



Professional Writing Skills English-II

MODULE-I

Example Questions

Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.

My favorite history professor, as well as some of his administrative staff, were asked to resign because fewer students were taking history courses than ever before. No error

Possible Answers:

than
were
as well as
because
No error

Correct answer:

were



Explanation:

In this sentence, the verb does not agree with the subject. The subject "professor" is singular ("as well as some of the administrative staff" is a Modifying phrase and doesn't count), so the correct verb form should be "was," not "were."

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Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.

Stephanie claims that she wants to attend college after graduation, but her poor attitude about studying during senior year do not indicate that she enjoys being a student. No error

Possible Answers:

Studying
No error
wants
to attend
do not indicate

Correct answer:

Explanation:

"Her poor attitude about studying" is the subject of this clause, so the verb must agree with the singular subject "attitude." Therefore, the correct verb should be "does"—her attitude "does not indicate."

do not indicate

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Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.



James is a proactive police officer, so although the local rebellious teenagers are annoyed by his strict nature, the overall safety of the town have improved drastically since he was hired. No error

Possible Answers:

Strict nature
are annoyed
No error
So although
have improved

Correct answer:

have improved

Explanation:

This is an issue of subject-verb agreement within this independent clause: "the overall safety of the town have improved drastically since he was hired." Simplified, the subject is "safety," which is a singular noun, so the verb must also be singular, making "have improved" incorrect and "has improved" the corrected verb.

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Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.

A pair of supportive shoes are important if you are experiencing lower backpain. No error

Possible Answers:

you
No error
are experiencing
supportive
are

Correct answer : are



Explanation:

The verb "are" agrees with a plural subject, but the subject of this sentence is the singular "pair." Changing "are" to "is" corrects the sentence's error. The corrected sentence reads, "A pair of supportive shoes is important if you are experiencing lower back pain."

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Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.

The paralegal believed that there were an overload of cases in the office, which was creating stress. No error

Possible Answers:

that
No error
which
of cases in the office
were

Correct answer:

were

Explanation:

The verb "were," which is used with plural nouns, corresponds to "overload," which is a singular noun. Therefore, the verb should be "was," to match the singular noun, instead of "were."

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Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.



Shana, Joe, and Marcel was incredible in each of their performances and the audience rewarded them through cheers and applause. No error

Possible Answers:

their
and
through
was
No error

Correct answer:

was

Explanation:

Shana, Joe, and Marcel are three nouns grouped together (as indicated by the "and"), and thus are effectively a plural noun. "Was" is used in reference to a singular subject; in this sentence, "was" should be "were" (e.g. "Shana, Joe, and Marcel *were* incredible . . .").

[Report an Error](#)

Example Question #2 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.

While the young analyst is bothered by the fact that his girlfriend is not very skilled behind the wheel, each of her other redeeming qualities compensate for her driving ability. No error

Possible Answers:

While
Compensate
is bothered by
No error
wheel, each

Correct answer:

compensate

Explanation:

The subject of the second part of the sentence is "each of her other qualities." Here, the subject is singular because of the modifier "each of." To make this easier to understand, try reading this part of the sentence as "each one of her other qualities." Therefore, the corresponding verb should be in a form that can be used with a singular noun, "compensates."

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Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.

Rebecca's preference for caviar and expensive chocolates are not a reflection of what she actually enjoys, but simply a manifestation of her tendency to spend money carelessly. No error

Possible Answers:

but
are
to spend
No error
preference

Correct answer:

are

Explanation:

The subject of the first part of the compound sentence is "Rebecca's preference." This is a singular subject. Therefore, the corresponding verb should be "is," not "are."

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Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.

The salami and chorizo in the refrigerator is very salty, so you may want to serve some water with it so that your guests will be comfortable. No error

Possible Answers:

and

may



with it

No error

is

Correct answer:

is

Explanation:

The subject in this sentence is "salami and chorizo," which is plural. Therefore, the corresponding verb should be plural as well. Therefore, "is," being singular, is incorrect. The proper verb is "are."

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Example Question #1 : Identifying Subject Verb Agreement Errors

Select the underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct. Some sentences contain no error at all.

The best part of running with bulls are the expressions on other peoples' faces as they try to stay one step ahead of the beasts behind them. No error

Possible Answers:

them

try to

are

ahead

No error

Correct answer:

are

Explanation:

The subject in this part of the sentence is "best part of running with the bulls." Here, "best part" is the subject, while "of running with the bulls" is a prepositional phrase that modifies "best part." Therefore, since "part" is singular, the subject is actually singular, and should be accompanied by a singular verb, "is," not "are."

Definitions and Examples

Noun

The name of something, like a person, animal, place, thing, or concept. Nouns are typically used as subjects, objects, objects of prepositions, and modifiers of other nouns.

- I finished the study.
 - I = subject
 - Maggie wrote the dissertation.
 - the dissertation = object
 - The author presented the results in Chapter 4.
 - in Chapter 4 = object of a preposition
 - His research findings can contribute to social change.
 - research = modifier
-

Verb

This expresses what the person, animal, place, thing, or concept does. In English, verbs follow the noun.

- It takes a good deal of dedication to complete a doctoral degree.
 - She studied hard for the test.
 - Writing a dissertation is difficult. (The *be* verb is also sometimes referred to as a copula or a linking verb. It links the subject, in this case **writing a dissertation**, to the complement or the predicate of the sentence, in this case, **hard**.)
-

Adjective

This describes a noun or pronoun. Adjectives typically come before a noun or after a stative verb, like the verb *to be*.

- The diligent student completed her assignment early.
 - Diligent describes the student and appears before the noun *student*.
- It can be difficult to balance time to study and work responsibilities.
 - Difficult is placed after the *to be* verb and describes what it is like to balance time.

