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Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics

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The Parts of Speech

English words can be divided into eight groups called the parts of speech.

QuickGuide

Nouns

page 4

A **noun** is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea.

- A **concrete noun** names any person, place, or thing.
- An **abstract noun** names an idea or quality.
- A **common noun** names any person, place, or thing.
- A **proper noun** names a particular person, place, or thing.
- A **compound noun** is made up of more than one word.
- A **collective noun** names groups of people or things.

Pronouns

page 6

A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of one or more nouns.

- A **personal pronoun** refers to a person or thing.
- A **reflexive** or **intensive pronoun** refers to or emphasizes another noun or pronoun.
- An **indefinite pronoun** refers to an unnamed person or thing.
- A **demonstrative pronoun** points out a specific person, place, or thing.
- An **interrogative pronoun** is used to ask a question.
- A **relative pronoun** is used to introduce a subordinate clause.

Verbs

page 11

A **verb** is a word that expresses action or a state of being.

- An **action verb** tells what action a subject is performing.
- A **transitive verb** requires a direct object.
- An **intransitive verb** expresses a complete thought without an object.
- A **verb phrase** is an action verb plus one or more helping verbs.
- A **linking verb** links the subject with another word in the sentence that either renames or describes the subject.

Adjectives

page 16

An **adjective** is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun.

- A **proper adjective** is formed from a proper noun and begins with a capital letter.
- A **compound adjective** is formed from two words.
- *A, an,* and *the* are a special group of adjectives called **articles**.

Adverbs

page 21

An **adverb** is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

Prepositions and Conjunctions

page 23

Prepositions and **conjunctions** are connecting words.

- A **preposition** shows the relationship between a noun or a pronoun and another word in a sentence.
- A **preposition** is always part of a *prepositional phrase*.
- **Coordinating and correlative conjunctions** connect words of equal grammatical rank.
- **Subordinating conjunctions** introduce subordinate clauses and connect them to the main clause.

Interjections

page 27

An **interjection** is a word that expresses strong feeling or emotion.

Nouns

A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea.

Types of Nouns

Concrete and Abstract
Common and Proper
Compound
Collective

The noun is one of the most frequently used parts of speech. The words in **bold** type below are nouns.

EXAMPLES

Steve was on his **way** to becoming the fastest **runner** in the **school**.

The **thought** of going to **Florida** during the **winter** created a **lot** of **excitement**.

Freedom and **justice** are **ideals** that **people** in many **countries** desire.

Nouns may be classified in several ways.

Concrete and Abstract Nouns

Nouns are often categorized in two main groups: concrete nouns and abstract nouns. Because **concrete nouns** name people, places, and things, they are easy to identify. **Abstract nouns** are often harder to recognize because they name ideas and qualities.

Concrete Nouns

People	student, mother, friend, Jimmy, Mrs. Owens, Dr. Shuler
Places	school, racetrack, earth, Chicago, California, Africa, Main Street
Things	ocean, summer, car, lion, airplane, building, cash

Abstract Nouns

Ideas and Qualities	love, hope, grief, sorrow, dream, belief, beauty, happiness, honor
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Common and Proper Nouns

Nouns may also be classified as common or proper. A **common noun** names any person, place, or thing. A **proper noun** names a particular person, place, or thing. Proper nouns are always capitalized.

Common and Proper Nouns

Common Nouns	friend, city, spacecraft, holiday, month, store
Proper Nouns	Maria Rodriguez, Houston, <i>Voyager</i> , Memorial Day, August, Carson's

Some proper nouns include more than one word, but they are still considered one noun. *Maria Rodriguez* is the name of one person, and *Memorial Day* is the name of one holiday.

Compound Nouns

Compound nouns include more than one word. These nouns can take three different forms. If you are unsure about which form to use when you write, check a dictionary.

Some Compound Nouns

Separate Words	first aid, coffee roll, sleeping bag
Hyphenated Words	ambassador-at-large, hole-in-the-wall, treasure-house
Combined Words	turtleneck, officeholder, onlooker, babysitter

Collective Nouns

Nouns such as *team* and *orchestra*, name groups of people or things. These nouns are **collective nouns**.

