

# Definite versus indefinite articles



Some native languages other than English do not use definite and indefinite articles. Therefore, speakers of these languages often have difficulty learning and using the English definite and indefinite articles accurately. This chapter will help to alleviate this problem.

## Definite articles

The definite article in English is **the**. It is pronounced as **thə** (ə = schwa) when it precedes words that begin with a consonant.

**thə** book  
**thə** funny story  
**thə** long book  
**thə** silly clown  
**thə** suggested material

But when **the** precedes a word that begins with a vowel, **the** is pronounced more like **thee**.

**thee** apple  
**thee** eleven parts of the book  
**thee** interesting articles  
**thee** obvious results  
**thee** understanding

Remember that for some English words beginning with **h**, that letter is pronounced with an aspiration. In other English words, the **h** is silent. This difference will determine the pronunciation of the definite article. For example:

**thə** *hat*  
**thee** *heir*

## EXERCISE

## 1.1

Circle the correct pronunciation of the definite article **the** with each of the words or phrases provided.

- |                              |          |
|------------------------------|----------|
| 1. little children           | thə thee |
| 2. amazing feats of strength | thə thee |
| 3. evil empire               | thə thee |
| 4. local newspapers          | thə thee |
| 5. hours we work             | thə thee |
| 6. president                 | thə thee |
| 7. residents of the hotel    | thə thee |
| 8. habits of whales          | thə thee |
| 9. newest automobiles        | thə thee |
| 10. advantage                | thə thee |
| 11. islands of Hawaii        | thə thee |
| 12. tall chimney             | thə thee |
| 13. honorary degree          | thə thee |
| 14. opinion of our readers   | thə thee |
| 15. liquidation sale         | thə thee |
| 16. heavy burden             | thə thee |
| 17. latest news              | thə thee |
| 18. unbelievable story       | thə thee |
| 19. yellow bird              | thə thee |
| 20. eventual outcome         | thə thee |

The definite article is used to modify a noun that is *the specific subject* of a speaker or writer. It is a person or thing that is *known and being discussed*. For example:

**The** man on the corner is my friend.

In this sentence, **the man** is the specific subject of the speaker. He is also known to the speaker, because he is a friend. Let's look at another example.

I know **the answer** to this question.

In this sentence, **the answer** is the specific subject of the speaker. It is the thing that is *known and being discussed* by the speaker. Let's look at one more example.

We keep our car in **the garage**.

Here, **the garage** is the specific location where our car is kept. It is a known place and is our subject.

EXERCISE

1.2

*In the blank provided, write the phrase that is the specific and known subject of the writer of the sentence. If there is more than one, write all of them. For example:*

John didn't like the blue suit and returned it.

the blue suit

1. Our family needs a vacation and will travel to the state of Florida for some sunshine.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. The problem in a business is always the lack of customers.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. I want to take the children to the park.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Did the tour guide find a beach for the tourists?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. The boys refused to play with the girls.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. She needs a lamp for the guest room.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. The newspaper was lying on the porch in the pouring rain.

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Let me know whether you find an article about the war.

\_\_\_\_\_

9. The scholarship winner wants to attend a university in the East.

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Who made a hole in the wall?

\_\_\_\_\_

# Indefinite articles

The English indefinite articles are **a** and **an**. Use **a** before a word that begins with a consonant and **an** before a word that begins with a vowel.

- a** long story
- a** pleasant surprise
- a** stranger
- an** anteater
- an** exciting movie
- an** orchestral piece

A word of caution regarding vowels: The vowel **u** is sometimes pronounced as **yoo**. In such cases, it is preceded by **a**.

**a** university

## EXERCISE

### 1.3

Write the correct indefinite article, **a** or **an**, in the blank provided.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ apple
2. \_\_\_\_\_ angry man
3. \_\_\_\_\_ crazy tale
4. \_\_\_\_\_ laughing boy
5. \_\_\_\_\_ unique story
6. \_\_\_\_\_ history lesson
7. \_\_\_\_\_ casual remark
8. \_\_\_\_\_ zookeeper
9. \_\_\_\_\_ yawning baby
10. \_\_\_\_\_ understandable mistake
11. \_\_\_\_\_ insult
12. \_\_\_\_\_ opening to the play
13. \_\_\_\_\_ tragic end
14. \_\_\_\_\_ universal remote
15. \_\_\_\_\_ cell phone
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Internet connection

17. \_\_\_\_\_ entertaining program
18. \_\_\_\_\_ ugly duckling
19. \_\_\_\_\_ honorable peace
20. \_\_\_\_\_ ordinary day

Indefinite articles modify nouns that are not the specific subject of a speaker or writer. Such nouns are considered *generalities*. The word *any* can often replace the indefinite article and make sense. This is usually the signal that the indefinite article is the preferred choice over the definite article. For example:

Do you have **a book**? (Do you have *any* book? Do you have *any* books *in general*?)

The person asking this question is not looking for a specific book but rather *any* book that might be available.

There is **a strange man** on the corner.

The man in this sentence is not known to the speaker. Thus, he is not the known subject of conversation. The speaker is probably wondering who the stranger is.

When a nonspecific noun is introduced, it is most often modified by **a** or **an**. But once it has been introduced, it becomes specific and can be modified by **the**. It is the known subject of the conversation. Consider the following dialogue:

TOM: There is **a** strange man on the corner. Do you know him?

MARY: I have never seen **the** man before.

TOM: I think **the** man might be lost.

MARY: Perhaps we should help **the** man.

Consider another example:

TOM: I want to buy **a** bike for my son. What kind should I get?

MARY: I like **the** red bike over there.

TOM: **The** red bike is really nice but a little big for my son.

MARY: **The** blue bike is a bit smaller. How about that one?

Notice that the addition of adjectives (**red** and **blue**) makes the bike more specific.

The choice of **a** or **an** and **the** is often a matter of intent. Does the speaker wish to suggest that a noun is being discussed generally (any person or object)? Or does the speaker wish to imply that a specific noun is the subject of the conversation (the known person or object)? For example:

**I like a cold beer.** (I like any glass of beer that is cold. Generally, I enjoy a cold beer.)

**I like the cold beer.** (I just tasted three beers. I only enjoyed one—specifically, the cold beer.)

In the blanks provided, write the correct definite or indefinite article—**the, a, or an**.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ story that \_\_\_\_\_ children are reading was written by \_\_\_\_\_ woman in England. But I don't remember her name.
2. Do you have \_\_\_\_\_ pencil I can borrow? I left my schoolbag on \_\_\_\_\_ kitchen table.
3. Did you enjoy \_\_\_\_\_ opera this evening? / Not really. I thought \_\_\_\_\_ baritone was weak and \_\_\_\_\_ orchestra too loud.
4. We just bought \_\_\_\_\_ cottage in the woods. / What good news. I'd love to see \_\_\_\_\_ cottage some day.
5. I need \_\_\_\_\_ vacation. I've worked for \_\_\_\_\_ company for six years, and now I want a couple weeks by \_\_\_\_\_ lake or pond where I can fish.
6. Sometime next year, I want to spend \_\_\_\_\_ week hunting in Colorado. They say that \_\_\_\_\_ mountains are beautiful in \_\_\_\_\_ autumn. Perhaps I should go then.
7. My husband needs \_\_\_\_\_ new suitcase. Let's go to \_\_\_\_\_ mall on Main Street. There's supposed to be \_\_\_\_\_ great leather goods store there.
8. Do you have \_\_\_\_\_ extra pen? I lost \_\_\_\_\_ one my brother gave me last year. I want to write him \_\_\_\_\_ letter and get it to \_\_\_\_\_ mailbox on \_\_\_\_\_ corner before 4 p.m.
9. There's \_\_\_\_\_ little boy alone in \_\_\_\_\_ park. He seems lost. / I think I know \_\_\_\_\_ boy. He lives in \_\_\_\_\_ large, white house on \_\_\_\_\_ hill outside of town.
10. John bought me \_\_\_\_\_ bracelet yesterday. / What does \_\_\_\_\_ bracelet look like? / I'm not sure. I haven't seen \_\_\_\_\_ bracelet yet. John hid it somewhere in \_\_\_\_\_ basement.

## Plural articles

Definite and indefinite articles function not only in the singular but also in the plural. The plural indefinite article, however, is no article at all. The plural noun stands alone and implies a general-ity. If the word *any* can be used with the plural noun, it is indefinite. For example:

books	(books in general, any books)
nations	(nations in general, any nations)
children	(children in general, any children)

Compare the use of definite and indefinite articles in the singular and plural. Keep in mind what the difference of meaning is.

DEFINITE ARTICLE	
SINGULAR	PLURAL
the house	the houses
the huge ship	the huge ships
the man	the men
the nervous horse	the nervous horses

INDEFINITE ARTICLE	
SINGULAR	PLURAL
an angry mob	angry mobs
an astronaut	astronauts
a mountain	mountains
a television program	television programs

Certain singular nouns that express something of a nonspecific nature or collectiveness can be written without an article. This structure implies a generality. For example:

**Beauty** is only skin-deep.

**Time** can be your enemy or your friend.

**Money** is the root of all evil.

**Hard work** can be a character builder.

EXERCISE

1.5

*Rewrite each sentence by changing the underlined singular nouns to the plural. Make any other necessary changes to the sentences.*

1. The boy played in the field with a dog.

---

2. We have a new gardener for the new nursery.

---

3. When on a vacation in Hawaii, I often visit a young surfer at the beach.

---

4. If you can find a racket, we can go to the tennis court and try to find a partner for you.

---

5. The child never watches a movie of which the nanny does not approve.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. If I had a puppy, I would give the puppy to a lonely man or woman.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. The reason for my tardiness is simple: there was an accident on the snowy road, and the police officer halted all traffic.

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Put a candle on the table and a bottle of white wine in the cooler, so we can celebrate.

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Did you send the lawyer a telegram or an e-mail?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. A pretty woman approached the car and held up a sign asking for help.

\_\_\_\_\_

EXERCISE

1.6

*Rewrite each sentence by changing the underlined plural nouns to the singular.*

1. The boys ran across the gardens and ruined rows of vegetables.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Rainstorms and windy days made the sightseeing trips miserable.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The new students had to carry trays of milk cartons into classrooms.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Are tourists from European countries better tippers than tourists from Asia?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. The reindeer bolted into the fields and startled the resting geese.

\_\_\_\_\_



## EXERCISE

## 1.7

Circle the letter of the word or phrase that best completes each sentence.

1. Ellen wanted \_\_\_\_\_ but didn't know where to buy one.  
a. the green blouse    b. a new sweater    c. purchases    d. money
2. Who was \_\_\_\_\_ unusual-looking man I saw in town yesterday?  
a. a    b. an    c. the    d. any
3. John accepted \_\_\_\_\_ she made but was a bit skeptical.  
a. reasons    b. logic    c. the anger    d. the excuses
4. I'm looking for \_\_\_\_\_ interesting book to read on the plane.  
a. these    b. a    c. an    d. the
5. They were in \_\_\_\_\_ hour-long discussion about the new project.  
a. any    b. several    c. an    d. a frequently

# Capitalization and punctuation

## Capitalization

European languages all use capitalization as a way of highlighting certain kinds of vocabulary. English is no different. There was a time when capitalization in English was a bit easier, because the general rule was to capitalize all nouns. Look at the following excerpt from the US Constitution and notice that all the nouns are capitalized.

### Article I—The Legislative Branch

#### Section 1—The Legislature

All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

#### Section 2—The House

The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States, and the Electors in each State shall have the Qualifications requisite for Electors of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature.

No Person shall be a Representative who shall not have attained to the Age of twenty five Years, and been seven Years a Citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State in which he shall be chosen.

This simple approach to capitalization is, unfortunately, no longer in vogue. However, standard rules exist to guide accurate capitalization of English.

There is only one pronoun that is always capitalized: **I**. However, this occurs only in the subjective case. The objective cases of **me**, **my**, **mine**, and **myself** are not capitalized unless they occur at the beginning of a sentence.

## Names

The simplest and perhaps most obvious rule of capitalization is that all names—first names, middle names, or surnames—are capitalized.

George Washington  
Franklin Delano Roosevelt  
Helen Keller  
Martin Luther King Jr.

# Titles

The titles that accompany names are also capitalized.

- Dr. Jonas Salk
- Mr. Brad Pitt
- Ms. Gloria Steinem
- President Barak Obama
- Professor Maria Ibbotson
- Queen Elizabeth II
- Senator Dianne Feinstein

# First word of a sentence

Always capitalize the first word of a sentence, whether the sentence is a statement, a question, or an exclamation.

- My brother has a new job in New York City.
- Have you ever visited Disneyland?
- Watch out for that car!

EXERCISE

2.1

*Rewrite each word that requires a capital letter.*

1. during the late afternoon, i like to stroll down to the river and visit mr. smith.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. are frank and ellen coming to your party tomorrow?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. i bought a puppy yesterday and decided to call her spotty.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. why does professor keller continue to call me edward? my name is john.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. dr. parsons said that this was the worst novel he ever read.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. don't just stand there! help me!  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. the newly elected president will take the oath of office tomorrow.  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. we wanted to meet vice president biden, but he was much too busy.