Remember that adjectives in English have no plural form. The same form of the adjective is used for both singular and plural nouns.

- A different idea
- Some different ideas
- INCORRECT: some ~~different~~s ideas

Adverb

This gives more information about the verb and about how the action was done. Adverbs tell how, where, when, why, etc. Depending on the context, the adverb can come before or after the verb or at the beginning or end of a sentence.

- He completed the course **enthusiastically**.
 - **Enthusiastically** describes how he completed the course and answers the *how* question.
 - Steven **recently** enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Communication program at Walden.
 - **Recently** modifies the verb enroll and answers the *when* question.
 - **Then**, I verified that most of my sources were peer-reviewed.
 - **Then** describes and modifies the entire sentence. See this link on [transitions](#) for more examples of conjunctive adverbs (adverbs that join one idea to another to improve the cohesion of the writing).
-

Pronoun

This word substitutes for a noun or a noun phrase (such as *it, she, he, they, that, those, ...*).

- Smith (2014) interviewed the applicants as **they** arrived.
 - **they** = applicants
 - **He** was interested in ideas **that** were never previously recorded, not **those** that have already been published.
 - **He** = Smith; **that** = ideas; **those** = those ideas
-

Determiner

This word makes the reference of the noun more specific (such as *his, her, my, their, the, a, an, this, these, ...*).

- Jones published **her** book in 2015.
 - **The** book was very popular.
-

Preposition

This comes before a noun or a noun phrase and links it to other parts of the sentence. These are usually single words (*on, at, by, ...*) but can be up to four words (*as far as, in addition to, as a result of, ...*).

- I chose to interview teachers **in** the district closest to me.

- The recorder was placed next to the interviewee.
- I stopped the recording in the middle of the interview due to a low battery.

Conjunction

A word that joins two clauses. These can be coordinating (an easy way to remember this is memorizing *FANBOYS* = *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) or subordinating (such as *because, although, when, ...*).

- The results were not significant, so the alternative hypothesis was accepted.
- Although the results seem promising, more research must be conducted in this area.

Auxiliary Verbs

Helping verbs. They are used to build up complete verbs.

- Primary auxiliary verbs (*be, have, do*) show the progressive, passive, perfect, and negative verb tenses.
 - Modal auxiliary verbs (*can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would*) show a variety of meanings. They represent ability, permission, necessity, and degree of certainty. These are always followed by the simple form of the verb.
 - Semimodal auxiliary verbs (*be going to, ought to, have to, had better, used to, be able to, ...*). These are always followed by the simple form of the verb.
-
- Researchers **have investigated** this issue for some time. However, the cause of the problem **has not beendetermined**.
 - primary: **have investigated** = present perfect tense; **has not been determined** = passive, perfect, negative form
 - He **could conduct** more research, which **may lead** to the answer.
 - The modal **could** shows ability, and the verb conduct stays in its simple form; the modal **may** shows degree of certainty, and the verb lead stays in its simple form.
 - Future researchers **are going to delve** more into this topic. They **are about to make** a breakthrough discovery.
 - These semimodals are followed by the simple form of the verb.

Common Endings

Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs often have unique word endings, called *suffixes*. Looking at the suffix can help to distinguish the word from other parts of speech and help identify the function of the word in the sentence. It is important to



use the correct word form in written sentences so that readers can clearly follow the intended meaning.

Here are some common endings for the basic parts of speech. If ever in doubt, consult the dictionary for the correct word form.

Common Noun Endings

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| -age: | suffrage, image, postage |
| -al: | arrival, survival, deferral |
| -dom: | kingdom, freedom, boredom |
| -ee: | interviewee, employee, trainee |
| -ence/ance: | experience, convenience, finance |
| -er/or: | teacher, singer, director |
| -ery: | archery, cutlery, mystery |
| -hood: | neighborhood, childhood, brotherhood |
| -ics: | economics, gymnastics, aquatics |
| -ing: | reading, succeeding, believing |
| -ism: | racism, constructivism, capitalism |
| -ity/ty: | community, probability, equality |
| -ment: | accomplishment, acknowledgement, environment |
| -ness: | happiness, directness, business |
| -ry: | ministry, entry, robbery |
| -ship: | scholarship, companionship, leadership |
| -tion/sion/xion : | information, expression, complexion |
| -ure: | structure, pressure, treasure |

Common Verb Endings

| | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|
| -ate: | congregate, agitate, eliminate |
| -en: | straighten, enlighten, shorten |
| -(i)fy: | satisfy, identify, specify |
| -ize: | categorize, materialize, energize |

Common Adjective Endings

-able/ible: workable, believable, flexible
-al: educational, institutional, exceptional
-ed: confused, increased, disappointed
-en: wooden, golden, broken
-ese: Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese
-ful: wonderful, successful, resourceful
-ic: poetic, classic, Islamic
-ing: exciting, failing, comforting
-ish: childish, foolish, selfish
-ive: evaluative, collective, abrasive
-ian: Canadian, Russian, Malaysian
-less: priceless, useless, hopeless
-ly: friendly, daily, yearly
-ous: gorgeous, famous, courageous
-y: funny, windy, happy

Common Adverb Endings

-ly: quickly, easily, successfully
-ward(s): backward(s), upwards, downwards
-wise: clockwise, edgewise, price-wise

Placement and Position of Adjectives and Adverbs

Order of Adjectives

If more than one adjective is used in a sentence, they tend to occur in a certain order. In English, two or three adjectives modifying a noun tend to be the limit. However, when writing in APA, not many adjectives should be used (since APA is objective, scientific writing). If adjectives are used, the framework below can be used as guidance in adjective placement.

