CHAPTER 1

GRAMMAR

FINDING NOUNS, VERBS, AND SUBJECTS

NOTE
We will use the standard of underlining subjects once and verbs twice.

Definitions

- A **noun** is a word or set of words for a person, place, thing, or idea. A noun of more than one word (*tennis court, gas station*) is called a **compound noun**.

There are **common nouns** and **proper nouns**. Common nouns are words for a general class of people, places, things, and ideas (*man, city, award, honesty*). They are not capitalized. Proper nouns are always capitalized. They name specific people, places, and things (*Joe, Chicago, Academy Award*).

For more on nouns, see Chapter Two, "Apostrophes," Rules 2a through 2e.

- A **verb** is a word or set of words that shows action (*runs, is going, has been painting*); feeling (*loves, envies*); or state of being (*am, are, is, have been, was, seem*).

Examples: *He ran around the block.*
I like my friend.
They seem friendly.

State-of-being verbs are called **linking verbs**. They include all forms of the verb *to be*, plus such words as *look, feel, appear, act, go*, followed by an adjective. (See the "Adjectives and Adverbs" section later in this chapter.)

Examples: *You look happy.*
We feel fine.
He went ballistic.

Verbs often consist of more than one word. For instance, *had been breaking down* is a four-word verb. It has a two-word main verb, *breaking down* (also called a **phrasal verb**), and two **helping verbs** (*had* and *been*). Helping verbs are so named because they help clarify the intended meaning.

Many verbs can function as helping verbs, including *is, shall, must, do, has, can, keep, get, start, help*, etc.

- A **subject** is the noun, pronoun (see the "Pronouns" section later in this chapter), or set of words that performs the verb.

Examples: *The woman hurried.*
Woman is the subject.
She was late.
She is the subject.
Shakespeare in Love *won an Academy Award.*
Shakespeare in Love is the subject.

Rule 1. To find the subject and verb, always find the verb first. Then ask who or what performed the verb.

Examples: *The jet engine **passed** inspection.*
Passed is the verb. Who or what passed? The engine, so *engine* is the subject. (If you included the word *jet* as the subject, lightning will not strike you. But technically, *jet* is an adjective here and is part of what is known as the complete subject.)
*From the ceiling **hung** the chandelier.*
The verb is *hung*. Now, if you think *ceiling* is the subject, slow down. Ask *who* or *what* hung. The answer is the chandelier, not the ceiling. Therefore, *chandelier* is the subject.

Rule 2. Sentences can have more than one subject and more than one verb.

Examples: *I like cake, and he likes ice cream*. (Two subjects and two verbs)
He and I like cake. (Two subjects and one verb)
She lifts weights and jogs daily. (One subject and two verbs)

Rule 3. If a verb follows *to*, it is called an **infinitive**, and it is not the main verb. You will find the main verb either before or after the infinitive.

Examples: *He is trying to leave*.
To leave is an infinitive; the main verb is *trying*.
To leave was his wish.
The main verb is *was*.

NOTE

One of the most stubborn superstitions in English is that it is wrong to insert a word between the *to* and the verb in an infinitive. This is called a **split infinitive** (*to **gladly** pay, to **not** go*). There is no English scholar alive who will say a split infinitive is technically wrong. However, split infinitives tend to be clumsy and unnecessary. Experienced writers do not use them without good reason.

Rule 4. Any request or command, such as *Stop!* or *Walk quickly*, has the understood subject *you*, because if we ask who is to stop or walk quickly, the answer must be "you."

Example: (*You*) *Please bring me some coffee*.
Bring is the verb. Who will do the bringing? The subject *you* is understood.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Being able to find the right subject and verb will help you correct errors of subject-verb agreement.

Basic rule. A singular subject (*she, Bill, car*) takes a singular verb (*is, goes, shines*), whereas a plural subject takes a plural verb.

Example: *The list of items is/are on the desk*.
If you know that *list* is the subject, then you will choose *is* for the verb.

Rule 1. A subject will come before a phrase beginning with *of*. This is a key rule for understanding subjects. The word *of* is the culprit in many, perhaps most, subject-verb mistakes.

Hasty writers, speakers, readers, and listeners might miss the all-too-common mistake in the following sentence:

Incorrect: *A bouquet of yellow roses lend color and fragrance to the room.*
Correct: *A bouquet of yellow roses lends. . .* (*bouquet lends*, not *roses lend*)

Rule 2. Two singular subjects connected by *or, either/or*, or *neither/nor* require a singular verb.