9. last night, little mary began to cry, and when i went to her room, i realized she had had a nightmare.

10. could you spend some time with mrs. martin? she's been rather lonely.

## Quotations

When sentences occur in *direct discourse* (a direct quote), the sentence that introduces the quote does not begin with a capital letter unless it is the first word in the sentence. For example:

“Be careful!” Bob shouted. “That machine is dangerous!”

“I see you hiding there,” the man called to the children.

She said, “You need to find a job soon.”

My aunt asked, “Why does that woman chase after you?”

Quotations do not occur in *indirect discourse*, which is the retelling of what someone has said. The quote does not begin with a capital letter unless it is a word that requires capitalization (such as I or a proper noun).

Bob shouted that we should be careful, because that machine is dangerous.

The man called to the children that he saw them hiding there.

She said that I need to find a job soon.

My aunt asked why that woman chases after me.

## Places

Towns, cities, nations and nationalities, continents, regions, and all other proper nouns are capitalized. If the proper noun consists of more than one word, all the primary words are capitalized. For example:

United States of America

Africa

Dade County

San Francisco

Brooklyn Bridge

Princeton University

St. Paul Lutheran School

Art Institute of Chicago

English

## Titles not capitalized

It has already been explained that titles that precede a name are capitalized. But they do not always have to be capitalized. If they are used to identify a rank, they appear without a name and are not capitalized.

The **king** came into the room.

Mr. Barton was the last **senator** to enter the hall.

Is Doris Whitman the new **principal** of the school?

But if you use a title to address a person, then it must be capitalized.

Did you get the test results, **Doctor**?

Please have a seat, **Senator**.

I look forward to reading your book, **Professor**.

### EXERCISE

## 2.2

*Rewrite each word that requires a capital letter.*

1. mr. president, have you been in touch with the government of iran?

---

2. "please control yourselves," the young teacher pleaded.

---

3. when the governor came into the room, senator smith stood to shake his hand.

---

4. she asked whether the queen will spend some time at windsor castle.

---

5. captain jones wrote, "i was shocked to see the russian ship floundering in the bering sea.

---

6. did ms. keller have a chance to read the declaration of independence?

---

7. my boss has to take a new job in either boston or philadelphia.

---

8. my favorite actress is angelina jolie, whom I once saw in a hotel in california.

---

9. the new museum is only a block from new york university.

10. "turn down that music!" mr. brown bellowed. "i need some sleep before i fly to europe!"

## Books and periodicals

In titles of books and periodicals, do not capitalize prepositions. For example:

*The Last **of** the Mohicans*

*Catcher **in** the Rye*

In addition, the articles **the**, **a**, and **an** should not be capitalized unless they are the first word of the title. This is also true of the words **as**, **and**, **but**, **if**, **nor**, and **or**.

*A Raisin in the Sun*

*Romeo and Juliet*

*The Aspen Times*

The verb **to be** and its conjugated forms (**am**, **are**, **is**, **was**, and **were**) should always be capitalized in titles.

*Be It Ever Thus*

*Are We as Interesting as We Think We Are?*

## Compass points

When points on the compass refer to a specific region, they should be capitalized. But when they identify a direction or a location in general, they are not. For example:

The **South** struggled in the last year of the Civil War.

My brother lives in the **East** now, not far from New York City.

I turned on the engine, put on some music, and headed **west**.

The **northern** part of the state consists mostly of farms.

## Seasons of the year

Do not capitalize the seasons of the year unless they are the first word in a sentence.

**Spring** is probably my favorite time of year.

We often spend the **summer** in Canada.

**Winter** sports interested me a lot when I was young.

The **fall** colors are disappointing this year.

If a season occurs in a title, it should be capitalized.

My favorite song is “**A**utumn Leaves.”

EXERCISE

2.3

Rewrite each word that requires a capital letter.

1. my father reads *the new york times* every morning.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. our library doesn't have *to kill a mockingbird* on its shelves.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. the department of state issued a warning through an official statement.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. *life on the mississippi* is considered a classic.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. professor howard's new book, *the war against poverty*, is doing well.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. the doctor spent a lot of time in a london museum to enjoy the works of gainsborough.  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. tony has spring fever and doesn't want to go to work.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. mark and helen tried out for *our town*, but the director wasn't interested in them.  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. i sold my ford convertible and want to buy a cadillac.  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. the stories of cowboys and indians in the west are partly just myth.  
\_\_\_\_\_

## School subjects

Do not capitalize the name of a school subject unless it is part of a specific course name. For example:

SUBJECT	COURSE NAME
history	The History of Europe
art	Renaissance Art
geometry	Principles of Geometry
foreign language	German I

## Series

If two or more sentences follow a colon, each sentence should be capitalized. But if there is only one sentence or just a series not contained in a complete sentence, do not capitalize the first letter following the colon. For example:

The parade was an outstanding success: Men proudly carried Old Glory. The crowds cheered and waved little flags above their heads.

Thomas Kelly is a bright student: his essay on the Depression was excellent.

As usual, Mom was prepared for the picnic: sandwiches of every type, a case of soft drinks, and a homemade apple pie.

### EXERCISE

## 2.4

Rewrite each word that requires a capital letter.

1. i signed up for german but transferred to another language after one week.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. michelangelo was more than a renaissance man: he was an inventor. he was an artist. and he was a visionary.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. my sister hates math, but ms. butterworth is such a good teacher that she studies a lot.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. we need fixings for sandwiches: cheese, sausage, mustard, and bread.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. when we were in the midwest, we visited chicago and shopped on michigan avenue.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. in economics, we read *a new theory of capitalism* by miriam thorn, economics professor at the university of toronto.  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. although i like the geography of the world, i found it of little use in my chemistry class.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. most freshmen had certain required courses: english, algebra, introduction to computers, and two electives.  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. the young prince married his bride in westminster abbey on a beautiful saturday afternoon.  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. my professor has a subscription to *the wall street journal*.  
\_\_\_\_\_



# Punctuation

The purpose of punctuation marks is to show in writing the inflections that occur in speech: the intonation of a question, an ordinary statement, powerful emotion, or even parenthetical ideas.

## Period

Use a period at the end of a sentence that is not a question or an exclamation.

Tomorrow is the fifth of January.  
I need to pay that bill by the end of the week.  
John tried to kiss Amy.

Use a period as a decimal point to set off a decimal amount or dollars from cents.

Nearly 5.75 gallons of fresh water are needed.  
How much is  $3.1 + 8.25$ ?  
That accident cost me \$545.85.

Periods are also used after initials.

Have you read T. S. Elliot?  
This book is about John D. Rockefeller.  
She arrived at 8:00 a.m.

Use a period with abbreviations.

I recently met Ms. Carson.  
Dr. Phillips isn't in today.  
Mary received her M.A. from Yale.

If a vertical list is numbered, each number is followed by a period.

### Things to do today:

1. Go online to find the address of the store.
2. Stop at the bank to withdraw \$300.
3. Shop carefully and look for sales.

## Question mark

A question mark is used after a question. It can also be used following a declarative sentence to suggest disbelief in the statement and thereby making it an exclamation.

How much did you pay for that puppy?  
May I have this dance?  
You bought an expensive luxury car?

## Exclamation point

Use an exclamation point to make a strong statement or to show emotion.

Look! That man fell out of the window!

Shut up! Leave me alone!

I love her so! I'll never get over her!

EXERCISE

2.5

In the blanks provided, supply the missing punctuation mark (period, question mark, or exclamation point) with the word or abbreviation provided in bold. For example:

I have never met **Mr** Jones. Mr.

1. The train is supposed to arrive at 9:00 **pm** \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you had a chance to read my **manuscript** \_\_\_\_\_
3. The little candle is only **2 5** inches long. \_\_\_\_\_
4. "Close that door right **now**" he shouted. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Why do you always arrive late to **work** \_\_\_\_\_
6. Watch **out** There's a truck coming around the **corner** \_\_\_\_\_
7. Dad is out in the yard raking **leaves** \_\_\_\_\_
8. My brother finally got his **BS** degree. \_\_\_\_\_
9. What kind of costume is that supposed to **be** \_\_\_\_\_
10. Get out of **here** \_\_\_\_\_
11. I miss my family so **much** \_\_\_\_\_
12. Be sure to read Chapter Ten before Monday's **class** \_\_\_\_\_
13. Are you sure you know how to get **there** \_\_\_\_\_
14. Today is Bill's **birthday** \_\_\_\_\_
15. That scarf costs **\$15 99**. \_\_\_\_\_

## Comma

When listing at least three items in a series, separate them with commas. If there are only two items in the series, use **and** instead of a comma. For example:

Jean bought a loaf of bread, some bananas, and a pound of coffee.

I need a new toothbrush and a bar of soap.

After dinner I'm going to wash my hair, take a long shower, and then curl up with a good book.

Use a comma to separate the day from the year in a date.

She was born March 5, 1999.

His birthday is on June 21, 2010.

Where were you on September 11, 2001?

When providing an address, separate the street from the town and the town from the state with a comma. Do not use a comma before a zip code, if one is included.

My new address is 1400 N. Lincoln Road, Albany, New York.

Do you still live at 1886 Benson Street, Chicago, Illinois 60600?

If a prepositional phrase or adverbial phrase introduces a sentence, a comma should be used following the phrase if it is rather long. For example:

Yesterday I went to the gym to work out.

During my last year in college, I met my future husband.

While visiting relatives in Ireland, we spent two nights in an old castle.

If a sentence begins with a dependent clause, use a comma. But if the dependent clause comes at the end of the sentence, do not use a comma.

When Jerry showed me her picture, I knew it was an old girlfriend of mine.

If you follow the instructions, you'll have no trouble building the model.

I'll be happy to help you if you find the problem too hard to solve.

A comma is used to separate every three digits in a long number. However, this approach to numbers is not used with years. For example:

That bicycle costs \$2,500.

The population is now over 300,000,000.

John Kennedy was elected president in 1960.

In a compound sentence, place a comma before the conjunction. If the sentences in the compound are short, the comma can be omitted.

I hurried to the lecture hall, because Professor Smith always had something important to say.

You still have fourteen math problems to do, so you'll have to burn the midnight oil tonight.

Mary won and we cheered.

If a sentence is interrupted with parenthetical information, the interruption is set off with commas. For example:

My boyfriend, as usual, was late.

Your debts, of course, were caused by your need to shop.

The meaning of this article, although somewhat vague, is criticism of the mayor.

If two or more adjectives modify a noun equally, they should be separated by commas.

Jane loved the cute, little puppies.

I need a big, cold beer!

Commas separate an interjection from the rest of the sentence.

Well, I see you're late again.

Oh, what a beautiful sunset.

Ah, how cute your baby is.

In direct discourse, a comma is used after the phrase that introduces the quote.

She asked, "Do you know the way to the library?"

My father said, "Take the car and pick up Aunt Mary at the station."

If the quote is the first element in the sentence, question marks and exclamation points are used in place of a comma. If the quote ends with a period, a comma replaces it. For example:

"Can you direct me to the subway?" the tourist asked.

"Stop all that screaming!" he shouted at her.

"I need a nice, long nap," she sighed.

Use a comma to separate the person addressed in a sentence.

Uncle Bill, do you know the capital of Maryland?

Children, take out your spelling books.

That's no way to act, Tom.

Use a comma to separate an appositive from the rest of the sentence.

Laura, my youngest sister, is in medical school right now.

Richard Snyder, our new mayor, is only twenty-nine years old.

They finally captured the thief, a boy of only eighteen.

In an informal letter, use a comma after the greeting and after the closing. For example:

Dear Ms. Collins,

Dear Uncle George and Aunt Louise,

Sincerely yours,

With love,

EXERCISE

2·6

*Place commas in the appropriate blanks; not all blanks require punctuation.*

1. Uncle Tim \_\_\_\_\_ a dental surgeon \_\_\_\_\_ lives in Oakland \_\_\_\_\_ on Main Street.
2. Today \_\_\_\_\_ I want to take a drive \_\_\_\_\_ out into the country \_\_\_\_\_ because the weather \_\_\_\_\_ is so nice.

3. During my first semester \_\_\_\_\_ in college \_\_\_\_\_ I became interested \_\_\_\_\_ in biology.
4. I'll send you \_\_\_\_\_ some postcards \_\_\_\_\_ when I get to Paris.
5. As the handsome man entered the room \_\_\_\_\_ all eyes \_\_\_\_\_ followed his every move.
6. Oh \_\_\_\_\_ you really look wonderful \_\_\_\_\_ in that dress.
7. Jim \_\_\_\_\_ would you help \_\_\_\_\_ me get the picnic basket \_\_\_\_\_ cooler \_\_\_\_\_ and blankets \_\_\_\_\_ from the attic?
8. The boys \_\_\_\_\_ as usual \_\_\_\_\_ came in from the yard \_\_\_\_\_ to wash up.
9. Someone asked him \_\_\_\_\_ "Are you feeling all right \_\_\_\_\_ Mr. Dunn?"
10. Our house is at 2890 Miller \_\_\_\_\_ Street \_\_\_\_\_ Streeterville \_\_\_\_\_ Iowa.

