



The section **English Skills** will present a variety of problem areas students have chosen as the ‘best and most beautiful’. You can either read the whole section and benefit immensely, or click onto only the areas you really want to know about and benefit in smaller bits.

1. What is a sentence – don’t you know either?

All academic writing is based on sentences. In other forms of communication it is often acceptable to speak or write in any form that gets the meaning across; however, in academic writing your sentences have to be correct. There are many definitions of a sentence, but the following one expresses the meaning quite clearly:

A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought.

Here are some examples:

- Sentence: Jack ran.
- Sentence: Jill ran.
- Sentence: Jack and Jill were late.
- Sentence: Jack and Jill ran up the hill to go to university and to fetch a pail of water on the way back.

As you might have noticed, a **sentence** can be short or long or anything in between, but it has to fulfil the following requirements.

- 1. It has to have a subject (noun or pronoun). This is usually the person, thing or concept that does the action in the sentence and is called the actor. It tells who or what the sentence is about.**

Example: Jack ran.
Jill ran.
Jack and Jill ran.
The hill is steep.
The well has good water.
Running is good for you.



- 2. It has to have a predicate (verb or verb phrase). This is usually the action that the actor does. It describes what the subject is or is doing.**

Example: Jack ran.
Jill ran.
Jill is taller than Jack.

The words 'ran' and 'is' are the **verbs** because they tell us what Jack and Jill are up to.

- 3. It has to express a complete thought.**

That means that the sentence should supply enough information so that you are satisfied. If the sentence reads like the following examples, you would know that something is missing (I hope):

Because Jack and Jill were running up the hill.

Jack and Jill are.

Running up the hill in order to go to university.

Here are some more examples of **subjects** and **verbs** in a complete sentence:

Subject	Verb	
Jill	runs	to the well.
The well	is located	on top of a hill.
It	is	full of water.
Jack and Jill	are exhausted	when they get to the well.
Jill	shouts.	
	Be careful!	



In a sentence the subject comes after the verb. However, sometimes the roles are reversed, i.e. in questions:

Then it looks like this:

Verb	Subject	Verb	
Are	Jack and Jill	running	up the hill?
Don't	they	know	that it is exhausting?

To find the subject, ask yourself:

- “ What word is the sentence describing?”
- “ Who or what is doing the action in the sentence?”

To find the **subject** in a question, turn the question into a statement.

- **Jack and Jill** are really running up the hill.
- **They** don't know that it is exhausting.

To find the verb ask yourself: “ What did the subject do?”

- Jack and Jill **ran** up the hill.
- They **don't know** that it is exhausting.

There are two basic kinds of sentences. They are often called ‘clause’(there is no intended relation to Santa!).

The first kind is called an **independent clause**:

An **independent clause** is a complete sentence because it has a **subject** and a **verb** and expresses **a complete thought**.

The second kind is called a **dependent clause**:

A **dependent clause** has a **subject** and a **verb** but does **not** express **a complete thought**. It needs to be combined with an independent clause to be elevated to real sentence status.



Here are some examples of **independent** clauses.

Independent clause:

- The moon was big and round that night.
- The frogs had a croaking contest.
- Aunt Jane had a wart on her nose.
- You fetch a pail of water.
- The fairy godmother supplies the glass slippers.

As you can see, they are all good sentences with subjects and verb forms, and they express a complete thought.

The relative of the independent clause is the dependent clause. It is usually incomplete because of the **dependent marker** (words such as while, because, since) which is also called a **subordinating conjunction**.

Even though you might have a perfectly perfect sentence with a subject and a verb, the very presence of the **dependent marker** spoils all the fun. Suddenly the sentence loses its status and is downgraded to a dependent clause. It can look like this:

Dependent clause:

- **Because** the moon was big and round that night.
- **While** the frogs had a croaking contest.
- **Even though** Aunt Jane had a wart on her nose.
- **When** you fetch a pail of water.
- **Until** the fairy godmother supplies the glass slippers.

As you can see, these sentences should not be left alone because they simply don't complete the idea. However, if you combine them with an independent clause, everybody is happy again, and you get a **complex sentence**.

A complex sentence consists of at least one **dependent** and one **independent** clause and can look like this: (the dependent part is underlined)

- Because the moon was big and round that night, the fairies had to close their windows.



- While the frogs had a croaking contest, I couldn't get any sleep.
- Even though Aunty Jane had a wart on her nose, nobody knew she was a wicked witch.
- When you fetch a pail of water, you had better be careful not to fall down.
- Until the fairy godmother supplies the glass slippers, Cinderella won't even think about going to the party.

Of course you can reverse the order of the dependent and independent clauses; you'll still have a complex sentence. Then it looks like this:

- The fairies had to close their windows because the moon was big and round that night,
- I couldn't get any sleep while the frogs had a croaking contest.
- Nobody knew she was a wicked witch even though Aunty Jane had a wart on her nose.
- You had better be careful not to fall down when you fetch a pail of water.
- Cinderella won't even think about going to the party until the fairy godmother supplies the glass slippers.

If you have been very perceptive, you might have noticed that the punctuation varies according to which part of the sentence comes first. There is more information in the punctuation section on this phenomenon.

By now you might have started to wonder what happens if you put two **independent** clauses together. Well, if you put two independent clauses together, you'll get one big and happy **compound sentence**.