Examples: *My aunt or my uncle **is** arriving by train today.*
*Neither Juan nor Carmen **is** available.*
*Either Kiana or Casey **is** helping today with stage decorations.*

Rule 3. The verb in an *or, either/or*, or *neither/nor* sentence agrees with the noun or pronoun closest to it.

Examples: *Neither the plates nor the serving bowl goes on that shelf.*
Neither the serving bowl nor the plates go on that shelf.

This rule can lead to bumps in the road. For example, if *I* is one of two (or more) subjects, it could lead to this odd sentence:

Awkward: *Neither she, my friends, nor I am going to the festival.*

If possible, it's best to reword such grammatically correct but awkward sentences.

Better: *Neither she, I, nor my friends are going to the festival.*
OR
She, my friends, and I are not going to the festival.

Rule 4. As a general rule, use a plural verb with two or more subjects when they are connected by *and*.

Example: *A car and a bike are my means of transportation.*

But note these exceptions:

Exceptions: *Breaking and entering is against the law.*
The bed and breakfast was charming.

In those sentences, *breaking and entering* and *bed and breakfast* are compound nouns.

Rule 5. Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by such words as *along with, as well as, besides, not*, etc. These words and phrases are not part of the subject. Ignore them and use a singular verb when the subject is singular.

Examples: *The politician, along with the newsmen, is expected shortly.*
Excitement, as well as nervousness, is the cause of her shaking.

Rule 6. With words that indicate portions—*percent, a lot, majority, some, all,* etc.—Rule 1 given earlier is reversed, and we are guided by the noun after *of*. If the noun after *of* is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb.

Examples: *Fifty percent of the* ***pie*** *has disappeared.*
Fifty percent of the ***pies*** *have disappeared.*
A third of the ***city*** *is unemployed.*
A third of the ***people*** *are unemployed.*
All of the ***pie*** *is gone.*
All of the ***pies*** *are gone.*
Some of the ***pie*** *is missing.*
Some of the ***pies*** *are missing.*

NOTE

In recent years, the SAT testing service has considered *none* to be strictly singular. However, according to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*: "Clearly *none* has been both singular and plural since Old English and still is. The notion that it is singular only is a myth of unknown origin that appears to have arisen in the 19th century. If in context it seems like a singular to you, use a singular verb; if it seems like a plural, use a plural verb. Both are acceptable beyond serious criticism." When *none* is clearly intended to mean "not one," it is followed by a singular verb.

Rule 7. In sentences beginning with *here* or *there*, the true subject follows the verb.

Examples: *There are four hurdles to jump.*
There is a high hurdle to jump.
Here are the keys.

NOTE

The word *there's*, a contraction of *there is*, leads to bad habits in informal sentences like *There's a lot of people here today*, because it's easier to say "there's" than "there are." Take care never to use *there's* with a plural subject.

Rule 8. Use a singular verb with distances, periods of time, sums of money, etc., when considered as a unit.

Examples: *Three miles* ***is*** *too far to walk.*
Five years ***is*** *the maximum sentence for that offense.*
Ten dollars ***is*** *a high price to pay.*
BUT
Ten dollars (i.e., dollar bills) ***were*** *scattered on the floor.*

Rule 9. Some collective nouns, such as *family, couple, staff, audience*, etc., may take either a singular or a plural verb, depending on their use in the sentence.

Examples: *The staff is in a meeting.*
Staff is acting as a unit.
The couple disagree about disciplining their child.
The couple refers to two people who are acting as individuals.

NOTE

Anyone who uses a plural verb with a collective noun must take care to be accurate—and also consistent. It must not be done carelessly. The following is the sort of flawed sentence one sees and hears a lot these days:

The staff is deciding how they want to vote.
Careful speakers and writers would avoid assigning the singular *is* and the plural *they* to *staff* in the same sentence.

Consistent: *The staff* ***are*** *deciding how* ***they*** *want to vote.*

Rewriting such sentences is recommended whenever possible. The preceding sentence would read even better as:

The staff members are deciding how they want to vote.