## Colons

One use of the colon was introduced earlier in the discussion of capitalization—if two or more sentences related to the same topic follow a colon, each sentence should be capitalized. But if there is only one sentence or just a series not contained in a complete sentence, there is no capitalization.

One of the most common uses for the colon is to separate hours from minutes when times are written as numerals.

It's exactly 10:55 a.m.

The last bus leaves the depot at 7:30 p.m.

Unlike an informal or personal letter, which uses a comma after the greeting and closing, a business letter uses a colon after the greeting but still uses a comma after the closing. For example:

Dear Professor Hansen:

Dear Sir:

Sincerely,

Respectfully,

A colon is used between the chapter and verse numbers in biblical references such as the following:

You'll find that in Genesis 1:4.

## Semicolon

A semicolon is often used to separate items in a series, especially when commas are used in those items for other purposes. For example:

In the last ten years we lived in Chicago, Illinois; Trenton, New Jersey; and Miami, Florida.

We visited Tom, my husband's former brother-in-law; Louise, his elderly aunt; and Martin Jones, who was a neighbor when his family lived in Montana.

A semicolon can also be used to join two independent clauses.

My sister was dancing onstage; I was recording her performance on my cell phone.  
 Jake hated math; he struggled with his homework every evening.

## Quotation marks

Statements in direct discourse are placed between quotation marks. For example:

The teacher said, “You’ve made a lot of progress, Eric.”  
 “Don’t be afraid to use all your strength,” Coach Brown told the team.  
 “Ow! That hurts!” the little boy bellowed.

If the punctuation mark at the end of a sentence that contains a quotation is used for the entire sentence, the punctuation mark is placed after the final quotation. If the punctuation mark is part of the quotation, it appears inside the final quotation mark.

Why did the officer say, “There’s no real danger here”?  
 Billy asked in a sleepy voice, “Do I really have to go to bed now?”

In the first example, the **question** is *Why did the officer say that?* (that meaning the quotation “There’s no real danger here.”) The officer’s statement, however, is a **declarative sentence**, not a question. Therefore, the question mark follows the quotation marks. In the second example, the quotation is Billy’s actual question. Therefore, the quotation marks follow the question mark.

Quotation marks are also used to indicate the title of a poem, article, song, or other short works. For example:

My favorite poem by Longfellow is “Evangeline.”  
 Our daughter gets a little nostalgic when she hears “White Christmas.”

Single quotation marks are used inside another quotation. Follow the regular rules for double quotation marks when including a quote surrounded by single quotation marks.

Laura asked, “Have you read his article, ‘The Road to the White House’?”  
 “My favorite song is ‘Amazing Grace,’” the old woman whispered.

Quotation marks can be used to emphasize a word or symbol to show that it is of specific interest and not just another word in the sentence.

People say “advertisement” in two different ways.

## Apostrophe

One of the primary functions of the apostrophe is to indicate a possessive in writing and to emphasize that the -s ending is not a plural. Singular possessives are formed by an apostrophe plus -s. If the word ends in -s, an apostrophe can be used alone, but an apostrophe plus -s is also acceptable.

Jane’s new hairstyle has the other girls talking.  
 Have you seen Mr. Moss’ new car?  
 Have you seen Mr. Moss’s new car?

When forming the possessive of a plural noun, place the apostrophe after the last *-s*.

The boys' father had to come to school again.  
He accidentally walked in on the bosses' weekly meeting.

If the plural is irregular, follow the rules for singular nouns.

He overheard the women's conversation and became embarrassed.  
Your children's behavior has improved a great deal.

When the possessive is made up of more than one noun, its meaning has two forms. One shows that two people own the same object, and one shows that two people own two different but similar objects. With the former, use an apostrophe and *-s* only after the second person mentioned. With the latter, use an apostrophe with both people. For example:

Did you see John and Mary's new cars? (*They have two new cars. The cars belong to both of them.*)  
Did you see John's and Mary's new cars? (*They each have a new car.*)

Apostrophes are also used to indicate that a letter or number has been omitted. This is particularly true of contractions.

#### Contractions

I am	=	I'm feeling rather ill.
you are	=	You're in the army now.
he is	=	He's my best friend.
cannot	=	I can't understand you.
they will	=	They'll be home by tomorrow.
it was	=	'Twas the night before Christmas.

When a portion of a number is omitted, an apostrophe can stand where the omitted number had been. For example:

#### Numbers

1958	=	My grandfather was born in '58.
1990s	=	I thought the '90s were a great time.

Some English speakers confuse the position of the apostrophe with numbers and use one when the number is just a plural and nothing has been omitted.

The 1920s were wild. (*not 1920's*)  
An interesting period was the Gay '90s. (*not 90's*)  
The 2000s had a lot of economic problems. (*not 2000's*)

But numbers can occur in the possessive, and they use an apostrophe to indicate that possessive.

The 1960s' riots were often a response to the Vietnam War. (*riots of the 1960s*)  
I love the '80's music. (*music of the '80s*)

# Hyphen

The hyphen is sometimes taken for granted as a simple form of punctuation. But it has its difficulties. One of them is its use in syllabification. When long words *wrap around* at the end of a line, one or more syllables have to appear on the next line. Syllabifying correctly is important.

Separate syllables tend to begin with a consonant. Some examples:

advertisement	=	ad-ver-tise-ment
constitution	=	con-sti-tu-tion
notification	=	no-ti-fi-ca-tion

But in some cases, a syllable will begin with a vowel or be a vowel that stands alone as a syllable.

deity	=	de-i-ty
faculty	=	fac-ul-ty
mariner	=	mar-i-ner

When in doubt about syllabification, refer to a dictionary.

Hyphens are also used to make compound words, that is, words that are combined to make a new word or to alter the meaning of a word. For example:

father-in-law  
six-pack  
mass-produced

Words combined by a hyphen tend to be nouns or adjectives. Many come from a verb phrase. For example:

These goods are produced on a massive scale.	=	These are mass-produced goods.
We tried <b>finding</b> the <b>facts</b> .	=	He's on a <b>fact-finding</b> mission.
I <b>warmed up</b> with a lap around the track.	=	You need a twenty-minute <b>warm-up</b> .
Do you <b>know how</b> to do that?	=	I just don't have the <b>know-how</b> .
Her stories about India really <b>opened my eyes</b> .	=	Her stories were real <b>eye-openers</b> .

Other compound words are derived from other parts of speech as well as verbs.

We're here for the <b>long term</b> .	=	This is a <b>long-term</b> agreement.
We'll finish the project at the <b>end</b> of the <b>year</b> .	=	It will be our <b>year-end</b> project.
She wants to <b>be well</b> again.	=	I worry about her <b>well-being</b> .
I <b>wore out</b> three pairs of shoes.	=	These shoes are completely <b>worn-out</b> .
The athlete is quite <b>able</b> and has a good <b>body</b> .	=	He is an <b>able-bodied</b> wrestler.

When numbers from 21 to 99 or fractions are written out, they become compound words combined by a hyphen.

I can't wait to turn **twenty-one**.  
There are **sixty-seven** applicants for the same job.  
She used **three-fourths** of the butter for the cookies.  
I bought **seven-tenths** of a yard of canvas.



In the blank provided, write an original sentence with the phrase in bold used as an adjective. For example:

I **know how** to do that.

Does he have the know-how to handle the job?

1. This **class** of people is **working** for itself.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. That judge has a **narrow mind**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. They say that John has a **strong will**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. He came back from the hunt with his **hands empty**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. This movie is **packed** with **action**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. The nanny **spoke** very **softly**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. They went on the journey for **one time** only.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Men in this profession wear **white collars**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. They took her picture very **close up**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. These problems **consume** a lot of our **time**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. These telephone wires run a **long distance**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. The little boy is **five years old**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. That mountain is **far off** in the distance.  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. His daughter has **blond hair**.

\_\_\_\_\_

15. We have our inventory at the **end** of the **year**.

\_\_\_\_\_

EXERCISE  
2.8

*Rewrite each sentence, capitalizing nouns that need a capital letter and adding the punctuation that has been omitted. For example:*

when he was in detroit mr jones bought a new buick

*When he was in Detroit, Mr. Jones bought a new Buick.*

1. their conversation was always one sided but tom didn't complain because he loved her dearly

\_\_\_\_\_

2. ive always wanted a long term relationship but im worried because I think you like me because im well to do

\_\_\_\_\_

3. shell get you a printout of the article and you can work on it in my office

\_\_\_\_\_

4. dont you wonder why ms brown said (quote) i cant believe theyre firing me

\_\_\_\_\_

5. get your hands off me she shouted at her brother in law

\_\_\_\_\_

6. the twins were born on june 5 1998 and our six year old was born just two years later on the same date.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. hes been taking introduction to computer science at the university of chicago since last september

\_\_\_\_\_

8. in most of asia youll discover that the peoples diet consists mainly of rice beans and fish

\_\_\_\_\_

9. professor simpson was more than a teacher he was also marvelous speaker he published several books he was even a great ballroom dancer

\_\_\_\_\_

10. oh no well have to leave for the station by 630 am if we want to catch the seven oclock train to boston

\_\_\_\_\_

# Homophones

3

Homophones are words that have nothing more in common than that *they sound the same*. Because English speakers have been reluctant to clean up their spelling system, they are chained to a dictionary for life if they wish to spell correctly. Spelling is based more on tradition than on the sound of a word. Homophones are part of this spelling dilemma.

For example, the words **to**, **too**, and **two** have completely different meanings and uses but are pronounced the same way. This was not always true. The number **two**, for instance, was at one time pronounced more like it is spelled. In fact, this ancient Anglo-Saxon word has a long-lost sister in modern German in the form of **zwo** (a variant of **zwei**). **Two's** pronunciation once resembled that of **zwo**. And the German word **zwo** means **two**.

But it is not the pronunciation of words that makes homophones a problem for both native and non-native English speakers. It is spelling. The reader of this book needs to compile a list of homophones and understand how they are spelled in order to use them correctly. This chapter offers practice with a wide variety of homophones to help with this objective.

Let's look at some homophones and their meanings.

HOMOPHONE	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
aid	assistance, help	Can I be of aid to you, ma'am?
aide	assistant, helper	My aide will show you to my office.
ail	sick	What's ailing you?
ale	beer	Give me a tall, cool ale, please.
air	what one breathes	The air in here is stifling.
heir	one who inherits	The heir to the throne is in France.
bailed	pumped water out	They bailed out the boat, but it finally sank.
baled	bundled hay	We baled hay in the hot sun.
bald	hairless	The bald man is buying a wig.
bawled	cried	He bawled his eyes out over the puppy.
bare	naked	She agreed to pose bare.
bear	ursine animal	A bear smelled what we were cooking on the grill.

(continued)

HOMOPHONE	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
capital	principal, wealth; seat of government	You'll need plenty of start-up capital.
capitol	government building	The US Congress is located on Capitol Hill.
carrot	vegetable	I finally learned to eat peas and carrots.
karat	measure of gold	Is that fourteen-carat gold?
cent	penny	The matches cost fifty cents.
scent	smell, aroma	There was a strong scent of perfume in the room.
sent	past tense of <i>send</i>	Did you get the letter I sent you?
days	plural of <i>day</i>	He spent ten days in jail.
daze	bewilder, stun	I was dazed by the bright light.
dear	beloved	You are so dear to me.
deer	ruminant mammal	Several deer are grazing in that field.
dew	condensation	There was dew on the petals of the flowers.
do	perform	Do your homework on the computer.
due	owed	That bill was due on the first of the month.

EXERCISE

3.1

Choose the word that is the correct completion of each sentence.

1. Be a dear/deer and close the window for me.
2. That is a capital/capitol idea.
3. There was an unusual cent/scent/sent in the air.
4. He was hit by the ball and left in a days/daze.
5. How many karats/carrots did you use in the stew?
6. This is a rather refreshing ail/ale.
7. Martha was the only air/heir to her father's fortune.
8. The final payment is dew/do/due on March 1.
9. The bald/bawled gentleman ordered a toupee.
10. An immature dear/deer is called a fawn.

Write original sentences using the following words correctly.

1. aide \_\_\_\_\_
2. ail \_\_\_\_\_
3. do \_\_\_\_\_
4. bear \_\_\_\_\_
5. capital \_\_\_\_\_
6. due \_\_\_\_\_
7. sent \_\_\_\_\_
8. bare \_\_\_\_\_
9. too \_\_\_\_\_
10. days \_\_\_\_\_
11. dew \_\_\_\_\_
12. aid \_\_\_\_\_
13. dear \_\_\_\_\_
14. daze \_\_\_\_\_
15. karat \_\_\_\_\_
16. bald \_\_\_\_\_
17. scent \_\_\_\_\_
18. carrot \_\_\_\_\_
19. cent \_\_\_\_\_
20. bawled \_\_\_\_\_

Homophones have one characteristic that is unique: they can be any part of speech—the possessive form of a noun, a conjugated form of a verb, or even a contraction. For example:

HOMOPHONE	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
you'll (contraction)	you will	You'll find clean towels in the drawer.
yule (noun)	Christmas time	Yule is a happy season.
lead (noun)	a heavy metal	Lead is no longer used for pipes.
led (verb)	to lead (past tense)	Their commander led the assault.

