COMPLETE ENGLISH GRAMMAR RULES
Examples, Exceptions, Exercises & Everything You Need to Master Proper Grammar

PETER HERRING
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About the author

Peter Herring was born in Boulder, Colorado, and grew up with a passion for reading. He attended the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, Canada, where he majored in English Literature. He went on to complete a master’s degree in Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama at University College Dublin in Ireland, where he graduated with honors.

Peter has worked as an editor since 2009, lending his passion for words to scientific research projects, non-fiction publishing, and The Free Dictionary.

He lives in Dublin, Ireland, with his wife and son.

About the editor

Nick Norlen is the managing editor of The Free Dictionary, where he oversees all editorial projects. After graduating with honors from La Salle University in Philadelphia, he worked as a reporter before joining the Farlex team in 2008.

He lives in Newtown, Pennsylvania, with his wife and daughter, whose first word is his favorite word.
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 prescriptive 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**
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.

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

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
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Countable Nouns</th>
<th>Plural Countable Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a cup</td>
<td>two cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countable Nouns</td>
<td>Uncountable Nouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an ambulance</td>
<td>several ambulances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a phone</td>
<td>10 phones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>✔ Correct</th>
<th>✗ Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Would you like tea?”</td>
<td>“Would you like a tea?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Do you have any information?”</td>
<td>“Do you have an information?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We bought new camping equipment.”</td>
<td>“We bought new camping equipments.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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)
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 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.

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 actor.)
- “His acceptance of the position was received warmly.” (The verb accept becomes the noun acceptance.)
• “The hardness of diamond makes it a great material for cutting tools.” (The adjective hard becomes the noun hardness.)

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

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:
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**?
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a cup</td>
<td>two cups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Now let’s see how they can be counted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a conversation</td>
<td>two conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an emergency</td>
<td>several emergencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a reading</td>
<td>10 readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an aspiration</td>
<td>many aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an emotion</td>
<td>hundreds of emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a belief</td>
<td>certain beliefs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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 determinant 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:
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
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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>noun + verb</td>
<td>haircut, rainfall, sunrise, sunset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun + preposition</td>
<td>hanger-on, passerby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun + prepositional phrase</td>
<td>brother-in-law, mother-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun + adjective</td>
<td>cupful, spoonful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb + noun</td>
<td>breakfast, washing machine, runway, pickpocket, swimming pool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preposition + noun</td>
<td>bystander, influx, onlooker, underpants, upstairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb + preposition</td>
<td>check-in, checkout/check-out, drawback, lookout, makeup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjective + verb</td>
<td>dry cleaning, public speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bedroom</td>
<td>bedrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>football</td>
<td>footballs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water bottle</td>
<td>water bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full moon</td>
<td>full moons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BUT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>secretary general</td>
<td>secretaries general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother-in-law</td>
<td>mothers-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passerby / passer-by</td>
<td>passersby / passers-by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>haircut</td>
<td>haircuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>check-in</td>
<td>check-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronouncing compound nouns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, compound nouns are pronounced with the emphasis on the first part of the word. For example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- BEDroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- BLACKbird</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- CHECK-in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- GREENhouse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- MAKEup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- WATER bottle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 something) 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 acceptance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 failure.)

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

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
“-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 *hardness*.)

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

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

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

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

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

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 *steadiness*.)

• “The teacher puts her students’ **happiness** above all else.” (The adjective *happy* becomes
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 greatness.)
- “The flatness of the Earth was disproven long ago.” (The adjective flat becomes the noun flatness.)

“-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 difficulty.)
- “That’s enough of your modesty.” (The adjective modest becomes the noun modesty.)
- “Honesty is a very important virtue.” (The adjective honest becomes the noun honesty.)

“-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 scarcity.)
• “Kindness is a rarity in this world.” (The adjective rare becomes the noun rarity.)

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

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

We often use the suffix “-ence” for adjectives ending in “-ent,” as in:
• “We demand greater independence.” (The adjective independent becomes the noun independence.)
“Silence is expected during tests.” (The adjective silent becomes the noun silence.)

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 **convert** pounds into kilograms.” (verb)
• “The church always welcomes recent **converts** to its meetings.” (noun)
• “Make sure you **record** the meeting so we can review it later.” (verb)
• “I love listening to old **records**.” (noun)
• “Please don’t **insult** my intelligence.” (verb)
• “We will not forget this **insult** 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Subjective Case</th>
<th>Objective Case</th>
<th>Possessive Determiner</th>
<th>Possessive Pronoun</th>
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<td>Neuter (Gender Neutral)</td>
<td>They</td>
<td>Them</td>
<td>Their</td>
<td>Th</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(*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
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...
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 determinant, 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 of 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
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
<table>
<thead>
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<th>People vs. Things</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular or Plural</th>
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<td></td>
<td>one (&quot;impersonal&quot; pronoun)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nobody/no one/no-one</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>somebody/someone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>whoever/whosoever</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>whomever/whomsoever</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you (see usage note)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
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.”
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
Functions of major demonstrative pronouns

The most common demonstrative pronouns are *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*. Their functions are explained in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demonstrative Pronoun</th>
<th>Singular/Plural</th>
<th>Nearby/Far Away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>this</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>nearby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>far away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>these</td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>nearby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>those</td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>far away</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**, **whosoever**, and **whomsoever**. For example:

• “**Whatsoever** is your favorite color?”
• “**Whosoever** do you think made this delicious meal?”
• “**Whomsoever** would you like to invite to your birthday party?”
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
- 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Antecedent</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Possessive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Who</td>
<td>Who / Whom</td>
<td>Whose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things</td>
<td>Which</td>
<td>Which</td>
<td>Whose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People or Things</td>
<td>That</td>
<td>That</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can be used...</th>
<th>as a subject?</th>
<th>as an object?</th>
<th>as a possessive?</th>
<th>to describe things?</th>
<th>to describe people?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>who</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗ (informal)</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whom</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✗ (formal)</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whose</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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...
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
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.”
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I play violin.”</td>
<td>“I played violin.”</td>
<td>“I had played violin.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I bake cakes.”</td>
<td>“I baked cakes.”</td>
<td>“I had baked cakes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I listen to my teacher.”</td>
<td>“I listened to my teacher.”</td>
<td>“I had listened to my teacher.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I gather firewood.”</td>
<td>“I gathered firewood.”</td>
<td>“I had gathered firewood.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I climb trees.”</td>
<td>“I climbed trees.”</td>
<td>“I had climbed trees.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I see the horizon.”</td>
<td>“I saw the horizon.”</td>
<td>“I had seen the horizon.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I grow bigger every day.”</td>
<td>“I grew bigger every day.”</td>
<td>“I had grown bigger every day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I give to charity.”</td>
<td>“I gave to charity.”</td>
<td>“I had given to charity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I sing on Tuesday.”</td>
<td>“I sang on Tuesday.”</td>
<td>“I had sung on Tuesday.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I swim often.”</td>
<td>“I swam often.”</td>
<td>“I had swum often.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I drive to work.”</td>
<td>“I drove to work.”</td>
<td>“I had driven to work.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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."
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.”

**Factive Verbs**

**Factive 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
• “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 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”
c) “-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: *Transitive verbs* transition or transfer an action to a person or thing that receives it. *In-* means not in this case, so *intransitive verbs* do not transition/transfer 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 two objects: a direct object and an indirect object. These are known as ditransitive verbs. The direct object relates to the person or thing that directly receives the action of the verb, while the indirect object relates to the person or thing that indirectly 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 pen.” (The indirect object, *Mary* immediately follows the direct object, *pen*.)

or

• “He gave a pen 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 mathematics.”
• “She teaches mathematics to the students.”
• “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.”

**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 **factive 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>play</td>
<td>played</td>
<td>played</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bake</td>
<td>baked</td>
<td>baked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen</td>
<td>listened</td>
<td>listened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approach</td>
<td>approached</td>
<td>approached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gather</td>
<td>gathered</td>
<td>gathered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>climb</td>
<td>climbed</td>
<td>climbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>walked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrive</td>
<td>arrived</td>
<td>arrived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bolt</td>
<td>bolted</td>
<td>bolted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chop</td>
<td>chopped</td>
<td>chopped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>copy</td>
<td>copied</td>
<td>copied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panic</td>
<td>panicked</td>
<td>panicked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*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)
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 Verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular Verb</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
<th>Third Person Singular Present Tense</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bake</td>
<td>baked</td>
<td>baked</td>
<td>bakes</td>
<td>baking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tap</td>
<td>tapped</td>
<td>tapped</td>
<td>taps</td>
<td>tapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tidy</td>
<td>tidied</td>
<td>tidied</td>
<td>tidies</td>
<td>tidying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mimic</td>
<td>mimicked</td>
<td>mimicked</td>
<td>mimics</td>
<td>mimicking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Irregular Verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular Verb</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
<th>Third Person Singular Present Tense</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ride</td>
<td>rode</td>
<td>ridden</td>
<td>rides</td>
<td>riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see</td>
<td>saw</td>
<td>seen</td>
<td>sees</td>
<td>seeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>given</td>
<td>gives</td>
<td>giving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swim</td>
<td>swam</td>
<td>swum</td>
<td>swims</td>
<td>swimming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
<th>Present Tense</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>was/were</td>
<td>been</td>
<td>is/am/are</td>
<td>being</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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
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
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:*

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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.”
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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Be Conjugations</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Auxiliary example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>base form</td>
<td>&quot;You must be joking.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>am</td>
<td>first-person singular present tense</td>
<td>&quot;I am moving to Germany next month.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are</td>
<td>first-person plural present tense</td>
<td>&quot;We are leaving tomorrow morning.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second-person singular/plural present tense</td>
<td>&quot;Are you working later?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>third-person plural present tense</td>
<td>&quot;Where are they going?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td>third-person singular present tense</td>
<td>&quot;She is wondering where we're going.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was</td>
<td>first-person singular past tense</td>
<td>&quot;I was talking to my brother yesterday.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>third-person singular past tense</td>
<td>&quot;It was raining quite hard last night.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>were</td>
<td>first-person plural past tense</td>
<td>&quot;We were looking for a new place to live.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second-person singular/plural past tense</td>
<td>&quot;You were thinking of running away?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>third-person plural past tense</td>
<td>&quot;When were they planning on electing a new president?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been</td>
<td>past participle</td>
<td>&quot;Everyone has been worrying about their jobs.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Have Conjugations</strong></th>
<th><strong>Form</strong></th>
<th><strong>Auxiliary Example sentence</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>base form</td>
<td>&quot;I have been to this part of town before.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has</td>
<td>third-person singular present tense</td>
<td>&quot;It has been raining for over an hour now.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had</td>
<td>past tense</td>
<td>&quot;They had been confident in the project's success.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
having | present participle | "Having worked his whole life, Larry relished the thought of retirement."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Do Conjugations</strong></th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Auxiliary Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>base form</td>
<td>&quot;Do be careful.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>does</td>
<td>third-person singular present tense</td>
<td>&quot;Does he know what he's talking about?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>did</td>
<td>past tense</td>
<td>&quot;We didn't know any better.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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
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
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.
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)
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
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
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 *have* 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 for* 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
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 \textit{will} is generally preferred in modern English (especially American English), using \textit{shall} adds an additional degree of politeness or formality to the sentence that \textit{will} sometimes lacks.

Generally, \textit{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 \textit{will} or \textit{be going to}. We can also use \textit{shall} to add formality or politeness to these constructions, especially the future simple tense and the future continuous tense. For example:

- “I \textit{shall} call from the airport.” (future simple tense)
- “We \textit{shall} be staying in private accommodation.”
- “Our company \textit{shall not} be held accountable for this.”
- “I \textit{shan’t*} be participating in these discussions.”

(*Contracting \textit{shall} and \textit{not} into \textit{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 \textit{shall} in the future perfect and future perfect continuous tenses as well:

- “As of next week, I \textit{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**?
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,
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 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?”
- “*May* we *be* of assistance in any way?”

Making a polite offer

Like *can*, we can use *may* to offer to 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
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 underlined word in the following sentence?

“Excuse me, can 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:

- “**Do** you **dare** cross me again?”
• “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 dare n’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 wasn’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 **oughtn’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?”

