

English Grammar Essentials

Key Concepts: The Pattern of a Normal Sentence

This course 'English Grammar Essentials' will talk about the rules of grammar that you ought to follow to write correct English. The rules will be taught by correcting grammatically wrong sentences. It will help you learn, understand, and write correct English.

The pattern of a normal English sentence includes subjects, verbs, complements, and modifiers.

Example:

"Bob and I ate a pizza last night."

Subject: Bob and I

Verb: ate

Complement: a pizza

Modifier: last night

Complement

A complement completes the verb. A complement answers either of the two questions: what or whom. Examples:

- John bought a cake yesterday
- Jill was driving a new car

Subject: Definition and Details

The Subject is the noun (person or thing) that performs or is responsible for the action of a sentence.

What to remember about 'Subjects':

1. Every English sentence must have a subject
2. The subject can also be a noun phrase
3. "It" can work as a subject of an impersonal verb
4. In some sentences, "there" can serve as a pseudo-subject. But the true subject appears after the verb, and the number of the true subject controls the verb.

Example: There was (verb - singular) a fire (subject - singular) in that building last month.

Modifiers

A modifier tells the time, place, or manner of the action. Often, it's a prepositional phrase. A modifier answers any of the following questions: when, where or how. A modifier answers any of the following questions: when, where, or how. Examples:

1. John bought a book at the bookstore. (Where did John buy the book?)
2. We ate dinner at seven o'clock. (When did we eat dinner?)
3. He was driving very fast. (How was he driving?)

Verb

The verb follows the subject in a declarative sentence. It generally shows the action of the sentence. A declarative sentence simply relays information in the form of statements.

A verb can also be a verb phrase, which consists of one or more auxiliaries and one main verb. Auxiliary verbs consist of "am, is, are, was, were". Main verbs can be used as stand-alone verbs or be supported with one or more auxiliary verbs.

Verb Phrase

1. Simple present - He walks to school every day
2. Simple past - He walked to school yesterday
3. Present progressive - He is walking to the school now
4. Past progressive (continuous) - He was walking to the school when he saw Jane
5. Present perfect - He has walked to school several times
6. Past perfect - He had walked to school before he hurt his foot

Irregular Verbs

The word form of irregular verbs changes irregularly in the tense form. A verb that does not follow the normal pattern of change. Here is a [good resource](#) to learn more about irregular verbs.

Key Concepts: Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject of a sentence and its verb must make a match. A similar subject-verb agreement problem occurs when the verb precedes the subject. Example:

Wrong: Here comes (singular verb) my brother and sister (plural subject).

Correction: Here come (plural verb) my brother and sister (plural subject).

Another problem in agreement occurs when the writer is not sure whether the subject noun is singular or plural.

Specific Cases: Subject-Verb Agreement

In the case of fractions (e.g. three-fourths) and percent (e.g. twenty percent), the number of the verb is determined by the object of the preposition.

1. Three-fourths of the tree (singular object of the preposition) is (singular verb) rotten
2. Only two-thirds of the children (plural object of the preposition) are (plural verb) in school today

More Specific Cases

Verbs must agree with the subject noun or pronoun, not with words mistakenly thought to be the subject. Examples:

- Her understanding (subject) of the arrangements (not the subject) is (verb) that the bride will carry red roses
- The 1996 Olympic Games (plural subject), regardless of the opposition, were (plural verb) held in Atlanta

Nouns, both singular and plural, when joined by and, are called compound subjects and need plural verbs.

Example: The picture and text go inside this box

Compound subjects thought of as a unit need singular verbs.

Example: Green eggs and veggies (compound subject as a unit) is Reggae's favorite breakfast.

Singular nouns joined by " or/nor" need singular verbs.

Example: A Coke or a Pepsi is what I thirst for

Tense

The English language offers a speaker or writer six different tenses with which to indicate the relative time in which an action can take place.

- Present: I eat spaghetti every day
- Past: She ate spaghetti every day
- Future: Phill will eat spaghetti every day
- Present Perfect: Monica has eaten spaghetti every day
- Past Perfect: Rose had eaten spaghetti every day
- Future Perfect: They all will have eaten spaghetti every day

All the tenses also have a progressive form, created by adding '-ing'.

Key Concepts: Diction Errors

A lot of/lots of:

Instead, use; very much / many etc.

Around:

Avoid using 'around' to designate time, distance or any other quality.

At:

Don't use 'at' after 'where'.

Badly:

Use 'badly' to express poorly or low quality. Don't use 'badly' to express very much, instead use words such as 'desperately'.

Being that/ Being as:

Do not use "Being that/Being as" in the place of 'Because'.

More Diction Errors

Because (used after reason)

Nonstandard: The reason for her back pain is because she has poor posture

Standard: The reason for her back pain is that she has poor posture

Both Alike

Redundant: The two brothers are both alike in appearance

Standard: The brothers are alike in appearance

Each other

Colloquial: At midnight, all the people on the bus wished each other a Happy New Year. (Each other refers to two; one another refers to more than two.)

Standard: At midnight, all the people on the bus wished one another a Happy New Year

Kind of/Sort of

Colloquial: Doug was kind of upset he heard the news. (Avoid using kind of and sort of when you mean very, rather, or somewhat.)

Standard: Doug was somewhat upset when he heard the news

Key Concepts: Even More Diction Errors

Like/as

In standard English, "like" is not an acceptable substitute for as, as if, or as though.

- Nonstandard: Adam plans to write a letter of complaint, just like Sandra does.
- Standard: Adam plans to write a letter of complaint, just as Sandra does

Like/maybe

Avoid using like and maybe in making estimates. Use approximately, perhaps, or about.

- Colloquial: There were like twenty cars in the parking lot
- Standard: There were approximately twenty cars in the parking lot

Parallel Construction

Parallel ideas in a series should be expressed in the same grammatical form.

- Nonstandard: I like skiing, hiking, to take pictures, and running
- Standard: I like skiing, hiking, taking pictures, and running

When used to compare or contrast, parallel ideas should be grammatical equivalents.

- Nonstandard: Going out to eat no longer thrills me as much as to cook at home
- Standard: Going out to eat no longer thrills me as much as cooking at home

Double Negatives

Two negatives usually mean nothing more than an error in standard usage.

Double Negative: They didn't do nothing wrong.

Standard: They did nothing wrong.

Double Negative: You can't hardly tell one bird from another without a guidebook.

Standard: You can hardly tell one bird from another without a guidebook.