Cadetclub

THE ENGLISH REVISION HANDBOOK

100 Essential Grammar Rules

NDA · CDS · AFCAT

Understand the rule. Recognise the trap.

Clear explanations. Worked examples. Common errors.

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All 100 rules at a glance

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1 Nouns, articles and determiners

Choose the noun form and its accompanying words.

Further reading: Determiners · Noun types

BUILD A NOUN PHRASE

DETERMINER	→	ADJECTIVE	→	NOUN
these		brave		cadets

1 Countable and uncountable nouns

A singular countable common noun normally needs a determiner. Plural countable nouns take many or few; uncountable nouns take much or little.

Example. We need a vehicle, several maps and some fuel.
Incorrect. There is much vehicles outside.
Correct. There are many vehicles outside.

Remember. Countability follows meaning: chicken can mean meat, while a chicken means a bird.

2 Advice, information and equipment

In their usual general senses, advice, information, equipment, furniture and luggage are uncountable. Use a piece of or another suitable unit to count them.

Example. This equipment is reliable. She gave me two pieces of advice.
Incorrect. The informations are useful.
Correct. The information is useful.

Remember. Some nouns change countability with meaning: paper is a material; a paper can be an article or examination.

3 Irregular and compound plurals

Check the established plural rather than adding -s mechanically. In many compounds, the main noun carries the plural ending.

Example. The children spoke to two women and their mothers-in-law.
Incorrect. The childs were waiting.
Correct. The children were waiting.

Remember. Compounds vary: passers-by, but grown-ups. Confirm an unfamiliar plural in a dictionary.

4 Possessives: singular, plural and shared

Add apostrophe-s to most singular possessors and irregular plurals; add an apostrophe after a regular plural ending in -s.

Example. The cadet’s bag is beside the cadets’ room.
Incorrect. The childrens uniforms are ready.
Correct. The children’s uniforms are ready.

Remember. Riya and Aman’s office is shared; Riya’s and Aman’s offices are separate. Possessives can also express time: a day’s leave.

5 A or an: follow the sound

Use a before a consonant sound and an before a vowel sound. The first spoken sound, rather than the first written letter, decides.

Example. She joined a university after an hour-long interview.
Incorrect. He is an European visitor.
Correct. He is a European visitor.

Remember. Initialisms follow pronunciation too: an MRI scan, but a USB cable.

6 A/an versus the

A/an introduces a non-specific singular countable item. The identifies something the listener can recognise from context or shared knowledge.

Example. I saw a helicopter. The helicopter landed near our camp.
Incorrect. She is engineer.
Correct. She is an engineer.

Remember. The can identify something on first mention: Please close the door, when the relevant door is clear.

7 When no article is needed

Plural countable and uncountable nouns often have no article when used generally. Most personal names and many place names also take no article.

Example. Discipline matters. Books develop understanding.
Incorrect. The honesty is important in every profession.
Correct. Honesty is important in every profession.

Remember. Use the for a specific instance: the honesty she showed. Names have established exceptions, such as the United Kingdom.

8 Little, a little and the little

With an uncountable noun, little presents the amount as insufficient or almost absent. A little means some. The little refers to the small amount available.

Example. We have a little time, so we can review one rule.
Incorrect. We have a little books.
Correct. We have a few books.

Remember. Compare: Little water remained, so we stopped; a little water remained, so we continued. The article changes the emphasis.

9 Few, a few and the few

Use these expressions with plural countable nouns. Few stresses scarcity; a few means some; the few identifies the small group available.

Example. A few volunteers stayed after the session.
Incorrect. Few information was available.
Correct. Little information was available.

Remember. Few volunteers came suggests disappointment. A few volunteers came presents their presence more positively.

10 Each, every, either and neither

Before a noun, these distributive determiners normally take a singular countable form: each cadet, every route, either gate, neither answer.

Example. Each candidate receives a number. Neither route is safe.
Incorrect. Every candidates must sign.
Correct. Every candidate must sign.

Remember. Before a defined plural group, use each of the candidates, either of these routes or neither of them. Every one of is possible; every of is not.