1. Determiner (i.e., *this, that, these, those, my, mine, your, yours, him, his, hers, they, their, some, our, several,...*) or article (*a, an, the*)
2. Opinion, quality, or observation adjective (i.e., *lovely, useful, cute, difficult, comfortable*)
3. Physical description



- (a) size (*big, little, tall, short*)
 - (b) shape (*circular, irregular, triangular*)
 - (c) age (*old, new, young, adolescent*)
 - (d) color (*red, green, yellow*)
4. Origin (i.e., *English, Mexican, Japanese*)
 5. Material (i.e., *cotton, metal, plastic*)
 6. Qualifier (noun used as an adjective to modify the noun that follows;
i.e., *campus activities, rocking chair, business suit*)
 7. Head noun that the adjectives are describing (i.e., *activities, chair, suit*)

For example:

- ***This*** (1) ***lovely*** (2) ***new*** (3) ***wooden*** (4) ***Italian*** (5) ***rocking*** (6) ***chair*** (7) is in my office.
- ***Your*** (1) ***beautiful*** (2) ***green*** (3) ***French*** (4) ***silk*** (5) ***business*** (6) ***suit*** (7) has a hole in it.

Commas With Multiple Adjectives

A comma is used between two adjectives only if the adjectives belong to the same category (for example, if there are two adjectives describing color or two adjectives describing material). To test this, ask these two questions:

1. Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written in reverse order?
2. Does the sentence make sense if the word “and” is written between them?

If the answer is yes to the above questions, the adjectives are separated with a comma. Also keep in mind a comma is never used before the noun that it modifies.

- ***This useful big round old green English leather rocking chair is comfortable.***
(Note that there are no commas here because there is only one adjective from each category.)
- ***A lovely large yellow, red, and green oil painting was hung on the wall.*** (Note the commas between yellow, red, and green since these are all in the same category of color.)

Position of Adverbs

Adverbs can appear in different positions in a sentence.

- At the beginning of a sentence: **Generally**, teachers work more than 40 hours a week.
- After the subject, before the verb: Teachers **generally** work more than 40 hours a week.
- At the end of a sentence: Teachers work more than 40 hours a week, **generally**.
- However, an adverb is not placed between a verb and a direct object. INCORRECT: Teachers work **generally** more than 40 hours a week.

More Detailed Rules for the Position of Adverbs

- Adverbs that modify the whole sentence can move to different positions, such as *certainly*, *recently*, *fortunately*, *actually*, and *obviously*.
 - Recently, I started a new job.
 - I recently started a new job.
 - I started a new job recently.
- Many adverbs of frequency modify the entire sentence and not just the verb, such as *frequently*, *usually*, *always*, *sometimes*, *often*, and *seldom*. These adverbs appear in the middle of the sentence, after the subject.
 - She frequently gets time to herself. (The adverb appears before the main verb.)
 - INCORRECT: ~~Frequently~~ she gets time to herself.
 - INCORRECT: She gets time to herself ~~frequently~~.
 - She has frequently exercised during her lunch hour. (The adverb appears after the first auxiliary verb.)
 - She is frequently hanging out with old friends. (The adverb appears after the *to* be verb.)
- Adverbial phrases work best at the end of a sentence.
 - He greeted us in a very friendly way.
 - I collected data for 2 months.

Exercise: Noun-Pronoun Agreement

Select the sentence which has the pronoun agreeing with the antecedent noun.

Select the sentence which has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**.

Show questions one by one

1. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- ? When a company changes **their** marketing strategy abruptly, **they** may cease to make money.
- ? When a company changes **its** marketing strategy abruptly, **it** may cease to make money.



2. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- A. ? If any one of the employees **is** late, **s/he** [OR 'he or she' OR 'she or he' OR 'they'] must report at once to the foreman.
- B. ? If any one of the employees **are** late, **they** must report at once to the foreman.

3. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- A. ? Neither trouble nor expense **was** spared in giving each of the boys the education **he** wanted.
- B. ? Neither trouble nor expense **were** spared in giving each of the boys the education **they** wanted.

4. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- A. ? When certain marketing tactics are not working, then obviously **it** must be changed.
- B. ? When certain marketing tactics are not working, then obviously **they** must be changed.

5. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- A. ? Each of the political parties **are** being forced to disclose **their** campaign expenses.
- B. ? Each of the political parties **is** being forced to disclose **its** campaign expenses.

6. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?



- A. ? The crew of three men and two women **were** applauded when **their** boat crossed the finishing line.
- B. ? The crew of three men and two women **was** applauded when **its** boat crossed the finishing line.

7. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- A. ? Several theories were put forward to explain the accident, but the investigators found **them** unsatisfactory.
- B. ? Several theories were put forward to explain the accident, but the investigators found **it** unsatisfactory.

8. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- A. ? All levels of the profession had **its** own salary range.
- B. ? All levels of the profession had **their** own salary range.

9. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- A. ? Management issued a statement on **its** new work practice agreement.
- B. ? Management issued a statement on **their** new work practice agreement.

10. Which of the following sentences has the **pronoun** agreeing with the antecedent **noun**?

- A. ? Every woman present at the function was a leader in **her** profession.
- B. ? Every woman present at the function was a leader in **their** profession.

30 Common Errors & Confusing Words

1. A While vs. Awhile

A *while* is a noun phrase consisting of *a* and *while*, whereas *awhile* is an adverb meaning “for a while.” A *while* usually follows the preposition *for* or *in*, whereas if you cannot put “for a while” into a sentence, you need to use *a while*.

- He went to the store for *a while*. (if you replace *a while* with *for a while*, it does not make sense -> He went to the store for *for a while*.)
- You should sleep *awhile*. (if you replace *awhile* with *for a while*, it makes sense -> You should sleep *for a while*.)

2. Advice vs. Advise

Advice is a noun, whereas *advise* is a verb.

- She took my *advice* and took out a loan.
- I *advised* her to take out a loan.