A **compound sentence** can look like this:

Cinderella really wants to stop cleaning out the ashes, but her stepmother has other ideas.

The two stepsisters are looking forward to going to the party, and Cinderella sits in the corner and sulks.



Everybody knows that mice can't sew dresses; however, the fairy godmother has always been the other option for getting clothes.

The glass slippers look absolutely gorgeous; nonetheless, they are killing your feet.

The parts of a compound sentence could stand alone, but then who wants to be alone all the time? Writing too many short sentences can sound very abrupt. The tricky part when combining independent clauses is the punctuation. However, that will also be dealt with in the punctuation section.

There are other kinds of combinations of dependent and independent clauses with fancy names. If you want to find out more about them, you could enrol in the Study Link Subject 'English Skills for Academic Writing'.

www.csu.edu.au/student/studylink



2. Fragments – It's just not complete

After learning about sentences, you need to know about fragments because for some reason they seem to appear very frequently in students' writing. Remember that a **sentence** expresses a complete thought. In contrast:

A fragment is a group of words that does not express a complete thought and does not contain even one independent clause.

That means something is happening to the sentence that stops it from being complete.

A fragment can occur for several reasons:

1. The subject is missing

Examples:

- Assumes the university is just over the hill.
- Cleaning out the ashes in the fireplace.
- Is nothing but a slimy, cold and warty frog.
- Is becoming absolutely wonderful at whatever he wants to do, including hopping.
- Right behind the refrigerator.

As you can see, even though something gets done in the sentence, there is nobody actually doing it, so the sentence is not complete. To turn it from a fragment into a sentence we need to add the **subject** (and sometimes some other words).

Then it can look like this:

- **Jill assumes** the university is just over the hill.
- **Cinderella** absolutely hates cleaning out the ashes in the fireplace.
- **The wicked stepsister** is cleaning out the ashes in the fireplace.
- **The prince** is nothing but a slimy, cold and warty frog.
- **He** is becoming absolutely wonderful at whatever he wants to do, including hopping.

- **The mice** are living right behind the refrigerator.



Sometimes the **verb** or **part of the verb form** is missing or wrong; then it looks like this:

Examples:

- It in the refrigerator.
- Jack tumbling down the hill.
- Something coming alive in the dark gloomy mist of the woods.
- He gone to find some juicy flies for lunch.

To fix these sentences, we need to add the verb or missing part of the verb form or correct the verb form.

- It **happened** in the refrigerator.
- Jack **was** tumbling down the hill.
- Something **is** coming alive in the dark gloomy mist of the woods.
- He **has** gone to find some juicy flies for lunch.

These are common examples of fragments; however, most frequently a fragment contains a subject and verb, but the **dependent marker** (which is also called a **subordinating conjunction**) turns the perfectly good sentence into a fragment. This has already been mentioned in the section on sentences, but because dependent markers are so pushy and find their way into so many assignments, here they are again.

- **Because** she was so very, very beautiful.
- **When** Jill saw Jack.
- **While** she was sitting in the lecture.
- **Since** Jill and Jack were behaving in a very irresponsible and downright outrageous way by running up the hill trying to fetch a pail of water that really wasn't needed at that time when they should have been studying instead.

This kind of fragment can be fixed in two ways.

1. Take the subordinating conjunction (dependent marker) away.



Once you have taken the **dependent marker** , e.g. because, while, when, since... away, you will find that you have a perfectly good **independent clause**.

Fragment: Because she was so very, very beautiful.

Correct sentence: She was so very, very beautiful.

Fragment: When Jill saw Jack.

Correct sentence: Jill saw Jack

Fragment: While she was sitting in the lecture.

Correct sentence: She was sitting in the lecture.

Fragment: Since Jill and Jack were behaving in a very irresponsible and downright outrageous way by running up the hill trying to fetch a pail of water that really wasn't needed at that time when they should have been studying instead.

Correct sentence: Jill and Jack were behaving in a very irresponsible and downright outrageous way by running up the hill trying to fetch a pail of water that really wasn't needed at that time when they should have been studying instead.

2. Instead of omitting the dependent marker, you can add another independent clause to the dependent clause.

Then it looks like this:

Fragment: Because she was so very, very beautiful.

Correct sentence: Because she was so very, very beautiful, **she could be terribly arrogant at times.**

Fragment: When Jill saw Jack.

Correct sentence: When Jill saw Jack, **she immediately wanted to get more water.**

Fragment: While she was sitting in the lecture.



Correct sentence: While she was sitting in the lecture, **she thought of Jack who was at home with a broken crown.**

Fragment: Since Jill and Jack were behaving in a very irresponsible and downright outrageous way by running up the hill trying to fetch a pail of water that really wasn't needed at that time when they should have been studying instead.

Correct sentence: Since Jill and Jack were behaving in a very irresponsible and downright outrageous way by running up the hill trying to fetch a pail of water that really wasn't needed at that time when they should have been studying instead, **their fall wasn't completely undeserved.**

3. Punctuation the easy way

Most students tell me they are not very good at punctuation, and they are right. It is simply amazing how creative people become when they



believe they should put at least a few commas somewhere. Often they end up in the most interesting places, the commas that is. This generally gets worse when it comes to semicolons. They really present a mystery to most students.

Here are some very basic punctuation rules that should help you avoid the worst pitfalls of comma and semicolon use and abuse.