Rule 10. The word *were* replaces *was* in sentences that express a wish or are contrary to fact:

Example: *If Joe* ***were*** *here, you'd be sorry.*

Shouldn't *Joe* be followed by *was*, not *were*, given that *Joe* is singular? But Joe isn't actually here, so we say *were*, not *was*. The sentence demonstrates the **subjunctive mood**, which is used to express things that are hypothetical, wishful, imaginary, or factually contradictory. The subjunctive mood pairs singular subjects with what we usually think of as plural verbs.

Examples: *I wish it* ***were*** *Friday.*
She requested that he ***raise*** *his hand.*

In the first example, a wishful statement, not a fact, is being expressed; therefore, *were*, which we usually think of as a plural verb, is used with the singular subject *I*.

Normally, *he raise* would sound terrible to us. However, in the second example, where a request is being expressed, the subjunctive mood is correct.

Note: The subjunctive mood is losing ground in spoken English but should still be used in formal speech and writing.

CLAUSES AND PHRASES

Definitions

- A **clause** is a group of words containing a subject and verb. An **independent clause** is a simple sentence. It can stand on its own.
  Examples: *She is hungry*.
  I am feeling well today.
- A **dependent clause** cannot stand on its own. It needs an independent clause to complete a sentence. Dependent clauses often begin with such words as *although, since, if, when*, and *because*.

  Examples: *Although she is hungry*. . .
  Whoever is hungry. . .
  Because I am feeling well. . .

Dependent	**Independent**
Although she is hungry,	*she will give him some of her food.*
Whatever they decide,	*I will agree to.*

- A **phrase** is a group of words without a subject-verb component, used as a single part of speech.

  Examples: *Best friend* (noun phrase)
  Needing help (adjective phrase; see the "Adjectives and Adverbs" section later in this chapter)
  With the blue shirt (prepositional adjective phrase; see the "Prepositions" section later in this chapter)
  For twenty days (prepositional adverb phrase)

PRONOUNS

Definition

- A **pronoun** (*I*, *me*, *he*, *she*, *herself*, *you*, *it*, *that*, *they*, *each*, *few*, *many*, *who*, *whoever*, *whose*, *someone*, *everybody*, etc.) is a word that takes the place of a noun. In the sentence *Joe saw Jill, and he waved at her,* the pronouns *he* and *her* take the place of *Joe* and

Jill, respectively. There are three types of pronouns: **subject** (for example, *he*); **object** (*him*); or **possessive** (*his*).

Rule 1. Subject pronouns are used when the pronoun is the subject of the sentence. You can remember subject pronouns easily by filling in the blank subject space for a simple sentence.

Example: ___ *did the job*.

I, he, she, we, *they*, *who*, *whoever*, etc., all qualify and are, therefore, subject pronouns.

Rule 2. Subject pronouns are also used if they rename the subject. They will follow *to be* verbs, such as *is, are, was, were, am, will be, had been*, etc.

Examples: *It is he*.
This is she speaking.
It is we who are responsible for the decision to downsize.

NOTE

In informal English, most people tend to follow *to be* verbs with object pronouns like *me, her, them*. Many English scholars tolerate this distinction between formal and casual English.

Example: *It could have been them*.
Technically correct: *It could have been* ***they***.
Example: *It is just me at the door*.
Technically correct: *It is just* ***I*** *at the door*.

Rule 3. This rule surprises even language watchers: when *who* refers to a personal pronoun (*I, you, he, she, we, they*), it takes the verb that agrees with that pronoun.

Correct: *It is I who* ***am*** *sorry*. (*I* ***am***)
Incorrect: *It is I who is sorry*.
Correct: *It is you who* ***are*** *mistaken*. (*you* ***are***)
Incorrect: *It is you who's mistaken*.

Rule 4. Object pronouns are used everywhere else beyond Rules 1 and 2 (**direct object, indirect object, object of a preposition**). Object pronouns include *me, him, herself, us, them, themselves*, etc.

Examples: *Jean saw* ***him***.
Him is the direct object.
Give ***her*** *the book*.
Her is the indirect object. The direct object is *book*.
Are you talking to ***me***?
Me is the object of the preposition *to*.

Rule 5. The pronouns *who, that*, and *which* become singular or plural depending on the subject. If the subject is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb.

Example: *He is the only one of those men who is always on time*.
The word *who* refers to *one*. Therefore, use the singular verb *is*.

Sometimes we must look more closely to find a verb's true subject:

Example: *He is one of those men who* ***are*** *always on time*.
The word *who* refers to *men*. Therefore, use the plural verb *are*.