3. A lot vs. A Lot vs. Allot

First of all, the “word” *alot* does not exist! A *lot* is frequently misspelled as one word, *alot*, but it is actually two words.

Memory tip: Think of *a lot* as meaning, *I want a whole lot full of something*. (a lot meaning *a parking lot*, a large area)

The word *allot* is a verb meaning *to distribute*.

- I have *allotted* this money to the charity.

4. Among vs. Between

Among is used to express a loose relationship of several items. *Between* expresses the relationship of one item to another item.

- I found a pen hidden *among* the papers on the desk.



- I found a pen hidden *between* two sheets of paper on the desk.

5. Apostrophes

Compare the following phrases:

- The girls are at home.
- The girl's home.
- The girls' home.

The meaning in the above phrases is changed dramatically based on the placement, if any, of the apostrophe. When talking about more than one person or object, there is *no apostrophe*.

- *chairs* (more than one chair)
- *boys* (more than one boy)
- *suitcases* (more than one suitcase)

The apostrophe with an *s* is added to show possession.

- The *girl's* home. (the home belonging to the girl)
- The *student's* notebook. (the notebook belonging to the student)

Likewise, an apostrophe is added after a plural word to show possession of that plural noun.

- The *girls'* home. (the home belonging to more than one girl)
- The *students'* notebook. (one notebook belonging to more than one student)
- The *students'* notebooks. (more than one notebook belonging to more than one student)

6. Assure vs. Ensure vs. Insure

Assure means "to tell someone that something will definitely happen." *Ensure* means "to make sure of something." *Insure* means "to buy an insurance policy."

- She *assured* me that the house would not flood.
- She took steps to *ensure* that the house did not flood.
- She is glad the house was *insured* against flood damage.



7. Breathe vs. Breath

Breathe is a verb, and *breath* is the noun form of *breathe*.

- It seems that he *breathed* his last *breath*.

This also applies to the verb *bathe* and the noun *bath*.

8. Capital vs. Capitol

Capital can mean either an uppercase letter, the seat of the government, or money. *Capitol* is the actual building where the government sits.

- I would like to visit the *Capitol* in the *capital* of the United States, Washington, D.C.

9. Complement vs. Compliment

A *complement* completes something else, whereas a *compliment* is something nice you say to someone.

- His black suit was a nice *complement* to his black shoes.
- She *complimented* him on his shoes.

10. Effect vs. Affect

This one is straightforward—effect is a noun, and affect is a verb!

Memory tip for *affect*: A is for action, and verbs are about action. Affect is a verb, and it starts with A.

Memory tip for *effect*: Think of the phrase “cause and effect.” “Cause” ends with an E, and a cause leads to an effect!

11. Emigrate vs. Immigrate

Emigrate means “to move away from a city or country,” whereas *immigrate* means “to move into a country from somewhere else.”

- My father *emigrated* from Venezuela.
- My mother *immigrated* to the United States.

12. Except vs. Accept



Except is a preposition that means “excluding,” and *accept* is a verb meaning “to receive.”

- I don't like any of my gifts, *except* this one. (there is only one gift that I like)
- Why did I *accept* all of these gifts?

13. Further vs. Farther

Use *farther* for physical distance, and *further* for metaphorical distance.

- How much *farther* do I need to drive?
- I would like to advance *further* in my career.

14. Good vs. Well

The word *good* is an adjective, whereas the word *well* is an adverb.

- How are you today? I am doing *well*.
- I feel *good* today.

15. Historic vs. Historical

Historic means “famous,” whereas *historical* means “related to history.”

- What a *historic* snowstorm!
- She decided to wear a *historical* costume for the Renaissance fair.

16. “I feel bad”

Isn't *feel* a verb, so shouldn't the word after it be an adverb, *badly*? The answer is, NO! *Feel* is a linking verb, linking the subject to the adjective that describes it. Therefore, the word after *feel* should, in fact, be an adjective. *I feel bad* is the correct sentence.

- The cake smells delicious. (*smells* is a linking verb; *delicious* is an adjective)
- Their talking is loud. (*is* is a linking verb; *loud* is an adjective)

17. I.e. vs. E.g.

I.e. and *e.g.* are both abbreviations of Latin terms.

E.g. is used to introduce a few examples, whereas *i.e.* is used to mean “in other words.”



- After work, I'd like to check out the new supermarket, *i.e.*, Key Food.
- After work, I'd like to go to a supermarket, *e.g.*, Key Food or Waldbaum's.

18. Into vs. In To

Into is a preposition showing what something is inside. *In* and *to* are two words that just happen to be next to each other on occasion.

- He got *into* the train. (*into* is one unit – a preposition)
- I dropped *in to* see you. (*drop in* is one unit on its own, and *to* see is another unit)
- Log *in to* the website by pressing this button. (*log in* is a phrasal verb)
- What is your *login*? (*login* is a noun)

The rules above apply to *onto* and *on to* as well.

19. Less vs. Fewer

Fewer is for count nouns, and *less* is for mass nouns. Check out our [Count Nouns & Mass Nouns](#) study sheet if you forget the difference!

20. Lie vs. Lay

Compare these two sentences:

- You *lie* down on the sofa.
- You *lay* the book down on the table.

The second one has a direct object (*book*), whereas the first sentence does not.

HOWEVER:

- Last week, you *lay* down on the couch.
- Last week, you *laid* the book on the table.
- You have *lain* on the couch for a few hours.
- You have *laid* the book on the table.

PRESENT TENSE

Lie

Lay

PAST TENSE

Lay

Laid

PAST PARTICIPLE

Lain

Laid



It just so happens that the past tense of the verb *to lie* is the same as the present tense of the verb *to lay*. You just have to memorize it!

21. Loose vs. Lose

Loose is an adjective, and *lose* is a verb.