Words often sound alike because of their regional pronunciations. In North America, it is common to pronounce the letter **T** like a **D** when it is in the middle of a word. For example:

wader	=	a person who wades or walks through water
waiter	=	a person who works as a server in a restaurant
bedding	=	blankets and linens for a bed
betting	=	placing a bet, gambling

Not all people pronounce the letter **T** in this manner, but because so many do, homophones such as these are included in this chapter.

Let's look at more examples of homophones.

HOMOPHONE	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
budding	blossoming	He was a budding rock star.
butting	hitting with head or horns	You're butting your head against the wall.
die	perish, succumb	Eventually, everyone must die.
dye	color, tint	Why do you want to dye your hair?
discussed	talked over	We discussed this problem yesterday.
disgust	sicken	Your remarks really disgust me.
doe	female deer	The fawn is looking for the doe.
dough	moistened flour	Tom is making the bread dough.
earn	deserve, work for	You will earn your degree this year.
urn	large vase	The shrub is growing in a large urn.
ewe	female sheep	The large ewe over there is pregnant.
yew	evergreen tree	We have several yews in our yard.
you	second person pronoun	Do I know you?
fair	just	It's not fair. You always win.
fare	money for transport	How much is the bus fare to Vine Street?

Be aware that there can be more than one meaning for some homophones. For example:

**fair** 1. just 2. not stormy 3. pretty 4. an exhibition or a carnival

This book gives the most prominent meaning.

HOMOPHONE	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
flour	meal for baking	Put some flour and milk in the bowl.
flower	a bloom	What pretty flowers!
gait	stride	I can tell by her gait that she feels better.
gate	door in a fence	Please don't let the gate slam.

HOMOPHONE	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
gnu	South African antelope	There is a large, male gnu at the zoo now.
knew	past tense of <i>know</i>	I knew you were hiding behind the door.
new	opposite of <i>old</i>	Marie bought a new car.
he'll	contraction for <i>he will</i>	He'll be back from Afghanistan next week.
heal	restore to health	This medicine will help to heal him.
heel	back part of the foot	I have a blister on my heel.
ladder	device for climbing	Find a ladder and get the kite off the roof.
latter	second of two	Your former answer was correct. The latter is not.
metal	substances like iron	You need a strong roof. Make it out of metal.
meddle	interfere	Why does your father meddle in our business?

EXERCISE

3.3

Complete the missing line of dialogue with any appropriate sentence that includes one of the previously illustrated homophones. For example:

Is your husband coming home soon?

Yes, he'll arrive on the four-o'clock train.

1. A wooden gate will rot in this weather.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. I put milk and butter in the bowl. Do you need anything else?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The two large gnus in that pen look angry.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why is that deer so fat?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Here comes Uncle Henry. He thinks I don't earn enough money.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_?

The bus ride from here to the new mall costs \$2.

7. \_\_\_\_\_?

Yes, I love roses and violets.

8. I heard you got a raise in pay.

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Grandmother always gives you a dollar, and she only gives me 50 cents.

\_\_\_\_\_

10. How did you change the color of your blouse?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_?

I think he walks like that because he's drunk.

12. How can we get the cat out of that tree?

\_\_\_\_\_

13. Are you going to buy an old house to fix up?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. That pot is too small for that large plant.

\_\_\_\_\_

15. Why are you limping?

\_\_\_\_\_

16. I didn't know you were acquainted with Jack Swanson.

\_\_\_\_\_

17. Is that tree an ordinary pine?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. The plumbing in our house consists mostly of plastic pipes.

\_\_\_\_\_

19. I keep telling you that we have to save money. We can't spend so much, and you need a job.

\_\_\_\_\_

20. \_\_\_\_\_

Are you going to make bread with it?

\_\_\_\_\_



You will be given a list of homophones and their meanings. Write an original sentence with each one. For example:

to / too / two

We will fly to California.

This meat is too tough.

I have only \$2 left.

1. naval = referring to the navy / navel = belly button

---



---

2. none = not one / nun = woman devoted to religion

---



---

3. oar = paddle for moving a boat / or = conjunction meaning *either* / ore = raw mineral

---



---



---

4. peddle = sell a small amount of goods / petal = part of a flower / pedal = lever operated by the foot

---



---



---

5. pudding = flavored dessert / putting = present participle of *put*

---



---

6. quarts = plural of *quart*, quarter of a gallon / quartz = crystallized silicon

---



---

7. raise = lift up, elevate / rays = plural of *ray*, beams of light / raze = to tear down, destroy

---



---



---

8. rap = knock / wrap = cover in paper or material

---

---

9. rote = mechanical memorization / wrote = past tense of *write*

---

---

10. sew = fasten with a needle and thread / so = conjunction meaning *in such a way* / sow = plant seed

---

---

---

11. their = possessive of *they* / there = location in the distance / they're = contraction of *they are*

---

---

---

12. threw = past tense of *throw* / through = preposition meaning *from end to end*

---

---

13. wait = rest patiently, await / weight = heaviness

---

---

14. wood = product from trees / would = past tense of *will*

---

---

15. your = possessive of *you* / you're = contraction of *you are*

---

---

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Refer to Appendix A for a detailed list of English homophones.

# Verb oddities

•4•

English has very few irregular verbs in the present tense. In most cases, those irregularities are hardly complex.

## Be

The high-frequency verb **to be** is the most complicated of these verbs, yet it is not a great challenge. Its present tense conjugation is as follows:

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
First person	I am	We are
Second person	You are	You are
Third person	He is She is It is	They are

When this verb occurs in a contraction, whether in a positive or a negative statement, the verb is made into a contraction with the subject. However, a second contraction can be formed with the negative adverb **not**. For example:

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
I'm	I'm not	—
You're	You're not	You aren't
He's	He's not	He isn't
She's	She's not	She isn't
It's	It's not	It isn't
We're	We're not	We aren't
They're	They're not	They aren't

Note that the phrase **I am** does not form a contraction with **not**.

When these contractions are used in a question, the verb in a positive question does not form a contraction. A contraction only occurs in the negative, and the pronoun **I** uses a new verb—**are**. In a negative question, the adverb **not** is contracted with the verb.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Am I?	Am I not? / Aren't I?
Are you?	Are you not? / Aren't you?
Is he?	Is he not? / Isn't he?
Is she?	Is she not? / Isn't she?
Is it?	Is it not? / Isn't it?
Are we?	Are we not? / Aren't we?
Are they?	Are they not? / Aren't they?

Singular nouns use the same verb and contraction forms as do third person singular pronouns. Plural nouns use the same verb and contraction forms as does the third person plural pronoun. For example:

The boy is	The boys are
The boy's	The boys're
The boy's not	The boys're not
The boy isn't	The boys aren't

Although you will often hear a contraction like **the boys're** in spoken language, it looks awkward in writing and is avoided.

Schoolchildren are discouraged from using the contraction **ain't**. It is considered poor grammar but is found today in a variety of regional dialects in the entire English-speaking world. It is the original negated contraction of **I am not: I ain't**. Although originally a contraction used with the pronoun **I**, today **ain't** is used with most any subject.

He ain't feeling well today.  
 Ain't it hot in here?  
 We ain't going to work tomorrow.

This description is not meant to encourage the use of **ain't**; rather, it is an explanation for this verb form's existence and widespread usage.

EXERCISE

4.1

Rewrite each sentence, changing the subject and verb to a contraction. Then rewrite the same sentence using the two forms of negative contractions and as a negative question with a contraction. For example:

She is pretty.  
She's pretty.  
She's not pretty.  
She isn't pretty.  
Isn't she pretty?

1. That girl is my sister.

---

---

---

---

2. We are tired.

---

---

---

---

3. You are a good friend.

---

---

---

---

4. They are at home.

---

---

---

---

5. He is strong.

---

---

---

---

## Have

The verb **have** and a few verbs that end in a vowel need some explanation. In the present tense, **have** has a slight irregularity in the third person singular: **have** becomes **has**.

He has brown eyes.

She has a class at 1 p.m.

It has become quite cold.

This verb forms its contractions and negative forms in the same way as **be**. For example:

You have	She has	I have
You've	She's	I've
You've not	She's not	I've not
You haven't	She hasn't	I haven't
Have you?	Has she?	Have I?
Haven't you?	Hasn't she?	Haven't I?

Note that **I** does not require any special attention with the verb **have**.

## Verbs ending in a vowel

The verbs **do**, **go**, and **ski** end in a vowel. In the third person singular, **do** and **go** do not just add an **-s** to the verb; they add **-es**. Because **ski** is a foreign word, it does not follow the same pattern as **do** and **go**; its third person singular conjugation just adds **-s**. Let's look at how these three verbs form their contractions and negative forms.

He does.	She goes.	Tom skis.
He does not.	She does not go.	Tom does not ski.
He doesn't.	She doesn't go.	Tom doesn't ski.
Does he?	Does she go?	Does Tom ski?
Doesn't he?	Doesn't she go?	Doesn't Tom ski?

There are two uses of **do**: one is as an auxiliary for negation or a question, and the other is as the transitive verb that means to **carry out**, **perform**, or **execute**. First, let's look at this verb's function as an auxiliary for another verb; in this case, **speak**.

### He speaks French.

Negation: He **does** not speak French.

Contraction: He **doesn't** speak French.

Question: **Does** he speak French?

Negation: **Doesn't** he speak French?

Now compare that usage with **do** when it means to **carry out**, **perform**, or **execute**.

### She does her homework.

Negation: She **does** not **do** her homework.

Contraction: She **doesn't do** her homework.

Question: **Does** she **do** her homework?

Negation: **Doesn't** she **do** her homework?

### We do yoga at home.

We **do** not **do** yoga at home.

We **don't do** yoga at home.

**Do** we **do** yoga at home?

**Don't** we **do** yoga at home?

In each of the preceding sentences, the auxiliary **do** accompanies the verb **do** (**carry out**, **perform**, **execute**) just as it does with other verbs such as **speak**.

**Do** does not act as the auxiliary for **be**. However, it can be the auxiliary for **have** when **have** is a transitive verb and not the perfect tense auxiliary. For example:

<i>BE</i>	<i>AUXILIARY HAVE</i>	<i>TRANSITIVE VERB HAVE</i>
He is here.	He has seen it.	He has a book.
He isn't here.	He hasn't seen it.	He doesn't have a book.
Is he here?	Has he seen it?	Does he have a book?
Isn't he here?	Hasn't he seen it?	Doesn't he have a book?

Although it sounds very formal or old-fashioned, you will sometimes hear or read **He hasn't a book**, **Has he a book?** or **Hasn't he a book?**

EXERCISE

4.2

*Rewrite each sentence in the negative, in the negative with a contraction, as a question, and as a negative question. For example:*

Mary likes Jim.

Mary does not like Jim.

Mary doesn't like Jim.

Does Mary like Jim?

Doesn't Mary like Jim?

1. They spend the summer in Canada.

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2. That man has her wallet.

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3. She does me a favor.

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4. They buy a new SUV.

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5. Jessica goes to college.

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6. We ski every winter.

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In the past tense, many verbs have irregular forms. Regular verbs are easy to form in the past tense, because most simply add the suffix **-ed**. For example:

	<i>LOOK</i>	<i>CARRY</i>
I	looked	carried
you	looked	carried
he, she, it	looked	carried
we	looked	carried
you	looked	carried
they	looked	carried

Only two verbs have an irregular past tense form that is radically different from their infinitive or present tense conjugation. These verbs—**be** and **go**—are hardly recognizable when used in the past tense.

	<i>BE</i>	<i>GO</i>
I	was	went
you	were	went
he, she, it	was	went
we	were	went
you	were	went
they	were	went



Other irregular past tense verbs, however, usually give a small clue in the form of the first letter or two that they are related to a certain infinitive and present tense conjugation. For example:

INFINITIVE	IRREGULAR PAST TENSE
to come	came
to do	did
to drive	drove
to find	found
to have	had
to keep	kept
to make	made
to see	saw
to sleep	slept
to speak	spoke
to stand	stood
to write	wrote

A few verbs in the past tense are identical to their infinitive in form. They are as follows:

INFINITIVE	IRREGULAR PAST TENSE
to beat	beat
to bet	bet
to burst	burst
to cast	cast
to cost	cost
to cut	cut
to hit	hit
to hurt	hurt
to let	let
to put	put
to set	set
to shed	shed
to shut	shut
to slit	slit
to spit	spit (spat)
to thrust	thrust
to wet	wet

A small group of ancient Anglo-Saxon irregular verbs have retained their traditional spelling but are not pronounced in a way that resembles that spelling. Their infinitives and past tense forms are as follows:

INFINITIVE	IRREGULAR PAST TENSE
to teach	taught
to catch	caught

*(continued)*

INFINITIVE	IRREGULAR PAST TENSE
to think	thought
to bring	brought
to seek	sought
to buy	bought
to fight	fought
to work	wrought (worked)

In some cases, verbs have two forms in the past tense. This occurs when a verb is undergoing a change from having an irregular past tense to having a regular past tense form. Here are a few examples:

INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE
to abide	abided, abode
to bid	bade, bid
to dive	dived, dove
to dream	dreamt, dreamed
to hang	hanged, hung
to kneel	knelt, kneeled
to light	lit, lighted
to mow	mowed, mown
to plead	pleaded, pled
to shine	shined, shone
to sink	sank, sunk
to slay	slayed, slew
to speed	speeded, sped

When these verbs are conjugated in the perfect tenses, the past participle tends to follow the pattern of the past tense; that is, there are sometimes two forms for the participle. For example:

He has <b>slayed</b> the dragon.	He has <b>slain</b> the dragon.
The thief has <b>pleaded</b> guilty.	The thief has <b>pled</b> guilty.
The servants have <b>lit</b> the candles.	The servants have <b>lighted</b> the candles.