2 Subject-verb agreement

Find the real subject before choosing the verb.

Further reading: Agreement · Collective nouns

FOLLOW THE SUBJECT

SUBJECT	→	DISTRACTOR	→	VERB
The list		**of names**		**is ready**

11 Agree with the head of the subject

The main noun or pronoun in the subject controls agreement. A nearby noun inside an of-phrase does not automatically control the verb.

Example. The quality of these reports is excellent.
Incorrect. The list of selected candidates are ready.
Correct. The list of selected candidates is ready.

Remember. First identify what the sentence says is ready: the list, not the candidates.

12 Subjects joined by and

Two distinct subjects joined by and normally take a plural verb. A coordinated expression can take a singular verb when it denotes one person, thing or unit.

Example. The pilot and the engineer are here.
Incorrect. Reading and writing is important skills.
Correct. Reading and writing are important skills.

Remember. Bread and butter is my usual breakfast treats the combination as one meal. Meaning matters; and does not force plural agreement in every sentence.

13 Each or every before coordinated subjects

When each or every distributes the reference over singular subjects joined by and, use singular agreement in the normal distributive reading.

Example. Every officer and every cadet has an assigned duty.
Incorrect. Each boy and each girl have a badge.
Correct. Each boy and each girl has a badge.

Remember. In The cadets each have a badge, the subject remains the plural cadets. The position and function of each matter.

14 Either...or and neither...nor agreement

When singular alternatives are linked, use a singular verb. With mixed singular and plural alternatives, proximity agreement with the nearer subject is common.

Example. Neither the instructor nor the cadets are absent.
Incorrect. Either Riya or Aman are leading the group.
Correct. Either Riya or Aman is leading the group.

Remember. Mixed-person or mixed-number subjects can sound awkward. Rephrase when possible rather than treating proximity as a universal rule for all coordination.

15 With, as well as and together with

An accompanying phrase introduced by with, along with, together with or as well as normally does not change the number of the main subject.

Example. The commander, along with two officers, is arriving.
Incorrect. The captain as well as the players are ready.
Correct. The captain as well as the players is ready.

Remember. Contrast The captain and the players are ready: and coordinates two subjects.

16 Everyone, somebody and each

Everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, anyone, nobody, each and every one normally take a singular finite verb.

Example. Everyone has submitted the form.
Incorrect. Each of the applicants have a receipt.
Correct. Each of the applicants has a receipt.

Remember. A later singular they is valid: Everyone has submitted their form. Singular verb agreement and gender-neutral reference are different issues.

17 A number of versus the number of

A number of means several and normally takes a plural noun and verb. The number of refers to a count and takes a singular verb.

Example. A number of cadets are waiting. The number of seats is limited.
Incorrect. The number of applicants have increased.
Correct. The number of applicants has increased.

Remember. Do not select the verb merely because applicants is the nearest noun.

18 One of + plural noun

After one of, use a plural countable noun or an appropriate plural pronoun. The main verb agrees with one when one is the subject.

Example. One of the pilots is on leave.
Incorrect. One of my friend lives nearby.
Correct. One of my friends lives nearby.

Remember. A relative clause can have a different subject: one of the pilots who fly this route. Who normally refers to pilots in that construction.

19 Collective nouns: follow the intended meaning

In British English, a collective noun can take singular agreement for a group acting as a unit or plural agreement when its members are foregrounded.

Example. The committee has issued its report. The committee are divided in their opinions.
Incorrect. The committees has issued their reports.
Correct. The committees have issued their reports.

Remember. Do not label committee are wrong automatically. Check meaning and keep the surrounding pronouns consistent.

20 Amounts, distances and periods as units

An expression of money, distance or time can take a singular verb when understood as one amount or measure.

Example. Ten kilometres is a long walk in this heat.
Incorrect. Five years are a long time to wait.
Correct. Five years is a long time to wait.

Remember. Use plural agreement when individual units are meant: The last five years have brought many changes.

21 Fractions and percentages of a group

With fractions, percentages, most of and some of, agreement commonly follows the noun whose quantity is being described.

