word. It is considered parenthetical, so we set it apart from the rest of the sentence with a comma.

Tag questions are often rhetorical, used to confirm an answer that the speaker already knows or believes to be the case. For example:

• “You’re not going to the party**, are you?**”

• “This isn't your hat**, is it?**”

• “That was the most delicious meal**, wasn’t it?**”

• “You can’t talk during the movie**, OK?”**

• “We’re going to the game**, right?**”

Other interrogative sentences

Some interrogative sentences consist of a declarative statement posed to someone as a question, such as:

• “You won?”

• “It ended just like that?”

Some questions can even be a single word. These are often “question words,” (e.g. *What?*, *Why?*, *When?*, etc.), but they can consist of other words as well. For example:

• Speaker A: “Sir, you need to move your car.”
• Speaker B: **“Me?”**

• Speaker A: “You didn’t eat all of your vegetables.”
• Speaker B: **“So?”**

• Speaker A: **“Well?”**
• Speaker B: “Hold on, I’m thinking!”

Indirect questions

Some declarative sentences express uncertainty, but are not truly interrogative. These are known as **indirect questions**. For example:

• "I was wondering if you would like to go to the party with me."

This does not pose an actual question, so it is not an interrogative sentence.

In informal writing, it is very common to see these types of sentences end with a question mark. However, this shouldn't be done, especially in formal or professional writing—the question mark should either be left out, or the sentence should be rewritten. For example, to change the sentence above from declarative to interrogative, we could say, "Would you like to go to the party with me?"

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Choose the sentence that is interrogative. (All ending punctuation has been removed.)

a) "I can't remember when dinner will be served"
b) "When will dinner be served"
c) "I wonder when dinner will be served"
d) "When dinner is served, please let me know"

2. Choose the sentence that is **not** interrogative. (All ending punctuation has been removed.)

a) "Can you tell me where the bathroom is"
b) "Where is the bathroom in this place"
c) "Where the bathroom is I'll never know"
d) "This isn't the way to the bathroom, is it"

3. Choose the sentence that is **not** interrogative. (Question marks have been added to every sentence.)

a) "I don't need surgery, do I?"
b) "How I managed to win is a mystery to you, isn't it?"
c) "Where were you, Mr. Smith, on the night in question?"
d) "I wonder how you play so well?"

4. Choose the question that is **not** a Yes/No question.

a) "Did you know that my dog was missing?"
b) "Have you seen him lately?"
c) "Where do you think he went?"
d) "Will you help me look for him?"

Negative Interrogative Sentences

Definition

As their name implies, **negative interrogative sentences** (sometimes called **interro-negative sentences**) are **interrogative sentences** that are made negative. In addition to asking literal questions, negative interrogative sentences are often used to imply that the speaker is expecting a certain answer or for emphatic effect.

Constructing negative interrogative sentences

As with all **negative sentences**, we generally form the negative interrogative by adding the word *not*. Where it appears in the sentence depends on the type of interrogative sentence we're using.

Yes/No questions

Questions that have either "yes" or "no" for an answer are formed using **auxiliary verbs** at the beginning of the sentence, as in:

• "**Do** you have a dollar?"

• "**Are** you aware of the consequences of your actions?"

• "**Have** you seen my wallet?"

To make them negative, we add the word *not* after the subject of the sentence. If *not* is contracted with the auxiliary verb, however, then the contraction comes before the subject.

Negative interrogative "yes/no" questions usually imply that the speaker expects the answer to be (or believes the answer *should be*) "yes."

For example:

• "**Don't** you have a dollar?"

• "**Are** you **not** aware of the consequences of your actions?"

• "**Haven't** you seen my wallet?"

With question words

We can also use the negative with interrogative sentences that are formed with

certain question words (*who, what, where,* and *why*). These kinds of questions are sometimes called **“Wh-” questions**, because of the common beginning of each of the question words.

To make these sentences negative, we add *not* either immediately after the subject of the sentence, or contract it with the linking or auxiliary verb. Unlike the negative form of “yes/no” questions, the negative form of question word sentences can either be literal or be used for emphasis.