• “**Oughtn’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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Gerund</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I like <strong>to hike</strong> on the weekend.”</td>
<td>“I like <strong>hiking</strong> on the weekend.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She loves <strong>to read</strong>.”</td>
<td>“She loves <strong>reading</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They hate <strong>to get</strong> bad news.”</td>
<td>“They hate <strong>getting</strong> bad news.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I prefer <strong>to go out</strong> on a Friday <strong>than to stay</strong> at home.”</td>
<td>“I prefer <strong>going out on a Friday</strong> than <strong>staying at home</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Gerund</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I remembered to close the window.” (I didn’t forget to do it.)</td>
<td>“I remember closing the window.” (I clearly recall it.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I forgot to meet John earlier.” (I didn’t remember to do it.)</td>
<td>“I forget meeting John earlier.” (I don’t remember this fact even though it happened.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Try to get some rest.” (Attempt to do this.)</td>
<td>“Try getting some rest.” (Try this as a possible solution to the problem.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I stopped to drink water before bed.” (I interrupted what I was doing to drink water.)</td>
<td>“I stopped drinking water before bed.” (I don’t drink water before bed anymore.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 *for some bread.*” (correct—prepositional phrase)
✖ I went to the supermarket *for 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 **without** 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
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular verb</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apologize</td>
<td>apologizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>close</td>
<td>closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>follow</td>
<td>following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look</td>
<td>looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remember</td>
<td>remembering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Irregular verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular verb</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td>eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>run</td>
<td>running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sing</td>
<td>singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular verb</th>
<th>Past Simple</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apologize</td>
<td>apologized</td>
<td>apologized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>close</td>
<td>closed</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>follow</td>
<td>followed</td>
<td>followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look</td>
<td>looked</td>
<td>looked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remember</td>
<td>remembered</td>
<td>remembered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular verb</th>
<th>Past Simple</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td>ate</td>
<td>eaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>run</td>
<td>ran</td>
<td>run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sing</td>
<td>sang</td>
<td>sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>thought</td>
<td>thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>wrote</td>
<td>written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>was/were</td>
<td>been</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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, it 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)
“Do you enjoy running?” (object)
“My brother’s favorite sport is cycling.” (complement)

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
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 without 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
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 substitute 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)
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

d) Thin verbs

c) Empty verbs

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 across** 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 up 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 away with her plan**.” (I’ll make sure she is caught and/or punished.)
- “A substitute teacher has been **filling in for Mr. Davis** all week.” (The substitute teacher is taking the place of Mr. Davis.)
- “I’ve been trying to **cut back 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  

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**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*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>be about to</td>
<td>To intend to do or be near to doing something in the immediate future</td>
<td>“Hi Johnny, I was about to call you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be after (someone)</td>
<td>To be hunting, looking for, and/or chasing after (someone)</td>
<td>“The police are after a man who robbed a bank yesterday.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be after (something)</td>
<td>To want (something) from someone</td>
<td>“He’s being so nice to me these days. He is after something, for sure.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb Phrase</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example</td>
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<tr>
<td>be down to</td>
<td>To have an amount of something reduced to a lower or minimal number</td>
<td>“After months of dieting, I am down to 190 pounds.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I am down to my last dollar.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be down to</td>
<td>To be the result of or primarily caused by something</td>
<td>“A large number of diseases are down to genetic traits.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be down with</td>
<td>To be suffering from, as a disease or illness</td>
<td>“I can’t go to work today because I am down with the flu.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be in</td>
<td>To be present in a given location</td>
<td>“I’m afraid Molly is not in at the moment.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I will let you know as soon as the doctor is in.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be into</td>
<td>To like something very much; to be particularly enthusiastic about something</td>
<td>“I’m really into this band right now.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **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.” |
<p>| <strong>be out of</strong> | To no longer have something | “Sorry, but we <strong>are out of</strong> coffee at the moment.” |
| <strong>be up</strong> | To be at a higher level | “The price of gas <strong>is up</strong> again.” |
| <strong>be up</strong> | To be occurring, especially in reference to strange or noteworthy events | “Something <strong>is up</strong>; the staff are all acting strange.” |
| <strong>be up</strong> | To be awake and out of bed | “John’s <strong>not up</strong> yet. He’s still sleeping.” |
| <strong>be up against</strong> | To meet or contend with difficulties or impediments | “I’m <strong>up against</strong> a lot of competition these days.” |
| <strong>be up to</strong> | To be someone’s decision or responsibility | “For now, the planning stage <strong>is up to</strong> you.” |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>be up to</strong></td>
<td>To be in the midst of doing or planning</td>
<td>“I am going to see what the children are up to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>be up to</strong></td>
<td>To be capable of doing (something) competently</td>
<td>“We’ll have to fire him. He isn’t up to the job.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Phrasal Verbs with come**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>come across</strong></td>
<td>To find unexpectedly</td>
<td>“I came across that old watch of mine when I was cleaning out the drawers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>come across</strong></td>
<td>To give a certain impression through the way one acts</td>
<td>“She comes across as a really confident person.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>come into</strong></td>
<td>To acquire, especially through inheritance or chance</td>
<td>“John has been buying some flashy cars lately. He must have come into a bit of money.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>come up with</strong></td>
<td>To think of, develop, or invent</td>
<td>“I’m finding it difficult to come up with new ideas.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phrasal Verbs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example sentence</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>come up against</td>
<td>To meet and be forced to deal with some impediment, obstacle, or difficulty</td>
<td>“We’ve <strong>come up against</strong> several political and legal problems.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come down with</td>
<td>To catch or become infected with, as a virus or disease</td>
<td>“I don’t feel very well today. I think I’ve <strong>come down with</strong> the flu.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come (a)round</td>
<td>To change one’s mind about and agree to something after some persuasion or time</td>
<td>“Your father doesn’t want you to have a dog, but give him a day or two and I’m sure he’ll <strong>come (a)round</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come back to</td>
<td>To be recalled in one’s memory</td>
<td>“I couldn’t remember her name, but after a few minutes it <strong>came back to</strong> me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Phrasal Verbs with get

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>get over</td>
<td>To recover from or feel better about some sad or traumatic event</td>
<td>“I can’t seem to get over the death of my cat. I feel sadder as the days go by.”</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>get over</td>
<td>To believe, understand, or no longer be surprised by something</td>
<td>“I can’t get over the way she spoke to me. She has no manners whatsoever.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get on</td>
<td>To have an easy, friendly relationship with someone; to be on good terms with someone</td>
<td>“My husband and I get on so well together.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get away</td>
<td>To escape, as from trouble, danger, or pursuit</td>
<td>“The police tried to catch the bank robbers but they managed to get away.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get away with</td>
<td>To avoid blame, responsibility, or conviction for some wrongdoing</td>
<td>“The criminal got away with the crime. There wasn’t enough evidence to convict him.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get out of</td>
<td>To find a way of avoiding having to do, confront, or deal with something</td>
<td>“How can I get out of this mess I'm in.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>get (a)round to</strong></td>
<td>To find the time to do or complete something that one has been meaning to do</td>
<td>“I still haven’t gotten (a)round to fixing the broken shutter.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>get back</strong></td>
<td>To return, usually home</td>
<td>“What time did you get back last night?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>get rid of</strong></td>
<td>To dispose of something that is no longer needed or wanted</td>
<td>“I want to get rid of that old mattress.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>get through to</strong></td>
<td>To make contact with someone, especially by phone</td>
<td>“I can’t get through to Sally. Her phone has been busy all morning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>get through to</strong></td>
<td>To make someone understand or comprehend something</td>
<td>“It is difficult to get through to him—he never listens to a word you say.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>get through to</strong></td>
<td>To advance to a higher stage in a competition</td>
<td>“We won in overtime and managed to get through to the finals.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Phrasal Verbs with *give*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>give away</td>
<td>To donate something; to bestow something upon someone</td>
<td>“He’s a generous man. He <strong>gives away</strong> half of his salary to charity each month.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give away</td>
<td>To present the bride to the groom, traditionally by the bride’s father</td>
<td>“In some countries, it is the custom for the father of the bride to <strong>give</strong> his daughter <strong>away</strong> at the wedding.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give back</td>
<td>To return something to someone</td>
<td>“Can you <strong>give back</strong> that book I lent you?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give in (to something)</td>
<td>To surrender (to) or stop resisting (something)</td>
<td>“No matter how much they try to get you to accept a lower offer, don’t <strong>give in</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“If you are on a diet, it's hard not to <strong>give in to</strong> temptation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give in</td>
<td>To collapse</td>
<td>“The floor <strong>gave in</strong> after the flood.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**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*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>look into</strong></td>
<td>To investigate</td>
<td>“The police are <strong>looking into</strong> reports of a robbery last night.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>look up</strong></td>
<td>To find or seek information, as from a list or some reference source</td>
<td>“Can you <strong>look up</strong> John’s phone number for me please?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>look forward to</strong></td>
<td>To anticipate with pleasure or excitement</td>
<td>“I am <strong>looking forward to</strong> seeing my family again after six months of living abroad.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>look out</strong></td>
<td>To pay attention to or be careful of something, especially danger</td>
<td>“<strong>Look out</strong>, there’s a car coming!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>look after</strong></td>
<td>To take care of or be responsible for someone or something</td>
<td>“Can you <strong>look after</strong> my cat while I’m away?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>look down on</strong></td>
<td>To regard as inferior</td>
<td>“My neighbors <strong>look down on</strong> us because we have less money.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>look on</strong></td>
<td>To observe as a spectator</td>
<td>“The crowd <strong>looked on</strong> as the firemen tried to put out the fire.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>look over</strong></td>
<td>To examine or inspect</td>
<td>“He carefully <strong>looked over</strong> the contract before signing it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
look up to

To admire and respect

“She really looks up to her boss. He has taught her many things.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>break down</td>
<td>To stop functioning</td>
<td>“My car broke down on the highway today.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break down</td>
<td>To become very emotionally upset; to begin crying</td>
<td>“She broke down when she was told her cat had died.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break up</td>
<td>To end a romantic relationship</td>
<td>“Have you heard the news? Sally and John broke up.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break into</td>
<td>To force entry</td>
<td>“Burglars broke into my house last night.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break away from</td>
<td>To become free from some restriction or restraint</td>
<td>“The police caught one of the burglars, but he managed to break away from them.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Phrasal Verbs with *break out*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>break out</td>
<td>To escape from some confinement or imprisonment</td>
<td>“The other burglar was put in prison, but he managed to <strong>break out</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break out</td>
<td>To appear or begin suddenly and spread quickly</td>
<td>“An epidemic of flu has <strong>broken out</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break out in</td>
<td>To have a large amount of something, usually a skin condition, appear suddenly and spread quickly</td>
<td>“My face has <strong>broken out in pimples</strong>, and I look terrible.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break even</td>
<td>To achieve a result with no loss or gain in profit</td>
<td>“The company <strong>broke even</strong> this year.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Phrasal Verbs with *pick*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pick up</td>
<td>To go and collect someone or something, especially by car</td>
<td>“Can you <strong>pick up</strong> the children after school?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrasal Verb</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>pick up</td>
<td>To receive, as a radio signal</td>
<td>“My cell phone never <strong>picks up</strong> a signal when I’m in the house.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pick up</td>
<td>To attempt to find or become acquainted with someone for romantic or sexual purposes</td>
<td>“He always wants to go <strong>pick up</strong> girls at bars.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pick on</td>
<td>To deliberately harass or tease someone</td>
<td>“You’re always <strong>picking on</strong> me, and I wish you would stop.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pick on</td>
<td>To select or choose someone</td>
<td>“The teacher always <strong>picks on</strong> Jane. She never gives the other students a chance to answer.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phrasal Verbs with put**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>put out</td>
<td>To extinguish something, such as a flame</td>
<td>“We have to <strong>put out</strong> the fire before it spreads to the rest of the house.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put out</td>
<td>To put an animal outside the house</td>
<td>“Would you <strong>put</strong> the cat <strong>out</strong> for a while?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Example</td>
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<tr>
<td>put (someone/oneself) out</td>
<td>To inconvenience someone or oneself on someone else’s behalf</td>
<td>“It would be great if you could do this for me, but don’t put yourself out.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put (someone) up</td>
<td>To host (someone) in one’s house</td>
<td>“I can put you up for the weekend, but no longer than that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put up with</td>
<td>To tolerate</td>
<td>“He couldn’t put up with her any longer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put up with</td>
<td>To make something available to be sold</td>
<td>“They’ve put up their house for sale.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put in</td>
<td>To spend or invest, especially time</td>
<td>“He puts in 12 hours at work every day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put off</td>
<td>To delay doing or commencing something</td>
<td>“See if you can put the meeting off for an hour. We still need more time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put (someone) off</td>
<td>To make someone uninterested in or disinclined to do something</td>
<td>“The sight of the octopus really put me off my food.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put aside/away</td>
<td>To save for future use</td>
<td>“I’ve put away/aside enough money to retire early.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>put aside for</td>
<td>To reserve something for someone until a later time</td>
<td>“Could you put this blouse aside for me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put through to</td>
<td>To connect someone with another person, usually via telephone</td>
<td>“Could you put me through to the manager please?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put through</td>
<td>To subject someone to something unpleasant or undesirable</td>
<td>“This job has put me through so much already.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put away</td>
<td>To store in or return to the proper location</td>
<td>“Can you please put away all those books lying around?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put down</td>
<td>To mock, belittle, or make to appear foolish</td>
<td>“She’s always putting her boyfriend down.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put down</td>
<td>To euthanize an animal</td>
<td>“Our poor cat is so old that we have to have him put down.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put on</td>
<td>To add to or increase the amount of</td>
<td>“I’ve put on a lot of weight recently.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrasal Verb</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example sentence</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>put on</td>
<td>To pretend or act</td>
<td>“He seems angry, but I know he’s just putting it on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put (someone) on</td>
<td>To deceive or tease someone</td>
<td>“I really thought I had won the prize. I can’t believe he was putting me on the whole time!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put down</td>
<td>To pass a telephone to someone</td>
<td>“Give me one second, and I’ll put him on.”</td>
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</table>