Example. Half the fuel is gone. Half the vehicles are ready.
Incorrect. Sixty per cent of the candidates is present.
Correct. Sixty per cent of the candidates are present.

Remember. Compare Sixty per cent is a good score, where the percentage itself is the subject.

22 Plural-looking and plural-only nouns

Some -s nouns are singular in their ordinary sense, such as news and mathematics. Police and cattle take plural agreement; scissors and trousers are normally plural.

Example. The news is encouraging. The police are investigating.
Incorrect. This pair of scissors are blunt.
Correct. This pair of scissors is blunt.

Remember. Pair is the head in a pair of scissors. Some nouns change agreement with meaning: statistics as a subject versus statistics as numerical results.

3 Pronouns and relative clauses

Keep reference, case and clause structure clear.

Further reading: Relative pronouns · They

KEEP THE REFERENCE CLEAR

ANTECEDENT	→	RELATIVE PRONOUN	→	CLAUSE
the cadet		**who**		**won the award**

23 Subject and object pronouns

Use subject forms for subjects and object forms after verbs and prepositions. Test a coordinated phrase by considering each pronoun separately.

Example. She and I prepared the report. The message is for him and me.
Incorrect. Between you and I, the plan needs revision.
Correct. Between you and me, the plan needs revision.

Remember. Formal It is I and ordinary It is me belong to different registers; do not apply a simplistic after-is rule to every context.

24 Possessive forms and contractions

Possessive pronouns such as yours, hers, ours and theirs have no apostrophe. Its is possessive; it’s means it is or it has.

Example. The aircraft has returned to its base. It’s been inspected.
Incorrect. This notebook is your’s.
Correct. This notebook is yours.

Remember. Whose asks about possession. Who’s means who is or who has.

25 Reflexive pronouns need a reason

Use myself, yourself and similar forms when the object refers back to the subject, or for emphasis. They are not formal substitutes for I or me.

Example. I checked myself in the mirror. I checked the figures myself.
Incorrect. Myself and Riya will attend.
Correct. Riya and I will attend.

Remember. In Please contact Riya or me, me is the normal object form. Myself is appropriate when the construction genuinely calls for reflexive or emphatic use.

26 Clear reference and singular they

A pronoun must refer clearly to the intended person or thing. Singular they is standard for a person whose gender is unspecified or who uses they.

Example. If a candidate needs help, they should contact the desk.
Incorrect. Every student must brings their card.
Correct. Every student must bring their card.

Remember. The error in the trap is brings after must, not their. Avoid ambiguous reference such as Aman told Ravi that he had been selected when either person could be meant.

27 Who and whom

Who normally serves as a subject; whom is the formal object form. Immediately after a preposition in formal writing, use whom for a person.

Example. Who called? To whom did you send the report?
Incorrect. The officer to who I spoke was helpful.
Correct. The officer to whom I spoke was helpful.

Remember. Who did you speak to? is normal modern English. Object who is not automatically an error in ordinary usage.

28 Defining and non-defining relative clauses

A defining clause identifies its noun without enclosing commas. A non-defining clause adds supplementary information and normally uses commas; that is not used for this function.

Example. The officer who briefed us has left. Riya, who briefed us, has left.
Incorrect. Riya, that briefed us, has left.
Correct. Riya, who briefed us, has left.

Remember. Which is valid in defining clauses too. Do not teach that defining clauses must always use that.

29 When a relative pronoun can disappear

In a defining relative clause, an object relative pronoun can often be omitted. A subject relative pronoun normally cannot be omitted.

Example. The report I submitted was accepted. The report that arrived was unsigned.
Incorrect. The officer who I met him was helpful.
Correct. The officer who I met was helpful.

Remember. Do not repeat the relative pronoun's role with an extra he, she, him or it inside the clause.

30 This, these, that and those

Match demonstratives to number: this/that with a singular noun or uncountable reference; these/those with plural nouns.

Example. This information is useful. These instructions are clear.
Incorrect. These kind of problems are common.
Correct. These kinds of problems are common.