Some Collective Nouns

band	congregation	flock	orchestra
class	crew	gang	swarm
colony	crowd	herd	team
committee	family	league	troop

Verb Tense

The four principal parts of a verb are used to form the tenses of a verb.

Verb Tenses

Present
Past
Future
Present Perfect
Past Perfect
Future Perfect

The time expressed by a verb is called the **tense** of a verb. The six tenses of a verb are *present*, *past*, *future*, *present perfect*, *past perfect*, and *future perfect*.

Six Tenses of the Verb Practice

Present	I practice at least one hour each day.
Past	I practiced last night.
Future	I will practice again this weekend.
Present Perfect	I have practiced every day this week.
Past Perfect	I had not practiced much before last year.
Future Perfect	By next week, I will have practiced almost four hundred hours.

The six basic tenses—three simple tenses and three perfect tenses—are used to show whether something is happening now, has happened in the past, or will happen in the future. All the tenses can be formed from the four principal parts of a verb and the helping verbs *have*, *has*, *had*, *will*, and *shall*.

Present Tense

The **present tense** is the first of the simple tenses and is used mainly to express (1) an action that is going on now, (2) an action that happens regularly, or (3) an action that is usually constant or the same. The present tense can also express general truth or ongoing reality, rather than action. To form the present tense, use the present form (the first principal part of the verb) or add *-s* or *-es* to the present form.

EXAMPLES

- Resolve** your disagreement before you leave. (current action)
- Every year, she **renews** her subscription to that news magazine. (regular action)
- The action of the waves slowly **erodes** the rock. (constant action)
- Everyone **feels** that way the first time they see the Grand Canyon. (general truth)
- The Statue of Liberty **is** a symbol of hope for millions. (ongoing reality)

The present tense has two other, less common, uses. The **historical present tense** is used to relate a past action as if it were happening in the present. When writing about literature, you may also use the **literary present**.

EXAMPLES

- Paul Revere **warns** the colonists of the British attack. (historical present)
- In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Sir Thomas Malory **tells** a beautiful love story. (literary present)

Past Tense

The **past tense** is used to express an action that already took place or was completed in the past. To form the past tense of a regular verb, add *-ed* or *-d* to the present form. Use a dictionary or turn to the lists earlier in this chapter if you are unsure of how to form the past tense of an irregular verb.

EXAMPLES

- I **smiled** at the thought of the impending holiday. (regular verb)
- The issue **was resolved** before the meeting ended. (regular verb)
- Arthur **rang** the church bells on Sunday morning. (irregular verb)
- The settlers **drove** their horse teams across the wilderness. (irregular verb)

Future Tense

The **future tense** is used to express an action that will take place in the future. It also suggests a potential effect or something that might happen in the future. To form the future tense, use the helping verb *shall* or *will* with the present form.

EXAMPLES

I **shall stop** at the pharmacy on the way home. (future action)

Plants **will wither** if not watered. (potential effect)

If you call me, I **will stop** at your house to water the plants. (possible action)

In formal writing, *shall* is used with *I* and *we*, and *will* is used with *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*. In informal speech, *shall* and *will* are generally used interchangeably with *I* and *we*. In questions, however, *shall* should still be used with *I* and *we*.

Present Perfect Tense

The **present perfect tense** has two uses: (1) to express an action that was completed at some indefinite time in the past and (2) to express an action that started in the past and is still going on. To form the present perfect tense, add *has* or *have* to the past participle.

EXAMPLES

I **have** often **wondered** what it would be like to fly a plane. (action completed at an indefinite time)

The airport **has offered** flying lessons for years. (action that is still going on)

Past Perfect Tense

The **past perfect tense** expresses an action that took place before some other past action. To form the past perfect tense, add *had* to the past participle.

EXAMPLES

I **had wandered** for hours before I found the campground.

The scouts **had moved** the tents before I returned.

Future Perfect Tense

The **future perfect tense** expresses an action that will take place before another future action or time. To form the future perfect tense, add *shall have* or *will have* to the past participle.

EXAMPLES

We **shall have walked** more than a hundred miles by the end of this vacation.

That thoroughbred **will have run** a dozen races before the year is over.

Verb Conjugations

A **conjugation** is a list of all the singular and plural forms of a verb in its various tenses. One of the best ways to study the tenses of a verb is to look at the conjugation of that verb. Following is a conjugation of the verb *swim*, whose four principal parts are *swim*, *swimming*, *swam*, and *swum*.