**Phrasal Verbs with run**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>run into</td>
<td>To encounter someone by chance</td>
<td>“I ran into an old friend of mine yesterday while I was out shopping.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>run out of</td>
<td>To exhaust the supply of something</td>
<td>“We’ve run out of coffee again. Could you get some on your way home?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>run up</strong></td>
<td>To accrue or accumulate, especially indebtedness</td>
<td>“He <strong>ran up</strong> a huge bill at dinner.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>run away with</strong></td>
<td>To hurriedly leave with someone else, as to elope</td>
<td>“His husband <strong>ran away with</strong> the secretary.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>run over</strong></td>
<td>To hit someone or something with a vehicle, usually a car</td>
<td>“He’s still very upset after <strong>running over</strong> the cat last night.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>run through</strong></td>
<td>To quickly discuss, summarize, or outline</td>
<td>“OK, can we just <strong>run through</strong> the main points again?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>run to</strong></td>
<td>To immediately seek assistance from someone</td>
<td>“He always runs to his mother whenever he’s in trouble.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>run on</strong></td>
<td>To be powered by</td>
<td>“Those new cars <strong>run on</strong> electricity, but they are so expensive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>run up against</strong></td>
<td>To encounter an obstacle, difficulty, or problem</td>
<td>“The company <strong>ran up against</strong> some problems initially, but now things are operating smoothly.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Phrasal Verbs with *take*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>take up</em></td>
<td>To begin, especially a hobby or pastime</td>
<td>“I’m thinking of taking up a new hobby.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>take up</em></td>
<td>To occupy, such as space or time</td>
<td>“I’m going to buy a smaller table. This takes up too much room.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>take up</em></td>
<td>Of clothes, to shorten or tighten</td>
<td>“My new pants are too long for me. I’m going to have to them taken up a bit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>take to</em></td>
<td>To have a newfound liking or appreciation for</td>
<td>“The boss has really taken to the new intern.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>take out</em></td>
<td>To obtain a legal agreement, such as insurance or a financial loan</td>
<td>“I’ve taken out an insurance policy on my house.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>take over</em></td>
<td>To obtain control of</td>
<td>“The company has been taken over by a Spanish corporation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>take off</td>
<td>To leave the ground and begin flight</td>
<td>“You’ve just missed the plane: it took off a few minutes ago.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take off</td>
<td>To remove an article of clothing</td>
<td>“Take off your jacket. It’s hot in here.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take off</td>
<td>To become successful or popular</td>
<td>“Business has really taken off this year.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take off</td>
<td>To not go to work or school for a certain period of time</td>
<td>“I’m really tired. I’m going to take a day off tomorrow.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>takes after</td>
<td>To be similar in character or appearance to a close relative</td>
<td>“He takes after his father in his love of tennis.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take back</td>
<td>To return something to the place where it was purchased</td>
<td>“My new cell phone doesn’t work. I’m going to take it back tomorrow and ask for a refund.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take on</td>
<td>To recruit or employ</td>
<td>“Why don’t you apply for a job at the new phone company? They are taking on new staff.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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 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 a mentor or another person.)
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Adjective</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example adjectives</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proper Adjectives</td>
<td>Formed from proper nouns to create descriptive words.</td>
<td>Italian, Shakespearean, Alaskan, Middle Eastern, Nordic</td>
<td>“He writes in a Shakespearean style.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound Adjectives</td>
<td>Created from two or more words that work together to modify the same noun; they are often joined with one or more hyphens.</td>
<td>top-right, last-minute, sugar-free, record-breaking, expensive-looking</td>
<td>“I know this is a last-minute suggestion, but it’s a good idea.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonstrative Adjectives (or Demonstrative Determiners)</strong></td>
<td>Used to specify what we are referring to and whether it is singular or plural, and to give more information about its proximity to the speaker.</td>
<td><strong>this, that, these, those</strong></td>
<td>“These cups are very pretty.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interrogative Adjectives (or Interrogative Determiners)</strong></td>
<td>Usually used to ask questions about something.</td>
<td><strong>what, which, whose</strong></td>
<td>“Whose computer is this?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nominal Adjectives</strong></td>
<td>Adjectives that perform the function of a <em>noun</em> in a sentence. They are preceded by the word <em>the</em> and can be found as the <em>subject</em> or the <em>object</em> of a sentence or clause.</td>
<td><strong>the best, the strongest, the blue</strong></td>
<td>“He wants the red car, but I want the blue.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Adjectives</strong></td>
<td>A subgroup of nominal adjectives, used to refer to a group of people based on a shared characteristic.</td>
<td><strong>the rich, the poor, the innocent, the French, the Americans, the Dutch</strong></td>
<td>“The rich should help the poor.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 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?
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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proper Noun</th>
<th>Proper Adjective</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>I love Italian food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>How much does this Chinese robe cost?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>In Europe, you can visit many ancient Christian churches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>Shakespearean</td>
<td>He writes in an almost Shakespearean style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canon</td>
<td>Canon</td>
<td>I’m really excited to use my new Canon camera.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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,
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-ian/-ean/-an</th>
<th>-ic</th>
<th>-ese</th>
<th>-i</th>
<th>-ish</th>
<th>-ish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Greenlandic</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Iraqi</td>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Israeli</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Nordic</td>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Lebanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>Emirati</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.”
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 *before* 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Near</th>
<th>Far</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>this</td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>these</td>
<td>those</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 as 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**?
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.”
- “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.”
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 only a 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
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
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
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 heavy, long 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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective (positive degree)</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>bigger</td>
<td>biggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thin</td>
<td>thinner</td>
<td>thinnest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad</td>
<td>sadder</td>
<td>saddest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slim</td>
<td>slimmer</td>
<td>slimmest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final consonant is *not* doubled if it is preceded by two vowels or another consonant, as
### Adjective (positive degree) Comparative degree Superlative degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>weak</th>
<th>weaker</th>
<th>weakest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strong</td>
<td>stronger</td>
<td>strongest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large*</td>
<td>larger*</td>
<td>largest*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small</td>
<td>smaller</td>
<td>smallest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective (positive degree)</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>happier</td>
<td>happiest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chewy</td>
<td>chewier</td>
<td>chewiest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective (positive degree)</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>careful</td>
<td>more/less careful</td>
<td>most/least careful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caring</td>
<td>more/less caring</td>
<td>most/least caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gifted</td>
<td>more/less gifted</td>
<td>most/least gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelligent</td>
<td>more/less intelligent</td>
<td>most/least intelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beautiful</td>
<td>more/less beautiful</td>
<td>most/least beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amazing</td>
<td>more/less amazing</td>
<td>most/least amazing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular adjective (positive degree)</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fun</td>
<td>more/less fun</td>
<td>most/least fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td>worse</td>
<td>worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well (healthy)</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far*</td>
<td>farther/further*</td>
<td>farthest/furthest*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective (positive degree)</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clever</td>
<td>cleverer or more/less clever</td>
<td>cleverest or most/least clever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>likely</td>
<td>likelier or more/less likely</td>
<td>likeliest or most/least likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrow</td>
<td>narrower or more/less narrow</td>
<td>narrowest or most/least narrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>quieter or more/less quiet</td>
<td>quietest or most/least quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simple</td>
<td>simpler or more/less simple</td>
<td>simplest or most/least simple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tall</td>
<td>taller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>faster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sweet</td>
<td>sweeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beautiful</td>
<td>more/less beautiful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllables</th>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One syllable</td>
<td>Add “-er” to the end of the adjective.</td>
<td>Tall becomes Taller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two syllables ending in “-y”</td>
<td>Replace “-y” with “-ier”</td>
<td>happy becomes happier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllables</th>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fun</td>
<td><em>more/less fun</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td><em>worse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td><em>better</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well (not ill)</td>
<td><em>better</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are also some adjectives that have two generally accepted comparative forms. These are some of the most common:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative Form 1</th>
<th>Comparative Form 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clever</td>
<td>cleverer</td>
<td>more/less clever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>likely</td>
<td>likelier</td>
<td>more/less likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrow</td>
<td>narrower</td>
<td>more narrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>quieter</td>
<td>more/less quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simple</td>
<td>simpler</td>
<td>more/less simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far*</td>
<td>farther</td>
<td>further</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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 aren’t taller than men.”
• “Waterskiing isn’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 – largest.)

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Superlative Form 1</th>
<th>Superlative Form 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clever</td>
<td>cleverest</td>
<td>most/least clever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>likely</td>
<td>likeliest</td>
<td>most/least likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrow</td>
<td>narrowest</td>
<td>most/least narrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>quietest</td>
<td>most/least quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simple</td>
<td>simplest</td>
<td>most/least simple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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
“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.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Adverb</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Example adverbs</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverbs of Time</strong></td>
<td>Describe when or for how long something happens or is the case.</td>
<td><em>now, tomorrow, yesterday, still, yet, later</em></td>
<td>“We are eating now.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Frequency</td>
<td>Describe how frequently something happens or is the case. A subset of Adverbs of Time.</td>
<td>always, usually, sometimes, often, rarely, daily, weekly, monthly</td>
<td>“I rarely eat breakfast in bed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Place</td>
<td>Describe the direction, distance, movement, or position involved in the action of a verb.</td>
<td>north, everywhere, here, there, forward, downward, up, uphill, behind</td>
<td>“I absolutely hate running uphill.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Manner</td>
<td>Describe how something happens or how someone does something. Usually formed from adjectives.</td>
<td>beautifully, wonderfully, slowly, deliberately, happily</td>
<td>“He walked slowly toward the bar.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Degree</td>
<td>Describe the intensity, degree, or extent of the verb, adjective, or adverb they are modifying.</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I'm fairly certain this is correct.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Purpose</td>
<td>Undoubtedly, truly, very, quite, pretty, somewhat, fairly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Adverbs of Purpose describe why something happens or is the case. Single-word adverbs are usually conjunctive adverbs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>“We’ve never seen such high numbers. We must therefore conclude that the results are not normal.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focusing Adverbs</th>
<th>Also, exclusively, just, mostly, notably, primarily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Focusing adverbs are used to draw attention to a particular part of a clause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>“They played mostly techno music at the party.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Adverbs</th>
<th>He does not work on Mondays.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Negative adverbs are used to negate or reduce the meaning of a verb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>“He does not work on Mondays.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunctive Adverbs</td>
<td>Used to connect independent clauses and describe the relationship between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative Adverbs</td>
<td>Used by the speaker to comment or give an opinion on something. Evaluative adverbs modify the entire clause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Viewpoint Adverbs</strong></td>
<td>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.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relative Adverbs</strong></td>
<td>Used to introduce relative clauses, when the information relates to a place, time, or the reason an action took place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverbial Nouns</strong></td>
<td>Nouns or noun phrases that function grammatically as adverbs to modify verbs and certain adjectives, usually specifying time, distance, weight, age, or monetary value.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.”
“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.
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
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:

- **X** “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)
- **X** “He *no more* works here.” (incorrect)

- ✔ “We will tolerate *no more*.” (correct)
- **X** “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?
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 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
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
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) resounding
   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
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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gradable</th>
<th>Non-gradable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>small</td>
<td>tiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cold</td>
<td>freezing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hot</td>
<td>boiling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>✗ Non-grading adverb with gradable adjective</th>
<th>✗ Grading adverb with non-gradable adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>absolutely small</td>
<td>a bit tiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utterly cold</td>
<td>dreadfully freezing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fully hot</td>
<td>unusually boiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>virtually difficult</td>
<td>extremely impossible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>completely sad</td>
<td>slightly devastated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, we can see how they become **correct** if we reverse the adverbs of degree:
Grading adverb with gradable adjective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a bit small</th>
<th>absolutely tiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dreadfully cold</td>
<td>utterly freezing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unusually hot</td>
<td>fully boiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extremely difficult</td>
<td>virtually impossible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slightly sad</td>
<td>completely devastated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-grading adverb with non-gradable adjective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>really small</th>
<th>really tiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pretty cold</td>
<td>pretty freezing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fairly difficult</td>
<td>fairly impossible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite sad</td>
<td>quite devastated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:
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
   c) 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?
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Definite Adverbs</th>
<th>Indefinite Adverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>every second</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲</td>
<td>hourly</td>
<td>usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲</td>
<td>daily</td>
<td>normally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲</td>
<td>monthly</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲</td>
<td>quarterly</td>
<td>occasionally/infrequently/seldom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.”
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
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.
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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Adding info</th>
<th>Adding stronger info</th>
<th>Unexpected Results</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accordingly</td>
<td>comparatively</td>
<td>contrarily</td>
<td>also</td>
<td>further</td>
<td>nevertheless</td>
<td>indeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a result</td>
<td>equally</td>
<td>conversely</td>
<td>besides</td>
<td>furthermore</td>
<td>nonetheless</td>
<td>in fact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consequently</td>
<td>likewise</td>
<td>however</td>
<td>in addition</td>
<td>moreover</td>
<td>surprisingly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hence</td>
<td>similarly</td>
<td>in comparison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>still</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>therefore</td>
<td></td>
<td>in contrast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thus</td>
<td></td>
<td>instead</td>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rather</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Certainty</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Judgment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apparently</td>
<td>astonishingly</td>
<td>bravely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clearly</td>
<td>frankly</td>
<td>carelessly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definitely</td>
<td>fortunately</td>
<td>fairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubtfully</td>
<td>honestly</td>
<td>foolishly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubtlessly</td>
<td>hopefully</td>
<td>generously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obviously</td>
<td>interestingly</td>
<td>kindly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presumably</td>
<td>luckily</td>
<td>rightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probably</td>
<td>sadly</td>
<td>spitefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undoubtedly</td>
<td>seriously</td>
<td>stupidly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surprisingly</td>
<td>surprisingly</td>
<td>unfairly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 _________________.