There is no such difficulty with irregularities in the future tense, since an infinitive follows the auxiliary **shall** or **will**: **He will slay the dragon. We shall light the candles.**

The auxiliary **shall** is used primarily with the first person (**I** and **we**), although many English speakers use **will** with these pronouns. But in a question, **shall** must be used appropriately.

I **shall** help him with the work. I **will** help him with the work.  
**Shall** I help him with the work?  
 We **shall** study together. We **will** study together.  
**Shall** we study together?

Rewrite each present tense sentence in the missing tenses. Write the future tense sentence as a question. For example:

He speaks Italian.

PAST He spoke Italian.

PRESENT PERFECT He has spoken Italian.

FUTURE He will speak Italian.

QUESTION Will he speak Italian?

1. She brings home a friend.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

2. The boys eat all the cake.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

3. I cut some bread for sandwiches.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

4. You aren't a good musician.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

5. The women sew a quilt.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

6. Jim doesn't have enough change.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

7. That rude question cost him his job.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

8. Mark and Joe don't have enough time.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

9. We meet at four o'clock.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

10. Laura speeds down the street.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

11. I let you try it on your own.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

12. Jim goes to night school.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

13. Tim sees a great movie.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

14. The girls do a project together.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

15. I am your mentor.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION \_\_\_\_\_

## Present participles

A verb used in a progressive tense indicates an *ongoing or incomplete action*. In sentences with this verb form, the verb **to be** is conjugated. The accompanying verb is formed as a present participle. This means that the *oddities* of certain verbs do not occur. For example:

COMPLETE ACTION	PROGRESSIVE/INCOMPLETE ACTION
John makes a plan.	John <b>is making</b> a plan.
John made a plan.	John <b>was making</b> a plan.
John has made a plan.	John <b>has been making</b> a plan.
John will make a plan.	John <b>will be making</b> a plan.

The verb **to be** can only be used in the present and past progressive tenses: **he is being**, **he was being**. Using them in a perfect tense or future tense sounds awkward and is therefore to be avoided.

EXERCISE

4.4

*Rewrite each present tense sentence in the missing tenses.*

1. She is cutting out interesting articles.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

2. I am having terrible headaches.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

3. James is learning to play the flute.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

4. Mr. Gardner is teaching that class.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

5. The moon is shining over the lake.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

6. Why is that man beating his horse?

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

7. We are skiing in the Alps.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

8. My brothers are going on vacation together.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

9. You are being rude.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

10. They are buying a house in the suburbs.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

# Tense usage

Not all languages use tenses in the same way. English has its own peculiarities, but they are fairly easy to understand. Mastery requires only a little study and practice.

## Present tense

The main challenge in each tense is the difference between the verb form that indicates a *complete or habitual action* and the verb form that indicates an *incomplete or ongoing action*. When a verb stands alone and is conjugated in the present tense, the meaning of its action is complete or habitual. For example:

I speak two languages.  
 My father works in a bank.  
 The children play with the dog.  
 Do you drink tea?

When the progressive form of conjugation (**to be + present participle**) is used in the present tense, the meaning of the verb's action is *ongoing or incomplete*. Compare the following sentences with the previous examples:

I am speaking with my girlfriend.  
 My father is working late tonight.  
 The children are playing with the dog.  
 Are you drinking tea?

### EXERCISE

#### 5.1

Rewrite each sentence using a verb phrase that indicates a complete action in its progressive form. For example:

We go to the zoo.  
We are going to the zoo.

1. The children learn about bears.

---

2. She writes a letter to her senator.

---



3. Does your aunt live in a retirement home?

---

4. I am very polite to him.

---

5. The dogs lie in a corner and sleep.

---

6. Tom has a party.

---

7. Are you funny?

---

8. The fraternity brothers build a bonfire.

---

9. Eric listens to a new rap artist.

---

10. Do you speak Arabic?

---

11. Sophia spends a lot of time with her grandmother.

---

12. They earn money for a vacation.

---

13. The little boy is naughty.

---

14. It gets cold again.

---

15. The roses die.

---

## Past tense

When the complete and incomplete forms of conjugation are used in the past tense, the difference in their meaning and usage becomes clearer. Let's look at some examples.

COMPLETE	INCOMPLETE
He spoke with my uncle.	He was speaking with my uncle.
I read a great article on it.	I was reading a great article on it.
Did you ride the train to work?	Were you riding the train to work?
Bob kissed Ashley.	Bob was kissing Ashley.

A sentence with a progressive tense form can be combined with a subordinate clause that usually indicates some kind of *interruption of the verb's action* and thereby makes it incomplete.

**When I arrived**, he was speaking with my uncle.

I was reading a great article on Mexico **when my son turned on the TV**.

Were you riding the train to work **when the accident happened?**

**When Mr. Smith came into the living room**, Bob was kissing Ashley.

It is possible to use the verb that indicates a complete action in the independent clause, but the meaning is completely different. It is not an interruption of the action; instead, it describes *the moment when the action began*. For example:

When I arrived, he **spoke** with my uncle.

The implication here is that he was waiting for me to arrive before he spoke with my uncle. My arrival triggered the start of their conversation, and that action was complete.

Here is another example:

When Mr. Smith came into the living room, Bob **kissed** Ashley.

This sentence implies that Bob was waiting for Mr. Smith to come into the living room before he kissed Ashley. Mr. Smith's appearance in the living room triggered the kiss, and that action was complete.

#### EXERCISE

### 5.2

Complete each sentence with any appropriate subordinate clause that begins with **when**.  
For example:

When Jim saw me, I was playing with my daughter.

1. When \_\_\_\_\_, Mary was running to her car.
2. When \_\_\_\_\_, the boys were singing campfire songs.
3. When \_\_\_\_\_, we were just pulling into the driveway.
4. When \_\_\_\_\_, I was just getting out of bed.
5. When \_\_\_\_\_, the swimmers were diving into the pool.

The subordinate clause is supplied for the following sentences. Complete each one with a sentence that contains a progressive verb conjugation.

6. When I looked into the dining room, \_\_\_\_\_.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ when someone turned out the lights.
8. When the fire truck pulled up, \_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ when Aunt Vi dropped the roast on the floor.
10. When the teacher turned around, \_\_\_\_\_.

Sentences such as these consist of (1) a subordinate clause with a verb that indicates a complete action and (2) a sentence that contains a verb indicating an incomplete action. It is possible to place the incomplete action in the subordinate clause and the complete action in the main sentence. Let's look at some examples:

He threw the ball at me when I was washing the car.

When we were dancing, John took a picture of us.

In this structure, it is possible to use subordinating conjunctions other than **when**. For example:

**While** we were strolling through the park, a cold wind blew over us.

**Although** Liz was singing beautifully, some of the boys ignored her.

**As** Tom was approaching the front door, Jim bolted out and knocked him down.

EXERCISE

5.3

Complete each sentence using any appropriate clause and the subordinating conjunction provided.

1. As \_\_\_\_\_, a flock of birds flew in front of the plane.
2. While \_\_\_\_\_, he tripped and fell in.
3. Although \_\_\_\_\_, I couldn't understand a word the man said.
4. When \_\_\_\_\_, some of the scaffolding collapsed.
5. Because \_\_\_\_\_, some of the guests had to push past us.
6. Even though \_\_\_\_\_, he could not become a citizen.
7. Now that \_\_\_\_\_, you can open a bank account.
8. Since \_\_\_\_\_, the house should be finished soon.
9. Until \_\_\_\_\_, he has to be guided by a parent.
10. Unless \_\_\_\_\_, you will lose your job.

When an auxiliary (**can, must, have to**, and so on) precedes a verb in a progressive structure, the verb **be** follows the auxiliary and is accompanied by a present participle. Consider these examples:

- You need **to be trying** to find a new job.
- We have **to be working** on these problems.
- You should **be going** to college now.

These same sentences can be stated with a verb that shows a complete action.

- You need **to try** to find a new job.
- We have **to work** on these problems.
- You should **go** to college now.

The difference is simple: when the action of the verb is ongoing or incomplete (**to be trying, to be working, to be going**), it implies that the action may take a long time to carry out.

## Perfect tenses

The present perfect and past perfect tenses are formed in the same way: the auxiliary **have** is accompanied by a past participle. In the present perfect tense, the auxiliary is conjugated in the present tense (**have, has**). In the past perfect tense, the auxiliary is conjugated in the past tense (**had**). Both tenses have forms for both a complete action and an incomplete action.

PRESENT PERFECT COMPLETE	PRESENT PERFECT INCOMPLETE
She has stolen the books.	She has been stealing the books.
We have written some checks.	We have been writing some checks.
Bill has worked hard.	Bill has been working hard.
PAST PERFECT COMPLETE	PAST PERFECT INCOMPLETE
I had dated Mary.	I had been dating Mary.
Had you traveled from Egypt?	Had you been traveling from Egypt?
They had fixed the old car.	They had been fixing the old car.

The use of these two tenses is relatively simple. The present perfect tense describes an action that *began in the past and ended in the present*. The past perfect tense describes an action that *began and ended in the past*. For example:

- I have worked here for three years. (*I began my job three years ago. I am still working here today.*)
- I had worked here for three years. (*I began my job ten years ago. I stopped working there seven years ago.*)

A subordinate clause can accompany a sentence in the past perfect tense.

- I had been living in Rome **when I met my future husband**.
- Until he told me otherwise**, I had believed that he still loved me.

*Rewrite each present tense sentence using the tenses indicated.*

1. I am learning to speak Japanese.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

PAST PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

2. They sing at the top of their voices.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

PAST PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

3. Some boys march alongside the soldiers.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

PAST PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

4. We are preparing a special dinner.

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

PAST PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

5. Is Martin going to college?

PAST \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

PAST PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

## Future tense

Two forms are used to describe the future: the future tense and the future perfect tense. Both are composed of **shall** or **will** and an infinitive. In the case of the future perfect tense, the infinitive is a phrase using **have** and a past participle.

### Future

He will arrive on time.

We shall begin the exercise.

They will escort the ladies home.

**Future perfect**

He will have arrived on time.

We shall have begun the exercise.

They will have escorted the ladies home.

These conjugations can also have a progressive form, which means that the action is ongoing or incomplete. In the future perfect tense, the structure consists of **shall** or **will** followed by **have been** and a present participle (**will + have been + playing**).

We shall be joining you for dinner.

She will be studying in Paris.

You will have been learning French for a year by then.

They will have been making that quilt for three months by the end of next week.

The future perfect in its progressive form implies that the act has been going on for some time, as in **learning French for a year** and **making that quilt for three months**. It is common to add a phrase that describes when the time for the action of the sentence has been completed, as with **by then** and **by the end of next week**.

Future perfect tense sentences become mired in verb forms. Most often, the simple future replaces them unless a very specific meaning is required. For example:

You will be learning French for a year by then.

They will be making that quilt for three months by the end of next week.

**EXERCISE****5.5**

*Rewrite each present tense sentence using the tenses indicated.*

1. Jack describes what he saw.

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

2. No one is rude.

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

3. Are you reading his latest novel?

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

4. The girls look everywhere for the cat.

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

5. Professor Jones is speaking for a long time.

FUTURE \_\_\_\_\_

FUTURE PERFECT \_\_\_\_\_

## Going

The future tense is often formed with **be going** and an infinitive. This form of the future says that there is *an intention* or *a plan* to do something. For example:

We **are going** to drive to New Mexico someday.

Is John **going** to become a doctor?

What **are** you **going** to do about all your debts?

This structure can also be used in the past tense. The meaning here is that the action was intended or planned at some time in the past.

Jack **was going** to visit his aunt in Spain.

**Were** you **going** to have the car repaired?

### EXERCISE

## 5.6

Complete each sentence with any appropriate phrase.

1. Is your mother going \_\_\_\_\_?
2. \_\_\_\_\_ to spend some time with my parents.
3. Ms. Patel was going \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ to drive to Toronto last week.
5. Are the boys going \_\_\_\_\_?

## Adverbs

The two verb forms (complete/habitual and ongoing/incomplete progressive) can be used with all tenses, but there is another aspect to consider when using these verbs. A sentence that contains a progressive conjugation changes that conjugation to complete/habitual when an adverb indicates that the verb's action occurs more than once. Here are some examples of such adverbs:

always  
every Monday  
frequently  
never (the opposite of *always*)  
often  
three times a week  
usually

Notice how a sentence changes when one of these adverbs is added.