- This shirt is too *loose* on me.
- How did you *lose* your phone?!

22. Numbers

In English, numbers greater than one thousand and up to ten thousand can be written in two ways:

- 1000
- 1,000

Numbers above ten thousand can be written by using a comma in the following way:

- 10,000
- 247,533

Decimals and money amounts can be written by using a period in the following way:

- 7.24 = seven and twenty-four hundredths
- 2.14 = two and fourteen hundredths
- \$1.37 = one dollar and thirty-seven cents
- \$359.08 = three hundred fifty-nine dollars and eight cents

23. Parallel Structure

One of the most common errors in English is disrespecting parallel structure.

Here is an example:

- I like *hiking, swimming, and biking*.
- ~~I like hiking, to swim, and biking.~~



The second sentence disrespects parallel structure. Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words in a sentence.

- I was asked to write my report *quickly, thoroughly, and accurately*.
- ~~I was asked to write my report quickly, thoroughly, and in an accurate manner.~~

24. Principal vs. Principle

When *principal* is a noun, it refers to a person in charge of an organization; when it is an adjective, it means “most important.” A *principle* is a firmly held belief.

- What did the *principal* want to speak to you about?
- The *principal* reason she wanted to see me was to discuss my recent tuition payment.
- It's not that I don't have the money, it's just a matter of *principle*.

25. Stationary vs. Stationery

Stationary means “not moving,” whereas *stationery* refers to paper and writing materials.

- Of course the door will remain *stationary* if you don't push it the right way!
- I love this *stationery* you printed your resume on!

26. Subject-Verb Agreement with Collective Nouns

If the sentence shows more individuality, you would use a plural verb; however, if the noun is acting as a unit, use a singular verb.

- The team *is* heading for practice.
- The team *are* eating with their families.

With a prepositional phrase, use a verb tense that corresponds to the subject.

- Nearly one in four people *is* Muslim. (*one* is the subject, so we use a singular verb, *is*)
- 25% of people *are* Muslim. (fractions and percentages can be singular or plural depending on the prepositional phrase that follows; *people* is plural, so we use *are*)



27. The “Bacon and Eggs” Rule

When we have two nouns that are used so often together we think of them as a singular idea, we use a singular verb.

- Bacon and eggs *was* served at brunch.
- Macaroni and cheese *is* delicious.

Likewise, we use a singular verb when we talk about amounts or quantities.

- A thousand dollars *is* a lot of money.
- Ten miles *is* too far to walk.

Expressions with “one of” are followed by a singular verb.

- One of my students *is* a gymnast.
- One of my friends *is* going to Africa this summer.

28. Title Capitalization

Here are some basic rules about how to capitalize titles:

- Always capitalize the first and last word.
- Capitalize nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.
- Do NOT capitalize articles, prepositions (shorter than five letters), or coordinating conjunctions.

Here are some examples:

- A Year in Paris
- Pride and Prejudice
- Cheaper by the Dozen

Of course, for every rule there are exceptions, so it is best to look it up if you are unsure of something.

29. Who vs. Which vs. That

Who refers to people, whereas *which* and *that* refer to groups or objects. *That* introduces an essential clause (which adds vital information to the sentence), whereas *which* introduces a nonessential clause (which adds supplementary, unnecessary information).

- She is the one *who* drove me home yesterday. (*who* refers to a person)
- I do not like cereal *that* has chocolate in it. (we do not know what type of cereal without the essential clause)
- This cereal, *which* has chocolate in it, is not good for you. (we do not need the information in the nonessential clause)

30. Who vs. Whom



Who refers to the subject of the sentence, whereas *whom* refers to the object of a verb or preposition.

- *Who* wants the last piece of pie? (*who* is the subject)
- *Whom* do you trust more? (*you* is the subject; *whom* is the object)

PHRASES AND IDIOMS

We often talk about the “idiomatic usage” of English. Let us begin by asking ourselves what an idiom is. Two central features identify an idioms :

- (a) The meaning of the idiomatic expression cannot be deduced by examining the meanings of the constituent items.
- (b) The expression is fixed, both grammatically and lexically.

Words which already exist can take on an idiomatic meaning in a special context. The expression ‘on the house’ is made up of words which already exist in the language. But these words individually do not help us to get the meaning of the expression. ‘On the house’ means ‘free for the customer, at the expense of the hotel or firm’. Moreover, it is not possible to replace any of the words and retain the idiomatic meaning. We cannot, for example, say ‘on the flat’, ‘on the building’, ‘on the bungalow’ etc. to express the idiomatic meaning deduced from the phrase ‘on the house’. We cannot replace with ‘bugle’ in the expression ‘to blow one’s own trumpet’. We cannot say ‘bag and suitcase’, trumpet in place of ‘bag and baggage’ for the idiomatic meaning.

In this unit we shall look at some common idiomatic expressions in English. The meaning of the idiom is given along with an illustrative sentence as a model of use. You must learn to make sentences of your own to illustrate the meaning of the phrases and idioms. The phrases and idioms have been arranged in the following groups –

- a. Idioms with nouns and adjectives
- b. Phrasal verbs
- c. Verbal idioms etc.

A. Idioms with nouns and adjectives.

1. a fine kettle of fish (an afterward state of affairs) : Your behavior has put the office in a fine kettle offish. (also : a pretty kettle of fish)
2. another cup of tea (something or someone very different from that which has been discussed) : The new Director’s way of enforcing discipline in the company is quite another cup of tea.



3. a big fish in a little/ small pond (someone who is important only in a small group or community) : I would prefer to be a big fish in a small pond, so I work here and haven't thought of changing my job.

4. a big hit (something very popular) : The film was a big hit among the rural people.

5. a big mouth (someone who boasts or exaggerates) : don't believe that he has a flat in the city; he is such a big mouth.