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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
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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Irregular Adverb</th>
<th>Sources of Confusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td><em>Hardly (ever)</em> is an adverb of frequency, meaning “almost never.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>straight</td>
<td>straight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lively</td>
<td>lively</td>
<td><em>Lively</em> 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.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late</td>
<td>late</td>
<td><em>Lately</em> is a different adverb that means “recently.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daily</td>
<td>daily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early</td>
<td>early</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>no adverb</td>
<td>Can be used in the adverbial prepositional phrase “in a friendly manner.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb (positive degree)</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vmentoracademy.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examtrix.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>faster</td>
<td>fastest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>harder</td>
<td>hardest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>higher</td>
<td>highest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late</td>
<td>later*</td>
<td>latest*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long</td>
<td>longer</td>
<td>longest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>lower</td>
<td>lowest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wide</td>
<td>wider*</td>
<td>widest*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*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:
### 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular adverb (positive degree)</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>careful</td>
<td>carefully</td>
<td>more/less carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficient</td>
<td>efficiently</td>
<td>more/less efficiently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>happily</td>
<td>more/less happily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horrible</td>
<td>horribly</td>
<td>more/less horribly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recent</td>
<td>recently</td>
<td>more/less recently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad</td>
<td>sadly</td>
<td>more/less sadly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strange</td>
<td>strangely</td>
<td>more/less strangely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb (positive degree)</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cheap or cheaply</td>
<td>cheaper or more/less cheaply</td>
<td>cheapest or most/least cheaply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loud or loudly</td>
<td>louder or more/less loudly</td>
<td>loudest or most/least loudly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quick or quickly</td>
<td>quicker or more/less quickly</td>
<td>quickest or most/least quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slow or slowly</td>
<td>slower or more/less slowly</td>
<td>slowest or most/least slowly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb (base form)</th>
<th>Comparative Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>faster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>harder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late</td>
<td>later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long</td>
<td>longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wide</td>
<td>wider*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Comparative Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>careful</td>
<td>carefully</td>
<td>more/less carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficient</td>
<td>efficiently</td>
<td>more/less efficiently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>happily</td>
<td>more/less happily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horrible</td>
<td>horribly</td>
<td>more/less horribly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recent</td>
<td>recently</td>
<td>more/less recently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad</td>
<td>sadly</td>
<td>more/less sadly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strange</td>
<td>strangely</td>
<td>more/less strangely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*Spelling note: When the adverb already ends in the letter “e,” just add “-r,” not “-er.”*)
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Comparative Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>badly</td>
<td>worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early</td>
<td>earlier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far</td>
<td>farther/further*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little</td>
<td>less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well</td>
<td>better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Comparative Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cheap/cheaply</td>
<td>cheaper/more cheaply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loud/loudly</td>
<td>louder/more loudly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quick/quickly</td>
<td>quicker/more quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slow/slowly</td>
<td>slower/more slowly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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**
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb (base form)</th>
<th>Superlative Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>Adverb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>fastest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>hardest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>highest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late</td>
<td>latest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long</td>
<td>longest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>lowest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wide</td>
<td>widest*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Superlative Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>careful</td>
<td>carefully</td>
<td>most/least carefully</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of course, there are some exceptions to the rules we’ve just looked at. These are some of the most common irregular superlative adverbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular Adverb</th>
<th>Irregular Superlative Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>badly</td>
<td>worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early</td>
<td>earliest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far</td>
<td>farthest/furthest*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Superlative Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cheap <em>or</em> cheaply</td>
<td>cheapest <em>or</em> most/least cheaply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loud <em>or</em> loudly</td>
<td>loudest <em>or</em> most/least loudly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quick</td>
<td>quickest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or quickly</td>
<td>or most/least quickly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>slow</th>
<th>slowest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>or slowly</td>
<td>or most/least slowly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 with 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
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.”

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Example sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>at, in, on, for, during, since, by, until, before, after, to, past</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|   | • “There is a film *at noon* we could see.” (adjectival)  
• “We’re meeting him *in an hour*.” (adverbial) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>at, in, on, by/near/close to, next to/beside, between, behind, in front of, above/over, below/under</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|   | • “The cat *on the roof* was hissing at us.” (adjectival)  
• “Try looking *behind the shed*.” (adverbial) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction or Movement</th>
<th>to, from, over, under, along, around, across, through, into, out of, toward(s), away from, onto, off, up, down</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|   | • “The house *down the road* is being sold.” (adjectival)  
• “They drove *across the country*.” (adverbial) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>by, with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|   | • “The book *by the famous author* is a big hit.” (adjectival)  
• “Her heart is filled *with emotion*.” (adverbial) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument or Device</th>
<th>by, with, on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason or Purpose</td>
<td>for, through, because of, on account of, from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason or Purpose</td>
<td>“The journey <strong>by boat</strong> is long and arduous.” (adjectival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason or Purpose</td>
<td>“He hit the nail <strong>with a hammer</strong>.” (adverbial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason or Purpose</td>
<td>“I have a separate computer <strong>for work</strong>.” (adjectival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason or Purpose</td>
<td>“They left early <strong>because of the storm</strong>.” (adverbial)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>of, to, with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>“A well-written cover letter <strong>to employers</strong> helps your chances of being hired.” (adjectival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>“I think she decided to go <strong>with Victor</strong>.” (adverbial)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>from, of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>“Tom is <strong>of German descent</strong>.” (adjectival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>“We started our trip <strong>from Italy</strong>.” (adverbial)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 at least 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>at, in, on, for, during, since, by, until, before, after, to, past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>at, in, on, by/near/close to, next to/beside, between, behind, in front of, above/over, below/under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction or Movement</td>
<td>to, from, over, under, along, around, across, through, into, out of, toward(s), away from, onto, off, up, down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>by, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument or</td>
<td>by, with, on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Device</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason or</td>
<td>for, through, because of, on account of, from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>of, to, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>from, of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition of Time</th>
<th>What it Describes</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td>specific and short times of day</td>
<td>“Let’s meet at noon.”&lt;br&gt;“Chris arrived at one o’clock.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td>months, years, and specific times of day</td>
<td>“Beth starts school in August.”&lt;br&gt;“In 2008, the U.S. held a presidential election.”&lt;br&gt;“I would rather work on the project in the afternoon.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on</td>
<td>days and dates</td>
<td>“On Tuesday, Dad went to the grocery store.”&lt;br&gt;“Valentine’s Day is on February 14.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>durations of time</td>
<td>“He lived abroad for many years.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during</td>
<td>simultaneous events</td>
<td>“We’re not supposed to study during class.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>since</td>
<td>a continuous event originating from a specific point in the past</td>
<td>“She’s been waiting to hear back from the office since yesterday.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by</td>
<td>a specific point in the future before which an event must be completed</td>
<td>“You must wake up by six o’clock tomorrow morning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>until</td>
<td>a continuous event that will terminate at a specific point in the future</td>
<td>“Daniel can’t sneak out of the house until his parents go to bed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>something prior to a specific time or event</td>
<td>“The moon rose before sunset.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
<td>something following a specific time or event</td>
<td>“Katrina made a promise to help out after work today.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>time in relation to the next hour of the day</td>
<td>“My watch says it’s 10 minutes to three right now.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past</td>
<td>time in relation to the previous hour of the day</td>
<td>“Ideally, the party would start no later than a quarter past eight.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition of Place</th>
<th>What it Describes</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>at</em></td>
<td>specific points or locations</td>
<td>“Ben is planning on staying the night <em>at</em> a hotel.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>in</em></td>
<td>enclosed spaces</td>
<td>“The rice is <em>in</em> the cabinet.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>on</em></td>
<td>surfaces or tops of things</td>
<td>“Leave the towel <em>on</em> the counter.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by, near, close to</td>
<td>lack of distance</td>
<td>“The library is <em>by/near/close to</em> the train station.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>next to, beside</td>
<td>adjacency</td>
<td>“Many people consider it rude to sit <em>next to/beside</em> a stranger in a movie theater.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between</td>
<td>something in the middle of two people or things</td>
<td>“To make a sandwich, simply put something <em>between</em> two slices of bread.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behind</td>
<td>something at the back of something</td>
<td>“I stood <em>behind</em> my sister while we waited in line.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in front of</td>
<td>something situated before something</td>
<td>“Let’s put the dresser in front of the window.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above, over*</td>
<td>something higher than something</td>
<td>“The arch above/over the hallway reminded Natalie of a castle she’d visited.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below, under**</td>
<td>something lower than something</td>
<td>“All children fear the monsters below/under their beds.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition of Direction or Movement</th>
<th>What it Describes</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>movement with a specific aim, direction, or destination</td>
<td>“My brother went to Europe with his friends.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from</td>
<td>movement with a specific point of origin</td>
<td>“She told stories about the time she walked to Spain from France.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over</td>
<td>movement higher than and across something else</td>
<td>“The bird flew over the trees.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above</td>
<td>movement to a point higher than something else</td>
<td>“He shot his arrow above the target.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under/beneath</td>
<td>movement lower than something</td>
<td>“That large worm went under/beneath the dirt.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>along</td>
<td>movement on a straight line or edge</td>
<td>“The childhood friends rode their bicycles along the road.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>around</td>
<td>movement in a circular direction</td>
<td>“The couple held hands and skated around the rink.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>across</td>
<td>movement from one end to the other</td>
<td>“I walked across the flimsy bridge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through</td>
<td>movement from one side of an enclosed space and out of the other</td>
<td>“The burglar entered the house through the basement window.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>into</td>
<td>movement ending inside something</td>
<td>“If you jump into the water like this, you can make a big splash.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of</td>
<td>movement ending outside something</td>
<td>“Get out of that cave before the bear comes back!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toward(s)*</td>
<td>movement closer to something</td>
<td>“Laughing, she threw up her hands and ran toward(s) the park.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>away from</td>
<td>movement farther from something</td>
<td>“Get away from the fire before you get burned.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onto</td>
<td>movement ending on top of something</td>
<td>“Be careful climbing onto that ledge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off</td>
<td>Movement down or away from something</td>
<td>“Parents are always yelling at their kids to get off the furniture.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up</td>
<td>Movement heading up</td>
<td>“When you use a fireplace, smoke goes up the chimney.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>Movement heading down</td>
<td>“He jumped down and hurt his knee.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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
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)
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun + to</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>access to</td>
<td>“I couldn’t enter the building without <em>access to</em> the door’s password.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>addiction to</td>
<td>“Alison has an <em>addiction to</em> football.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answer to</td>
<td>“Her <em>answer to</em> the teacher’s question was incorrect.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approach to</td>
<td>“Professor Smith’s <em>approach to</em> the experiment was incredibly innovative.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>damage to</td>
<td>“The <em>damage to</em> the car is worse than I thought it’d be.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dedication to</td>
<td>“Ned has intense <em>dedication to</em> his schoolwork.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun + for</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>admiration for</td>
<td>“Penny has so much admiration for her mother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cure for</td>
<td>“Health officials recently announced that a cure for the fatal disease had been found.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun for</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desire for</td>
<td>“My <strong>desire for</strong> success is more important than my <strong>desire for</strong> romance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hope for</td>
<td>“Youths often have high <strong>hopes for</strong> humanity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>need for</td>
<td>“The <strong>need for</strong> social interaction is a basic human trait.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passion for</td>
<td>“Simply having a <strong>passion for</strong> writing doesn’t necessarily mean you will become a best-selling author.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reason for</td>
<td>“There is always a <strong>reason for</strong> change.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respect for</td>
<td>“Certain cultures promote <strong>respect for</strong> elders.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>room for</td>
<td>“There’s <strong>room for</strong> one more person at this table.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathy for</td>
<td>“You should always have <strong>sympathy for</strong> strangers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talent for</td>
<td>“Greg has a <strong>talent for</strong> stand-up comedy.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Noun + of

The preposition *of* can be used with many nouns. Here are some common combinations:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun + of</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advantage of</td>
<td>“Most people seem to underestimate the <strong>advantage of</strong> majoring in philosophy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disadvantage of</td>
<td>“The <strong>disadvantage of</strong> becoming an entrepreneur is the amount of debt you can accumulate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fear of</td>
<td>“My niece has a <strong>fear of</strong> the dark.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habit of</td>
<td>“I used to have a <strong>habit of</strong> biting my fingernails.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intention of</td>
<td>“Do you have any <strong>intention of</strong> going out today?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of</td>
<td>“Timothy’s <strong>knowledge of</strong> beekeeping is impressive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of</td>
<td>“The police cannot arrest him due to a <strong>lack of</strong> evidence.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>memory of</td>
<td>“I have no <strong>memory of</strong> my first year in school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process of</td>
<td>“The <strong>process of</strong> elimination is a popular technique when taking multiple-choice tests.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smell of</td>
<td>“I love the <strong>smell of</strong> freshly baked cookies.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun + in</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>belief in</td>
<td>“It is not uncommon to have a belief in a higher power.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change in</td>
<td>“Scientists detected little change in the atmosphere.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decrease in</td>
<td>“A decrease in taxes would dramatically affect the economy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delay in</td>
<td>“There appears to have been a delay in processing your payment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience in</td>
<td>“She has little experience in backpacking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increase in</td>
<td>“I’m hoping for an increase in environmentally friendly products.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun + on</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advice on</td>
<td>“I read magazines for advice on relationships.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attack on</td>
<td>“Some view the new law as an attack on our rights.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ban on</td>
<td>“The early 20th century saw a short-lived ban on alcohol.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun + at</td>
<td>“Though new to skiing, he made an attempt at the highest slope.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I have no chance at winning this game.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun + from</td>
<td>“This is the age at which you are eligible for military service.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There’s always a point at which trying to reason with him becomes futile.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb + for</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apologize for</td>
<td>“Brittany never <strong>apologizes for</strong> her behavior.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask for</td>
<td>“The student <strong>asked for</strong> a pencil.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beg for</td>
<td>“The man <strong>begged for</strong> a second chance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care for</td>
<td>“I don’t <strong>care for</strong> salads.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fight for</td>
<td>“Many generations of people have <strong>fought for</strong> freedom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hope for</td>
<td>“The family is <strong>hoping for</strong> a miracle.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long for</td>
<td>“The man <strong>longed for</strong> the days of his youth.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pay for</td>
<td>“Who’s going to <strong>pay for</strong> these tickets?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide for</td>
<td>“Parents are expected to <strong>provide for</strong> their children.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>search for</td>
<td>“Did you <strong>search for</strong> the missing piece yet?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wait for</td>
<td>“I’m <strong>waiting for</strong> the bus.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wish for</td>
<td>“Some people <strong>wish for</strong> nothing but fame.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work for</td>
<td>“She <strong>works for</strong> the government.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Verb + to**