Literal questions

The negative interrogative is often used literally for sentences with question words.

For example:

• “It seems like just about everyone is signed up for the trip. **Who isn’t** coming?”

• “**Why haven’t** we left yet?”

• “Your keys must be somewhere. **Where have** we **not** looked?”

In each of these sentences, the speaker is asking a question that requires a literal response.

Emphatic responses

We can also use the negative interrogative with these question words for emphasis, usually in response to another question. In this case, *not* is almost exclusively contracted with the auxiliary verb, as in:

• Person A: “Who’s coming to the party tomorrow night?”
• Person B: “**Who isn’t** coming?” (It seems like everyone will be coming.)

• Person A: “Where did you travel while you were in Europe this summer?”
• Person B: “Oh man, where **didn’t** I go?” (The speaker went to a lot of places in Europe.)

This type of question is not only used in response to other questions though—it can stand on its own as a rhetorical question. For example:

• Person A: “My uncle also said we could use his cabin for the week if we wanted. He’ll also pay for our food while we’re up there.”
• Person B: “Wow, **why wouldn’t** we go there for spring break?” (There doesn’t appear to be any reason not to go there.)

• Person A: “They just outlawed skateboarding in public in this town.”
• Person B: “Sheesh, **what isn’t** illegal here anymore?” (It seems like everything is against the law now.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What can negative interrogative sentences be used for?

a) To ask literal questions
b) To imply that the speakers expects a certain answer
c) For emphatic effect
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) All of the above

2. Negative interrogative sentences imply that the speaker expects a certain answer with what type of question?

a) Tag questions
b) Alternative questions
c) Yes/No questions
d) “Wh-” questions

3. What is the **most likely** purpose of the following negative interrogative sentence?
“Why wasn’t I informed of this meeting earlier?”

a) As a literal question
b) As an emphatic response
c) As a rhetorical question where the speaker expects a certain answer
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

4. Which of the following is contracted with the word *not* in negative interrogative sentences?

a) Main verb
b) Auxiliary verb
c) Subject
d) Direct object

Imperative Sentences

Definition

We use **imperative sentences** to give orders, commands, and general instructions. Such sentences are said to be in the **Imperative Mood**, one of the **Irrealis Moods** in English.

Verbs without subjects

When we make an imperative sentence, we use the infinitive form of the verb (without "to"), and we omit the subject of the verb. We can also intensify the sentence by adding an exclamation mark at the end.

For example:

• "Stand up."

• "Sit down!"

• "Turn off the light before you leave."

• "Go to bed!"

As you can see, there are no subjects in the sentences above. For example, it would be incorrect to say, "Open *you* the window"—it should simply be, "Open the window." It would also generally be incorrect to say "You open the window," unless it is done for emphasis (as in a retort). For example:

• A: "Daniel, could you please open the window?"

• B: "*You* open the window!"

Subjects vs. Nouns of Address

Note that this is **not** the same as using a **noun of address** (also known as a **vocative**), which is a noun or noun phrase used to address someone directly in a sentence. Nouns of address act as parenthetical elements within a sentence, grammatically unrelated to the rest of the content. They are set apart with one or two commas, depending on their position in a sentence. For example:

• "**John,** please turn out that light."

• "Stand up**, Janet**."

• "Be quiet**, sir**!"

• “**You there,** pay attention!”

John, Janet, sir, and *you there* are not the subjects of their sentences’ verbs; they are nouns of address.

Negative Imperatives

We can also make imperative statements negative by putting “do not” or “don’t” before the infinitive verb:

• “Don’t run in the hallways!”

• “Do not leave your dirty dishes in the sink.”

The imperative form is also used for general instructions, as might be seen on product instructions, formal announcements, notices, or in prohibitions. If these are in the negative, “do not” is usually not contracted. For example:

• “Wash all woolen garments in lukewarm water.”

• “Do not smoke in the airport.”

• “Do not leave your luggage unattended.”