In sentences like this last example, many would mistakenly insist that *one* is the subject, requiring ***is*** *always on time*. But look at it this way: *Of those men who* ***are*** *always on time, he is one*.

Rule 6. Pronouns that are singular (*I, he, she, everyone, everybody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody, someone, somebody, each, either, neither*, etc.) require singular verbs. This rule is frequently overlooked when using the pronouns *each, either*, and *neither*, followed by *of*. Those three pronouns always take singular verbs. Do not be misled by what follows *of*.

Examples: *Each of the girls sings well*.
Either of us is capable of doing the job.
Neither of them is available to speak right now.

Exception: When *each* follows a noun or pronoun in certain sentences, even experienced writers sometimes get tripped up:

Incorrect: *The women each gave her approval*.
Correct: *The women each gave their approval*.
Incorrect: *The words* are *and* there *each ends with a silent vowel*.
Correct: *The words* are *and* there *each end with a silent vowel*.

These examples do not contradict Rule 6, because *each* is not the subject, but rather an **adjunct** describing the true subject.

Rule 7. To decide whether to use the subject or object pronoun after the words *than* or *as*, mentally complete the sentence.

Examples: *Tranh is as smart as she/her*.
If we mentally complete the sentence, we would say *Tranh is as smart as she is*. Therefore, *she* is the correct answer.
Zoe is taller than I/me.
Mentally completing the sentence, we have *Zoe is taller than I am*.
Daniel would rather talk to her than I/me.
We can interpret this sentence in two ways: *Daniel would rather talk to her than to me*. **OR** *Daniel would rather talk to her than I would*. A sentence's meaning can change considerably, depending on the pronoun you choose.

Rule 8. The possessive pronouns *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *its*, *ours*, *theirs*, and *whose* never need apostrophes. Avoid mistakes like *her's* and *your's*.

Rule 9. The only time *it's* has an apostrophe is when it is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*. The only time *who's* has an apostrophe is when it means *who is* or *who has*. There is no apostrophe in *oneself*. Avoid "one's self," a common error.

Examples: *It's been a cold morning.*
The thermometer reached its highest reading.
He's the one who's always on time.
He's the one whose wife is always on time.
Keeping oneself ready is important.

Rule 10. Pronouns that end in *-self* or *-selves* are called **reflexive pronouns**. There are nine reflexive pronouns: *myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, oneself, ourselves, yourselves*, and *themselves*.

Reflexive pronouns are used when both the subject and the object of a verb are the same person or thing.

Example: *Joe helped* ***himself***.

If the object of a preposition refers to a previous noun or pronoun, use a reflexive pronoun:

Example: *Joe bought it for himself.*

Reflexive pronouns help avoid confusion and nonsense. Without them, we might be stuck with sentences like *Joe helped Joe*.

Correct: *I worked myself to the bone.*
The object *myself* is the same person as the subject *I*, performing the act of working.
Incorrect: *My brother and myself did it.*
Correct: *My brother and I did it.*
Don't use *myself* unless the pronoun *I* or *me* precedes it in the sentence.
Incorrect: *Please give it to John or myself.*
Correct: *Please give it to John or me.*
Correct: *You saw me being myself.*
Myself refers back to *me* in the act of being.

A sentence like *Help yourself* looks like an exception to the rule until we realize it's shorthand for ***You*** *may help yourself*.

In certain cases, a reflexive pronoun may come first.

Example: *Doubting himself, the man proceeded cautiously.*

Reflexive pronouns are also used for emphasis.

Example: *He himself finished the whole job.*

Rule 11a. Avoid *they* and *their* with singular pronouns.

Incorrect: *Someone brought their lunch.*
Correct: *Someone brought **her** lunch.*
OR
*Someone brought **his** lunch.*

If the gender is undetermined, you could say *Someone brought **his or her** lunch* (more on this option in Rule 11b).

Rule 11b. Singular pronouns must stay singular throughout the sentence.

Incorrect: *Someone has to do it—and they have to do it well.*

The problem is that *someone* is singular, but *they* is plural. If we change *they* to *he or she*, we get a rather clumsy sentence, even if it is technically correct.

Technically correct: *Someone has to do it—and he or she has to do it well.*

Replacing an ungrammatical sentence with a poorly written correction is a bad bargain. The better option is to rewrite.

Rewritten: *Someone has to do it—and has to do it well.*

Many writers abhor the *he or she* solution. Following are more examples of why rewriting is a better idea than using *he or she* or *him or her* to make sentences grammatical.