*To* is commonly used with verbs and usually refers to direction (literal or metaphorical) or connections between people or things. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb + to</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adjust to</td>
<td>“You’ll <strong>adjust</strong> to your new school in no time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>admit to</td>
<td>“He <strong>admitted</strong> to reading her diary.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belong to</td>
<td>“The wallet <strong>belongs to</strong> that woman over there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travel to</td>
<td>“I am <strong>traveling to</strong> England tomorrow.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen to</td>
<td>“Grace is <strong>listening to</strong> music in her room.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go to</td>
<td>“Anthony, please <strong>go to</strong> the back of the classroom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relate to</td>
<td>“I can’t <strong>relate to</strong> this character at all.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respond to</td>
<td>“Josh <strong>responded to</strong> his friend’s email.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb + about</td>
<td>Example Sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask about</td>
<td>“I asked about the company’s job opening.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care about</td>
<td>“She doesn’t seem to care about going to college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complain about</td>
<td>“The boy complained about his early curfew.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forget about</td>
<td>“I forgot about the wedding reception.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hear about</td>
<td>“Did you hear about the renovation project?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joke about</td>
<td>“Kim often jokes about her high-pitched voice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know about</td>
<td>“What do you know about physics?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb + with</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agree with</td>
<td>“I don’t agree with his opinions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>argue with</td>
<td>“The two argued with each other for several minutes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb + with</td>
<td>Example Sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb + in</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>believe in</td>
<td>“The majority of children believe in Santa Claus.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engage in</td>
<td>“Maurice likes to engage in political debates.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>invest in</td>
<td>“Now is the time to invest in as many companies as possible.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preposition *in* accompanies several verbs and tends to point to involvement or connections between people or things. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb + in</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>approve of</td>
<td>“Ellen doesn’t approve of her sister’s friends.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consist of</td>
<td>“Pizza consists of bread, cheese, and tomato sauce.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dream of</td>
<td>“I dream of visiting Europe.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hear of</td>
<td>“Have you heard of this new TV show?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take care of</td>
<td>“Who will take care of your goldfish while you’re away?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think of</td>
<td>“If you only think of failure, you’ll never take any risks.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Verb + at

*At* is commonly used with verbs to indicate places, skills, and reactions. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb + at</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arrive at</td>
<td>“We arrived at the hotel in the morning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balk at</td>
<td>“Melissa balked at the news.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excel at</td>
<td>“My five-year-old niece already excels at math and science.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb + on</td>
<td>Example Sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laugh at</td>
<td>“The boy couldn’t stop <strong>laughing at</strong> Isabella’s joke.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look at</td>
<td>“<strong>Look at</strong> the whiteboard, please.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nod at</td>
<td>“She <strong>nodded at</strong> her coworkers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shout at</td>
<td>“He could hear someone <strong>shouting at</strong> the TV.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smile at</td>
<td>“My son <strong>smiles at</strong> me every time I walk through the door.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stare at</td>
<td>“It’s uncomfortable when people <strong>stare at</strong> you.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Verb + on**

The preposition *on* is used with a number of different verbs. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb + on</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agree on</td>
<td>“The committee finally <strong>agreed on</strong> a solution.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bet on</td>
<td>“I wouldn’t <strong>bet on</strong> that happening.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comment on</td>
<td>“The lawyer briefly <strong>commented on</strong> the lawsuit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb + on</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb + from</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>benefit from</td>
<td>“Aspiring musicians benefit from getting public exposure for their music.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come from</td>
<td>“Saya comes from Japan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differ from</td>
<td>“How does milk chocolate differ from white chocolate?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>escape from</td>
<td>“The prisoners escaped from their captors.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recover from</td>
<td>“The girl recovered from her illness.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refrain from</td>
<td>“Could you please refrain from shouting?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resign from</td>
<td>“The CEO resigned from her position after 25 years with the company.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retire from</td>
<td>“He retired from his job last year.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suffer from</td>
<td>“Many people suffer from social anxiety.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 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?
2. Which of the following sentences contains a \textit{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.”

e) all of the above

3. Which of the following sentences \textit{does not} contain a \textit{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.”

e) all of the above

4. Which of the following sentences uses an \textit{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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective + of</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective + to</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accustomed to</td>
<td>“He quickly became <strong>accustomed to</strong> city life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>addicted to</td>
<td>“I think I'm <strong>addicted to</strong> action movies.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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.”
<p>|                                                     | “Mrs. Roberts was <strong>nice to</strong> the cashier.”                 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>married to</td>
<td>“Cassie is married to Nick.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean to, rude to,</td>
<td>“Don’t be mean to your classmates.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unfriendly to</td>
<td>“The couple was rude to the waitress.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opposed to</td>
<td>“I am opposed to these changes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similar to</td>
<td>“His idea is similar to mine.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Adjective + about

The preposition *about* typically accompanies emotive adjectives in regards to specific situations or events. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective + about</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>angry about, furious about, mad about</td>
<td>“My neighbor is angry about the loud music we played last night.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“That woman is furious about having to wait in line.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“You’re always mad about something.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective + for</td>
<td>Example Sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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.” |
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective + with</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| angry with, furious with | “Nicole is angry with her mother.”  
“I heard he’s furious with you!” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Example Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| annoyed with, fed up with | “I’m **annoyed with** this traffic.”  
“I’m **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 *not passive*. 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
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
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*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiom that Starts with <em>In</em></td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in advance</td>
<td>ahead of time; before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in brief</td>
<td>concisely; in a few words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in bulk</td>
<td>in large amounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in common</td>
<td>sharing a trait with someone or something else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in danger</td>
<td>prone to danger or threatened by a dangerous situation; about to be harmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in debt</td>
<td>owing money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in demand</td>
<td>desired; wanted; sought after (usually skills or products)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase</td>
<td>Synonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in depth</td>
<td>thoroughly; comprehensively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in detail</td>
<td>thoroughly; comprehensively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the end</td>
<td>finally; at last</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in fact</td>
<td>really; actually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in general</td>
<td>usually; most of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a minute</td>
<td>very soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in particular</td>
<td>especially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in reality</td>
<td>really; actually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Idioms that start with *on*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *on*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Starts with <em>On</em></th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on average</td>
<td>usually; typically; normally</td>
<td>“Bruce works out on average four times a week.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on board</td>
<td>located on a ship, train, or airplane</td>
<td>“The ship will depart once everyone is on board.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on demand</td>
<td>immediately available when asked for or requested</td>
<td>“Most people prefer to watch movies on demand.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on display</td>
<td>being shown, showcased, or exhibited</td>
<td>“A famous painting is now on display at the museum.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on fire</td>
<td>in flames; burning</td>
<td>“A building was on fire yesterday.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositional Idiom</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on hand</td>
<td>available, accessible</td>
<td>“Do you have a notepad <strong>on hand</strong>?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td>in contrast (to a previously stated point of view)</td>
<td>“It’s fun to see movies, but <strong>on the other hand</strong> tickets can be quite expensive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on purpose</td>
<td>intentionally; deliberately</td>
<td>“Liz left without us <strong>on purpose</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on sale</td>
<td>being sold, especially at a reduced price</td>
<td>“The hat you wanted is <strong>on sale</strong> at the mall.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on schedule</td>
<td>functioning as planned or scheduled</td>
<td>“The buses seem to be <strong>on schedule</strong> today.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on time</td>
<td>at the planned or expected time (e.g., of arrival)</td>
<td>“Alfred never arrives <strong>on time</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Idioms that start with **out of**

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition **out of**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prepositional Idiom</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiom that Starts with \textit{Out of}</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Example Sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of the blue</td>
<td>without prior indication; unexpectedly</td>
<td>“He showed up at our house \textit{out of the blue}.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of breath</td>
<td>tired; exhausted; panting</td>
<td>“She became \textit{out of breath} after trudging up the stairs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of character</td>
<td>contrary to one’s personality</td>
<td>“Teresa has been acting \textit{out of character} lately.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of harm’s way</td>
<td>safe</td>
<td>“I’m just glad the baby is \textit{out of harm’s way}.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of order</td>
<td>not functioning or working properly; temporarily broken or unusable (usually referring to machinery)</td>
<td>“This printer is \textit{out of order}.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of the ordinary</td>
<td>unusual; not normal</td>
<td>“His methods are \textit{out of the ordinary}.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Examtrix.com
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>out of print</strong></th>
<th>no longer published or printed (usually referring to books)</th>
<th>“Unfortunately, that book is out of print.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>out of the question</strong></td>
<td>impossible or unlikely; unreasonable</td>
<td>“Your request is out of the question.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>out of season</strong></td>
<td>not ripe or readily available (usually fruits or vegetables)</td>
<td>“Grapes are out of season this time of year.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>out of style</strong></td>
<td>not fashionable or hip</td>
<td>“Perms have been out of style for decades.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>out of time</strong></td>
<td>having no more (remaining) time</td>
<td>“We are almost out of time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>out of town</strong></td>
<td>temporarily away at a location in a different vicinity</td>
<td>“Brian will be out of town this weekend.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>out of work</strong></td>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>“Most of my friends are unfortunately out of work.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Idioms that start with *at*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *at*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Starts with <em>At</em></th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at all times</td>
<td>always</td>
<td>“Wear your seatbelt at all times.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at fault</td>
<td>responsible for something bad; culpable</td>
<td>“She is the only one at fault.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at first</td>
<td>in the beginning; initially</td>
<td>“At first, she attempted to speak to everyone individually.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at hand</td>
<td>near in space or time</td>
<td>“Always keep your passwords close at hand.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at last</td>
<td>finally</td>
<td>“He made it to the airport at last.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at once</td>
<td>immediately</td>
<td>“Go to your room at once!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at rest</td>
<td>motionless</td>
<td>“An object at rest stays at rest unless acted on by an outside force.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
at risk  | prone to danger or threatened by a dangerous situation | “Families residing near the volcano are especially at risk.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Starts with For</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>for certain</td>
<td>surely; definitely; positively</td>
<td>“Is Desmond coming to the party tomorrow for certain?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for example</td>
<td>as an example; for instance</td>
<td>“English isn’t the only international language; for example, French is the national language of many different countries.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for fun</td>
<td>as a hobby; for enjoyment</td>
<td>“What do you usually do for fun?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Idioms that start with *by*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *by*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Starts with <em>By</em></th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by accident</td>
<td>unintentionally; not deliberately</td>
<td>“The kids broke the vase by accident.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiom that Starts with From</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Example Sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by all means</td>
<td>definitely; certainly</td>
<td>“Prospective students are by all means encouraged to visit the campus.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by hand</td>
<td>without the use of machinery</td>
<td>“He makes intricate sculptures by hand.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by mistake</td>
<td>unintentionally; not deliberately; as a mistake</td>
<td>“I went to the wrong location by mistake.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by the way</td>
<td>incidentally (used to introduce a different topic)</td>
<td>“By the way, have you written your essay yet?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Idioms that start with *from*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that start with the preposition *from*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Starts with From</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from afar</td>
<td>from a distance; coming from far away</td>
<td>“I could hear music from afar.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from head to toe</td>
<td>all over the body</td>
<td>“She was covered in mud from head to toe.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from scratch</td>
<td>from the beginning and using only the basic elements or ingredients</td>
<td>“Bob made raspberry cupcakes from scratch.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from time to time</td>
<td>occasionally; infrequently</td>
<td>“They return to their home country from time to time.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.
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*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Ends with <em>Up</em></th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>act up</td>
<td>to misbehave</td>
<td>“The toddlers have been acting up lately.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blow up</td>
<td>to explode; to detonate or make explode</td>
<td>“Demolition workers blew up an old building to make room for a new mall.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bring up</td>
<td>to mention (in conversation)</td>
<td>“It’s a good idea to <strong>bring up</strong> your career goals during a job interview.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come up</td>
<td>to happen (usually unexpectedly)</td>
<td>“Something <strong>came up</strong> yesterday, so I was unable to attend the event.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give up</td>
<td>to stop (doing something); to quit</td>
<td>“Leah is trying to <strong>give up</strong> smoking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hang up</td>
<td>to end a phone call</td>
<td>“Always <strong>hang up</strong> if a telemarketer tries to sell you something.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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 up** | “mix up” has two similar meanings: to confuse, or to or assemble something out of order | “I always **mix up** the twins when I see them—one of these days I’ll learn to tell them apart.”  
“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*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Ends with Down</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 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.” |
<p>| die down                  | to lessen in intensity or become weaker                                  | “The wind has <strong>died down</strong> a bit.”                                               |
| let down                  | to disappoint                                                           | “I feel like I’ve <strong>let down</strong> my parents.”                                       |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>definition</th>
<th>example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pipe down</td>
<td>to be less loud</td>
<td>“Pipe down or I’m sending you to your room!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play down</td>
<td>to make something seem less important than it truly is</td>
<td>“Successful people often play down their achievements to avoid sounding arrogant.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>step down</td>
<td>to resign or retire from a position</td>
<td>“A prominent political figure recently stepped down in response to a scandal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turn down</td>
<td>to reject</td>
<td>“She has turned down many marriage proposals.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wind down</td>
<td>to relax</td>
<td>“Let’s wind down with some popcorn and a movie.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Idioms that end with *on*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that end with the preposition *on*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Ends with <em>On</em></th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>catch up on</td>
<td>to get informed about something; to get up to date with something</td>
<td>“Helen plans to catch up on her reading tonight.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>count on</td>
<td>to rely or depend on</td>
<td>“I can always count on you to lend me a hand when I need it most.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drag on</td>
<td>to continue for a long time and become boring or tedious</td>
<td>“The man’s speech dragged on for well over an hour.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go on</td>
<td>to continue</td>
<td>“It might seem like the end of the world, but life still goes on after setbacks like this.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiom</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grow on</td>
<td>to eventually become liked by</td>
<td>“This new flavor of ice cream has really grown on me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hang on</td>
<td>to wait; to be patient</td>
<td>“Could you hang on a moment?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>move on</td>
<td>to stop focusing on the past and continue with one’s life</td>
<td>“Gerald struggled to move on after losing the tennis match.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pick on</td>
<td>to tease; to make fun of or bully</td>
<td>“You shouldn’t pick on your little brother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tell on</td>
<td>to report someone else’s wrongdoing to a person of authority</td>
<td>“She went to the teacher to tell on her friend.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>try on</td>
<td>to put on a garment or piece of clothing to see how it fits</td>
<td>“I’d like to try on this shirt, please.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Idioms that end with off**