To understand the following information, it helps if you have read the section on **the sentence**.

If you understand and follow the following rules, you should be able to avoid approximately between 92.5 and 95.7 % of all punctuation errors. The rest nobody will notice anyway.

Rule No 1.

A full stop looks like this : •

A comma looks like this: ,

A semicolon looks like both put together: ;

A semicolon **can** replace a full stop if two sentences are closely related in meaning.

A comma **cannot** replace a full stop or a semicolon.

That can look like this:

The wicked stepmother looked into the mirror. She was developing a pimple on her nose.

Or :

The wicked stepmother looked into the mirror; she was developing a pimple on her nose.

Poisonous apples look very nice and delicious. They definitely give you indigestion though.

Or:



Poisonous apples look very nice and delicious; they definitely give you indigestion though.

Remember: A comma won't be enough in these cases.

Rule No. 2

Put a comma between a dependent clause and an independent clause if the dependent clause comes first.

Remember: an **independent** clause has a subject and a verb and can stand alone because it expresses a complete thought. It is also called “**a simple sentence**”.

A **dependent clause** also has a subject and a verb, but generally contains a **dependent marker**, e.g. because, while, since,... called a **subordinating conjunction**. This word makes it necessary to connect the dependent clause to an independent clause via a comma if the dependent clause comes first.

Here are some examples to make this clearer:

Independent clause: The shoemaker was very poor.

Dependent clause: Because the shoemaker was very poor.

Independent clause: The little elves helped him to upgrade his business.

Dependent clause: After the little elves helped him to upgrade his business.

Independent clause: The shares in the stock market soared.

Dependent clause: While the shares in the stock market soared.

Now, if you combine these sentences with the dependent clause coming first, you'll get:

Because the shoemaker was very poor, the little elves helped him to upgrade his business.



After the little elves helped him to upgrade his business, the shares in the stock market soared.

While the shares in the stock market soared, the shoemaker decided to run for prime minister.

Notice the comma after the dependent clause.

Now comes the tricky part:

When the dependent clause comes **after** the independent clause, you **don't** need to add a comma. This is a secret few people know!
Now I've shared it with you.

This makes the sentence look like this:

The little elves helped the little shoemaker to upgrade his business because he was very poor.

The shares in the stock market soared after the little elves helped the shoemaker to upgrade his business.

The shoemaker decided to run for prime minister while the shares in the stock market soared.

Think of it this way:

The strong independent clause can carry or lead the weaker independent clause without any help.

However, the weaker dependent clause can only pull or lead the independent clause with the help of a comma.

To remember this, you might think of the independent clause as the horses that pull the pumpkin coach without any help. The dependent clause, represented by the pumpkin coach, would need help to pull the horses.

Rule No. 3



If you have two or more independent clauses you can deal with them in four ways.

1. **Use a full stop.** The sentences are happy by themselves.

Examples:

Jack and Jill now take the longer way to university.
Jack has completely recovered from his injury.
Both have decided to use less water from now on.
Walking up the steep hill has kept Jack and Jill fit.

2. **Use a semicolon.** The sentences like a bit of closeness.
Even independent sentences get lonely sometimes.

Jack and Jill now take the longer way to university; Jack has completely recovered from his injury.

Walking up the steep hill has kept Jack and Jill very fit; both have decided to use less water from now on.

3. **Use a coordinating conjunction and a comma.** A **coordinating conjunction** is the big brother or sister of the **subordinating conjunction**. Fortunately, there are only seven of them: **and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet**.

Coordinating conjunctions are always preceded by **a comma** when they connect two **independent clauses**.

Always! Don't forget!

Then it can look like this:

Jack has completely recovered from his injury, **but** he and Jill now take the longer way to university.



Walking up the steep hill has kept Jack and Jill very fit, yet both have decided to use less water from now on.

Jill was very glad that she hadn't been hurt, and Jack had learnt his lesson about being careful when running up the hill.

4. You can also connect two independent clauses with an **independent marker**.

Independent markers are words such as: **therefore, moreover, thus, consequently, however, since.**

Using these words in your academic writing is a very good idea, especially if you get the punctuation right. Generally, in the company of one of the independent markers, you'll find a semicolon and a comma.

Then it looks like this:

Independent clause; **independent marker**, independent clause

The fairy godmother appeared rather late; **however**, she did make up for it in the end.

Cinderella loved the glass slippers; **moreover**, they fitted only her size 10 feet.

The mice were at the wrong time in the wrong place; **consequently**, they got turned into horses.

The pumpkin was turned into a coach; **thus**, its status was greatly elevated for the night.

Rule No. 4

If there is a word, a phrase or a quotation before an independent clause, you put a comma after it, before the independent clause.



It is called an **Introducer comma**.

This means in plain English that most information that is presented before the independent clause is followed by a comma. This can be in the form of a word, a phrase, a clause or a direct quotation.

Here are some examples:

If a word comes before the independent clause, it is followed by a comma:

Consequently, the mice have been traumatised ever since.

Well, the pumpkin tasted absolutely horrible afterwards.

Enthusiastically, the dog kept trying to drive coaches ever after.

Nonetheless, the fairy godmother had saved the day.

If a phrase comes before the independent clause, it is followed by a comma:

A phrase is a series of words that **doesn't** contain a subject or a verb but simply adds information.

As a result, Cinderella made it to the ball just in time.

