

Grammar for Writers

This is not a grammar book; this is a writing book. However, good writers should be able to talk about grammar. Then they can talk about their writing. If you know some basic grammar terms, you can learn how to write correct and interesting sentences more easily. You can understand, talk about, and ask questions about the grammatical mistakes you make in your writing, and you can correct them more easily. At the same time, it is important to develop a 'feeling' or intuition about English grammar: you can do this by exposing yourself to English. Read English stories, magazines, and web pages. Listen to English songs; watch English films; have conversations in English. You will be surprised at how these activities also help your writing!

Parts of Speech

➤ Noun

A *noun* names something: a person or animal (*teacher, Anne, bird*), a place (*mountain, New York, bedroom*), a thing (*computer, dress, mobile phone*), or idea (*love, honesty, happiness*).

Writers need to think about *noun phrases* in addition to simple nouns. A noun phrase includes the main noun and some words that describe it.

bag (noun)

The bag that my mother gave me (noun phrase)

Note: *Pronouns* (*I, you, he, she, it, we, and they*) are words that replace nouns, and are used in the same way.

The topic of your sentences and paragraphs will be a noun or noun phrase.

➤ Verb

The *verb* tells about the action or state in the sentence.

He runs. (action)

They are eating dinner.

She seems lonely. (state)

I feel tired.

Verbs change slightly according to who is doing the action (*he runs; they run*) and the tense or time (*he runs every day; he ran yesterday*). We say that a verb must *agree* with the person or thing that the sentence is about.

A *verb phrase* is the main verb (*run*) plus any auxiliary verbs (*does run, is running, has run, could be running*).

Verb phrases show your feelings about your topic. You also use verbs when you write to tell stories and to explain what happened.

➤ Preposition

Prepositions are short words (*at, on, for*) that connect ideas. They tell about time, place, or purpose (reason).

We eat dinner **at** *seven o'clock.* (time)
My book is **on** *the desk.* (place)
She bought a gift **for** *her friend.* (purpose)

A *prepositional phrase* includes a preposition and a noun. The prepositional phrases in the examples above are *at seven o'clock*, *on the desk* and *for her friend*.

Adding prepositional phrases to your sentences is an easy way to write longer, more detailed sentences.

➤ Adjective

An *adjective* describes, or tells about, a noun. It answers the question *What kind of* or *Which?*

She has a **red** *bag.* (What kind of bag does she have?)
The **small brown** *dog is mine.* (Which dog is yours?)

Adjective phrases – several words – do the same thing. Notice that there can be several adjective phrases for one noun.

She has a bag **from Peru.**
The dog **over there by that tree** *is mine.*

Many adjective phrases are prepositional phrases. Since adjectives and adjective phrases describe nouns, you will often see adjective phrases in noun phrases:

The red bag **with the black handles** *is mine.*

Using adjectives when you write helps you paint a picture of the nouns you are describing. They help your reader to see what you are describing.

➤ Adverb

An *adverb* describes, or tells about, a verb. It answers the questions *Where, When, How, For how long / How often,* and *Why?*

It rained **yesterday.** (When did it rain?)
She eats **slowly.** (How does she eat?)
I **sometimes** *play tennis.* (How often do you play tennis?)

Adverb phrases contain several words. These may also be prepositional phrases. There can be more than one adverb phrase in a sentence.

She went **to the bank to get some money.** (Where did she go? Why did she go there?)

Adverbs add power to your verb phrases. They add more information and support to your ideas.

Use both adjectives and adverbs to make your writing more sophisticated, interesting and accurate.

➤ Article

There are three articles in English: *a*, *an* and *the*. All of the articles signal nouns: *She is a friend*; *Would you like an apple?*; *Meet me in the classroom*. However, not all nouns have articles before them: *I will see you on Friday*; *I didn't see that film*; *I don't believe in magic*. Using English articles correctly takes a lot of practise. Do not be discouraged if you make mistakes with articles while learning to write in English.

Parts of a Sentence

A complete sentence must have a subject and a predicate.

➤ Subject

The subject of a sentence is the person, thing, or idea that the sentence is about. It is always a noun or a noun phrase. In a statement, it usually comes before the verb. To check if your subject agrees with the verb, find the *head noun* – the most basic noun that the sentence is about.