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that end with the preposition off:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Ends with <em>Off</em></th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>back off</td>
<td>to withdraw or retreat</td>
<td>“Some salespeople don’t know when to back off.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brush off</td>
<td>to ignore something; to pretend something important is not important</td>
<td>“You can’t just brush off what happened between you two.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>call off</td>
<td>to cancel</td>
<td>“Employees were forced to call off the strike.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drop off</td>
<td>to take to and deposit at some location</td>
<td>“Dustin usually drops off his shirts at the dry cleaner before work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kick off</td>
<td>to begin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word</td>
<td>definition</td>
<td>example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lay off</td>
<td>to terminate employees</td>
<td>“Oil companies have had to <strong>lay off</strong> many workers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nod off</td>
<td>to doze; to fall asleep</td>
<td>“I always <strong>nod off</strong> during long ceremonies.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pull off</td>
<td>to successfully complete a difficult task</td>
<td>“Penny <strong>pulled off</strong> the challenging dance routine.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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” 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).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Ends with With</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“take off”</td>
<td>“My online business really <strong>took off</strong> after it was mentioned on the news.”</td>
<td>“The plane <strong>took off</strong> an hour late.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“wear off”</td>
<td>to lose effectiveness; to stop having an effect</td>
<td>“I think the pain medicine is starting to <strong>wear off</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Idioms that end with *with*

The table below shows various examples of prepositional idioms that end with the preposition *with*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom that Ends with With</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come down with</td>
<td>to become sick; to fall ill</td>
<td>“Dimitri <strong>came down with</strong> a terrible cold.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come up with</td>
<td>to think of, suggest, or develop (an idea)</td>
<td>“Scientists are trying to <strong>come up with</strong> a solution to climate change.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do away with</td>
<td>to stop or abolish; to get rid of</td>
<td>“Some people want to <strong>do away with</strong> taxes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get along with</td>
<td>to have a good or friendly relationship with someone</td>
<td>“They don’t seem to <strong>get along with</strong> each other.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get away with</td>
<td>to avoid punishment for a wrongdoing</td>
<td>“The criminals didn’t <strong>get away with</strong> the robbery.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go through with</td>
<td>to undertake or complete (usually an undesirable or difficult action)</td>
<td>“Will your family <strong>go through with</strong> the move to Texas?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keep up with</td>
<td>to stay up to date; to stay informed about</td>
<td>“I can’t <strong>keep up with</strong> celebrity gossip.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put up with</td>
<td>to tolerate</td>
<td>“She shouldn’t <strong>put up with</strong> her brother’s pranks anymore.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 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 used prepositions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **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.”
<pre><code>                                                                                   | “He can’t **get over** his self-esteem issues.”                                  |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>go through</td>
<td>to experience (something difficult)</td>
<td>“Dad is <strong>going through</strong> a mid-life crisis.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hang out</td>
<td>to socialize or get together (with someone)</td>
<td>“Do you want to <strong>hang out</strong> this weekend?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>root for</td>
<td>to cheer for someone; to support or take sides with someone</td>
<td>“You’d better <strong>root for</strong> me if I make it to the semi-finals.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sink in</td>
<td>to become clearly and gradually understood</td>
<td>“He let the college’s rejection <strong>sink in</strong> before deciding to reapply the following year.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stick around</td>
<td>to wait, stay, or remain (in a place)</td>
<td>“Is she <strong>sticking around</strong> for the next act?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tag along</td>
<td>to accompany</td>
<td>“My little sister likes to <strong>tag along</strong> when I go out with my friends.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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?”
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?
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
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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Comparison / Concession</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>(just) as</td>
<td>even if</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>in order that</td>
<td>after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because</td>
<td>although</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>wherever</td>
<td>so that</td>
<td>before</td>
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<tr>
<td>since</td>
<td>even though</td>
<td>as long as</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>whenever</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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?
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Near</th>
<th>Far</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singular</strong></td>
<td><em>this</em></td>
<td><em>that</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plural</strong></td>
<td><em>these</em></td>
<td><em>those</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.)
Possessive Adjectives

Possessive adjectives, also known as possessive determiners, are used to indicate whom an item belongs to. The possessive adjectives are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person</td>
<td>your</td>
<td>your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
<td>his / her / its</td>
<td>their</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Numeral &amp; Suffix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>first</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinal</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fourth</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fifth</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sixth</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seventh</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eighth</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ninth</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenth</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eleventh</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twelfth</td>
<td>12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thirteenth</td>
<td>13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fourteenth</td>
<td>14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fifteenth</td>
<td>15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinal</td>
<td>Numeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sixteenth</td>
<td>16th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seventeenth</td>
<td>17th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eighteenth</td>
<td>18th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nineteenth</td>
<td>19th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twentieth</td>
<td>20th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twenty-second</td>
<td>22nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twenty-third</td>
<td>23rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twenty-fourth</td>
<td>24th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thirtieth</td>
<td>30th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiftieth</td>
<td>50th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hundredth</td>
<td>100th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Pronoun</th>
<th>Possessive Determiner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>his</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 **in front** 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 little brother, Richard.”
• “Please return my three library books as soon as possible.”
• “Have they found their train tickets yet?”
• “The Earth spins on its invisible 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* without 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 *factive 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 *underlined*, and the gerund or gerund phrase (as object complement) is in **bold**:

- “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**.”
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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stative verb</th>
<th>Example with a gerund as an object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>“I love going to the movies.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like</td>
<td>“I like living by the ocean.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enjoy</td>
<td>“Do you enjoy working in retail?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mind</td>
<td>“Would you mind watching my seat for me while I go to the bathroom?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel like</td>
<td>“I feel like staying home tonight.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stand</td>
<td>“She can’t stand being around him.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action verb</th>
<th>Example with a gerund as an object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>admit (to)</td>
<td>“He admitted (to) cheating on the exam.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoid</td>
<td>“He always tries to avoid doing his homework.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consider</td>
<td>“He is considering moving to London.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delay</td>
<td>“He delayed paying his phone bill.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deny</td>
<td>“He denied stealing the money.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insist on</td>
<td>“He insisted on giving me a ride to the train station.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keep/continue</td>
<td>“Please, keep/continue telling me your story.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mention</td>
<td>“She mentioned meeting him for a coffee earlier.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practice</td>
<td>“She practices speaking English whenever she gets the chance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recommend</td>
<td>“I recommend going to the mountains in the summer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resist</td>
<td>“She resisted sneaking out to the party down the road.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>“They suggested staying at a five-star hotel.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>✔  Infinitive (Correct)</th>
<th>✗  Gerund (Incorrect)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

vmentoracademy.com
Examtrix.com
“They **promised to be** quiet in the car.”

“I **agreed to leave** him alone.”

“She **asked to see** 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Gerund (Correct)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Infinitive (Incorrect)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I <strong>recall seeing</strong> an advertisement for that somewhere.”</td>
<td>“I <strong>recall to see</strong> an advertisement for that somewhere.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I <strong>recommend reading</strong> <em>Moby Dick</em> at some point in your life.”</td>
<td>“I <strong>recommend to read</strong> <em>Moby Dick</em> at some point in your life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He’ll <strong>consider hearing</strong> your side of the story later, if he has time.”</td>
<td>“He’ll <strong>consider to hear</strong> your side of the story later, if he has time.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gerund</th>
<th>Infinitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I like hiking.”</td>
<td>“I like to hike.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I love swimming.”</td>
<td>“I love to swim.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I prefer going out on the weekend.”</td>
<td>“I prefer to go out on the weekend.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Gerund</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I remembered to close the window.” (I didn’t forget to do this)</td>
<td>“No, I didn’t leave the window open. I remember closing it.” (I recall doing this)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I forgot to read this book for school.” (I didn’t remember to do this, so it didn’t happen)</td>
<td>“I forget reading this book for school.” (I don’t recall this fact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’ve been trying to call you all day, but the line has been busy.” (Attempt to do something)</td>
<td>“Try calling my cell phone next time.” (This is a possible solution to the problem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I stopped drinking sugary drinks because of my health.” (I don’t drink sugary drinks anymore)</td>
<td>“I stopped to drink at the well.” (I interrupted what I was doing to drink from the well)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Interjection</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aah</td>
<td>fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aha</td>
<td>triumph, sudden understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>argh</td>
<td>frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brr</td>
<td>being cold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 “-ed” or “-en” 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Subjective Case</th>
<th>Objective Case</th>
<th>Possessive Determiner</th>
<th>Possessive Pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Person</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Masculine/feminine</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Me</td>
<td>My</td>
<td>My</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>Masculine/feminine</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>Us</td>
<td>Our</td>
<td>Our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Person</td>
<td>Singular/Plural</td>
<td>Masculine/feminine</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>Your</td>
<td>Your</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degrees of Comparison - Adjectives</th>
<th>Degrees of Comparison - Adverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vmentoracademy.com</td>
<td>Examtrix.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“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
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

“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.”
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Subject + present verb</td>
<td>“I go shopping on Tuesdays.” “She runs fast.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>Subject + have/has + past participle</td>
<td>“I have eaten here before.” “She has lived here for a long time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Subject + is/are + present participle</td>
<td>“We are cooking dinner.” “He is singing a song.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Continuous</td>
<td>Subject + have/has + been + present participle</td>
<td>“He has been thinking about it.” “I have been taking an art class.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Aspects of the past tense

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
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<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Subject + is/are + past participle</td>
<td>“We had been cooking dinner.” “He had been singing a song.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Continuous</td>
<td>Subject + have/has + been + past participle</td>
<td>“He had been thinking about it.” “I had been taking an art class.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspects of the future tense</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspect</strong></td>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Examples</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Simple                      | Subject + will/be going to + infinitive | “I will go shopping on Tuesday.”  
 |                             |                             | “She is going to run fast.” |
| Perfect Continuous 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**.

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-reported sentence</th>
<th>Verb shift</th>
<th>Reported speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I live</em> in Germany.</td>
<td><em>present simple tense</em> shifts to <em>past simple tense</em></td>
<td><em>He said</em> <em>he lived</em> in Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I was</em> a carpenter before I moved here.</td>
<td><em>past simple tense</em> shifts to <em>past perfect tense</em></td>
<td><em>She said that</em> <em>she had been</em> a carpenter before she moved here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>He is writing</em> a letter to our friend.</td>
<td><em>present continuous tense</em> shifts to <em>past continuous tense</em></td>
<td><em>She told us</em> <em>he was writing</em> a letter to our friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>She was sleeping</em> when you called.</td>
<td><em>past continuous tense</em> shifts to <em>past perfect continuous tense</em></td>
<td><em>He told me</em> <em>you had been sleeping</em> when I called.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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?”
“ 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 as 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
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
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.
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-
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?
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)

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
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 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 yesterday.” (correct)
✔ “Yesterday I **went** to the park.” (correct)
✔ “Yesterday, I **went** to the park.” (correct)
✖ “I yesterday **went** to the park.” (incorrect)
✖ “I **went** yesterday 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
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
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
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
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?
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
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.
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 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
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 when 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Subject + present verb</td>
<td>&quot;I go shopping on Tuesdays.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;She runs fast.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>Subject + <em>have/has</em> + past participle</td>
<td>&quot;I have eaten here before.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;She has lived here for a long time.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Continuous Subject + *is/are* + present participle

| Continuous | Subject + *is/are* + present participle | "We are cooking dinner."  
|            |                                | "He is singing a song." |