I am sitting in the living room. I **often** sit in the living room.

We have been waiting for you. We have **always** waited for you.

They will be singing in a choir. They will sing in a choir **every Friday**.

If an adverb is an individual word, it generally appears together with the verb: *He **usually** wears a blue suit.* If the adverb is a phrase, it most often appears at the end of the sentence: *He wears a blue suit **every Thursday**.*

EXERCISE

5.7

Rewrite each sentence using the adverb provided in parentheses.

1. Mary was writing a letter to her brother.  
(frequently) \_\_\_\_\_
2. I will be wearing a dark blue suit.  
(usually) \_\_\_\_\_
3. John and Laura have been living in a tiny apartment.  
(never) \_\_\_\_\_
4. The surgeon is scrubbing his hands.  
(several times a day) \_\_\_\_\_
5. He had been playing tennis with his boss.  
(seldom) \_\_\_\_\_
6. We were arguing about our bills.  
(sometimes) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Ms. Garcia is tending to her garden.  
(once a week) \_\_\_\_\_
8. Is the lawyer appearing in court?  
(often) \_\_\_\_\_
9. My relatives have been trying to get a visa.  
(many times) \_\_\_\_\_
10. They were bringing the children gifts.  
(always) \_\_\_\_\_



# Passive versus static passive

•6•

The active voice is used in a standard statement and is formed with a subject, transitive verb, and direct object. For example:

I saw the man.  
She has made some cookies.  
The boys will repair that old car.

## Passive voice

The passive voice changes the position of the subject, verb, and direct object, but the meaning of the sentence is essentially the same as that in the active voice sentence. The difference is that the subject of the active voice—the doer of the action—is put in a passive position. The passive voice sentence is composed of the direct object used as the subject, the verb as a past participle accompanied by a form of **be**, and the subject now used as the object of the preposition **by**.

The man was seen by me.  
Some cookies have been made by her.  
That old car will be repaired by the boys.

Some say that the passive voice should be avoided. Despite such a claim, the passive voice is found in speech and written material in great abundance—even in this very sentence. It is a good choice when the speaker or writer wishes to avoid pointing out the subject in an active voice. For instance, this obscures the guilt of a perpetrator of an unpleasant or even illegal act, which cannot be done in an active sentence. Consider the following active voice sentence, which says clearly who the thief is:

The mayor stole money from the city treasury.

But when that sentence is expressed in the passive voice, the same meaning can be retained or the guilty party omitted, and the basic meaning is altered only slightly.

Money from the city treasury was stolen by the mayor.  
Money was stolen from the city treasury.

The English passive voice can be described by the following three statements:

1. The direct object in the active voice sentence becomes the subject of the passive voice sentence: **money from the city treasury**.

2. The verb in the active voice sentence becomes a past participle and is accompanied by the verb **be** conjugated in the verb tense used in the active voice sentence: **was stolen**.
3. The subject of the active voice sentence becomes the object of the preposition **by**: **by the mayor**.

This same pattern is used to change other active voice sentences to the passive voice. For example:

ACTIVE	PASSIVE
John will kiss Mary.	Mary will be kissed by John.
That woman has bought a BMW.	A BMW has been bought by that woman.

EXERCISE

6•1

*Rewrite each sentence in the passive voice, retaining the tense of the active voice verb. Then write the passive voice sentence again, omitting the doer of the action or guilty party. For example:*

John breaks our lawnmower.

*Our lawnmower is broken by John.*

*Our lawnmower is broken.*

1. My sister has sold the puppies.

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2. The storm badly damaged three houses.

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3. Ms. Patel will write a book on the subject of art history.

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---

4. A terrible fire had destroyed the town hall.

---



---

5. My brother trains the horses for the rodeo.

---



---

6. Jim slapped the drunken man across the face.

---

---

7. The aircraft carrier transported nearly a hundred planes across the Atlantic.

---

---

8. She will write a poem about springtime.

---

---

9. The police have captured and arrested the pickpocket.

---

---

10. A fallen tree crushed our new car.

---

---

Passive voice verb structures can exist in the progressive form just like other verbs and imply that the action is incomplete or ongoing. But the progressive form is only found in the present and past tenses of the passive voice. For example:

Active: The mayor is stealing money from the city treasury.

Passive: Money from the city treasury is being stolen by the mayor.

Active: The mayor was stealing money from the city treasury.

Passive: Money from the city treasury was being stolen by the mayor.

The passive voice verb structure in its progressive form will always be **is being + past participle** or **was being + past participle**.

EXERCISE

6.2

*Rewrite the sentences from the previous exercise by changing the passive voice sentences to their progressive form. Take note of how they differ in meaning from the answers in Exercise 6-1.*

John is breaking our lawnmower.

*Our lawnmower is being broken by John.*

*Our lawnmower is being broken.*

1. My sister was selling the puppies.

---

---

2. The storm was damaging three houses.

---

---

3. Ms. Patel is writing a book on the subject of art history.

---

---

4. A terrible fire is destroying the town hall.

---

---

5. My brother is training the horses for the rodeo.

---

---

6. Jim was slapping the drunken man across the face.

---

---

7. The aircraft carrier was transporting nearly a hundred planes across the Atlantic.

---

---

8. She is writing a poem about springtime.

---

---

9. The police were capturing and arresting the pickpockets.

---

---

10. A fallen tree is crushing our new car.

---

---

## Other auxiliaries

The passive voice uses auxiliaries to modify the meaning of a sentence in the same way that auxiliaries are used with a single infinitive. For example:

I **want to** speak with you.  
**Were** you **able to** find your wallet?  
 She **has to** work harder.

The following are some commonly used auxiliaries:

be able to  
 be supposed to  
 can  
 have to  
 may  
 might  
 must  
 need to  
 should  
 want to

They combine with infinitives to make a verb phrase. When combined with a passive voice structure, the passive voice infinitive is composed of **be + past participle**. It is the auxiliary that changes its conjugation as the tenses change.

Present: My wife **wants to be invited** to my boss's party.  
 Past: My wife **wanted to be invited** to my boss's party.  
 Present perfect: My wife **has wanted to be invited** to my boss's party.  
 Future: My wife **will want to be invited** to my boss's party.

But consider a sentence with a more complex auxiliary: **A war has been able to be prevented for now**. When passive voice sentences become mired with verbs, the tendency is to simplify. The previous example would be changed to the simple past tense: **A war could be prevented for now**.

### EXERCISE

### 6.3

Write a passive voice sentence or question in the present tense using the auxiliary and transitive verb provided. For example:

can / repair

Can his bicycle be repaired again?

1. must / find

---

2. be able to / repair

---

3. have to / drive

---

4. should / question

---

5. want to / invite

---

6. be supposed to / reward

---

7. need to / send

---

8. may / transfer

---

9. might / sell

---

10. can / break

---

## Indirect objects

Transitive verbs are usually accompanied by direct objects. But some of them can also be accompanied by an indirect object—that is, the person *to whom* or *for whom* an action is carried out. For example:

John gives **his sister** \$20. (*To whom does he give \$20? **His sister** is the indirect object.*)

She bought **the boy** some candy. (*For whom did she buy candy? **The boy** is the indirect object.*)

Indirect objects can be used in passive voice sentences in two different ways: (1) they can become the subject of the sentence; or (2) they can become the object of the preposition **to** or **for**, and the direct object becomes the subject of the sentence. Consider how the following active voice sentence changes: **She bought the boy some candy.**

**The boy** was bought some candy by her.

Some candy was bought **for the boy** by her.

Look at another example: **They will send Mr. Carlson birthday cards.**

**Mr. Carlson** will be sent birthday cards by them.

Birthday cards will be sent **to Mr. Carlson** by them.

*Rewrite each active voice sentence in the passive voice, first with the indirect object as the subject and then with the direct object as the subject.*

1. Martin buys the girls some ice cream.

---

---

2. I am lending my neighbors valuable tools.

---

---

3. Jack has written her a long letter.

---

---

4. Ms. Patel will give Mr. Jordan this gift.

---

---

5. The realtor found me a nice apartment in Brooklyn.

---

---

6. The farmer feeds the horse oats.

---

---

7. The mayor is presenting the hero (with) a medal.

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---

8. The handsome man brought her some chocolates.

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---

9. She was sending him little gifts.

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---

10. Someone will give the homeless man a place to live.

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---

## Static passive

The static passive looks like the passive voice, because it consists of a form of **be** plus a past participle. But the static passive describes a *state* or *condition* of the subject of the sentence by using the past participle as an adjective.

How can the two types of passive be differentiated? If the sentence uses a verb in the progressive form, it is in the passive voice.

The men **are being arrested** for the brawl.

Was the bridge **being damaged** by the high winds?

When the passive structure is composed of **be + past participle** alone, some confusion can arise. This is a particular problem when the *culprit* or *doer of the action* of the verb is not named. For example:

The old church is destroyed by a construction crew. (*passive voice*)

The old church is destroyed. (*passive voice or static passive*)

In the second example, it is not clear whether **destroyed** is being used as a past participle or an adjective. It can be either, and it is only the speaker or writer who knows the actual intent of the sentence.

It is possible to run a little test to determine whether a participle is part of the passive voice or being used as an adjective: substitute an adjective (for example, **new**) for the participle. If the substitution makes sense, *it is possible* that the participle is an adjective and that the structure is static passive. If the substitution makes no sense, the participle is part of the passive voice. Look at some examples:

The girl was being kissed by him.

The girl was being **new** by him. (*Makes no sense. Passive voice.*)

The beautiful clock was broken.

The beautiful clock was **new**. (*Makes sense. Can be static passive.*)

The horses have been herded into a pen.

The horses have been **new** into a pen. (*Makes no sense. Passive voice.*)

My gold watch is repaired.

My gold watch is **new**. (*Makes sense. Can be static passive.*)



Remember that a static passive sentence can be understood as the passive voice if that is the intent of the writer or speaker. Many sentences can be both types of passive. For example:

The goods were stolen.

It is possible that the thief (the doer of action) has been omitted from the sentence (**The goods were stolen by a well-known criminal**). Then the sentence is in the passive voice. It is also possible to substitute an adjective for the participle, and the sentence still makes sense (**The goods were new**). Then it is the static passive.

The point here is that the speaker or writer must choose whether to use the passive voice or an adjective. In many cases, only he or she will know which it is. To ensure the use of the passive voice, include the *doer of the action* in the sentence. Or if it makes sense, use a progressive form of the verb **be**.

EXERCISE

6.5

Write two sentences using the verb provided: one in the progressive passive voice in the present tense and one in the static passive in the present tense. For example:

repair

The window is being repaired by my uncle.

The window is repaired.

1. paint

---

---

2. break

---

---

3. scratch

---

---

4. bend

---

---

5. sell

---

---

## 7.

# Subject-verb agreement

Making a subject agree with its accompanying verb is as simple as determining whether the subject is singular or plural. If the subject is singular, use a singular verb form. If the subject is plural, use a plural verb form. For example:

SINGULAR SUBJECTS	PLURAL SUBJECTS
the man is	the men are
the girl has	the girls have
the teacher sees	the teachers see
the house was	the houses were

It is only in the third person singular that the conjugational ending **-s** is added to most verbs (the girl **has**, the teacher **sees**). But this does not occur with certain auxiliaries.

SINGULAR SUBJECTS	PLURAL SUBJECTS
the boy can	the boys can
the girl will	the girls will
the woman must	the women must
the cat may	the cats may

The verb **be** is the only verb that has a complex conjugation in the present tense.

I am	we are
you are	you are
he is	they are
she is	
it is	

## And, or, and nor

As simple as subject-verb agreement sounds, situations frequently arise in which the agreement between these two elements does not seem clear. For example, when two subjects are combined by **and**, they become a plural subject and require a plural verb.

My brother and my sister **are** in school.

The man and the woman **speak** quietly.

But when they are combined by **or** or **nor**, a singular verb is required.

My brother or my sister **is** going to help you with the children.

Either the man or the woman **speaks** three languages. I don't know which one.

Neither the policeman nor the driver **knows** how the accident happened.

However, if the second of the two subjects is plural, a plural verb is used.

Neither my brother nor my two sisters **have** the time to help you.

Neither your wallet nor your keys **are** in that drawer.

If the second element is the first person singular pronoun **I**, the verb is conjugated for that pronoun.

Neither Martin nor I **am** interested in this idea.

Either the boys or I **was** responsible for ordering the pizza.

When **either** or **neither** is used as a pronoun and is the subject of the sentence, a singular verb is used.

Both blouses are nice. Either **is** a good choice.

I studied your answers. Neither of them **makes** any sense to me.

Some phrases that accompany a subject give the impression that the subject is plural. But these phrases can be misleading, because they are *parenthetical information* and not part of the subject. For example:

The scientist, **along with** a team of assistants, is planning the next experiment.

Ms. Garcia, **as well as** a contingent of students, was helping in the evacuation.

Her sister, **together with** the other team members, came out onto the field.

#### EXERCISE

### 7.1

In the blank provided, write the correct form of the verb in parentheses. For example:

(want) Several men want to help search for the missing pups.