Amy is my sister.

She is my sister.

The girl with the long hair is my sister. (*girl* is the head noun)

The young girl with the long hair sitting over there is my sister. (*girl* is the head noun)

➤ Predicate

The predicate tells what the subject does, what happens to the subject, or how the subject is. The predicate contains at least the verb, and often other words that follow the verb.

Amy studies.

Amy studies English.

Amy studies English in her room for several hours every night.

Finding the subject and predicate of your sentences helps you see whether you have a complete sentence, and whether the subject and verb of your sentence agree.

Punctuation

Here are some common rules for using punctuation in your writing. Of course, this is not a complete list. If you have further questions, check a grammar book or ask your teacher.

➤ Capitalisation

Always capitalise:

- the first word of every sentence.
- days of the week (*Tuesday*) and months of the year (*April*).
- the first letter (only) of the names of people and places (*Bangkok, Ayaka Seo*).
- the main words of a title, but not articles (*a, an, the*) or prepositions (words like *to, of, for*) or conjunctions (*and, but*), unless they are the first word in the title: *The Three Things I Do in the Morning*.

➤ Full stop (.)

A full stop comes at the end of a statement:

An electronic dictionary is more convenient than a paper one.

If the sentence ends with an abbreviation, don't use more than one full stop:

RIGHT: *My mother just finished her Ph.D.*

WRONG: *My mother just finished her Ph.D..*

➤ Comma (,)

Use a comma to separate a series of three or more items. However, only use a comma between the last two items and *and* if they are long.

I take a dictionary, a notebook and some paper to class every day.

I spent last week swimming in the pool, lying in the sun, and reading all about love and adventure.

Use a comma before words like *and, but, or, and so* to separate two parts of a sentence that each have a subject and a verb.

She needed some work experience, so she got a part-time job.

He did not study at all, but he still got an 87 on the test.

Use a comma after an introductory word or expression, such as *However, Therefore, and In conclusion*:

However, the high price of electric cars means that most people cannot afford one.

➤ Quotation marks (' ')

Use quotation marks when you type or write the title of a book or film:

'Hamlet' was written by Shakespeare.

When you use a word processor, you can use italics instead:

Hamlet was written by Shakespeare.

Use quotation marks to show the exact words someone spoke or wrote:

The professor announced, 'We're going to have an exam next week.'

Shakespeare wrote, 'All the world's a stage.'

Do not use quotation marks if you're reporting what another person said:

The professor said that we should study hard this week.

➤ Punctuation when using quotation marks

If you are using expressions like *he said* or *the girl remarked* after the quotation, then use a comma and not a full stop at the end of the quoted sentence:

'We're going to have an exam next week,' announced the professor.

Use a full stop if the quoted sentence comes at the end:

The professor announced, 'We're going to have an exam next week.'

Notice how a comma is used after *announced*, above, to introduce the quotation.

➤ Quotation marks and capitalisation

Capitalise the first letter of the word that begins a quotation. However, if an expression like *she said* interrupts the quotation and divides the sentence, then do not capitalise the first word of the part that finishes the quotation:

'Next week,' said the professor, 'we are going to have an exam.'

The comma after *week* separates the quotation from the rest of the sentence.

Use a capital letter only if the second part is a new, complete sentence:

'We'll have an exam next week,' explained the teacher. 'It will take thirty minutes.'

➤ Advice for academic writing

The following are not usually used in academic writing, although they are fine in informal situations, such as letters to your friends.

- Brackets that give information which is not part of your main sentence:
Mobile phones are useful (and besides, I think they look great).
If your idea is important, it should be in a sentence of its own. If it is not important, it should not be in your paper.
- The abbreviation *etc.* to continue a list. Instead, use a phrase like *such as* in your sentence:
Students in my university come from countries such as China, India and Australia.
- Exclamation marks (!). Instead, write strong sentences with plenty of details to show your reader your feelings:
Angel Falls is one of the most spectacular natural wonders you will ever see.
- An ellipsis (...) at the end of a sentence, to show that the sentence is not finished:
The professor said that I should study hard, so ...
Instead, finish your sentence:
The professor said that I should study hard, so I should not go to the party tonight.