Incorrect: *No one realizes when their time is up.*
Correct but awkward: *No one realizes when his or her time is up.*
Rewritten: *None realize when their time is up.*
Incorrect: *If you see anyone on the trail, tell them to be careful.*
Correct but awkward: *If you see anyone on the trail, tell him or her to be careful.*
Rewritten: *Tell anyone you see on the trail to be careful.*

Rule 12. When a pronoun is linked with a noun by *and*, mentally remove the *and* + noun phrase to avoid trouble.

Incorrect: *Her and her friend came over.*
If we remove *and her friend*, we're left with the ungrammatical *Her came over.*
Correct: ***She** and her friend came over.*

Incorrect: *I invited he and his wife*.
If we remove *and his wife*, we're left with the ungrammatical *I invited he*.
Correct: *I invited* ***him*** *and his wife*.
Incorrect: *Bill asked my sister and I*.
If we remove *my sister and*, we're left with the ungrammatical *Bill asked I*.
Correct: *Bill asked my sister and* ***me***.

NOTE

Do not combine a subject pronoun and an object pronoun in phrases like *her and I* or *he and me*. Whenever *and* or *or* links an object pronoun (*her, me*) and a subject pronoun (*he, I*), one of those pronouns will always be wrong.

Incorrect: *Her and I went home*.
Correct: *She and I went home*. (She went and I went.)

WHO VS. WHOM

Rule. Use this *he/him* method to decide whether *who* or *whom* is correct:

he = who
him = whom

Examples: ***Who****/Whom wrote the letter?*
He wrote the letter. Therefore, *who* is correct.
*Who/****Whom*** *should I vote for?*
Should I vote for *him*? Therefore, *whom* is correct.
We all know ***who****/whom pulled that prank*.
This sentence contains two clauses: *we all know* and *who/whom pulled that prank*. We are interested in the second clause because it contains the *who/whom*. *He* pulled that prank. Therefore, *who* is correct.
*We wondered who/****whom*** *the book was about*.
This sentence contains two clauses: *we wondered* and *who/whom the book was about*. Again, we are interested in the second clause because it contains the *who/whom*. The book was about *him*. Therefore, *whom* is correct.

Note: This rule is compromised by an odd infatuation people have with *whom*—and not for good reasons. At its worst, the use of *whom* becomes a form of one-upmanship some employ to appear sophisticated. The following is an example of the pseudo-sophisticated *whom*.

Incorrect: *a woman whom I think is a genius*
In this case *whom* is not the object of *I think*. Put *I think* at the end and witness the folly: *a woman whom is a genius, I think*.
Correct: *a woman* ***who*** *I think is a genius*

Learn to spot and avoid this too-common pitfall.

WHOEVER VS. WHOMEVER

To determine whether to use *whoever* or *whomever*, the *he/him* rule in the previous section applies:

he = whoever
him = whomever

Rule 1. The presence of *whoever* or *whomever* indicates a dependent clause. Use *whoever* or *whomever* to agree with the verb in that dependent clause, regardless of the rest of the sentence.

Examples: *Give it to* ***whoever****/whomever asks for it first*.
He asks for it first. Therefore, *whoever* is correct.
*We will hire whoever/****whomever*** *you recommend*.
You recommend *him*. Therefore, *whomever* is correct.
We will hire ***whoever****/whomever is most qualified*.
He is most qualified. Therefore, *whoever* is correct.

Rule 2. When the entire *whoever/whomever* clause is the subject of the verb that follows the clause, analyze the clause to determine whether to use *whoever* or *whomever*.

Examples: *Whoever is elected will serve a four-year term*.
Whoever is the subject of *is elected*. The clause *whoever is elected* is the subject of *will serve*.
Whomever you elect will serve a four-year term.
Whomever is the object of *elect*. *Whomever you elect* is the subject of *will serve*.

A word to the wise: *Whomever* is even more of a vogue word than *whom*. Many use it indiscriminately to sound cultured, figuring that no one will know any better.

WHO, THAT, WHICH

Rule 1. *Who* and sometimes *that* refer to people. *That* and *which* refer to groups or things.

Examples: *Anya is the one **who** rescued the bird.*
*"The Man **That** Got Away" is a great song with a grammatical title.*
*Lokua is on the team **that** won first place.*
*She belongs to a great organization, **which** specializes in saving endangered species.*

Rule 2a. *That* introduces what is called an **essential clause**. Essential clauses add information that is vital to the point of the sentence.