6. a big shot (an important person) : He left the village nearly thirty years ago; he is now a big shot in Guwahati.

7. In a big way (on a large scale) : Mrs. Ahmed has invited about a hundred people for her daughter's birthday; she likes to do things in a big way.

8. (give someone) a big hand (applaud) : After her song was over, the entire assembly gave her a big hand.

9. a blessing in disguise (an unlucky event that turns out to be advantageous) : Missing the train turned out to be a blessing in disguise for me when I learnt that the train met with an accident fifteen minutes later.

10. The calm before the storm (a period of calm or inactivity before an unexpected period of trouble) : The boarders are unusually quiet these days; all one hopes is that it is not just the calm before the storm.

11. castles in the air (make impossible plans) : The egg seller lying in the shade of the tree is building castles in the air by thinking about exporting eggs abroad.

12. Child's play (a very easy task) : Solving the flood problem in the state is not a child's play.

13. a drop in the ocean (a very small amount) : The central grant for solving the flood problem in our state is just a drop in the ocean; we need much more than that.

14. The fit of the gab (natural ability of being a fluent speakers) : It was understandable that with his gift of the gab, he would do well in politics.

15. The man in the street (the average person) : Today the man in the street has access to all the information through the RTI Act.

16. The run of the mill (everyday routine thing) : There was nothing special that



I did today; just the run of the mill, as far as I could see.

17. A stone's throw (a short distance) : The railway station is just a stone's throw from our house.

18. The tip of the iceberg (only the beginning or the small part of a problem) : This incident is just the tip of the iceberg; I am sure there's much more to come.

19. A tower of strength (a person who can be relied upon) : The boy was a tower of strength for his mother after his father's death.

20. the writing on the wall (an event which points to impending danger) : With the Singur incident involving Tata, Corporate Houses have seen the writing on the wall on matters of huge investments.

Adjective and Noun : In the following examples we see the phrase being formed with an adjective and a noun.

1. The acid test (the toughest test) : Rina thinks she is a good dancer. But the acid test will come when she has to face national level contestants.

2. A burning question (an important issue) : The problem of illegal migrants is a burning question for the state.

3. A closed book (subject that a person knows little about) : I am afraid Greek tragedy is more or less a closed book to me.

4. Double Dutch (unintelligible language) : I am afraid Dr. Johnson's writing is double Dutch for me.

5. A fair weather friend (a person who stops being a friend when in trouble) : You should avoid your fair weather friends because they will not be with you when you are in trouble.

6. A foregone conclusion (an inevitable result) : As the train is running late by 5 hours, it is a foregone conclusion that I shall miss the connecting train.

7. Foul play (violent offence) : At first we thought that his wife committed suicide; but the neighbours suspected foul play and rushed to the police station.

8. A gentleman's agreement (an agreement based on trust) : I borrowed the money from him on a gentleman's agreement.

9. An ivory tower (a way of life or state that is out of touch with the reality) : you must be living in an ivory tower if you ignore the reality of poverty.



10. A left handed complement (of doubtful sincerity) : By suggesting that he looked smart in the wig, he was paying a left handed complement to this.
11. A low profile (quiet behaviour) : In spite of his scholarship, Professor Baruah likes to keep a low profile.
12. A meal ticket (reliable provider of money and comfort) : A husband is much more than a meal ticket in the family.
13. A necessary evil (something which is undesirable or unpleasant but still necessary) : Most teachers consider public examinations a necessary evil.
14. An olive branch (a desire for peace) : The extremists offered an olive branch to the Government.
15. An open book (someone straight forward and honest) : His life is an open book; he is one of the simplest person that I know.

B. Phrasal Verbs

1. Add up (make sense, be logical) : A lot of evidence was found and they all added up to strengthen the case.
2. Agree with someone (suit somebody) : The hostel food did not agree with my health.
3. Allow for something (take something into consideration) : We set off an hour later to allow for morning the traffic jam at Chandmari to be over.
4. Answer back (reply in a rude way) : It is impolite to answer back to your elders.
5. Ask someone in (invite someone) : I asked her in at my birthday.
6. Ask someone out (invite someone to go out) : We asked them out for dinner at the Ashoka.
7. Attend to someone/ something (look after) : Please attend to the work urgently.
8. Back out (withdraw) : He promised his support but backed out at the last moment.
9. Back someone/ something up (support) : I shall back him up in the college



election.

10. Bank on someone/ something (rely) : The leader is banking on the tea garden votes for his victory.

11. Bear something out (support, confirm) : I hope you will bear me out when I make the statement.

12. Blow over (be forgotten) : the storm had blown over and the incident is forgotten now.

13. Blow something up (exaggerate) : The incident has been blow up by the press for publicity.

14. Boil down to something (to be reduced to something) : The whole problem boils down to the availability of funds for the project.

15. break down (collapse) : She broke down in sorrow.

16. Break into (enter illegally) : Last night robbers broke into the bank.

17. Break out (appear and spread rapidly) : Cholera broke out in the village soon after the floods.

18. Break through (make a major discovery or advancement) : Science claims to have broken through in several new aspects of the cure for diabetes.

19. Break up (come to an end) : Their marriage broke up after the incident.

20. Bring something down (reduce something) : The incident of car theft in the city has of late been brought down.

21. Build up (develop) : Suspense builds up towards the end of the film.

22. Burst in (enter suddenly) : She burst in with the news that she had got the job.

23. Call for (demand) : His conduct calls for a thorough inquiry.

24. Call in (stop somewhere on the way to somewhere else) : I will call in at the shop on my way to office.

25. Call off (cancel) : If it rains, the cricket match will be called off.

26. Call on (visit) : The company phoned to say that a representative will call on



the next Monday.