After a day of sulking and feeling sorry for herself, she had a wonderful time at the party.

Having been warned to return before midnight, she left when the clock struck twelve.

After a night of wearing glass slippers, Cinderella vowed never to look at them again.

If a dependent clause comes before the independent clause, it is followed by a comma. We've already discussed this earlier on; however, here it is again.

Because the prince was dashing and handsome, Cinderella danced with him.



While Cinderella had a great time at the ball, the stepsisters drank too much champagne.

Since the wicked stepmother hadn't been invited to the ball, she stayed home and watched TV.

If a direct quotation comes before the independent clause, it is followed by a comma:

“Oh no,” squeaked the mouse as it was turned into a horse.

“It does fit after all,” said Cinderella when she finally managed to close the zipper on her new dress.

“That was close,” sighed the fairy godmother.

Review:

A comma follows after a word, phrase, a dependent clause or a direct quotation that precedes the independent clause.

Rule No. 5

If you have any information left over after the independent clause, put a comma after the independent clause and in front of the additional information.

This is true for word, phrases, tag questions and direct quotations.

Then it can look like this:

If a word follows an independent clause, you put a comma in front of it.

I want to marry a prince, **too.**



It does have its disadvantages at times, **however**.

I would not want to wear glass slippers, **ever**.

If a phrase follows an independent clause, you put a comma in front of it.

The prince has to listen to peoples problems every day, **for example**.

He really wants to find the girl who stepped on his foot with that glass slipper, **hurting his toe dreadfully**.

He promises to buy her a pair of Hush Puppies, **almost immediately**.

If a tag question follows the independent clause, you put a comma in front of it.

The prince really had to get married, **didn't he?**

Cinderella was really bored with cleaning out fireplaces, **wasn't she?**

They would make a nice couple, **wouldn't they?**

If a direct quotation follows an independent clause, you put a comma in front of it.

The prince asked her, **“Will you marry me?”**

Cinderella answered, **“Okay.”**

The wicked stepmother said to her daughters, **“You'd better clean out the fireplace right now.”**

Rule No. 6



If you need to insert a **phrase or clause** in an independent clause with information that is **essential** to the meaning, you don't need to use any commas.

However, if the meaning is interesting, but **not essential** to the sentence, you put commas at the beginning and the end of that phrase or clause.

Here are some examples:

Essential information:

Sleeping Beauty **who had been cursed by a wicked fairy** had to be very careful not to prick her fingers.

(The information is essential because not all girls called Beauty have been cursed by a wicked fairy.)

Not essential information:

Sleeping Beauty, **who everybody has heard about,** had to be very careful not to prick her fingers.

Essential information:

The wicked fairy **who had cursed Sleeping Beauty** was very annoyed because she had not been invited to the party.

(The information is essential because not all wicked fairies get upset if they are not invited to a party.)

Not essential information:

The wicked fairy, **whose name we can't reveal at this time,** was very annoyed because she had not been invited to the party.

Essential information:

Everybody in the castle **in which Beauty lived** fell asleep for 124 years.

(The information is essential because it tells us in which castle this happened. Fortunately other castles were spared.)



Not essential information:

Everybody in the castle, **including the fleas on the dog**, fell asleep for 124 years.

So, this really wasn't so hard, was it? If you understand and apply these basic rules, you should do well and impress everybody with your grasp of punctuation. However, if you are really intrigued by punctuation rules, you will find further information in the Study Link subject SSS017.

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4. What on earth is a dangling modifier?

If you are ever in need of an impressive conversation topic, how about this: “Do you know what a dangling modifier is?” You’ll be surprised how many crazy ideas people come up with. You might also not be invited to another party.

However, to solve the mystery for you:

A dangling modifier is generally a phrase that describes something that has been left out of the sentence. This can confuse the reader, lead to misunderstandings and be at times very, very funny. To modify something means to give more information about a word or phrase.

Here are some examples to explain what that means.

Try to work out who is or does what in these sentences. If you are confused, you see what havoc those dangling modifiers can create.

- While playing with the golden ball, the frog fell in love with the princess. (Who is playing with the ball?)
- Being wet, green and warty, the princess gave the frog the kiss he needed so badly. (What does the princess look like?)
- Sitting next to her plate during dinner, the princess could hardly eat anything. (Where does the princess sit?)
- Even when sleeping, the frog wouldn’t leave her alone. (What exactly are the sleeping arrangements?)

Do you get the idea? Most people don’t write this kind of sentences on purpose, but they happen quite frequently. Yet, there is good news.

You can correct a dangling modifier by inserting the noun or pronoun in the sentence that the modifier (the additional information) describes. That way the modifier stops dangling, and it becomes clear who or what the information relates to.

Here are some examples:



- While **the princess** was playing with the golden ball, the frog fell in love with her.
- Even though **the frog** was wet, green and warty, the princess gave the frog the kiss he needed so badly.
- With **the frog** sitting next to her plate during dinner, the princess could hardly eat anything.
- Even when **the princess** was sleeping in her bed, the frog wouldn't leave her alone.

The main thing to remember is to check your sentences carefully. Just because you know what you want to say, it doesn't mean the reader does.

5. A misplaced modifier isn't any better



A close relative of the dangling modifier is the misplaced modifier. It is a phrase, clause or word that is placed too far from the word or words it modifies. To modify a word means to give more information about it.