Usage Note: Imperatives vs. “No” + Gerund

There is another form of prohibition that can be found in public notices, which is “no” plus a gerund (a verb put into the “-ing” form and used as a noun). This is used for general prohibitions, as in “no running,” “no smoking,” “no parking,” etc. While similar to the negative imperatives above, and even having the exact same meaning sometimes (“do not smoke in the airport” means the same as “no smoking in the airport”), this formation is not truly imperative from a grammatical point of view; it is considered a **noun phrase** made up of a determiner (“no”) and a gerund.

Using “Do”

We can also use the auxiliary verb “do” before the main verb of an imperative sentence. This adds an emphasis to the tone of the command, instruction, or request. For instance:

• “Oh, *do* shut up!”

• “*Do* take care of yourself, Mary!”

• “Please *do* enjoy your stay.”

This “emphatic do” can also be made negative, which changes the way a negative imperative sentence is constructed. Take for instance this negative imperative:

• “Don’t talk to me like that.”

If we want to add emphasis to “don’t,” we simply add the subject back into the sentence before the verb:

• “Don’t *you* talk to me like that!”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. When can a verb subject be **included** in an imperative sentence?

a) Always
b) When it comes before the verb.
c) When it comes after the verb.
d) When it is used for emphasis.
e) Never.

2. What verb tense do we use to form imperative sentences?

a) Present participle
b) Infinitive
c) Gerund
d) Past participle

3. Which of the following is **not** in the imperative mood?

a) No talking during class, Jeff.
b) Don’t run with scissors.
c) Jane, please sit down.
d) Talking is not allowed.
e) A & B
f) C & D
g) A & D
h) B & C

4. Which **auxiliary verb** can be used to construct an imperative sentence?

a) Do
b) Be
c) Can
d) Must

Conditional Sentences

Definition

Conditional sentences are in the **conditional mood** (a sub-category of the **subjunctive mood**), which is used for hypothetical scenarios that are dependent on a certain condition or conditions. They are usually constructed using *if* to identify the conditions that must be met.

There are four “degrees” of conditionals, all of which vary in structure and meaning.

Zero Conditional

A **zero conditional** sentence uses the **present simple tense** to talk about what is always or generally true. It is classified as a conditional because it creates a hypothetical situation to describe what *would be* true each time something happens.

The general structure for the zero conditional is: “If + subject + present tense of predicate verb, subject + present tense of main verb.”

For example:

• “**If** you **throw** a ball in the air, it **comes** back down.” (Always true: A ball comes back down every time you throw it in the air.)

• “**If** we **get up** early, we always **go** jogging.” (Generally true: We jog every time we get up early.)

First Conditional

The **first conditional** is very similar in structure to the zero conditional. We still use *if* plus the present simple to create the condition, except that we now use the **future simple tense** (*will* + bare infinitive) to describe a probable result of the condition.

Thus, the structure is: “*If* + present simple tense, *will* + infinitive.”

For example:

• “**If** I **see** him, I ***will*** **tell** him.”

• “**If** I **win** the lottery, I ***will*** **buy** a new house.”

We can also create negative first conditionals by using the negative of the present simple in the *if* clause, and the negative of *will* in the future simple clause.

For example:

• “If I ***do not*** **go**, I **will not see** him.”

• “If I ***don’t*** **see** him, I **won’t have to say** goodbye.”

• “If he ***doesn’t*** **arrive** soon, we **won’t have** time to catch the 9:30 train.”

We can also reorder the sentence to have the future tense clause at the beginning of the sentence, and the *if* conditional clause at the end. Additionally, we can use **modal auxiliary verbs** other than *will* (such as *must, can, could, may, might,* or *should*) to create different shades of certainty in the future simple tense.

Let’s take a look at some examples:

• “I **will** go *if* he calls me.” (*Will* expresses a certainty.)

• “I **must** go *if* he calls me.” (*Must* expresses a personal obligation for the speaker.)

• “I **can** go *if* he calls me.” (*Can* expresses either permission from a third party or the fact that speaker is free from other commitments.)

• “I **might** go *if* he calls me.” (*Might* expresses a 50% possibility.)

• “I **may** go *if* he calls me.” (*May* is similar to *might*, but it is more formal and the possibility is slightly less.)