Example: *I do not trust products **that** claim "all natural ingredients" because this phrase can mean almost anything.*
We would not know the type of products being discussed without the *that* clause.

Rule 2b. *Which* introduces a **nonessential clause**, which adds supplementary information.

Example: *The product claiming "all natural ingredients," **which** appeared in the Sunday newspaper, is on sale.*
The product is already identified. Therefore, *which* begins a nonessential clause containing additional, but not essential, information.

NOTE

Essential clauses do not have commas introducing or surrounding them, whereas nonessential clauses are introduced or surrounded by commas.

Rule 3. If *that* has already appeared in a sentence, writers sometimes use *which* to introduce the next clause, whether it is essential or nonessential. This is done to avoid awkward formations.

Example: *That which doesn't kill you makes you stronger.*
This sentence is far preferable to the ungainly but technically correct *That that doesn't kill you makes you stronger.*

NOTE

The distinction between *that* and *which*, though a useful guideline, is widely disregarded: *Which* is routinely used in place of *that*, even by great writers and journalists, perhaps because it sounds more elegant.

ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Definitions

- An **adjective** is a word or set of words that **modifies** (i.e., describes) a noun or pronoun. Adjectives may come before the word they modify.

  Examples: *That is a **cute** puppy.*
  *She likes a **high school** senior.*

Adjectives may also follow the word they modify:

Examples: *That puppy looks **cute**.*
*The technology is **state-of-the-art**.*

- An **adverb** is a word or set of words that modifies verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.

  Examples: *He speaks **slowly*** (modifies the verb *speaks*)
  *He is **especially** clever* (modifies the adjective *clever*)
  *He speaks **all too** slowly* (modifies the adverb *slowly*)

An adverb answers how, when, where, or to what extent—how often or how much (e.g., *daily, completely*).

Examples: *He speaks **slowly*** (answers the question *how*)
*He speaks **very** slowly* (answers the question *how slowly*)

Rule 1. Many adverbs end in *-ly*, but many do not. Generally, if a word can have *-ly* added to its adjective form, place it there to form an adverb.

Examples: *She thinks quick/**quickly***.
How does she think? *Quickly*.
*She is a **quick**/quickly thinker*.
Quick is an adjective describing *thinker*, so no *-ly* is attached.
*She thinks **fast**/fastly*.
Fast answers the question *how*, so it is an adverb. But *fast* never has *-ly* attached to it.
*We performed bad/**badly***.
Badly describes *how* we performed, so *-ly* is added.

Rule 2. Adverbs that answer the question *how* sometimes cause grammatical problems. It can be a challenge to determine if *-ly* should be attached. Avoid the trap of *-ly* with linking verbs, such as *taste, smell, look, feel*, etc., that pertain to the senses. Adverbs are often misplaced in such sentences, which require adjectives instead.

Examples: *Roses smell **sweet**/sweetly*.
Do the roses actively smell with noses? No; in this case, *smell* is a linking verb—which requires an adjective to modify *roses*—so no *-ly*.
*The woman looked **angry**/angrily to us*.
Did the woman look with her eyes, or are we describing her appearance? We are describing her appearance (she appeared angry), so no *-ly*.
*The woman looked angry/**angrily** at the paint splotches*.
Here the woman actively looked (used her eyes), so the *-ly* is added.
*She feels **bad**/badly about the news*.
She is not feeling with fingers, so no *-ly*.

Rule 3. The word *good* is an adjective, whose adverb equivalent is *well*.

Examples: *You did a good job*.
Good describes the job.
You did the job well.
Well answers *how*.
You smell good today.
Good describes your fragrance, not how you smell with your nose, so using the adjective is correct.
You smell well for someone with a cold.
You are actively smelling with your nose here, so use the adverb.

Rule 4. The word *well* can be an adjective, too. When referring to health, we often use *well* rather than *good*.

Examples: *You do not look well today*.
I don't feel well, either.

Rule 5. Adjectives come in three forms, also called **degrees**. An adjective in its normal or usual form is called a **positive degree adjective**. There are also the **comparative** and **superlative** degrees, which are used for comparison, as in the following examples:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
sweet	*sweeter*	*sweetest*
bad	*worse*	*worst*
efficient	*more efficient*	*most efficient*

A common error in using adjectives and adverbs arises from using the wrong form of comparison. To compare two things, always use a **comparative** adjective:

Example: *She is the **cleverer** of the two women* (never *cleverest*)

The word *cleverest* is what is called the **superlative** form of *clever*. Use it only when comparing three or more things:

Example: *She is the **cleverest** of them all*.