Here are some examples:

- The wicked fairy put a spell on Beauty because she was not invited to the party. (Who was invited to the party?)
- Beauty pricked her finger on a spindle in the attic which was very sharp and put her to sleep for 124 years. (How many sharp attics have you been in lately?)
- After 124 years a prince cut through the briars around the castle and kissed Beauty with his sword which woke her up. (An interesting way of kissing.)

Misplaced Modifiers can be corrected by putting the modifier as close as possible to the word or phrase it is describing.

Here are some examples:

- Because the wicked fairy was not invited to the party, she put a spell on Beauty.
- Beauty pricked her finger on a sharp spindle in the attic, and this put her to sleep for 124 years.
- After 124 years, a prince cut through the briars around the castle with his sword and kissed Beauty, which woke her up.

6. Pronouns for pros – how to avoid confusion

As you have seen in the previous section, it is quite easy to confuse your reader. Even after you have mastered the dangling and misplaced



modifiers, you still need to be aware of another culprit called the **pronoun**.

Pronouns are words such as **I, you, he, she, it, they, we**. They are used in place of a noun or a name. Even though you might have mentioned something or somebody's name in the previous sentence, it can be quite confusing if you only refer to it by using a pronoun in the following sentence. This happens often in continuous texts.

The story continues:

After 124 years a prince cut through the briars around the castle with his sword and kissed Beauty, which woke her up.

Here are some (confusing) examples:

- The wicked fairy was angry that she not only got kissed by the prince but that he also wanted to marry her. (Who was getting kissed and married?)
- After all this time, she was getting quite old and had lots of wrinkles in her face. (Who is getting old?)
- They really were amazingly happy together. (Who was happy?)

As you can see, even though you might have all the information clear in your mind, it can be confusing for the reader. The golden rule in this case is, repeat the name of the person or object if necessary to avoid confusion.

Suddenly the previous sentences become much clearer:

- The wicked fairy was angry that **Sleeping Beauty** not only got kissed by the prince but that he also wanted to marry her.
- After all this time, **the wicked fairy** was getting quite old and had lots of wrinkles in her face.
- **Sleeping Beauty** and **the prince** really were amazingly happy together.

Of all the pronouns, the No. 1 offender, however, is "it". It can be really confusing.



Look at the following text and try to work out what “it” stands for.

The castle lay dreaming in the fading daylight. It was sombre and gloomy. A short, balding shape was approaching the castle on its horse. The black crows were cawing a warning, but it didn't appear to notice. It was still continuing on its way. Suddenly a horrible screeching noise shattered its peace. The figure, now revealed as a prince, had drawn its sword and was galloping towards it.

Well, have you worked out what all the **it** and **its** refer to?

Here is a better version:

The castle lay dreaming in the fading daylight. It was a sombre and gloomy **day**. A short, balding shape was approaching the castle on its horse. The black crows were cawing a warning, but **the rider** didn't appear to notice. **He** was still continuing on **his** way. Suddenly a horrible screeching noise shattered the peace **of the castle**. The figure, now revealed as a prince, had drawn **his** sword and was galloping towards **the castle**.

See how much clearer the second version is. Guess which version your lecturer would prefer (if your assignment were about Sleeping Beauty that is).

7. Tense - it's about time

One of the problems lecturers encounter is mixed up tenses. The word 'tense' refers to the form a verb takes to show the time when an action happened. Tenses in the English language can be confusing. Not only does the English language have tenses to express whether an event happened now, in the past, or in the future, but we also have tenses that



express whether an action is ongoing (continuous) or how it relates to other reference points in time (perfect tenses). All of those can be put in the passive and active voice.

Nonetheless, even though this sounds very complicated, native speakers use all of these tenses correctly and with flair, and others simply have to learn all of this. The main problem **all** students have is that they sometimes get confused about which tense to use, and/ or they mix up the tenses in an unacceptable way.

The main focus of this section will be to help you avoid unacceptable mixtures in academic writing. However, just to refresh your memory, here is a short explanation and a table of how the verb form changes depending on the different tenses.

Present Tenses:		
Simple present	I <u>spin</u> straw into gold. (quite often, whenever I feel like it)	Expresses general truth, unchanging or complete events in the present time (now).
Simple present continuous	I <u>am spinning</u> straw into gold. (as we speak)	Actions are developing or happening now.
Present perfect	I <u>have spun</u> straw into gold. (I have finished now, but I remember clearly)	An event that started in the past and is still connected to the present.
Present perfect continuous	I <u>have been spinning</u> straw into gold. (I have done this for the last three hours; my fingers still hurt)	Connects the past with the present- the effect is still noticeable.
Past Tenses:		
Simple past	I <u>span</u> straw into gold. (during my last holiday)	Completed action or event in the past.
Simple past continuous	I <u>was spinning</u> straw	An interrupted



	into gold. (..when my mother brought me a cup of coffee)	action or event in the past
Past perfect	I <u>had spun</u> straw into gold. (when the prince came for a visit)	A complete action or event in the past that happened before another point in the past.
Past perfect continuous	I <u>had been spinning</u> straw into gold. (when I suddenly remembered that my favourite show was on TV)	An event that happened in the past before another event in the past and the effects are still noticeable.
<u>Future Tenses:</u>		
Simple future	I <u>will spin</u> straw into gold. (I promise)	States an event in the future that I know will happen.
Simple future continuous	I <u>will be spinning</u> straw into gold. (next Monday at 2 am)	Fixed arrangements in the future.
Future perfect	I <u>will have spun</u> straw into gold. (by the time my favourite TV show starts)	An event in the future that will have happened before another event in the future.
Future perfect continuous	I <u>will have been spinning</u> straw into gold. (for about three hours before my favourite TV program starts – and I can just imagine what my fingers will feel like)	An event in the future that is still ongoing when another event will happen.