• “I **should** go *if* he calls me.” (The speaker feels a mild obligation.)

• “You **should** go *if* he calls you.” (The speaker is recommending that you go or is giving you a personal opinion.)

• “I **can’t** go *if* he calls me.” (The speaker is not able or does not have permission.)

• “I **shouldn’t** go *if* he calls me.” (The speaker feels a mild obligation not to.)

• “I **might/may not** go *if* he calls me.” (We very rarely contract *might not* in modern English, and we almost never contract *may not*.)

Interrogative sentences (questions)

To form a question in the first conditional, we invert the subject with the modal auxiliary verb.

• “If I he calls me, **should I go**?”

• “**Could I leave early** if Jake covers my shift?”

• “If I finish my homework on time, **may I go** to the party?”

• “If I come with you, **will you** buy me lunch?”

Second Conditional

We use the **second conditional** to speak about a hypothetical situation or outcome resulting from the condition. Unlike the first conditional, we use the second conditional to talk about things that cannot or are unlikely to happen.

To create the second conditional, we use the **past simple tense** after the *if* clause, followed by *would* + the bare infinitive for the result of the condition.

In addition to *would* (which we use to describe something we would definitely do), we can also use *could* for what we would be able to do, as well as *might* for what it is possible (but unlikely) we would do.

For example:

• “If I went to London, I **would visit** Trafalgar Square.”

• “If I won the lottery, I **could buy** a new house.”

• “If you had a phone, you **could call** me every day.”

• “If I was/were* older, I **might stay up** all night long.”

(*Note that in more formal English, it is standard to use *were* in conditional sentences using the past tense of *be*, irrespective of it having a singular or plural subject. However, in everyday writing and speech, it is common to use *was* for singular subjects.)

We can also put the second conditional in the negative to describe something that would not be the case if something else were also not the case. To form the negative, we use the negative of the past simple in the *if* clause, and make *would* negative in the clause describing the result of the condition.

For example:

• “If our father **didn’t work** so hard, we **wouldn’t be able** to afford this house.”

• “If I **didn’t live** in London, I **could never speak** English so well.”

Interrogative sentences (questions)

To form questions in the second conditional, we invert *would/could/might* with the subject. For example:

• “If you had a million dollars, **would you buy** an expensive boat?”

• “**Would you travel** to South America if you spoke Spanish?”

We can also put a question word before *would* in this form:

• “**What would you do** if your family wasn’t so wealthy?”

• “**Where might you go** if you won the lottery?”

• “If you could have dinner with a famous person, **who would you choose**?”

Third Conditional

Third conditionals are used to establish a hypothetical situation in the past, followed by a hypothetical outcome that did not really happen—typically, the outcome is the opposite of what actually happened.

To form the third conditional, we use the **past perfect tense** for the *if* conditional clause, and *would have* + the **past participle** of the verb for the hypothetical outcome.

(As with the second conditional, we can also use *could* or *might* instead of *would*. Additionally, we can use *should have* + the past participle to describe an outcome that ought to have happened.)

For example:

• “If I **had been** more prepared, I **would have passed** that test.”

In reality, the speaker was not prepared, and so they did not pass the test. By creating a condition in the past using the past perfect tense, they can articulate how they might have achieved a different outcome if they were more prepared.

Here are some other examples:

• Truth: “She was not there and couldn’t help you.”
• Conditional: “If she **had been** there, she **could have helped** you.”

• Truth: “I was late for work yesterday because I overslept.”
• Conditional: “If I **hadn’t overslept**, I **wouldn’t have been late** for work.”

• Truth: “You knew you had a test today.”
• Conditional: “If you **knew** you had a test today, you **should have studied** harder.”

Interrogative sentences (questions)

To form a question in the third conditional, we invert *would/could/might/should* with the subject and add a question word before it (if necessary).

For example:

• “Would you have come to the party if you had known about it?”

• “What might you have done if you had known the truth?”

• “Where could you have gone if you hadn’t come here?”

The Mixed Conditional

A very commonly used “fifth” conditional is what’s known as the **mixed conditional**, which is a cross between the third conditional and the second.