1. (be) Neither the others nor I \_\_\_\_\_ willing to change the date of the dance.
2. (have) Both John Carlson and I \_\_\_\_\_ entered the race.
3. (do) \_\_\_\_\_ everyone have to pay a fee?
4. (be) Either the TV or all the books \_\_\_\_\_ to be moved another time.
5. (appear) The governor, as well as his wife and children, \_\_\_\_\_ on the stage.
6. (have) Either the microwave or the dishes \_\_\_\_\_ to be put in storage.
7. (be) There \_\_\_\_\_ a long column of soldiers marching into town.

8. (want) Neither Jane nor he \_\_\_\_\_ to be in the play.
9. (play) Mark or his sister \_\_\_\_\_ the guitar rather well.
10. (write) Both Tom and Laura \_\_\_\_\_ me letters.

A prepositional phrase often follows pronouns such as **anyone**, **any one**, **anybody**, **each**, **each one**, **everyone**, **every one**, **everybody**, **no one**, **nobody**, **someone**, and **somebody**. These pronouns all require a singular verb, but the object of a prepositional phrase that accompanies one of these pronouns can be plural. This can cause the speaker or writer to use a plural verb erroneously. Here are some example sentences:

- Any one of the boys **is** likely to be nominated.
- Each of the contestants **performs** very well.
- Nobody **wants** to walk that far.
- Somebody **needs** to speak up and tell the truth.

A word of caution with **anyone/any one**, **each/each one**, and **everyone/every one**. The words **anyone**, **each**, and **everyone** are singular pronouns.

- Anyone can understand that.
- Each of you has to climb that rope.
- Everyone needs a kind word now and then.

When **one** stands alone, it is a pronoun, and **any**, **each**, and **every** are modifiers.

- Any one of the men can do this job.
- Each one of the crew members has to learn the safety rules.
- Every one of you is to be rewarded for your service.

EXERCISE

7.2

*Complete each sentence with any appropriate phrase in the present tense.*

1. Each of the girls \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Two of the boys are showing progress, but neither \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Every one of these designs \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The four pictures are of triangles, but each \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Not everyone \_\_\_\_\_.
6. I like both computers. I suppose either \_\_\_\_\_.
7. I tasted all five cakes. Each one \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The flute, as well as the clarinet, \_\_\_\_\_.

9. You all performed well, but not everyone \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Anybody \_\_\_\_\_.

## Number

The noun **number** is used in a somewhat peculiar way. If it is used with a definite article and is followed by a prepositional phrase introduced by **of**, it is considered a singular noun, and a singular verb is required.

The number of tickets we needed **was** ten.

The number of runners in the marathon **comes** to more than three hundred.

If **number** is used with an indefinite article and is followed by a prepositional phrase introduced by **of**, it is considered a plural.

A number of my students **are** worried about the upcoming exam.

A number of older workers **have** lost their jobs.

## All, none, and some

The pronouns **all**, **none**, and **some** can be used with a singular or plural verb, depending on the prepositional phrase that accompanies them. If the object of the preposition is singular, a singular verb is used; if it is plural, a plural verb is used. Let's look at some examples:

SINGULAR	PLURAL
All of the fabric <b>is</b> ruined.	All of my books <b>are</b> ruined.
None of the food <b>tastes</b> good.	None of the cookies <b>taste</b> good.
Some of the money <b>was</b> counterfeit.	Some of the stocks <b>were</b> counterfeit.

### EXERCISE

### 7.3

Complete each sentence with any appropriate phrase in the present tense.

- Some of your friends \_\_\_\_\_.
- A number of young athletes \_\_\_\_\_.
- None of the coffee \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ all of your time \_\_\_\_\_?
- The number of people \_\_\_\_\_.
- All of our neighbors \_\_\_\_\_.
- Each one of the women \_\_\_\_\_.
- Some of the butter \_\_\_\_\_.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ anyone \_\_\_\_\_?

10. A large number of his statements \_\_\_\_\_.

## Time and money

Measurements of time often include a plural noun, but these expressions require a singular form of the verb **be**. For example:

Eight days **was** a long time to wait for his check to arrive.

Two months **is** the amount of time you have to pay off the loan.

If the amount of time is followed by a verb other than **be**, the verb is plural.

Sixty years **have** gone by since I was a boy.

Eleven hours **pass** before I finally see the train approaching.

Amounts of money follow a similar pattern: a singular form of **be** is used with plural amounts of money, and a plural form is used with other verbs.

Ten dollars **is** a lot for that old book.

Two hundred dollars **was** the price of his new bike.

Eight dollars **lay** on the floor. (*eight individual dollar bills*)

Fifty cents **fell** out of his pocket. (*50 cents in individual coins*)

## Scissors and politics

Several nouns end in **-s** and look like plurals. Most of them are, but some are singular. For example:

### Plural nouns

The scissors **are** on the table.

Your pants **look** a bit wrinkled.

**Were** his trousers cut to the correct length?

### Singular nouns

Politics **is** a difficult career to follow.

Mathematics **has** always been my hardest subject.

Measles usually **causes** itching.

The difference between these two groups of words is that the plural nouns are a single object made up of two parts: two blades on the scissors, two legs on pants and trousers. The singular nouns describe one thing but happen to end in **-s**.

## Collective nouns

Many nouns are collective nouns. Some examples are as follows:

army

choir

club

committee  
company  
family  
government  
group  
jury  
team

They describe a group of people as one entity. But it is possible for collective nouns to be considered singular or plural. If the noun is considered a single unit, it uses a singular verb.

The army **is** looking for recruits.  
Our choir **performs** for several local organizations.  
**Does** your club meet every Saturday?

But if the members of a collective group are acting individually, a plural verb is used.

The choir **are** being fitted for new robes. (*The members of the choir try on various robes.*)  
The committee **depart** for their homes around 5 p.m. (*The committee members go to different homes.*)  
The jury **have** gone into separate rooms to study the evidence. (*The members of the jury have gone to separate rooms.*)

Naturally, many collective nouns can be formed in the plural; in such cases, they always use plural verbs.

Several governments **choose** to avoid the international meeting.  
Two teams **are** struggling to win the state championship.

EXERCISE

7.4

Complete each sentence with any appropriate phrase in the present tense.

1. Five years \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Our group \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The sharper scissors \_\_\_\_\_.
4. This organization \_\_\_\_\_.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ your tweezers \_\_\_\_\_?
6. Four families \_\_\_\_\_.
7. My pants \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Civics \_\_\_\_\_.
9. A new company \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Time \_\_\_\_\_.

# Verbs and prepositions

Many verbs can be followed by any variety of prepositional phrases. These verbs describe a specific action, and the prepositional phrases describe the locale of the action or how or when it is carried out. Let's look at a simple sentence with the verb **read** and how prepositional phrases enhance the sentence.

- Jim is reading a book.
- Jim is reading a book **about prehistoric times**.
- Jim is reading a book **under a shady tree**.
- Jim is reading a book **during his math class**.
- Jim is reading a book **from my father's library**.

Notice that a different preposition is used in each sentence, and each phrase provides information about some aspect of the sentence: What is the book about? Where is Jim reading? When is he reading? Where did he find the book?

It is clear that prepositional phrases are an important device for enhancing sentences, and most sentences can include a large variety of such phrases. But some verbs and verb phrases can use only a specific preposition to achieve a desired meaning. Let's look at some of these verb-preposition combinations.

VERB PHRASE AND PREPOSITION	MEANING
be concerned about	be worried about something
be concerned with	be seriously troubled with something
be interested in	have a curiosity about something
be involved with	be occupied with something
belong in	be in a place where something is normally located
belong to	have membership in an organization
drink to	toast, make a toast
think about	have someone or something in your thoughts
worry about	be uneasy about

It is important to know which preposition is required with such verbs. People may understand you if you use the wrong preposition. For example:

- I am interested **for** classical music.
- I am interested **of** classical music.



But for clarity and accuracy, it is essential to use the correct preposition with a verb:

I am interested **in** classical music.

## To

A group of intransitive verbs that describe motion to a place are frequently followed by the preposition **to** and a phrase that names a destination. For example:

We are driving **to New York**.

I usually walk **to the park**.

They're flying **to Norway**.

The boys run **to the locker room**.

The baby crawled **to the toy chest**.

The young couple strolled **to the shore of the lake**.

## Location prepositions

Certain other verbs are paired with prepositions that describe a location rather than a destination. Here are some of the commonly used verbs and prepositions of this type:

I **placed** the books **on** the shelf.

We **put** the glasses **in** the cabinet.

Mary **set** the bowl **on** the table.

He **threw** the ball **between** the trees.

She **drops** her book **next to** the sofa.

Thomas **lays** the letter **near** the bright lamp.

These verbs are transitive and are accompanied by a direct object. The prepositions needed with such verbs introduce a phrase that describes where the direct object is positioned.

The preposition **into** can replace **in** to emphasize that something is moving *to the interior of an object or place*.

I drive the car **into** the garage.

Bring the flowers **into** the dining room.

The nurse inserted the needle **into** the patient's vein.

### EXERCISE

## 8.1

Write an appropriate preposition in the blank provided.

1. I am not interested \_\_\_\_\_ such a project.
2. Can you put those plates \_\_\_\_\_ the cupboard for me?
3. The wild horses are galloping \_\_\_\_\_ the river.
4. Mr. Lopez laid the blanket \_\_\_\_\_ the bed.
5. We are going to drive all the way \_\_\_\_\_ Nova Scotia.

6. Please put the floor lamp \_\_\_\_\_ the sofa and the end table.
7. Are you coming \_\_\_\_\_ the party tonight?
8. My mother now belongs \_\_\_\_\_ a political action committee.
9. I am very concerned \_\_\_\_\_ how you are raising your children.
10. Let's drink \_\_\_\_\_ Bill. It's his twenty-first birthday.
11. The lights aren't working. Stand \_\_\_\_\_ the window to read the message.
12. They flew more than a thousand miles \_\_\_\_\_ Cairo.
13. Marie often thought \_\_\_\_\_ her family in France.
14. Let's put the bouquet of roses \_\_\_\_\_ the piano.
15. I carefully slid the sharp knife \_\_\_\_\_ the drawer.

## About, for, and to

Verbs that *provide or seek information* use certain prepositions in the same way. The most common of these prepositions is **about**.

- She **tells about** her vacation.
- They **chat about** the lovely wedding.
- I **write about** it in my column.
- Have you **read about** the new medical discovery?
- The correspondent **reported about** the bank scandal.
- My father never **speaks about** his family.
- I'd like to **ask you about** your trip to Florida.
- What do you **know about** Ms. Kelly?
- What did he **say about** his visit to Scotland?

In many instances, **of** can replace **about**, especially with **tell, write, read, speak,** and **know**.

The preposition **for** can also accompany some of these verbs. However, the meaning is different and has nothing to do with providing or seeking information. For example:

- I write **for** a newspaper in Raleigh. (*I am employed as a reporter for a newspaper.*)
- The girl often reads **for** Mr. James. (*For some reason, Mr. James cannot read.*)
- We need to ask **for** your help. (*We are seeking your aid.*)
- What do you have to say **for** yourself? (*How do you explain your behavior?*)

The preposition **to** can also accompany some of these verbs, and again, a different meaning is achieved.

- I often write **to** my relatives in Mexico. (*I correspond with my relatives.*)
- The girl often reads **to** Mr. James. (*She reads a book aloud.*)
- He reports **to** the manager. (*His boss is the manager.*)
- My father is speaking **to** my teacher. (*My father is having a conversation with my teacher.*)
- What did she say **to** him? (*What conversation did she have with him?*)

Write an appropriate verb in the blank provided.

1. I don't \_\_\_\_\_ anything about this problem.
2. Mr. Henderson said he wants to \_\_\_\_\_ to my parents.
3. The boys quietly \_\_\_\_\_ about one of the girls.
4. In June we're going to \_\_\_\_\_ to Alaska.
5. She never \_\_\_\_\_ of her ex-husband.
6. Do you always \_\_\_\_\_ such long letters to your girlfriend?
7. I really don't have anything to \_\_\_\_\_ about my actions.
8. She \_\_\_\_\_ about the proposed building in a brief article.
9. My brother \_\_\_\_\_ a little about what the mayor is planning.
10. I'm afraid I have to \_\_\_\_\_ for another loan from you.

Let's look at a few more useful verb-preposition combinations.

VERB PHRASE AND PREPOSITION	MEANING
call to	shout to get someone's attention
care for	protect; feel affection for someone
climb up	ascend by climbing
come between	interfere between two people
cry over	regret, weep
fall into	have good fortune with something
laugh at	ridicule with laughter
look into	investigate
settle into	become comfortable in
shout at	yell angrily
stand for	represent; endure or suffer
stare at	glare, look intensively
wait for	await, remain until something happens
watch over	guard, protect

Write an appropriate verb and preposition in the blanks provided. For example:

Next week John is driving to Switzerland.