This should give you an idea how to use the tenses. However, if you want more information on the tenses as such and how to form them, follow the links below:



http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/grammar/g_seqtense.html

<http://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/verbtenseintro.html>

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/sequence.htm>

If you do know enough about tenses now, here is an example of a paragraph where tenses are mixed up. The names of the tenses used will be given just to give you an idea of what to call all of those verb forms.

Example:

On a beautiful day in the summer of 2006, Alberta the miller's daughter is being called (*present continuous*) by her father. The king had arrived (*past perfect*) because he hears (*simple present*) that Alberta can spin (*present tense*) straw into gold. Her father had been bragging (*past perfect continuous*) again, badly this time.

Since the king was (*past tense*) very stupid and very greedy, he actually believes (*present tense*) the story. He tells (*present tense*) Alberta to spin that gold or die. She, understandably, was (*past tense*) very upset and has (*present tense*) no idea what to do. First, she threw (*past tense*) a tantrum, then she cries (*present tense*) even though that makes (*present tense*) her eyes all puffy and red.

As you can see, past tenses and present tenses have been mixed up. Of course, at times, depending on the content of the story, that is quite acceptable, especially if you use the present tense, the present continuous and the present perfect together as has been done in the following example:

Example:

As she is finishing (*present continuous*) her third cup of coffee for the morning, Alberta hears (*present tense*) somebody shouting for her, a noise that has been getting (*present perfect continuous*) louder and more persistent.

In this case, the mixing of the tenses is consistent with the meaning of the sentence. All the events are happening in the present tense; the coffee drinking is an ongoing action, when another event interrupts (she finally hears her dad). At the same time, Alberta becomes aware that the noise of her father's shouting has been happening for a while.

Now here is the rewritten previous story in a consistent time frame.



Example:

On a beautiful day in the summer of 2006, Alberta the miller's daughter is being called (*present continuous*) by her father. The king has arrived (*present perfect*) because he has heard (*present perfect*) that Alberta can spin (*present tense*) straw into gold. Her father has been bragging (*present perfect continuous*) again, badly this time.

Since the king is (*present tense*) very stupid and very greedy, he actually believes (*present tense*) the story. He tells (*present tense*) Alberta to spin that gold or die. She, understandably, is (*present tense*) very upset and has (*present tense*) no idea what to do. First, she throws (*present tense*) a tantrum, then she cries (*present tense*) even though that makes (*present tense*) her eyes all puffy and red.

In this case the story could be written in the present tense or the past tense as long as the tense is consistent. Using the present tense can make the story more immediate; however, when an action definitely took place in the past, it can also be written in the past.

Here is an example of Rumpelstilzchen writing about his experience in the past tense.

On Friday, 21. June 2006, I awoke at 1 am. It was cold and rainy outside. I knew I had a job to do. I went to the barn at the palace and found a rather pretty girl sitting on a bail of straw. Her eyes were puffy and red from crying that had obviously gone on for some time. There were also a lot of used tissues on the ground. I quickly assessed the situation, stated my demands and began to spin about 25 bales of straw into gold. To my relief, the girl stopped sobbing rather soon and fell asleep. I finished the task at 4:30 am, well in time for a well-deserved breakfast. Once again, I had successfully put theory into practice.

In contrast to this rather formal report, here is what Rumpilstilzchen wrote in his journal a year later:

Today is the day when I am getting my reward for all the gold spinning I did last year. I am so excited. I hope nothing goes wrong and the queen doesn't know my name. I dress carefully, wait for the right moment when the queen is alone, and appear in a very dramatic puff of smoke. "I have come to demand my payment. I want your daughter," I demand in a deep and, may I say so, sonorous voice. Frankly, I am not sure what to do with a baby, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.



This account has been written mainly in the present tense to make the story more immediate, except for the part where logic demanded the past tense.

In contrast to this rather personal account, here is a more scientific piece of writing written in the present tense. Because it is a scientific and academic piece of writing, the passive voice has been used frequently.

Spinning straw into gold is an art that is based on an understanding of quantum physics. At the level of the subatomic particles, all elements are broken down into even smaller forms of energy. Complete focus of the mind of a participant changes the frequency of any particular particle and can reprogram it with the desired new information. In this case, organic matter is turned into a metal. The monotonous action of a repetitive movement, such as spinning, helps the participant to focus his/her mind on the task thus affecting the quantum field to achieve the desired outcome. Distractions, such as crying girls, should be avoided.

In your studies, for example, you might be asked to write a case study or about your experience at a practicum. In that case you can choose which tense seems more appropriate. In most kinds of writing it will be obvious which tense you have to use. The main thing to remember here is that if you are in doubt, you should ask your lecturer. Once you have decided which tense to use, you need to use it consistently.



8. The passive voice has been abused

Being passive means usually that somebody watches while others do all the work. This is fairly similar when it comes to grammar.