There are two ways to form a mixed conditional, depending on the meaning we wish to achieve.

If it is being used to describe how an unreal situation in the past might have affected an unreal outcome in the present, we use the **past perfect tense** in the *if* conditional clause and *would / could* + the bare infinitive of the verb for the result of the condition.

For example:

• “If I **had studied** more (the condition is in the past), I **would be** a doctor (the result of the condition is in the present).”

• “If I **had been** born in Italy, I **would be** Italian.”

• “If he **hadn’t lost** his job, he **wouldn’t be** unemployed.”

If the mixed conditional is being used to describe how an unreal condition in the present might have affected an unreal outcome in the past, we use the **past simple tense** in the *if* conditional clause and *would have / could have* + the past participle of the verb for the result of the condition.

For example:

• “If I **wasn’t/weren’t so shy** (condition in the present), I **would have asked** her on a date (unreal outcome in the past).”

• “If she **was/were a better driver**, she**’d have gotten** her license by now.”

• “If we **worked** a little harder, we **could have finished** this project already.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What verb tense is used in the ***if* clause** for the **second conditional**?

a) Past simple tense
b) Past perfect tense
c) Future simple tense
d) Future perfect tense

2. Which of the following **correctly** completes this sentence using the **third conditional**?
“If I had been earlier, _____”

a) I would miss the train.
b) I missed the train.
c) I would not have missed the train.
d) I would not be missing the train.

3. Which two conditionals can form a **mixed conditional**?

a) Zero and first conditional
b) First and second conditional
c) Second and third conditional
d) First and third conditional

4. Which of the following modal verbs is **most commonly** used to create conditional sentences?

a) can
b) will
c) do
d) be

5. Which of the conditionals does **not** describe an unreal situation?

a) Third conditional
b) Second conditional
c) First conditional

d) Zero conditional

6. What kind of conditional is the following sentence an example of?
“I would have studied marine biology if I weren’t afraid of water.”

a) Mixed conditional
b) Third conditional
c) Second conditional
d) First conditional

Major and Minor Sentences (Regular and Irregular Sentences)

Definition

A **major sentence** (also called a **regular sentence**) is any complete sentence that is made up of or contains an **independent clause**—that is, it has both a subject and a predicate (a verb and any of its constituent parts).

A **minor sentence** (also called an **irregular sentence**), on the other hand, is any sentence that does not have at least one independent clause—that is, it does **not** have both a subject and a complete predicate—and yet is used in writing or speech as a complete sentence that stands on its own.

All of the other sections in the chapter on **Sentences** deal with major sentences, so we will focus on minor sentences in this section.

Minor Sentences

Minor sentences can be made up of single words, sentence fragments, interjections, or set expressions (such as **idioms and proverbs**. We’ll examine several examples of each below to see how they are used in everyday English.

Single-word sentences

In conversational English, we very often use single words to get across required information in response to another person. These are known as **sentence words, one-word sentences**, or just **word sentences**. For example:

• Person A: “Where is your meeting again?”

• Person B: “**Denver**.”

• Person A: “I think it’s best that we don’t get involved.”
• Person B: “**Agreed**.”

• Person A: “When do you need these reports finished?”
• Person B: “**Tomorrow**.”

Even though the second speaker’s response is only made up of a single word in each of these examples, it contains all the relevant information that is necessary in the context of the conversation.

Sentence fragments

We also commonly use sentence fragments (phrases, incomplete clauses, or dependent clauses) as standalone sentences. Again, these are typically used in conversational English when we are responding to someone else. For example:

• Person A: “Are you going to have lunch soon?”
• Person B: “**In about an hour**.” (prepositional phrase)

• Person A: “Do you want to come to a movie with me later?”
• Person B: “**Sounds good!**” (incomplete clause)

• Person A: “When did you realize that you wanted to pursue politics?”
• Person B: “**When I was in college**.” (dependent clause)

Interjections

Single words and short phrases are also commonly used as **interjections** (also known as **exclamations**) to convey a strong emotion, such as surprise, alarm, excitement, dismay, etc. These are divided into **primary** and **secondary interjections**.