1. The American flag \_\_\_\_\_ democracy and liberty.
2. I was so embarrassed. They all \_\_\_\_\_ my clothes and shoes.
3. We understand the problem and will \_\_\_\_\_ it as soon as possible.
4. Now that the move is over, the couple has \_\_\_\_\_ their new apartment.
5. Grandma will \_\_\_\_\_ the children while I take you to the emergency room.
6. I feel so uncomfortable. That man is \_\_\_\_\_ me.
7. You're late. I \_\_\_\_\_ an hour \_\_\_\_\_ you.
8. One of the students came to her desk and \_\_\_\_\_ her \_\_\_\_\_ a pencil.
9. Just \_\_\_\_\_ your coats \_\_\_\_\_ that chair.
10. A frantic boy was \_\_\_\_\_ me for help.
11. I like him so much, but I don't think he \_\_\_\_\_ me at all.
12. If you \_\_\_\_\_ the ladder, you can reach the cat.
13. There's no reason to \_\_\_\_\_ your lost wallet. It had nothing in it.
14. I liked to \_\_\_\_\_ the blind man.
15. Why would he want to \_\_\_\_\_ those young lovers?
16. He was unemployed for so long. Then one day he \_\_\_\_\_ a great job.
17. He dropped the cell phone, and his boss began to \_\_\_\_\_ him.
18. The women often \_\_\_\_\_ the news in the neighborhood.
19. I will not \_\_\_\_\_ this kind of rude behavior again.
20. Jean \_\_\_\_\_ a political column \_\_\_\_\_ a New York magazine.

This chapter has provided a limited look at verb-preposition combinations. It is only the first step in mastering such combinations. When learning new verbs, it is essential to know whether specific prepositions are used with them. Incorrect prepositions can change the desired meaning of a sentence or make the sentence impossible to understand.

# Subjunctive

9

The subjunctive is a verb form that is used to express *emotion, opinion, possibility, unreality, or an action that has not yet taken place*. It has three forms of conjugation that are all used in their own individual ways.

1. The stem of an infinitive becomes the verb with all persons, whether singular or plural. Let's look at this conjugation with three verbs.

INFINITIVE AND STEM		
TO GO / GO	TO LIKE / LIKE	TO BE / BE
I go	I like	I be
you go	you like	you be
he/she/it go	he/she/it like	he/she/it be
we go	we like	we be
they go	they like	they be

2. The plural past tense form of a verb is used as a subjunctive conjugation.

INFINITIVE AND PAST TENSE		
TO GO / WENT	TO LIKE / LIKED	TO BE / WERE
I went	I liked	I were
you went	you liked	you were
he/she/it went	he/she/it liked	he/she/it were
we went	we liked	we were
they went	they liked	they were

3. Certain auxiliaries, such as **could**, **should**, and **would**, become the auxiliary of an infinitive.

COULD, SHOULD, WOULD + INFINITIVE		
TO GO / COULD GO	TO LIKE / SHOULD LIKE	TO BE / WOULD BE
I could go	I should like	I would be
you could go	you should like	you would be
he/she/it could go	he/she/it should like	he/she/it would be
we could go	we should like	we would be
they could go	they should like	they would be

# Present subjunctive

The first subjunctive type is often called the *present subjunctive*, because its conjugation resembles the present tense of the verb. The obvious exception to this is the verb **to be**.

A present subjunctive conjugation is required when certain verbs are used. Some of the most common are **ask, command, demand, desire, determine, insist, order, pray, prefer, recommend, request, require, and suggest**. The use of a subjunctive conjugation is only obvious when using the verb **to be** or with a third person singular subject and a verb in a sentence. First, let's look at **to be** as it is used following one of the verbs in the previous list.

The judge demanded that he **be** fined for his behavior.

She recommends we **be** ready by 5 p.m.

Mark suggested that I **be** careful around those dogs.

These verbs introduce a subordinate clause that requires the conjugated verb to be in the present subjunctive. The use of the conjunction **that** is optional.

Now compare the following pairs of sentences. One in each pair has a third person singular subject, and only with that subject is the present subjunctive conjugation made clear.

I insist that **you find** a job in the next few days.

I insist that **she find** a job in the next few days. (*Not she finds.*)

Laura asks that **the men work** a little faster on the project.

Laura asks that **the man work** a little faster on the project. (*Not the man works.*)

Tom prefers **we share** the cost of the rental car.

Tom prefers **he share** the cost of the rental car. (*Not he shares.*)

## EXERCISE

### 9.1

Rewrite the sentence provided as a subordinate clause with the introductory phrase.  
For example:

**The conductor suggests that** \_\_\_\_\_.

You have your tickets ready.

The conductor suggests that you have your tickets ready.

**The angry woman demanded that** \_\_\_\_\_.

1. Someone pays for the accident.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. We are better behaved the next time.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The child uses no more naughty words.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. I am more helpful in the future.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. The pickpocket returns her purse immediately.

\_\_\_\_\_

**I really prefer \_\_\_\_\_.**

6. You speak to me in English or Italian.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Your brother is a bit more polite.

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Ms. Patel learns a different poem by heart.

\_\_\_\_\_

9. The tourists are ready to depart at noon.

\_\_\_\_\_

10. It never happens again.

\_\_\_\_\_

The present subjunctive is also needed after certain standard phrases that introduce a subordinate clause. Some of these phrases are as follows:

It's a bad idea	It is imperative
It's a good idea	It is important
It's best	It is recommended
It's crucial	It is required
It's desirable	It is urgent
It's essential	It is vital

Note that the subject and verb can be stated as a contraction, and the conjunction **that** is optional. Let's look at some example sentences:

It is a very good idea that you be alert when driving at night.

It's urgent he find an emergency room or clinic.

**EXERCISE**

**9.2**

*Complete each phrase with any appropriate clause that has a third person singular subject.*

1. The teacher asked that \_\_\_\_\_.
2. I insist \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The old woman desires that \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The captain commands \_\_\_\_\_.
5. She finally suggests that \_\_\_\_\_.

6. The boss recommends that \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The rules required that \_\_\_\_\_.
8. No one suggested \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Headquarters gave the order that \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Our instructor requested \_\_\_\_\_.
11. It's essential that \_\_\_\_\_.
12. It was important \_\_\_\_\_.
13. It will be required that \_\_\_\_\_.
14. It's best that \_\_\_\_\_.
15. It was strongly recommended that \_\_\_\_\_.

The present subjunctive also appears in a small number of standard phrases that come from the past and are traditional in the English language. Here are some examples:

Be he beggar or be he king. (*It doesn't matter whether he's rich or poor.*)

Long live the king! (*We wish the king a long life.*)

Be that as it may. (*It is possible that that is true.*)

Come what may. (*It doesn't matter what the future is.*)

May you know much love. (*I hope you will find love in the future.*)

## Past subjunctive

The second type of subjunctive is called the *past subjunctive*, because it is derived from a past tense verb. It is often used as the verb in a sentence that describes a *wish*. Such sentences frequently begin with **if only**. For example:

If only he spoke a little Spanish.

If only my wife knew how much I love her.

A perfect tense structure can also be used in these phrases; the past subjunctive verb is the auxiliary **have** followed by a past participle. This structure implies that the wish relates to a time in the past.

If only she had paid that bill on time.

If only we had discovered the problem a little earlier.

The verb **wish** can be used to introduce a past subjunctive conjugation.

I wish my son were back from Afghanistan.

Jean often wished she had become a professional dancer.

He wishes he had seen that movie.

The past subjunctive also appears in clauses introduced by **as though** or **as if**. For example:

That woman talks as though she were so intelligent.

Why do you act as if you had a solution to this problem?



## EXERCISE

## 9.3

Rewrite each sentence following the phrase **if only**. If the sentence is in the past or perfect tense, change the verb to **have** and a past participle. For example:

She spoke with her boss about it.

If only she had spoken with her boss about it.

1. The weather stays warm.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. I did not break that window.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. We are better friends now.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. She has learned about it from her daughter.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. No one heard what I said.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. You were not right about it.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. I saw that car coming.

\_\_\_\_\_

8. The Cubs win the pennant.

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Barbara is still my girlfriend.

\_\_\_\_\_

10. I have a million dollars.

\_\_\_\_\_

## EXERCISE

## 9.4

Complete each phrase with any appropriate clause.

1. You talk as if \_\_\_\_\_.

2. The boy behaved as though \_\_\_\_\_.

3. He glared at me as if \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Did Jim sing as though \_\_\_\_\_?
5. They act as if \_\_\_\_\_.

## If

The conjunction **if** has already been shown in expressions that require a past subjunctive conjugation. When **if** is used to introduce a subordinate clause, two kinds of sentences can be formed: one uses a verb in the indicative, and the other uses a verb in the past subjunctive. But the past subjunctive is usually formed from an auxiliary and an infinitive (**could be, should stay, would have**). These sentences set up a *condition* that must be met in order to achieve a *result*. For example:

### Condition

### Result

If it snows in Denver, it usually snows in Colorado Springs. (*indicative*)

If it snowed in Denver, it would usually snow in Colorado Springs. (*subjunctive*)

If you find some money, you can pay your rent. (*indicative*)

If you found some money, you could pay your rent. (*subjunctive*)

### Result

### Condition

She is happy if she sleeps until 8 a.m. (*indicative*)

She would be happy if she slept until 8 a.m. (*subjunctive*)

The subordinate clause can begin or end the sentence. For example:

**If she slept until 8 a.m.**, she would be happy.

She would be happy **if she slept until 8 a.m.**

### EXERCISE

## 9.5

Complete each subjunctive sentence with any appropriate clause. For example:

If you were home, I would visit you.

1. If the boys helped me, \_\_\_\_\_.
2. If you looked in the garage, \_\_\_\_\_.
3. If I had enough time, \_\_\_\_\_.
4. If the train got in late, \_\_\_\_\_.
5. If the teacher understood what I meant, \_\_\_\_\_.
6. She would go out with me if \_\_\_\_\_.
7. No one would laugh if \_\_\_\_\_.

8. The girls would stay longer if \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The weather would be better if \_\_\_\_\_.
10. It would be so nice if \_\_\_\_\_.

Conditional sentences can be written with verbs in a perfect tense. Compare the following pairs of sentences that contrast the simple past subjunctive with a past subjunctive formed like a perfect tense (**have + past participle**).

If John saw her in the park, he would speak with her.

If John **had seen** her in the park, he **would have spoken** with her.

No one would believe him if he suddenly told the truth.

No one **would have believed** him if he **had** suddenly **told** the truth.

The past subjunctive written with **have** and a past participle implies a condition and result that took place in the past.

Besides **could**, **should**, and **would**, **might** is another auxiliary that is used in the past subjunctive. It usually occurs in the “result” clause and suggests that the outcome is only a possibility. Compare the following pairs of sentences:

If you asked nicely, I would help you. (*If the condition is met, this will happen.*)

If you asked nicely, I might help you. (*If the condition is met, this is a possibility.*)

Jim would stay home if he could watch the game. (*This will happen if the condition is met.*)

Jim might stay home if he could watch the game. (*This is a possibility if the condition is met.*)

The subjunctive auxiliaries introduced in this chapter all function in the same way but provide different nuances of meaning.

**Could** suggests an outcome that can occur: **You could become president.**

**Should** suggests a likely or desirable outcome: **You should become president.**

**Would** suggests what the outcome will be: **You would become president.**

**Might** suggests that the outcome is merely a possibility: **You might become president.**

EXERCISE

9.6

Complete each subjunctive sentence with any appropriate clause. For example:

If you had been home, I would have visited you.

- If she had been more careful, \_\_\_\_\_.
- I would have spent more time here \_\_\_\_\_.
- If \_\_\_\_\_, I could have taken a nap.
- If \_\_\_\_\_, Tom might find a good job.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ if he had heard his wife's speech.
6. If you could get your wish, \_\_\_\_\_?
7. She might earn a degree if \_\_\_\_\_.
8. If \_\_\_\_\_, nothing would be done about it.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ if she had known about the party.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ if they could borrow some money.
11. If Bill hadn't eaten the cake, \_\_\_\_\_.
12. I could have remained at home if \_\_\_\_\_.
13. The baby might have slept longer if \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Her bedroom could look nicer if \_\_\_\_\_.
15. What would you have said if \_\_\_\_\_?

# Little versus few

•10•

It may seem strange that an entire chapter of this book is devoted to two simple words: **little** and **few**. But the paragraphs that follow will show that these two simple words can cause a lot of difficulty. Some people find it hard to believe that native English speakers use them so erroneously. Others believe these words to be so similar that they can be used almost interchangeably.

## Little

The adjective **little**, which means **small**, does not cause people any problems. It is the opposite of **big** and modifies many nouns with utter simplicity.

The **little** boy went fishing.  
The puppies are so **little** and cute.

It is the alternative meaning of **little** that marks the start of the usage problems. Its other meaning is the opposite of **much**: *not much, below the usual amount*.

I have **little** time for nonsense like this.  
The boy has **little** energy left to go hiking.  
The elderly lady needed **little** help to cross the street.

In general, **little** is used with *collective* or *mass nouns*, which are singular: **time, money, energy, water, sugar**, and so on.

## Few

The adjective **few** acts in the same way as **little** but modifies plural nouns and is the opposite of **many**: *not many, a small number of*. Here are some examples:

There were **few** moments when I really enjoyed opera.  
**Few** people in the audience understood his speech.  
He had read **few** books as boring as this one.