To explain the **passive voice**, let's first understand its partner, the **active voice**.

Remember from the previous sections, which you might or might not have read, that a sentence consists of at least a **subject** and a **verb**. The **subject** is the person, object or concept who/which performed the action in the sentence and was therefore also called **the actor**. The **verb** shows what is happening in the sentence.

Generally, there is also somebody or something which **receives the action** and is called the **object**.

In the sentence, "Bertha kisses the frog", Bertha is the actor, or actress in this case, who does all the kissing. Now, kissing without somebody to kiss is rather boring, so Bertha kisses the frog who might or might not enjoy being acted on.

Then it looks like this:

<u>subject</u>	<u>verb</u>	<u>object</u>
Bertha	kisses	the frog.
The frog	finds	the golden ball.



I don't kiss frogs.

Sometimes the person, object etc. who performs the action is not as important as the object that receives the action, which brings us to the **passive voice**.

In that case, the **subject** and **object** trade places. Then it looks like this:

<u>Object</u>	<u>verb</u>	<u>subject</u>
The frog	is kissed	by Bertha.
The golden ball	is found	by the frog.
The frog	is not kissed	by me.

You have to decide whether to use the **active** or the **passive voice**, depending on which part of the sentence you want to emphasise.

It can look like this:

Bertha kisses the frog. (active voice)

or:

The frog is kissed by Bertha. (passive voice)

Especially in academic or scientific writing, the passive voice is often used to focus on the results rather than on the scientists etc. who have done all the work.

Instead of writing:

Mrs. Flog and Mr. Bahl have found proof that frogs don't really turn into princes. (active)

you could write:

Proof has been found by Mrs. Flog and Mr. Bahl that frogs don't really turn into princes. (passive)

In fact, usually the people who have done all the work become so unimportant that they get completely left out of the sentence.



Then it looks like this:

Proof has been found that frogs don't really turn into princes.

As you might have noticed by now, not only do the subject and object trade places and the subject is often made redundant, but the verb form also changes.

Native speakers will do this automatically, while second language learners have to learn the changed verb forms in the different tenses. A list of the changed verb forms has been included for your enjoyment.

Present tense:

Active Voice: Berta kisses the frog.

Passive Voice: The frog has been kissed by Berta.

Present Perfect:

Active Voice: Berta has kissed the frog.

Passive Voice: The frog has been kissed by Berta.

Past Tense:

Active Voice: Berta kissed the frog.

Passive Voice: The frog has been kissed by Berta.

Past Perfect:

Active Voice: Berta had kissed the frog.

Passive Voice: The frog had been kissed by Berta.

Future:



Active Voice: Berta will kiss the frog.

Passive Voice: The frog will be kissed by Berta.

Future Perfect:

Active Voice: Berta will have kissed the frog.

Passive Voice: The frog will have been kissed by Berta.

The passive voice is a useful tool in academic writing even though your grammar checker might try to tell you it is inaccurate to use it. This is not actually true in Australia.

The only reason for the decline in popularity of the passive voice is that it has been overused and sometimes downright abused in the past. Some of the articles you have had to read might have been proof of that.

However, a lot of lecturers don't like you to use the personal pronoun "I" in your writing (unless they give you special permission), so you more or less have to use the passive voice.

Instead of writing:

I will discuss the current trends in transmutation of frogs into princes.
(active)

you could write:

In this essay the current trends in transmutation of frogs into princes will be discussed. (passive)

Or another example:

I will show that it is theoretically possible to change amphibians into aristocrats. (active)

It will be shown by me that it is theoretically possible to change amphibians into aristocrats. (passive)

However, in this case it might be politically advisable to leave out the "by me". It definitely should not appear in academic writing.



9. Parallel Form – It’s about equality

If you want to express a series of ideas that are similar in importance, you have to make sure that the grammatical forms you use are consistent (parallel). This applies to the word, phrase and clause level. What does that mean?

Here is an example:

Not parallel:

The wolf had big eyes, shaggy fur, huge paws and was smiling in a wicked way.

Parallel:

The wolf had big eyes, shaggy fur, huge paws and a wicked smile.

As you can see, the first description suddenly changes form. Instead of continuing with adjectives (big, shaggy, huge) and nouns (eyes, hair, smile), the word forms change completely. They should be similar because they continue with the same idea.

Here are some more examples that show you how this works on all levels, for words, phrases (a group of words that doesn’t have a subject or a verb) or clauses (a group of words that includes a subject and a verb).

Here are some examples:



Word and Phrase level

Not parallel:

Miss Hood was skipping, laughing and picked flowers on the way to her grandmother.

Parallel:

Miss Hood was skipping, laughing and picking flowers on the way to her grandmother.

In the above example, all the verb forms should be the same and be grammatically consistent with the auxiliary verb form 'was'.

More examples:

Not parallel:

She was on the way to see her grandmother who liked to drink wine, to eat chocolates and smelling the flowers her granddaughter brought her.

Parallel:

She was on the way to see her grandmother who liked to drink wine, to eat chocolates and to smell the flowers her granddaughter brought her.

Again, all verbs should have the same form and be preceded by 'to'. It is not always necessary to add 'to' to every verb, but you definitely should not change the verb form from "to smell" to 'smelling'.

Not parallel

The wolf fooled Miss Hood into believing he was her grandmother because he was wearing her nightgown, was sitting in her bed with a box of chocolates in front of him and the TV was on.