Remember. Alternatively, write This kind of problem is common. Change the whole noun phrase consistently.

31 Another, other, others and the other

Another normally accompanies a singular countable noun. Other precedes a noun; others stands alone as a plural pronoun. The other identifies a remaining or specified alternative.

Example. I need another pen. Some cadets ran; others walked.
Incorrect. Some chose English; other chose Maths.
Correct. Some chose English; others chose Maths.

Remember. Another three days is also grammatical: another can precede a number plus a plural noun meaning an additional quantity.

32 Each other and one another

These reciprocal expressions describe a relationship between participants: each participant acts towards another. They often overlap in modern usage.

Example. The two teams congratulated each other.
Incorrect. They checked each others equipment.
Correct. They checked each other’s equipment.

Remember. A rigid two people versus more than two distinction is not a dependable modern rule. Form the possessive each other’s or one another’s.

4 Tenses and time

Choose forms from meaning and the time reference.

Further reading: Tenses and time · Time clauses

PLACE THE ACTION IN TIME

PAST		PRESENT		FUTURE
She trained.	→	**She trains.**	→	**She will train.**

33 Present simple versus present continuous

Use the simple present for routines, general states and regular events. Use the present continuous for an action in progress or a temporary developing situation.

Example. She studies every evening. She is studying at the moment.
Incorrect. Listen! Someone knocks at the door.
Correct. Listen! Someone is knocking at the door.

Remember. The simple present can describe schedules; the continuous can describe arrangements. Meaning, not a signal word alone, decides.

34 State verbs and changing meanings

Verbs describing knowledge, possession, preference or perception often use simple forms. Some allow continuous forms when they express an activity or temporary behaviour.

Example. I know the answer. I am thinking about the problem.
Incorrect. I am knowing the answer.
Correct. I know the answer.

Remember. Compare She has a car with She is having lunch. A blanket ban on continuous forms of have or think is wrong.

35 Present perfect versus a finished past time

Use the present perfect to connect a past event with now. Use the past simple for an event located in a completed past period such as yesterday or in 2020.

Example. I have submitted the form. I submitted it yesterday.
Incorrect. She has joined the academy last year.
Correct. She joined the academy last year.

Remember. Today and this week can be unfinished periods. The appropriate tense depends on whether the speaker treats the relevant period as still open.

36 Since gives a starting point; for gives duration

Use since with a starting point and for with a length of time. A situation continuing up to now commonly takes a present-perfect form.

Example. She has lived here since 2022. She has lived here for four years.
Incorrect. He has waited since two hours.
Correct. He has waited for two hours.

Remember. For also occurs with other tenses: We stayed for two days. Since can introduce a clause: since she arrived.

37 Perfect simple versus perfect continuous

The perfect simple often emphasises a result or completed quantity. The perfect continuous often emphasises an ongoing or recently repeated activity and its duration.

Example. I have written three reports. I have been writing reports all morning.
Incorrect. She has been knowing him for years.
Correct. She has known him for years.

Remember. Some situations permit both forms with a shift in emphasis: has worked here and has been working here.

38 Past simple versus past continuous

The past continuous presents an action as in progress at a past time. The past simple commonly presents a completed event occurring during that background action.

Example. We were revising when the lights went out.
Incorrect. At eight yesterday evening, I am studying.
Correct. At eight yesterday evening, I was studying.

Remember. While and when do not mechanically select a tense. Decide whether each action is background, ongoing, habitual or completed.

39 Past perfect: the earlier past

Use had + past participle to locate an event before another past reference point when that earlier relationship needs to be made explicit.

Example. The train had left before we reached the station.
Incorrect. She had went home before the meeting began.
Correct. She had gone home before the meeting began.

Remember. The past perfect is not compulsory merely because a sentence contains two past events. Before or after may already make the order clear.

40 Past perfect continuous

Use had been + -ing to emphasise the duration of an activity continuing up to a past reference point.

Example. He had been waiting for an hour when the bus arrived.
Incorrect. She had been worked there for years when the office closed.
Correct. She had been working there for years when the office closed.