Perfect Continuous Subject + *have/has* + *been* + present participle

| 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Subject + past verb</td>
<td>&quot;I went shopping on Tuesday.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;She ran fast.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>Subject + <em>had</em> + past participle</td>
<td>&quot;I had eaten here before.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;She had lived here for a long time.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Subject + <em>was/were</em> + present</td>
<td>&quot;We were cooking dinner.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participle</td>
<td>&quot;He was singing a song.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>Subject + <em>had</em> + <em>been</em> + present</td>
<td>&quot;He had been thinking about it.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>participle</td>
<td>&quot;I had been taking an art class.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Subject + <em>will/would/be going to</em> + infinitive</td>
<td>&quot;I will go shopping on Tuesday.&quot; &quot;She is going to run fast.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>Subject + <em>will have</em> + past participle</td>
<td>&quot;I will have eaten before arriving.&quot; &quot;She will have lived here for a long time.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Subject + <em>will/would/be going to</em> + be + present participle</td>
<td>&quot;We are going to be cooking dinner.&quot; &quot;He will be singing a song.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Continuous</td>
<td>Subject + <em>will have/would have/be going to</em> + <em>have</em> + been + present participle</td>
<td>&quot;He’ll have been thinking about it.&quot; &quot;I would have been taking an art class.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.”
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 **lived** next door to us for years.” (regular)
- “I **locked** 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
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 [vmentoracademy.com](http://vmentoracademy.com) [Examtrix.com](http://Examtrix.com)
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 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 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
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 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)
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.”
- “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?
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
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)
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 sentence 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**
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)
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?
“Y ou should congratulate your sister on her academic achievement.”
a) “Y our sister should congratulate on her academic achievement.”
b) “Y our sister should be congratulated on her academic achievement.”
c) “Y our sister should congratulate on her academic achievement by you.”
d) “Y our 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
When the agent is important

When expressing a neutral or professional tone

A & B

A & C

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
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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-reported sentence</th>
<th>Verb shift</th>
<th>Reported speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I live in Germany.</em></td>
<td>present simple tense shifts to past simple tense</td>
<td>He said <em>he lived</em> in Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I was a carpenter before I moved here.</em></td>
<td>past simple tense shifts to past perfect tense</td>
<td>She said that <em>she had been</em> a carpenter before she moved here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>He is writing a letter to our friend.</em></td>
<td>present continuous tense shifts to past continuous tense</td>
<td>She told us <em>he was writing</em> a letter to our friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>She was sleeping when you called.</em></td>
<td>past continuous tense shifts to past perfect continuous tense</td>
<td>He told me <em>you had been sleeping</em> when I called.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original Sentence</td>
<td>Tense Shifts</td>
<td>Reported Sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been to Paris four times.</td>
<td><strong>present perfect tense</strong> shifts to <strong>past perfect tense</strong></td>
<td>She said <em>she had been</em> to Paris four times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The film <em>had ended</em> when I switched on the TV.</td>
<td>No shift in the first verb, because there is no tense further in the past. The second verb shifts from <strong>past simple tense</strong> to <strong>past perfect tense</strong>.</td>
<td>He said the film <em>had ended</em> when he’d switched on the TV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When she finally arrived, I <em>had been waiting</em> for over two hours.</td>
<td>No shift, as there is no tense further in the past.</td>
<td>He said he <em>had been waiting</em> for over two hours when she finally arrived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I will call you tomorrow.</em></td>
<td>The <strong>modal verb</strong> <em>will</em> shifts to its past-tense version, <em>would</em>.</td>
<td>He told me that he <em>would call</em> me tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 she 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 says he is writing a letter to their friend.” or:
- “She said 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*.”
• “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 *hadn’t said* 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>Third-person singular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I play</td>
<td>she plays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they break</td>
<td>it breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we buy</td>
<td>he buys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>Third-person singular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they catch</td>
<td>she catches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we mix</td>
<td>it mixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hush</td>
<td>he hushes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we pass</td>
<td>he passes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they quiz</td>
<td>the teacher quizzes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I approach  she approaches

We also usually add the “-es” suffix to verbs ending in a **consonant** + “-o,” as in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>Third Person Singular Present Tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I go</td>
<td>he goes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we do</td>
<td>she does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they forgo</td>
<td>he forgoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they veto</td>
<td>the committee vetoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I lasso</td>
<td>the rancher lassoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you undo</td>
<td>he undoes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, verbs ending in a **vowel** + “-o” (such as moo, boo, woo, or radio) simply take the “-s” ending (moos, boos, woos, radios). **Solo** is unique in that it ends in a consonant + “o,” yet it also only takes “-s” for the third-person singular (solos).
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.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>Third-person singular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they cry</td>
<td>he cries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we try</td>
<td>she tries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they scurry</td>
<td>it scurries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the dogs bury</td>
<td>he buries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fly</td>
<td>the pilot flies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spy</td>
<td>she spies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical person</th>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>Past Tense Singular</th>
<th>Past Tense Plural</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
<th>Present Tense Singular</th>
<th>Present Tense Plural</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>been</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first person</td>
<td>I was</td>
<td>we were</td>
<td></td>
<td>I am</td>
<td>we are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second person</td>
<td>you were</td>
<td>you were</td>
<td></td>
<td>you are</td>
<td>you are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third person</td>
<td>he/she/it was</td>
<td>they were</td>
<td></td>
<td>he/she/it is</td>
<td>they are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 *books*, *dogs*, *tables*, 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. *countess* (female), or *prince* (male) vs. *princess* (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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Subjective Case</th>
<th>Objective Case</th>
<th>Possessive Determiner</th>
<th>Possessive Pronoun</th>
<th>Possessive Pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Person</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Masculine/feminine</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>my</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Person</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>Masculine/feminine</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>our</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Person</td>
<td>Singular/Plural</td>
<td>Masculine/feminine</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>your</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective spelling</th>
<th>How to modify</th>
<th>Positive degree</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One syllable, ending in a consonant preceded by one vowel.</td>
<td>Add “-er” for comparative degree or “-est” for superlative degree. Double final consonant.</td>
<td><strong>big</strong></td>
<td><strong>bigger</strong></td>
<td><strong>biggest</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One syllable, ending in a consonant preceded by two vowels or another consonant.</td>
<td>Add “-er” for comparative degree or “-est” for superlative degree. Do not double final consonant if preceded by one vowel.</td>
<td><strong>strong</strong></td>
<td><strong>stronger</strong></td>
<td><strong>strongest</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One syllable, ending in an “e”</td>
<td>Add “-r” for comparative degree or “-st” for superlative degree.</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>larger</td>
<td>largest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two syllables, ending in a “y”</td>
<td>Replace “y” with “i” and add “-er” for comparative degree or “-est” for superlative degree.</td>
<td>happy</td>
<td>happier</td>
<td>happiest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more syllables, or two syllables not ending in &quot;y&quot;</td>
<td>Add the words more or less before the adjective to make them comparative, or most/least to make them superlative.</td>
<td>clever</td>
<td>more/less careful</td>
<td>most/least careful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb spelling</th>
<th>How to modify</th>
<th>Positive degree</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One syllable, ending in a consonant</td>
<td>Add “-er” for comparative degree or “-est” for superlative degree.</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>faster</td>
<td>fastest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One syllable, ending in an “e”</td>
<td>Add “-r” for comparative degree or “-st” for superlative degree.</td>
<td>late</td>
<td>later</td>
<td>latest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Add the words *more* or *less* before the adverb to make it comparative, or *most/least* to make it 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
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:
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 suffragette, 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:

- actor
- cleaner
- lawyer
- executioner
• executor
• aviator
• bachelor

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”—widower (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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>queen</td>
<td>king</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girl</td>
<td>boy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 *lioness*), many are totally unique words specific to that gender. Here are a few common examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal type</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>horses</td>
<td>mare</td>
<td>stallion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deer</td>
<td>doe</td>
<td>buck</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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 *heard* or *walked*, 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 *dogs*, *cats*, *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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular noun</th>
<th>Plural form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>boy</td>
<td>boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book</td>
<td>books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box</td>
<td>boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beach</td>
<td>beaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lady</td>
<td>ladies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>city</td>
<td>cities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular noun</th>
<th>Plural form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>person</td>
<td>people/persone*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mouse</td>
<td>mice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goose</td>
<td>geese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child</td>
<td>children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foot</td>
<td>feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman</td>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
<th>Spelling rule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>bigger</td>
<td>biggest</td>
<td>With one-syllable adjectives, add “-er” or “-est” and <strong>double</strong> the final consonant if preceded by one vowel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular adjective</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fun</td>
<td>more/less fun</td>
<td>most/least fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td>worse</td>
<td>worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well (healthy)</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far</td>
<td>farther/further</td>
<td>farthest/furthest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little (amount)</td>
<td>less</td>
<td>least</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many/much</td>
<td>more</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Regular adverb</th>
<th>Spelling rule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beautiful</td>
<td>beautifully</td>
<td>Adjective + “-ly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enthusiastic</td>
<td>enthusiastically</td>
<td>If the adjective ends in “-ic,” it will change to “-ically.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>happily</td>
<td>If the adjective ends in a “-y,” it will change to “-ily.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terrible</td>
<td>terribly</td>
<td>If the adjective ends in “-le,” the ending is dropped and is replaced with “-ly.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due</td>
<td>duly</td>
<td>If the adjective ends in “-ue,” the “e” on the end is dropped and is replaced with “-ly.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Irregular adverb</th>
<th>Sources of confusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>Last becomes <em>lastly</em>, but <em>fast</em> becomes <em>fast</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td><em>Hardly (ever)</em> is an adverb of frequency, meaning “almost never.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>straight</td>
<td>straight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lively</td>
<td>lively</td>
<td><em>Lively</em> still exists as an adverb in phrases like <em>step lively</em>; however, it is more often used in the adverbial prepositional phrase <em>in a lively manner</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late</td>
<td>late</td>
<td><em>Lately</em> is a different adverb that means “recently.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daily</td>
<td>daily</td>
<td><strong>Adverbs of frequency</strong> that relate to units of time have the same form as both adjectives and adverbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early</td>
<td>early</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:
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 the chapter on **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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>play</td>
<td>played</td>
<td>played</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bake</td>
<td>baked</td>
<td>baked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen</td>
<td>listened</td>
<td>listened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approach</td>
<td>approached</td>
<td>approached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gather</td>
<td>gathered</td>
<td>gathered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>climb</td>
<td>climbed</td>
<td>climbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chop</td>
<td>chopped</td>
<td>chopped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>copy</td>
<td>copied</td>
<td>copied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panic</td>
<td>panicked</td>
<td>panicked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Past Simple Tense</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>see</td>
<td>saw</td>
<td>seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grow</td>
<td>grew</td>
<td>grown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>thought</td>
<td>thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throw</td>
<td>threw</td>
<td>thrown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drive</td>
<td>drove</td>
<td>driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ride</td>
<td>rode</td>
<td>ridden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>run</td>
<td>ran</td>
<td>run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swim</td>
<td>swam</td>
<td>swum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sit</td>
<td>sat</td>
<td>sat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammaticalperson</th>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>PresentTense Singular</th>
<th>PresentTense Plural</th>
<th>PresentParticiple</th>
<th>PastTense Singular</th>
<th>PastTense Plural</th>
<th>PastParticiple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>being</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first person</td>
<td>I am</td>
<td>we are</td>
<td></td>
<td>I was</td>
<td>we were</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second person</td>
<td>you are</td>
<td>you</td>
<td></td>
<td>you were</td>
<td>you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third person</td>
<td>he/she/it is</td>
<td>they are</td>
<td></td>
<td>he/she/it was</td>
<td>they</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example sentence</th>
<th>Type of subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Computers can process numbers very quickly.”</td>
<td>Noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A boy I know owns a motorcycle.”</td>
<td>Noun phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Someone ate my cake!”</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Swimming is great exercise.”</td>
<td>Gerund</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example sentence</th>
<th>Parts of the predicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I refuse.”</td>
<td>• <em>refuse</em> — intransitive finite verb in the present simple tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My family loves going to the beach each summer.”</td>
<td>• <em>loves</em> — transitive finite verb in the present simple tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>going to the beach</em> — gerund phrase acting as the direct object of the verb <em>loves</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>each summer</em> — adverbial phrase modifying the verb phrase <em>loves going to the beach</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In school we are learning about the American Revolution.”</td>
<td>• <em>in school</em> — adverbial prepositional phrase acting as a modifier of the present participle <em>learning</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>are</em> — finite auxiliary verb used with the present participle <em>learning</em> to create the present continuous tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>learning</em> — present participle (a type of non-finite verb) used with the auxiliary finite verb <em>are</em> to form the present continuous tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>about the American Revolution</em> — prepositional phrase functioning as the direct object of the present participle <em>learning</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To learn more about forming and identifying the predicate, as well as the various
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!”
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)

“Everyone have a television.” (incorrect)

“Everyone has a television.” (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 before 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 after 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example sentence</th>
<th>Parts of the predicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example sentence</th>
<th>Parts of the predicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vmentoracademy.com
Examtrix.com
“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*

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example sentence</th>
<th>Parts of the compound predicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| “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*. |
“My friend Daniel teaches in the morning, volunteers in the afternoon, and plays volleyball in the evening.”

1. teaches in the morning  
2. volunteers in the 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 sentence 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**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example sentence</th>
<th>Finite vs. non-finite verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| “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) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Finite verb</th>
<th>Non-finite verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Susy lives in New York City.”</td>
<td><em>lives</em> (present simple tense, third-person singular)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They were being very difficult.”</td>
<td><em>were</em> (past simple tense, third-person plural)</td>
<td><em>being</em> (present participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We have seen that movie already.”</td>
<td><em>have</em> (present simple tense, first-person plural)</td>
<td><em>seen</em> (past participle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example sentence</th>
<th>Modifiers</th>
<th>What they modify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| “Jonathan always brings his favorite toy to school.” | 1. *always* — adverb  
2. *favorite* — adjective  
3. *to school* — adverbial prepositional phrase |
| “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) |
“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?

vmentoracademy.com
Examtrix.com
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 **factive 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**
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.