Incorrect: *Chocolate or vanilla: which do you like best?*
Correct: *Chocolate or vanilla: which do you like **better**?*

Rule 6. **There are also three degrees of adverbs**. In formal usage, do not drop the *-ly* from an adverb when using the comparative form.

Incorrect: *She spoke quicker than he did*.
Correct: *She spoke **more quickly** than he did*.
Incorrect: *Talk quieter*.
Correct: *Talk **more quietly***.

Rule 7. When *this, that, these*, and *those* are followed by a noun, they are adjectives. When they appear without a noun following them, they are pronouns.

Examples: *This house is for sale*.
This is an adjective.
This is for sale.
This is a pronoun.

PREPOSITIONS

Definition

- A **preposition** is a word that indicates location (*in, near, beside*) or some other relationship (*about, after, besides*) between a noun or pronoun and other parts of the sentence. A preposition isn't a preposition unless it goes with a related noun or pronoun, called the **object of the preposition**.

Examples: *Let's meet before noon*.
Before is a preposition; *noon* is its object.
We've never met before.
There is no object; *before* is an adverb modifying *met*.

Rule 1. A preposition generally, but not always, goes before its noun or pronoun. One of the undying myths of English grammar is that you may not end a sentence with a preposition. But look at the first example that follows. No one should feel compelled to say, or even write, *That is something with which I cannot agree*. Just do not use extra prepositions when the meaning is clear without them.

Correct: *That is something I cannot agree* ***with***.
Correct: *Where did you get this?*
Incorrect: *Where did you get this* ***at****?*
Correct: *How many of you can I depend* ***on****?*
Correct: *Where did he go?*
Incorrect: *Where did he go* ***to****?*

Rule 2a. The preposition *like* means "similar to" or "similarly to." It should be followed by an object of the preposition (noun, pronoun, noun phrase), not by a subject and verb. Rule of thumb: Avoid *like* when a verb is involved.

Correct: *You look like your mother*.
That is, you look *similar to* her. (*Mother* is the object of the preposition *like*.)
Incorrect: *You look like your mother does*.
(Avoid *like* with noun + verb.)

Rule 2b. Instead of *like*, use *as, as if, as though*, or *the way* when following a comparison with a subject and verb.

Correct: *You look **the way** your mother does*.
Incorrect: *Do like I ask*. (No one would say *Do similarly to I ask*.)
Correct: *Do **as** I ask*.
Incorrect: *You look like you're angry*.
Correct: *You look **as if** you're angry*. (**OR *as though***)

Some speakers and writers, to avoid embarrassment, use *as* when they mean *like*. The following incorrect sentence came from a grammar guide:

Incorrect: *They are considered as any other English words*.
Correct: *They are considered as any other English words would be*.
Correct: *They are considered to be like any other English words*.

Remember: *like* means "similar to" or "similarly to"; *as* means "in the same manner that." Rule of thumb: Do not use *as* unless there is a verb involved.

Incorrect: *I, as most people, try to use good grammar*.
Correct: *I, **like** most people, try to use good grammar*.
Correct: *I, **as** most people **do**, try to use good grammar*.

NOTE

The rule distinguishing *like* from *as, as if, as though*, and *the way* is increasingly ignored, but English purists still insist upon it.

Rule 3. The preposition *of* should never be used in place of the helping verb *have*.

Correct: *I should have done it*.
Incorrect: *I should of done it*.

Rule 4. Follow *different* with the preposition *from*. Things differ *from* other things; avoid *different than*.

Incorrect: *You're different than I am*.
Correct: *You're different from me*.

Rule 5. Use *into* rather than *in* to express motion toward something. Use *in* to tell the location.

Correct: *I swam in the pool.*
Correct: *I walked into the house.*
Correct: *I looked into the matter.*
Incorrect: *I dived in the water.*
Correct: *I dived into the water.*
Incorrect: *Throw it in the trash.*
Correct: *Throw it into the trash.*

EFFECTIVE WRITING

Rule 1. Use concrete rather than vague language.