27. Carry on (continue) : Please carry on your work I without anybody disturbing you.

28. Come round (recover) : He came round after a long illness.

29. Crop up (happen) : Something unexpected had cropped up and I had to postpone my visit.

30. Deal in (do business) : The grocer also deals in a variety of cosmetic items.

31. Deal with (treat a topic/ subject) : We have been dealing with this firm for a long time.

32. Drop in/ by/ over/ round (pay someone a casual visit) : Please drop in when you have the time.

33. Dwell on something (discuss) : The speaker has dwelt on the issue of terrorism at great length.

34. End up (finish) : If you don't drive carefully, you will end up meeting with an accident.

35. Fall out (quarrel) : The two neighbors have fallen out again.

36. Fall through (fail to develop or take place) : Our holiday plans fell through at the last minute owing to her illness.

37. Follow something up (pursue) : The story is interesting and deserves to be followed up.

38. Get off (escape punishment) : He was lucky; he got off with a minor punishment.

39. Get off something (alight from a vehicle) : The conductor will tell you where you will have to get off.

40. Get on (make progress) : How are you getting on with your dance classes.

41. Give in (surrender) : The mob was at last forced to give in to the police.

42. Give up (stop doing something) : He gave up smoking at the doctor's advice.



43. Go down with something (fall ill) : Most of my classmates have gone down with flu.
44. Go on (continue talking) : I was tired of listening to him, but he just went on and on.
45. hang on (wait) : Hang on, I will get you some help.
46. hold back (restrain oneself) : The pupils of Socrates tried to hold back their tears when he lifted the cup of poison to his lips.
47. join in (participate) : We are planning a picnic for next Sunday, why don't you join it?
48. keep in (stay indoors) : It's best to keep in when it is very cold.
49. look in (make a short visit) : I shall look in on Rina when I visit Jorhat.
50. look out (be careful) : Please look out when you are crossing the road.
51. look over (examine) : I looked over the house before buying it.
52. look up (improve) : The weather is looking up at last.
53. look someone up (visit someone) : I shall look you up when I happen to visit Delhi.
54. make off (escape) : The thief made off with the valuables.
55. Move in (take possession of) : The new neighbour had just moved in.
56. pack up (stop work) : The workers in the building packed up at about five o'clock.
57. push off (leave) : I'll have to push off now.
58. put across (express) : I tried to put my ideas across; but they didn't understand.
59. put off (postpone) : The cricket match had to be put off because of the rain.
60. put by (save) : I put by some money for the trip.
61. put up with (tolerate) : I cannot put up with bad manners.



62. run out (expire) : The contract runs out in March next year.
63. set off (begin a journey) : We set off early in the morning.
64. settle down (establish oneself) : I have settled down in Guwahati.
65. show off (display one's capabilities) : Don't show off your scholarship; others are not interested.
66. stand by (support) : He stood by her in her difficulties.
67. Stop over (break a journey) : I shall stop over at Kolkata on my way to Pune.
68. Turn down (reject) : He turned down the offer.
69. Walk out (strike) : The workers staged a walk out.
70. warm up (become lively) : The party warmed up with the arrival of the film star.
71. Wear off (to stop or disappear gradually) : The effects of the medicine will soon wear off.
72. Write off (regard as no good) : He was written off by his family as a failure.

C. Verbal Idioms

1. Bark up the wrong tree (get wrong ideas) : By putting the blame on Mr. Baruah for the lapse, you are barking up the wrong tree.
2. Be a cut above something/ someone (be better) : The new typist seems to be a cut above his predecessor.
3. be no picnic (not easy) : the question paper in English was no picnic.
4. Beat about the bush (talk indirectly) : Instead of coming to the point, he wasted a lot of time in beating about the bush.
5. Blow one's own trumpet (praise oneself) : He is otherwise efficient, but he too often blows his own trumpet.
6. Bring to book (punish) : He was brought to book for his offence.
7. Burn the midnight oil (work hard) : He burnt the midnight oil to do well in



the examination.

8. Bring the hatchet (decide to end hostilities) : Let us bring the hatchet and be friends again.

9. Clip someone's wings (limit power) : The Government had decided to clip the wings of the new Director.

10. Cross swords (argue) : I didn't like to cross swords with him in this matter.

11. drop names (mention influential names) : He has the habit of dropping names to impress people.

12. feel the pinch (feel an unpleasant change) : Because of the steep rise in prices, everybody is feeling the pinch.

13. fight a losing battle (try hard without much chance of success) : We the Assam seem to be fighting a losing battle against floods.

14. fight shy of (avoid) : She always fights shy of taking a difficult decision.

15. follow suit (do the same as someone else has done) : When the SBI lowered the interest rates, all the other nationalized banks followed suit.

16. get down to brass tacks (moving on to essential details) : It was only when we got down to brass tacks did we realize the difficulty of the project.

17. give vent to (express) : He was so annoyed with his behaviour that he could not stop himself from giving vent to his anger.

18. go the whole hog (do something thoroughly) : Instead of painting a window here and a door there, I suggest you go the whole hog and paint the house.

19. hang fire (get delayed) : Our plans for the excursion are hanging fire because of the examination.

20. have something up one's sleeve (have some secret information) : She looks fairly happy; surely she must have got something up her sleeve.

21. hit the headlines (become a main subject in the media) : The floods in Majuli have hit the headlines.