Remember. For a completed result, the past perfect simple may fit better: She had written the report before the office closed.

41 Future time clauses normally use present forms

After when, before, after, as soon as or until in an ordinary future-time clause, use a present form rather than will merely to mark future time.

Example. I will call when I reach the station.
Incorrect. We will leave as soon as the rain will stop.
Correct. We will leave as soon as the rain stops.

Remember. An embedded question is different: I do not know when the rain will stop. There, when asks about time rather than introducing a future-time condition.

42 Future continuous

Use will be + -ing for an activity expected to be in progress at a future time.

Example. At this time tomorrow, we will be travelling to Delhi.
Incorrect. At noon tomorrow, she will be write the test.
Correct. At noon tomorrow, she will be writing the test.

Remember. A future-simple form can describe the event without presenting its internal progress: She will write the test tomorrow.

43 Future perfect and deadlines

Use will have + past participle for an event expected to be complete by a future reference point.

Example. By Friday, I will have completed the application.
Incorrect. By next month, she will have finish the course.
Correct. By next month, she will have finished the course.

Remember. In By the time she arrives, we will have finished, the time clause uses arrives, not will arrive.

44 Used to, be used to and get used to

Used to + base verb expresses a former habit or state. Be/get used to + noun or -ing means be/become accustomed to something.

Example. I used to run at dawn. I am used to running at dawn.
Incorrect. She is used to wake up early.
Correct. She is used to waking up early.

Remember. After did in a standard written question, use Did you use to...? The past-habit expression and accustomed-to construction have different grammar.

5 Verb patterns and non-finite forms

Check what form the controlling word allows.

Further reading: Verb patterns · Infinitive / -ing

READ THE WHOLE VERB PATTERN

CONTROLLING VERB	→	REQUIRED FORM	→	COMPLETE PATTERN
decide		**to + verb**		**decide to train**

45 Do, does and did take the base form

When do, does or did supports a question, negative or emphatic affirmative, the following main verb is in its base form.

Example. Does she know? He did not attend. I do understand.
Incorrect. Did you went to the briefing?
Correct. Did you go to the briefing?

Remember. Do is not added to an ordinary question already containing be or a modal: Is she ready? Can he attend?

46 Lie/lay and rise/raise

Lie meaning recline has lay and lain; lay meaning put something down has laid and laid and takes an object. Rise is intransitive; raise normally takes an object.

Example. He lay on the bed. She laid the map on the table.
Incorrect. The sun raises in the east.
Correct. The sun rises in the east.

Remember. Lie meaning say something untrue has lied and lied. Identify meaning and transitivity before choosing a form.

47 The first verb controls the next form

Some verbs take a to-infinitive, such as decide to go. Others take an -ing complement, such as enjoy swimming or avoid arguing.

Example. They decided to leave. She avoided answering.
Incorrect. He enjoys to read.
Correct. He enjoys reading.

Remember. Learn complete patterns. Like, love, hate and prefer can allow both forms, sometimes with a change of emphasis.

48 A preposition is followed by a noun or -ing form

When a preposition takes a verb as its complement, use an -ing form. To can be a preposition rather than an infinitive marker.

Example. We look forward to meeting you. She succeeded in solving it.
Incorrect. He left without to inform us.
Correct. He left without informing us.

Remember. Compare want to meet, where to marks an infinitive, with object to meeting, where to is a preposition.

49 Infinitive or -ing can change the meaning

Stop doing ends an activity; stop to do introduces a purpose for stopping. Remember doing recalls an event; remember to do means not forgetting a duty.

Example. He stopped smoking. He stopped to drink water.
Meaning check. Meaning: I recalled posting it. Wording: I remembered to post it.
For the intended meaning. I remembered posting it.

Remember. Try doing tests a possible method; try to do describes an attempt. Choose the pattern that preserves the intended meaning.

50 Let, make and help

In the active voice, let and causative make take object + base verb. Help allows object + base verb or object + to-infinitive.

Example. Let her speak. They made him wait. She helped me pack.
Incorrect. The instructor made us to repeat it.
Correct. The instructor made us repeat it.