<p>| “The dog chased its tail.” | “Mary reads a new book every week.” | “I asked Jonathan on a date.” |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: The dog chased what?</th>
<th>Question: Mary reads what?</th>
<th>Question: I asked whom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer: its tail</td>
<td>Answer: a new book</td>
<td>Answer: Jonathan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Object</th>
<th>Prepositional Phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I sent my brother a letter.”</td>
<td>“I sent a letter to my brother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My father baked our class a batch of cupcakes.”</td>
<td>“My father baked a batch of cupcakes for our class.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She teaches many different students mathematics.”</td>
<td>She teaches mathematics to many different students.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective Case</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
<th>Objective Case</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Direct Object</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Indirect Object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>“I read a great book recently.”</td>
<td>Me</td>
<td>“Jeff told me about a great book.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>“We went out for ice cream.”</td>
<td>Us</td>
<td>“Mom took us out for ice cream.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>“You said the project was finished!”</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>“I told you it would be finished next week!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>“He left for practice already.”</td>
<td>Him</td>
<td>“I'm waiting for him to return from practice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>“She is writing a play.”</td>
<td>Her</td>
<td>“The play was written by her.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It</td>
<td>“It might rain today.”</td>
<td>It</td>
<td>“I want it to stop snowing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>“They won't like this.”</td>
<td>Them</td>
<td>“I asked them a week ago.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>“Who told you about our plan?”</td>
<td>Whom</td>
<td>“Whom have you told about our plan?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whoever</td>
<td>“Whoever broke this vase is in deep trouble!”</td>
<td>Whom</td>
<td>“Study with whomever you like.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:
*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 function 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
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 **factive 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**

**Factive 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

Adverbal 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example (with adverbial)</th>
<th>Example (without adverbial)</th>
<th>Does the meaning change?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The teacher sent Tim <strong>home</strong>.”</td>
<td>“The teacher sent Tim.”</td>
<td>Yes—the adverbial is a complement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She told me the story <strong>quickly</strong>.”</td>
<td>“She told me the story.”</td>
<td>No—the adverbial is an adjunct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Please put the book <strong>on the shelf</strong>.”</td>
<td>“Please put the book.”</td>
<td>Yes—the adverbial is a complement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He wrote a book <strong>in his spare time</strong>.”</td>
<td>“He wrote a book.”</td>
<td>No—the adverbial is an adjunct.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Adjective</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example adjectives</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proper Adjectives</td>
<td>Formed from <em>proper nouns</em> to create descriptive words.</td>
<td>Italian, Shakespearean, Alaskan, Middle Eastern, Nordic</td>
<td>&quot;He writes in an almost Shakespearean style.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound Adjectives</td>
<td>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).</td>
<td>top-right, last-minute, sugar-free, record-breaking, expensive-looking</td>
<td>“I know this is a last-minute suggestion, but hear me out.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonstrative Adjectives (or Demonstrative Determiners)</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td><strong>this, that, these, those</strong></td>
<td>“These cups are very pretty.”</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interrogative Adjectives</strong></td>
<td>Usually used to ask questions about something.</td>
<td><strong>what, which, whose</strong></td>
<td>“Whose computer is this?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nominal Adjectives</strong></td>
<td>Adjectives that perform the function of a <strong>noun</strong> in a sentence. They are preceded by the word <strong>the</strong> and can be found as the <strong>subject</strong> or the <strong>object</strong> of a sentence or clause.</td>
<td><strong>the best, the strongest, the blue</strong></td>
<td>“He wants the red car, but I want the blue.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Adjectives</strong></td>
<td>A subgroup of <strong>nominal adjectives</strong>, used to refer to a group of people based on a shared characteristic.</td>
<td><strong>the rich, the poor, the innocent, the French, the Dutch</strong></td>
<td>“The rich should help the poor.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Adverb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example adverbs</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Time</td>
<td>Describe when or for how long something happens or is the case.</td>
<td>now, tomorrow, yesterday, still, yet, later</td>
<td>“We are eating now.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverbs of Frequency</strong></td>
<td>Describe how frequently something happens or is the case. A subset of Adverbs of Time.</td>
<td>always, usually, sometimes, often, rarely, daily, weekly, monthly</td>
<td>“I rarely eat breakfast in bed.”</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverbs of Place</strong></td>
<td>Describe the direction, distance, movement, or position involved in the action of a verb.</td>
<td>north, everywhere, here, there, forward, downward, up, uphill, behind</td>
<td>“I absolutely hate running uphill.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverbs of Manner</strong></td>
<td>Describe how something happens or how someone does something. Usually formed from adjectives.</td>
<td>beautifully, wonderfully, slowly, deliberately, happily</td>
<td>“He walked slowly towards the bar.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverbs of Degree</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I'm fairly certain this is correct.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Purpose</td>
<td>Describe why something happens or is the case. Single-word adverbs are usually <strong>conjunctive adverbs.</strong></td>
<td>undoubtedly, truly, very, quite, pretty, somewhat, fairly</td>
<td>“We’ve never seen such high numbers. We must <strong>therefore</strong> conclude that the results are not normal.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing Adverbs</td>
<td>Used to draw attention to a particular part of a clause.</td>
<td>also, exclusively, just, mostly, notably, primarily</td>
<td>“They played <strong>mostly</strong> techno music at the party.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Adverbs</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>no, not, hardly, barely, never, seldom</td>
<td>“He does <strong>not</strong> work on Mondays.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunctive Adverbs</td>
<td>Used to connect independent clauses and describe the relationship between them.</td>
<td>comparatively, therefore, also, however, moreover, similarly</td>
<td>“Jen is terrible at math; <strong>however</strong>, she still likes it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative Adverbs</td>
<td>Used by the speaker to comment or give an opinion on something. Evaluative adverbs modify the entire clause.</td>
<td>apparently, astonishingly, clearly, frankly, obviously, presumably</td>
<td>“<strong>Clearly</strong>, we're going to have to work harder.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial Phrases</td>
<td>Viewpoint Adverbs</td>
<td>Relative Adverbs</td>
<td>Adverbial Nouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>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.)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Personally, in my point of view, according to you, scientifically, biologically</strong></td>
<td><strong>I don’t know why he got angry.”</strong></td>
<td>“I can barely see a foot in front of me in this fog.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Personally, I don’t believe it’s true.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relative Adverbs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Used to introduce relative clauses, when the information relates to a place, time, or the reason an action took place.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>where, when, why</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverbial Nouns</strong></td>
<td><strong>Nouns or noun phrases that function grammatically as adverbs to modify verbs and certain adjectives, usually specifying time, distance, weight, age, or monetary value.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>tomorrow, an hour, an ounce, five dollars, 25 years</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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.

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, it 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.
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  
   c) 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun phrase examples</th>
<th>How they appear in a sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a book — determiner $a$ + noun book</td>
<td>“I found a book I'd like to read.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>her sweetly smiling child — determiner her + adverb sweetly + adjective (present participle) smiling + noun child</td>
<td>“She gazed lovingly at her sweetly smiling child.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the red car — determiner the + adjective red + noun car</td>
<td>“The red car belongs to me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb phrase examples</th>
<th>How they appear in a sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>am running</strong> — auxiliary verb <em>am</em> + present participle <em>running</em></td>
<td>• “I <strong>am running</strong> late.” (forms the present continuous tense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>have completed</strong> — auxiliary verb <em>have</em> + past participle <em>completed</em></td>
<td>• “They <strong>have completed</strong> work on the building.” (forms the present perfect tense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>quickly ran to the bus</strong> — adverb <em>quickly</em> + verb <em>ran</em> + prepositional phrase <em>to the bus</em></td>
<td>• “She <strong>quickly ran to the bus</strong>.” (forms the predicate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>plays the trombone</strong> — verb <em>plays</em> + object <em>the trombone</em></td>
<td>• “My brother <strong>plays the trombone</strong>.” (forms the predicate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My favorite</th>
<th>Determiner my + adjective favorite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I brought my favorite jacket to school.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wonderfully talented</th>
<th>Adverb wonderfully + adjective talented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The singer was wonderfully talented.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alone in the world</th>
<th>Adjective alone + adjective complement in the world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“She felt alone in the world.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Adverb once + noun phrase a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“My dad swims once a week.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases consist of a preposition and its object. They most commonly function as adverbs, but they can also be adjectival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prepositional phrase examples</th>
<th>How they appear in a sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• on the wall — preposition <em>on</em> + object <em>the wall</em></td>
<td>• “We hung the painting <em>on the wall.</em>” (adverbial prepositional phrase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• in the driveway — preposition <em>in</em> + object <em>the driveway</em></td>
<td>• “The car <em>in the driveway</em> is my dad’s.” (adjectival prepositional phrase)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gerund phrase examples</th>
<th>How they appear in a sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• swimming every day — gerund swimming + adverbial phrase every day</td>
<td>• “Swimming every day is good for your health.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reading books in the dark — gerund reading + object books + adverbial prepositional phrase in the dark</td>
<td>• “I wouldn't recommend reading books in the dark.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive phrase examples</th>
<th>How they appear in a sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• to help one another — infinitive to help + object one another</td>
<td>• “We must all try to help one another.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(functions as a noun, the direct object of try)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Participle Phrases

Like gerunds and infinitives, **participle phrases** 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participle phrase examples</th>
<th>How they appear in a sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>destroyed in the accident</strong> — past participle destroyed + adverbial prepositional phrase <em>in the accident</em></td>
<td>“My car, destroyed in the accident, was taken away by the tow truck.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• **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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Subject</th>
<th>The Predicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contains the noun phrase:</td>
<td>Contains the verb phrase:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The bright orange cat</em></td>
<td><em>lives in the shed in the garden</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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
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: “The man,” “with brown hair,” and “and a black shirt.”
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 man with brown hair and a black shirt sat down.”

Here are some more examples of sentences with noun phrases inside of other noun phrases:

• “They passed an orange bus driven by a jolly old man wearing a lady’s wig on the highway.”
• “Please hand me the book with the torn cover.”

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 doghouse.”
• “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
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?
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 remotely controlled.”**
  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.)

NounClauses
• “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.”
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 a 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
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

**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
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, it 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
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 appear 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 appositive

Restrictive appositive

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,
Dependent Clauses

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)
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.)

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“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 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.*)

**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**, **whose**.
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*.)
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
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?)
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, \textit{when we get to wear jeans to work}.”
• “Samantha, \textit{whom I’ve asked to be my bridesmaid}, is getting married next year.”
• “The senator, \textit{who is up for re-election next month}, has made a lot of promises to his constituency.”
• “The movie, \textit{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 \textbf{cannot} be introduced by the relative pronoun \textit{that} or the relative adverb \textit{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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea Being Modified</th>
<th>Subordinating Conjunction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>when, whenever, while, before, after, since, until, once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>where, wherever, everywhere, anywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason or purpose</td>
<td>because, as, since, so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>if, unless, whether or not, in the event, provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison or manner</td>
<td>like, as, as… as, as if, the way, than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>though, although, even though, whereas, even if</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.*
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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He goes</td>
<td>by bus</td>
<td>to the movies</td>
<td>every Saturday</td>
<td>at 8 o'clock.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now let’s reorder the information in the predicate (everything after the verb “goes”):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>Where?</th>
<th>When (at what time)?</th>
<th>How?</th>
<th>When?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He goes</td>
<td>to the movies</td>
<td>at 8 o'clock</td>
<td>by bus</td>
<td>every Saturday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, the sentence still makes logical sense, sounds fine, and retains all of the
Now let’s restructure it to have part of the predicate come at the beginning of the sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When (at what time)?</th>
<th>When?</th>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>Where?</th>
<th>How?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At 8 o'clock</td>
<td>every Saturday</td>
<td>he goes</td>
<td>to the movies</td>
<td>by bus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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?

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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
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
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, but it 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)
• “They wanted to go to Venice; however, I wanted to see Madrid.” (conjunctive adverb)

• “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 **secolons**. 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.”
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 **interrogative sentences** made negative) 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
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?
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?”
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?”
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?
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?”
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
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

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
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

Page. Article: Question-Answer

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16. Common and Proper Nouns: 1-b, 2-b, 3-b
18. Nouns of Address: 1-e, 2-b, 3-d, 4-a, 5-b
21. Concrete and Abstract Nouns: 1-b, 2-a, 3-b, 4-a, 5-a, 6-b
24. Countable Nouns: 1-f, 2-b, 3-b, 4-d, 5-c
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31. Collective Nouns: 1-d, 2-c, 3-a, 4-b, 5-c
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46. Personal Pronouns - Person (First person, Second person, Third person): 1-b, 2-d, 3-a, 4-d
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51. Personal Pronouns - Reflexive Pronouns: 1-c, 2-a, 3-d, 4-b
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100. Primary Auxiliary Verbs: 1-b, 2-c, 3-c, 4-d, 5-a
104. Modal Auxiliary Verbs: 1-a, 2-d, 3-a, 4-c, 5-b, 6-b
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110. Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Would: 1-b, 2-d, 3-c, 4-a
112. Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Shall: 1-a, 2-d, 3-c
115. Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Should: 1-a, 2-d, 3-b, 4-a
118. Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Can: 1-d, 2-c, 3-a
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123. Modal Auxiliary Verbs - May: 1-c, 2-c, 3-b, 4-d
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