Primary interjections

Primary interjections are single words derived from sounds, rather than from existing word classes. They still have widely recognized meaning, however. Some common primary interjections are:

- **argh** (an expression of frustration)
- **brr** (an expression of being cold)
- **eww** (an expression of disgust)
- **grr** (an expression of anger)

- **ooh** (an expression of amazement)
- **phew** (an expression of relief)

Primary interjections are often linked to a major sentence with a comma, but they can also stand on their own as minor sentences, in which case they are generally punctuated with an exclamation point. For example:

• "**Ooh**! That's a beautiful dress."

• "**Brr**! It's freezing in here!"

• "**Eww**! I hate coconuts!"

Secondary Interjections

Secondary interjections are single words or short phrases that do belong to other existing word classes. Some common secondary interjections are:

• bless you
• congratulations
• good grief
• hell
• hey
• hi
• oh my
• oh my God
• oh well
• shoot
• well
• what
• wow

Secondary interjections are also often punctuated with exclamation points. For example:

• "**Oh my God**! We won the lottery!"

• "**Wow**! What a great achievement!"

• "**Congratulations**! That was an impressive victory."

However, we can also have weaker secondary interjections that are punctuated with periods, or interrogative ones that use question marks. For example:

• "**Well shoot.** I really thought we were going to win."
• "**Good grief.** I didn't see that coming."

• “**Well?** Are we going to watch a movie?”
• “**What?** You don’t like coconuts?”

Idioms, Proverbs, and Set Expressions

English has a large number of expressions that have a set, established understanding, even if they technically are not grammatically complete or do not make literal sense. Many of these are **idioms** (expressions that have a non-literal meaning) or **proverbs** (short sayings that carry a basic truth or precept), though there are other expressions with set meanings that are in frequent and widespread use, as well.

There are thousands of such phrases, so we will only cover a few here that are considered minor sentences. To learn more, check out The Free Dictionary’s **Complete Guide to Idioms, Proverbs, and Phrasal Verbs**.

Idioms

Idioms are phrases whose meaning cannot be gleaned from the literal words they’re composed of, often having a unique grammatical structure. Because of this, they are frequently used in ways that go against traditional grammar rules, and they are often used as sentences unto themselves in conversation. For example:

• “Hi, Bill, how are you?”
• “Hey, Jeff! **Long time no see**!”

• “Be more careful next time, or there might not be a ‘next time.’ **Catch my drift**?”

• “How can you evict us from our house like this?”
• “**Orders are orders**.”

• “When will you have that report ready for me?”
• “**Any minute now**!”

Idioms are so frequently used and understood in everyday speech and writing that they are often truncated or abbreviated, with the full phrase left to be implicitly understood by the listener or reader. For instance:

• “I went through all the trouble of getting her this job, and she still managed to screw it up.”

• “Well, **you can lead a horse to water**.” (Short for “**You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink**.”)

• “I took them to the best restaurant in town, but they said they would rather have had cheeseburgers.”
• “What do you expect? **Pearls before swine**.” (Short for “**cast (one’s) pearls before swine**.”)

Proverbs

Proverbs are similar to idioms in that their codified meaning is widely understood due to frequent and widespread use. Proverbs are self-contained sentences that express a truth based on common sense or shared experience. Many of them have become pared down into minor sentences over time. For example:

• “You should try and form better habits in your day-to-day routine. **Early to bed, early to rise**!)” (Short for “**Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise**.”)

• “I’m not sure why people are shocked that he’s suspected of stealing. **If the shoe fits**.” (Short for “**If the shoe fits, wear it**.”)

• “Sure, bring your friends. **The more the merrier**!”

Other set expressions

There are other common expressions that stand on their own as minor sentences that are not necessarily idiomatic or proverbial but nevertheless have a particular meaning that is inherently understood. (Many of these are forms of (or similar to) the **interjections** that we looked at above.)

Expressions of greeting and farewell are a prime example of set expressions that function as or form minor sentences. For example:

• “**Hello**! How are you?”

• “**Good afternoon**! It’s a pleasure to see you.”

• “I’m afraid I must depart. **Good day**, gentlemen.”