Parallel

The wolf fooled Miss Hood into believing he was her grandmother because he was wearing her nightgown, was sitting in her bed with a box of chocolates in front of him and was watching TV.



Not parallel

The wolf had swallowed the grandmother easily, quickly and without pain.

Parallel

The wolf had swallowed the grandmother easily, quickly and painlessly.

Clauses

Not Parallel

After the ranger saved Miss Hood and her grandmother, he told them that they should never let a wolf into their house, that they should check visitors or pretend grandmothers for hairy paws and shaggy fur, and call 000 on their mobile phones in case of an emergency.

Parallel

After the ranger saved Miss Hood and her grandmother, he told them that they should never let a wolf into their house, that they should check visitors or pretend grandmothers for hairy paws and shaggy fur, and that they should call 000 on their mobile phones in case of an emergency.

Another area where students often mix grammatical forms is when they are writing a list or dot points.

Here are some examples:

In the morning Miss Hood made a list of things to remember. These included:

- To visit grandmother
- Make sure to pick flowers on the way
- Buying some more red wine
- Remember to be careful of the wolf

A much better list would look like this:



- Visit grandmother
- Make sure to pick flowers on the way
- Buy some more wine
- Remember to be careful of the wolf

As you can see, it is important to check for grammatical consistency and to make sure that all the words, phrases and clauses are parallel if you have a series of ideas that are all at the same level of importance.



10. The happy ending – Subject – verb agreement

Subjects and verbs are definitely the most important participants in a sentence. Remember, the subject is the actor or acting concept in a sentence, and the verb does all the work and tells us what the subject is doing. They are always together. Therefore, it is very important that these two agree.

No matter what happens in their private life, they have to follow the rule that:

A **singular** subject takes a **singular** verb.

and

A **plural** subject takes a **plural** verb.

How do you recognise whether a subject or a verb is singular (one) or plural (more than one)?

One of the clues, apart from common sense, is in the “s”.

If a verb or the auxiliary verbs ends with “s”, it is singular. Auxiliary verbs are words such as: has, is, was.

If a subject ends with “s”, it is generally plural.

If that confuses you, the singular verb follows the pronouns: he, she, it.

Here is an example that shows the singular subject and its corresponding verbform:

Singular subject and verb:

Present tense	Present Perfect	Past tense form of ‘to be’
She loves <u>s</u>	She has <u>s</u> loved	She was <u>s</u> pretty
He loves <u>s</u>	He has <u>s</u> loved	He was <u>s</u> pretty
It loves <u>s</u>	It has <u>s</u> loved	It was <u>s</u> pretty



The plural verb follows the pronouns: they, we, you

Plural subject and verb

Present tense	Present Perfect	Past tense form of 'to be'
They love We love	They have loved We have loved	They were pretty We were pretty

Most of the time, subject-verb agreement is fairly easy. However, there are a few situations when this can be confusing.

Here are some rules:

- 1. When the subject consists of two or more nouns or pronouns and is connected by "and", you need to use a plural verb.**

Examples:

- The mice **and** Cinderella **are** busy.
- Cinderella **and** the mice **are doing** a lot of work.
- Petunia **and** John **are sewing** the dress.

- 2. When the subject consists of two singular nouns and is connected by either, or, neither, nor, use a singular verb.**

Examples:

- Petunia **or** John **have been doing** the shopping.
- **Either** the stepsister **or** Cinderella **is going to marry** the prince.
- **Neither** one sister **nor** the other one **is** very nice.

- 3. When a compound subject is mixed with one singular and one plural noun and connected with neither, nor, either or, the verb agrees with the subject nearer to it.**



Examples:

- **Either** the pumpkin or the **mice are** getting the main role in the tale.
- **Either** the mice or the **pumpkin is** getting the main role in the tale.
- **Either** the prince or the parents are having a nervous breakdown.
- **Either** the parents or the prince is having a nervous breakdown.

4. Don't be confused by plural or singular words in a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb.

Examples:

- **The main problem** of the wicked stepsisters **is** the glass slipper.
- **An important character**, apart from the mice, **is** the pumpkin.
- **The fairy godmother**, with her passion for shoes, **is** in the right place at the right time.
- **The stepsisters**, who are not really related to Cinderella, **have** smelly feet.
- **The pumpkin**, who has serious adjustment problems, **has** suddenly gained status.
- **The dog**, after having seen what happened to the mice, **is** scared of fairy godmothers.

5. Some pronouns point back to another pronoun or noun used earlier. The word to which the pronoun refers is called the antecedent. The personal pronoun must agree with its antecedent in person, gender and number.

Examples:

- **The fairy godmother** waves **her** wand frantically.
- **The mice** finally offer **their** help to Cinderella.
- **The prince** drives everybody crazy with **his** search for the owner of the glass slipper.
- **The pumpkin** sees **his** psychologist almost every day.

6. The pronouns each, everyone, everybody, anyone, anybody, someone, and somebody are singular. Don't get confused by what follows after them.



Examples:

- **Each** of the stepsisters **was annoying** in **her** own way.
- **Everyone** of the mice **was bragging** about **his/her** adventure.
- **Anybody** who **has** a glass slipper is invited to see the prince.
- The prince is looking for **somebody** who **has** a lot of blisters on her feet.