22. Hold water (withstand an investigation) : Your lame excuse for being absent will not hold water with the management.

23. Keep in touch (continue contacts) : We keep in touch with each other.
24. keep pace with (make progress as fast as others) : India is keeping pace with America in her nuclear program me.
25. keep in appearances (continue to make a good impression in order to hide one's poverty etc.) : He had a hard time in keeping up appearance with his meager income.
26. keep open house : (welcome visitors at any time) : I keep open house here; I do not mind anyone staying.
27. know something inside out (know something very well) : I have been reading 'Hamlet' so thoroughly that I know the play inside out.
28. Make a mountain of a molehill (treat something as being make difficult or serious that it is) : It was a small matter; but the press made a mountain of a molehill.
29. Make amends (compensate) : Hari Singh was sorry to rob Anil that night and was willing to make amends.
30. Miss the boat (miss an opportunity) : The last date of application expired yesterday; I am afraid you have missed the boat.
31. Nip in the bud (destroy something at early stage) : We saw the little boy smoking, so we decided to nip it in the bud then and there. His tropes to go abroad were nipped in the bud when his father died.
32. Put on airs (behave in a self important manner) : She certainly put on airs in her speech.
33. Rest on one's laurels (enjoy a period of inactivity) : After winning the big national award he can afford to rest on his laurels.
34. Ring a bell (reminds one vaguely of something) : His name rings a bell; I've probably read one of her articles in the newspaper.
35. Rise to the occasion (cope with a situation) : Let us rise to the occasion and tackle the problem of terrorism.
36. Rock the boat (upset or disturb something) : We were happy with preparation of the conference until the General Secretary of the Steering Committee rocked the boat by proposing last minute changes.



37. Roll up ones sleeves (prepare oneself to start working) : The program me for the examinations has been announced today; it's time you rolled up your sleeves.

38. Run in the family (a physical feature, talent or character seen in different generations of a family) : Music runs in his family.

39. Set the ball rolling (start something) : With the Minister's inauguration program me of the company set in the ball rolling for the project.

40. show one's true colours (reveals one's character) : The man showed his true colors when he revealed his unfriendliness to the club.

41. sit tight (wait patiently and see what happens) : When the call for Assam Bandh was given, we had no option but to sit tight.

42. Speak for itself/ themselves (something that is clear) : The examination reform program me of SEBA is a great success. The results speak for themselves.

43. Spill the beans (let out information) : He told the story in strict confidence and asked me not to spill the beans.

44. stand one ceremony (pay too much attention to correct behavior) : When you talk to the Governor, it is important to stand on ceremony.

45. Steal the show (receive more appreciation than anyone else) : The cultural program me was excellent, but Zubeen stole the show with his performance.

46. steen clear of (avoid) : The doctor has warned me to steer clear of fats and spicy food.

47. Stick to one's guns (be firm) : Many people will try to influence you, but you must stick to your guns.

48. Sugar/ sweeten the pill (make something unpleasant appear pleasant) : The new management is very strict and has already suspended five workers; but to sugar the pill it has announced an ex-gratia allowance.

49. Sweep something under the carpet (hide) : The Government is trying to sweep the scandal under the carpet.

50. Swim with the tide (conform to general view) : His success in politics is largely due to the fact that he swims with the tide.



51. Take a leaf out of one's book (follow someone's good example) : Abhishek is not quite up to the mark as an actor; he should take a leaf out of his father's book for tailor made roles.
52. Take something as read (regard something as being known) : The Chairman took the proceedings of the last meeting as being read, and moved on to the recommendation part.
53. Take someone/ something by storm (make a great impression) : The arrival of Ketreena took Bollywood by storm.
54. take one's hat off to someone (admire someone's achievements) : I take my hat off to Khuswant Singh, who at ninety plus could write such wonderful columns.
55. take something in one's stride (deal with a problem or difficulty calmly) : There's always a power failure in our part of the city, you must learn to take this in your stride.
56. Throw a party (celebrate) : You must throw us a party for your daughter's success.
57. Throw one's weight around (showing arrogance) : No one in the office likes him because he likes to throw his weight around all the time.
58. Tighten one's belt (spend less money) : After retirement from service, he didn't have to tighten his belt because of the steady income from his books.
59. Turn over a new leaf (change one's behaviour) : After his return from England and meeting Gandhi, the young barrister Jawaharlal Nehru turned over a new leaf and joined politics.
60. upset the applecart (spoil a plan) : When all the preparations were complete, we didn't expect him to upset the applecart by rescheduling the date of the program me.
61. Wash one's dirty linen in public (reveal private scandals) : Let us not wash dirty linen in public and instead concentrate on our own work.
62. Wipe the floor with someone (triumph over someone) : It was a terrible match; Mohan Bagan wiped the floor with the Railway team.
63. Work wonders (have a beneficial effect) : Yoga can work wonders on back pain.

Sequence of Tenses–Grammar Rules



Grammar

BASICS

The rules governing verb tenses are dictated by logic; an action in the future obviously cannot happen before an action in the past. In writing, it's a matter of looking at your clauses and sentences and determining when each action is happening relative to everything else. The past must come before the present, and the present before the future, etc. Pay particular attention to the verb sequence when you have a dependent clause before an independent clause, or a result clause before the if-clause.

When an independent clause is in the past tense, any dependent clauses must also be written in the past tense, *not* the present tense or the future tense.

Consider the example below for an illustration of this rule:

The cat was bathing because his feet are dirty.

The cat was bathing because his feet will be dirty.

Because the tense of the independent clause is in the past (was bathing), the verb in the dependent clause should also be in the past, as illustrated in the sentence below:

The cat was bathing because his feet were dirty.

As with many rules in English, however, there is an exception. In cases where a universal truth is conveyed, the present tense may be used after the past tense.

Consider this example:



Even the early doctors knew that washing hands prevents infection.

The fact that hand washing prevents infection is a universal truth that doesn't change with time, so it can be expressed in the present tense. Of course, the rule regarding the sequence of tenses doesn't mean that the actual verbs have to be in chronological order, just the actions. We can put the dependent clause at the beginning of the sentence, as illustrated below:

Athena will continue to learn English when she gets to the States.

It's alright to have the future tense (will continue) before the present tense (gets) because the temporal conjunction (when) shows that the second action actually happens first.