Vague: *The weather was of an extreme nature on the West Coast.*
This sentence raises frustrating questions: When did this extreme weather occur? What does "of an extreme nature" mean? Where on the West Coast did this take place?
Concrete: *California had unusually cold weather last week.*

Rule 2. Use **active voice** whenever possible. Active voice means the subject is performing the verb. **Passive voice** means the subject receives the action.

Active: *Barry hit the ball.*
Passive: *The ball was hit.*

Notice that the party responsible for the action—in the previous example, whoever hit the ball—may not even appear when using passive voice. So passive voice is a useful option when the responsible party is not known.

Example: *My watch was stolen.*

NOTE

The passive voice has often been criticized as something employed by people in power to avoid responsibility:

Example: *Mistakes were made.*
Translation: *I made mistakes.*

Rule 3. Avoid overusing *there is, there are, it is, it was*, etc.

Example: *There is a case of meningitis that was reported in the newspaper.*
Revision: *A case of meningitis was reported in the newspaper.*
Even better: *The newspaper reported a case of meningitis.* (Active voice)

Example: *It is important to signal before making a left turn.*
Revision: *Signaling before making a left turn is important.*
OR
Signaling before a left turn is important.
OR
You should signal before making a left turn.

Example: *There are some revisions that must be made.*
Revision: *Some revisions must be made.* (Passive voice)
Even better: *Please make some revisions.* (Active voice)

Rule 4. To avoid confusion (and pompousness), don't use two negatives to make a positive without good reason.

Unnecessary: *He is not unwilling to help.*
Better: *He is willing to help.*

Sometimes a *not un-* construction may be desirable, perhaps even necessary:

Example: *The book is uneven but not uninteresting.*

However, the novelist-essayist George Orwell warned of its abuse with this deliberately silly sentence: "A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field."

Rule 5. Use consistent grammatical form when offering several ideas. This is called **parallel construction**.

Correct: *I admire people who are honest, reliable, and sincere.*
Note that *are* applies to and makes sense with each of the three adjectives at the end.
Incorrect: *I admire people who are honest, reliable, and have sincerity.*
In this version, *are* does not make sense with *have sincerity*, and *have sincerity* doesn't belong with the two adjectives *honest* and *reliable*.

Correct: *You should check your spelling, grammar, and punctuation*.
Note that *check your* applies to and makes sense with each of the three nouns at the end.

Incorrect: *You should check your spelling, grammar, and punctuate properly*.
Here, *check your* does not make sense with *punctuate properly*, and *punctuate properly* doesn't belong with the two nouns *spelling* and *grammar*. The result is a jarringly inept sentence.

Rule 6. Word order can make or ruin a sentence. If you start a sentence with an incomplete phrase or clause, such as *While crossing the street* or *Forgotten by history*, it must be followed closely by the person or thing it describes. Furthermore, that person or thing is always the main subject of the sentence. Breaking this rule results in the dreaded, all-too-common **dangling modifier**, or **dangler**.

Dangler: *Forgotten by history, his autograph was worthless*.
The problem: *his autograph* shouldn't come right after *history*, because *he* was forgotten, not his autograph.

Correct: *He was forgotten by history, and his autograph was worthless*.

Dangler: *Born in Chicago, my first book was about the 1871 fire*.
The problem: the sentence wants to say *I* was born in Chicago, but to a careful reader, it says that *my first book* was born there.

Correct: *I was born in Chicago, and my first book was about the 1871 fire*.

Adding *-ing* to a verb (as in *crossing* in the example that follows) results in a versatile word called a **participle**, which can be a noun, adjective, or adverb. Rule 6 applies to all sentences with a participle in the beginning. Participles require placing the actor immediately after the opening phrase or clause.

Dangler: *While crossing the street, the bus hit her*. (Wrong: the bus was not crossing.)

Correct: *While crossing the street, she was hit by a bus*.
OR
She was hit by a bus while crossing the street.

Rule 7. Place descriptive words and phrases as close as is practical to the words they modify.

Ill-advised: *I have a cake that Mollie baked in my lunch bag.*
Cake is too far from *lunch bag*, making the sentence ambiguous and silly.
Better: *In my lunch bag is a cake that Mollie baked.*

Rule 8. A sentence fragment is usually an oversight, or a bad idea. It occurs when you have only a phrase or dependent clause but are missing an independent clause.

Sentence fragment: *After the show ended.*
Full sentence: *After the show ended, we had coffee.*