Simple Tenses of the Verb *Swim*

Present	
Singular I swim you swim he, she, it swims	Plural we swim you swim they swim
Past	
Singular I swam you swam he, she, it swam	Plural we swam you swam they swam
Future	
Singular I shall/will swim you will swim he, she, it will swim	Plural we shall/will swim you will swim they will swim

Perfect Tenses of the Verb *Swim*

Present Perfect Tense	
Singular I have swum you have swum he, she, it has swum	Plural we have swum you have swum they have swum
Past Perfect Tense	
Singular I had swum you had swum he, she, it had swum	Plural we had swum you had swum they had swum
Future Perfect Tense	
Singular I shall/will have swum you will have swum he, she, it will have swum	Plural we shall/will have swum you will have swum they will have swum

The conjugation of the verb *be* is very different from other irregular verbs, as the box below shows. The four principal parts of *be* are *am*, *being*, *was*, and *been*. Notice that *been* is always used with helping verbs.

Simple Tenses of the Verb *Be*

Present	
Singular I am you are he, she, it is	Plural we are you are they are
Past	
Singular I was you were he, she, it was	Plural we were you were they were
Future	
Singular I shall/will be you will be he, she, it will be	Plural we shall/will be you will be they will be

Perfect Tenses of the Verb *Be*

Present Perfect Tense	
Singular I have been you have been he, she, it has been	Plural we have been you have been they have been
Past Perfect Tense	
Singular I had been you had been he, she, it had been	Plural we had been you had been they had been
Future Perfect Tense	
Singular I shall/will have been you will have been he, she, it will have been	Plural we shall/will have been you will have been they will have been

CHAPTER
15

Writing Strong Sentences

Writing strong, well-organized sentences is a first step in developing a personal writing style. This chapter tells you how you can apply the steps of the writing process to writing strong sentences.

QuickGuide

Prewriting

page 280

Finding the right words is a key to thinking about your topic.

Note: In the table below, the Six Traits of Writing are indicated in blue.

- Consider **audience, purpose, and occasion.**
Ideas / Conventions
- Choose **vivid, descriptive words.** Voice / Word Choice
- Use **figurative language.** Voice / Word Choice

Drafting

page 282

Your ideas will begin to take shape as you create clear, concise sentences.

- Create **concise sentences.** Word Choice / Fluency / Conventions
- Use **sentence variety.** Organization / Word Choice / Fluency / Conventions



Revising

page 285

Adjust your draft until it communicates exactly what you want it to.

- Eliminate wordiness and empty expressions. [Organization / Word Choice / Fluency / Conventions](#)
- **Combine sentences.** [Organization / Word Choice / Fluency / Conventions](#)
- **Refresh tired images.** [Word Choice / Conventions](#)

Editing and Publishing

page 289

Editing is the final step you need to take before sharing your writing through publishing.

- Correct faulty parallelism. [Conventions](#)
- Correct compound and complex sentences. [Word Choice / Conventions](#)
- **Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation.** [Conventions](#)
- Publish your writing

Prewriting

Finding the right words is a key to thinking about your topic.

Topics

Considering Audience,
Purpose, and Occasion
Choosing Vivid Words
Using Figurative Language

Your writing style is the distinctive way you express yourself through the words you choose and the way you shape your sentences. Writing strong, well organized sentences will help you communicate with your readers in a way that is easily understood and appreciated.

Carefully chosen words and sentences are the tools of skillful communication. Just as speakers use facial expressions and subtle changes in tone of voice to communicate their meaning writers choose words and shape sentences.

Considering Audience, Purpose, and Occasion

Strong sentences are sentences that fulfill their purpose. Before you begin writing, think about the proper words for the audience you are addressing and the occasion for which you are writing. Choose formal language and grammar for academic or professional purposes, audiences, and occasions. Write less formally to communicate with family and close friends.

Choosing Vivid Words

Using general words is like sketching the outline of a person without adding the distinguishing features. **Vivid words**, on the other hand, supply details that convey an image precisely. The vivid words in the following passage create a mood and make the scene from the novel *Ethan Frome* easy to picture. The words in blue in the text are especially vivid—adding to the feeling of repression and doom.