Remember. Passive make takes to: We were made to repeat it. Permission with let is usually expressed passively as be allowed to.

51 See or hear: complete event versus activity

After see, hear, watch and similar perception verbs, object + base verb can present a whole event; object + -ing presents an activity in progress.

Example. I saw her cross the road. I saw her crossing the road.
Incorrect. I saw him to enter the room.
Correct. I saw him enter the room.

Remember. In the passive, the bare infinitive commonly gains to: He was seen to enter. An -ing complement can remain: He was seen entering.

52 Avoid a dangling participle

An introductory participial clause normally describes the subject of the following main clause. Make that subject the person or thing performing the introductory action.

Example. Walking towards the gate, I noticed a broken sign.
Incorrect. Walking towards the gate, the sign caught my attention.
Correct. Walking towards the gate, I noticed the sign.

Remember. The trap makes the sign appear to be walking. Rewrite the introductory clause fully if its subject differs.

53 Object + to-infinitive patterns

Verbs such as tell, ask, advise, allow and persuade can take object + to-infinitive. The object identifies who should perform the following action.

Example. She advised us to revise. They allowed him to enter.
Incorrect. He suggested me to apply.
Correct. He suggested that I apply.

Remember. Suggest also allows an -ing clause: He suggested applying. Its pattern differs from advise someone to do something.

54 Too...to and adjective + enough

Too + adjective/adverb + to-infinitive presents an excessive degree for the stated action. Enough follows an adjective/adverb but precedes a noun.

Example. The bag is too heavy to lift. She is strong enough to lift it.
Incorrect. He is enough tall to reach the shelf.
Correct. He is tall enough to reach the shelf.

Remember. For an explicit subject, use for + object form: The bag is too heavy for me to lift. Avoid an unnecessary final it when the bag is already understood as the object.

6 Modals and conditionals

Distinguish ability, obligation, possibility and imagined time.

Further reading: Must / have to · Conditionals

MATCH CONDITION AND RESULT

CONDITION	RESULT	MEANING
If it rains,	→ **we will stay inside.**	→ **a real possibility**

55 Can, could and be able to

Can and could take a base verb without -s. Can commonly expresses present ability; could can express general past ability. Be able to supplies other tense forms.

Example. She can swim. By the age of six, she could swim well.
Incorrect. He can speaks three languages.
Correct. He can speak three languages.

Remember. For a single actual past success, managed to or was able to often makes achievement clearer. Could remains natural with past perception and understanding.

56 May and might: possibility

May and might express possibility and take a base verb. They do not change for a third-person singular subject.

Example. She may arrive late. They might need more time.
Incorrect. The bus might arrives after noon.
Correct. The bus might arrive after noon.

Remember. Do not assign fixed numerical probabilities to may and might. Context affects how tentative either sounds. May can also express permission.

57 Must and have to: obligation

Must and have to can both express necessity. Have to has inflected and tense forms: has to, had to and will have to.

Example. All visitors must sign in. We had to leave early yesterday.
Incorrect. She will has to submit the form tomorrow.
Correct. She will have to submit the form tomorrow.

Remember. The contrast between personal obligation and external requirement is a tendency, not a reliable absolute rule. Must is also used for official requirements.

58 Must not versus need not

Must not expresses prohibition. Need not or do not have to expresses absence of necessity. These are different meanings.

Example. You must not enter this room. You need not bring a calculator.
Meaning check. Meaning: bringing food is optional. Wording: You must not bring food.
For the intended meaning. You need not bring food.

Remember. Needn't have done says an unnecessary action actually happened. Didn't need to do states lack of necessity without by itself proving whether the action happened.

59 Should, ought to and past advice

Should takes a base verb; ought normally takes to + base verb. Should have + past participle can criticise or regret a past action or omission.

Example. You should rest. You ought to rest. You should have checked the date.
Incorrect. You should had informed us.
Correct. You should have informed us.

Remember. Should have can also express an expectation: They should have arrived by now. Context determines whether it is advice, criticism or probability.