• “**Goodbye**. I hope we meet again.”

Expressions of well wishes operate the same way:

• “I hear you have a big exam coming up. **Good luck**!”

• “This is a big trip you’re undertaking. **Godspeed**!”

Some set expressions have been adapted from other languages, as in:

• “**Bon voyage**! Enjoy your trip abroad!” (From French, expressing good wishes to a departing traveler.)

• “I hope you enjoy the meal. **Bon appétit**, everyone!” (From French, a salutation to someone about to eat.)

• “**Gesundheit**!” (From German, meaning “health,” used in English as a verbal response to someone who has sneezed.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following would **not** comprise a **minor** sentence?

a) A word
b) A phrase
c) A dependent clause
d) An independent clause

2. Which of the following can be used to punctuate a **secondary interjection**?

a) A period
b) An exclamation point
c) A question mark
d) A & C
e) B & C
f) All of the above

3. Identify the minor sentence in the following example:
“I’ll give Samantha a lift back to the office. Sound good?”

a) I’ll give Samantha a lift back to the office.
b) Sound good?
c) Neither A nor B
d) Both A & B

4. When are single-word sentences **most commonly** used in English?

a) Conversations
b) Formal writing

c) Informal writing
d) Professional writing

5. Identify what **kind** of minor sentence is highlighted in the following example:
Speaker A: “I really need that loan you promised me.”
Speaker B: “**All in good time.**”

a) One-word sentence
b) Interjection
c) Idiom
d) Proverb

Quiz answers

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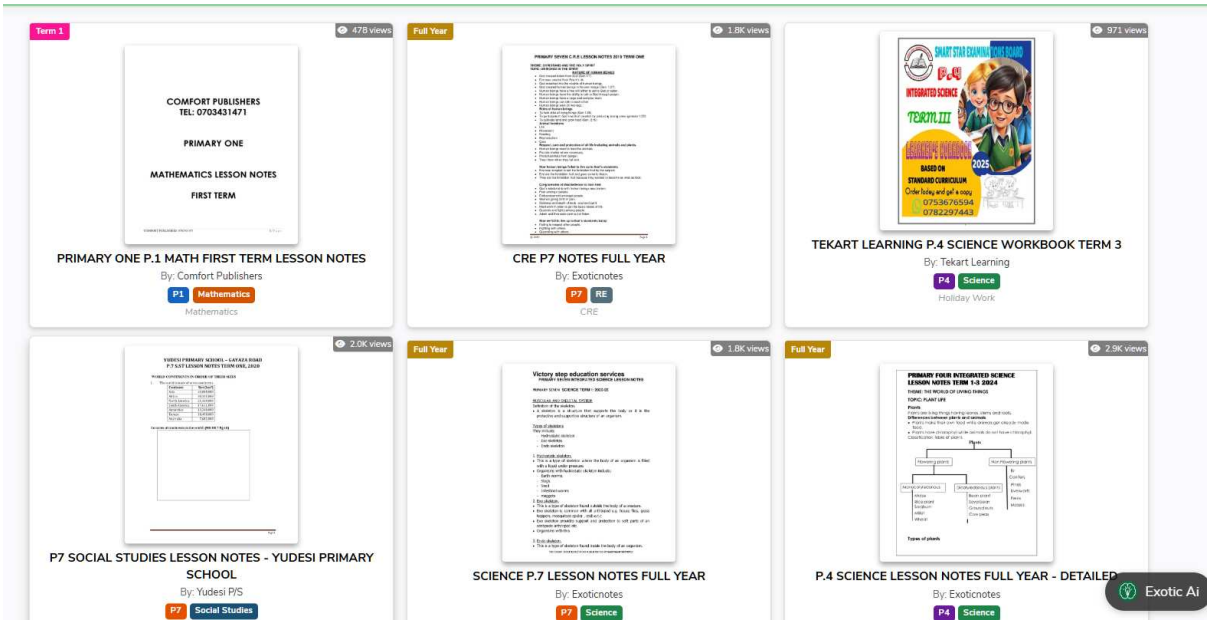
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