Professional Model: Vivid Words

They walked on in silence through the blackness of the **hemlock-shaded** lane, where Ethan's sawmill **gloomed** through the night, and out again into the comparative clearness of the fields. On the farther side of the hemlock belt the open country **rolled away** before them **grey** and **lonely** under the stars. Sometimes their way led them under the shade of an **overhanging** bank or through the **thin obscurity** of a **clump** of leafless trees. Here and there a farmhouse stood far back among the fields, **mute** and **cold** as a **grave-stone**. The night was so still that they heard the frozen snow **crackle** under their feet.

—Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome*

Use Specific Words In the following examples, notice how specific words leave a deeper impression than dull, general words do.

General Noun	noise
Specific Nouns	crash, whisper, clang
General Verb	walked
Specific Verbs	ambled, strolled, lumbered

Using Figurative Language

Effective writers often use figurative language to create memorable images. The most common figures of speech are **similes** and **metaphors**.

Similes and Metaphors Both of these figures of speech compare—or express a similarity—between two essentially different things. Similes use *like* or *as* to state the comparison. Metaphors, on the other hand, imply a comparison without using *like* or *as*. Notice how the use of a simile or a metaphor enlivens the following sentences.

Without Image	After her chores, Karen quickly ran out of the house.
Simile	After her chores, Karen exploded out of the house like a Fourth of July firecracker .
Metaphor	Karen became a Fourth of July firecracker , exploding out of the house after her chores.

Drafting

Your ideas will begin to take shape as you create clear, concise sentences.

Topics

Creating Concise Sentences
Using Sentence Variety

During the drafting process, the writer pulls together a careful assemblage of sentences and phrases. This is the time that style—the writer’s unique signature—comes into play.

Creating Concise Sentences

Referring to a truly effective piece of writing, the English writer Katherine Mansfield once remarked, “There mustn’t be one single word out of place or one word that can be taken out.” Sentences that follow this advice are concise; whether short or long, they contain no unnecessary words or phrases.

Avoid Redundancy One way to avoid wordiness is to eliminate unnecessary repetition, or **redundancy**. In a redundant sentence, the same idea is repeated without any new shades of meaning.

Redundant	The slowly moving train crawled into the station.
Concise	The train crawled into the station.
Redundant	She grew four inches in height in one year, though the doctor’s medical opinion was that she was done growing.
Concise	She grew four inches in one year, though her doctor had thought she was done growing.

Use Active Verbs Sentences that contain active verbs tend to be simpler, more direct, and more concise than passive sentences.

Passive	It was declared by the principal that we would not be allowed to eat lunch off campus.
Active	The principal declared she would not allow us to eat lunch off campus.

Using Sentence Variety

If all sentences in a paper were the same length and structure, the composition would be monotonous and dull. Good writing uses a mixture of sentences to imitate the natural rhythms of speech. (For additional guidance in creating sentence variety, see *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style* by Virginia Tufte or *Image Grammar Student Activity Book, High School*, by Harry Noden.)

Vary Sentence Structure To avoid monotony and keep your readers' interest, strive to use a mixture of sentence structures in your essays. Notice the variety in the following passage. To enhance your appreciation of the sentence variety, read the paragraph aloud and notice the various rhythms you hear.

Professional Model: Using a Variety of Sentences

Encounter with Gorillas

Suddenly the air was shattered by the screams of five male gorillas bulldozing down the foliage toward me. Their screams were so deafening that I could not locate the source of the noise. I knew only that the group was charging from above; then the tall vegetation gave way as though an out-of-control tractor were headed directly for me. Only on recognizing me did the group's dominant silverback swiftly brake to a stop three feet away, causing a five-gorilla pileup. I then sank to the ground submissively. The hair on each male's headcrest stood erect; canines were fully exposed. The irises of their eyes, ordinarily soft brown, glinted yellow, and an overpowering fear odor filled the air. For a good half hour, all five males screamed if I made even the slightest move. After a 30-minute period, the group allowed me to pretend to feed meekly on vegetation and then finally moved rigidly out of sight.

—Dian Fossey, *Gorillas in the Mist*

Vary Sentence Beginnings Sentences that always begin with subjects become tiresome to read or hear. Begin your sentences in a variety of ways, such as those shown in the examples on the following page.