60 Modal deductions about the past

Use modal + have + past participle for a past inference: must have for a strong positive deduction, can't have for a strong negative deduction, and may/might have for possibility.

Example. The floor is wet; someone must have cleaned it.
Incorrect. She must has forgotten the time.
Correct. She must have forgotten the time.

Remember. Could have can express either a past possibility or an unrealised opportunity. It does not always mean the event definitely failed to happen.

61 Zero and first conditionals

For general cause and effect, use present forms in both clauses. For an ordinary open future condition, use a present form in the if-clause and a suitable future result.

Example. If you heat ice, it melts. If it rains, we will stay indoors.
Incorrect. If she will arrive early, we will begin at once.
Correct. If she arrives early, we will begin at once.

Remember. Will can occur in an if-clause to express willingness or insistence. The trap concerns will used merely as a future-time marker.

62 Second conditional: an imagined present or future

A common unreal or unlikely pattern is if + past form, followed by would/could/might + base verb. The past form marks remoteness, not necessarily past time.

Example. If I had more time, I would practise daily.
Incorrect. If I would have more time, I would practise daily.
Correct. If I had more time, I would practise daily.

Remember. If I were you is the conventional advisory form. Were is common in formal counterfactual clauses; was is also found in ordinary usage.

63 Third conditional: an imagined past

For an unreal past condition and past result, use if + had + past participle, followed by would/could/might have + past participle.

Example. If we had left earlier, we would have caught the train.
Incorrect. If he had studied, he would passed.
Correct. If he had studied, he would have passed.

Remember. The normal pattern keeps would have in the result clause, not the if-clause. Express the past condition with had studied.

64 Mixed conditionals follow the time meaning

A past condition can have a present result, and a present situation can explain a past result. Select forms for each clause's actual time reference.

Example. If I had trained regularly, I would be fitter now.
Incorrect. If she had saved more, she would has enough money now.
Correct. If she had saved more, she would have enough money now.

Remember. Here have is the base verb for present possession, not a perfect auxiliary. Do not turn every result of a past condition into would have + participle.

65 Unless, provided that and as long as

Unless generally means except if or if not. Provided that and as long as introduce a condition that must be met.

Example. You may enter provided that you show your pass.
Incorrect. We will continue unless it will rain.
Correct. We will continue unless it rains.

Remember. Do not add not mechanically after unless: it changes the meaning. An additional negative can be grammatical when that double-negative meaning is genuinely intended.

66 Wish and if only

Use a past form for an unreal present wish and past perfect for regret about the past. Wish + would often expresses a desired change or annoyance.

Example. I wish I knew the answer. I wish I had checked the date.
Meaning check. Meaning: I regret not checking yesterday. Wording: I wish I checked it yesterday.
For the intended meaning. I wish I had checked it yesterday.

Remember. Wish + to-infinitive is a different, formal construction: I wish to apply. It expresses a present desire, not necessarily an unreal situation.

7 Adjectives, adverbs and comparison

Describe and compare the intended things accurately.

Further reading: Adjectives / adverbs · Less / fewer

ASK WHAT THE WORD DESCRIBES

NOUN	VERB	LINKING VERB
a careful driver	drives carefully	seems careful

67 Adjective or adverb?

Adjectives describe nouns and often follow linking verbs such as seem, become and feel. Adverbs commonly modify actions, adjectives or other adverbs.

Example. She is a careful driver. She drives carefully.
Incorrect. He is a confidently speaker.
Correct. He is a confident speaker.

Remember. A linking verb can take an adjective: The plan sounds sensible. Not every word ending in -ly is an adverb: friendly is usually an adjective.

68 -Ed and -ing adjectives

Many -ed adjectives describe an experienced feeling; the corresponding -ing adjective describes what causes that feeling.

Example. The briefing was interesting, and the cadets were interested.
Meaning check. Meaning: the lecture made me feel bored. Wording: I was boring.
For the intended meaning. I was bored.

Remember. I was boring is grammatical if I caused other people to feel bored. The error depends on the intended meaning, not the person being described.

69 Natural adjective order

Before a noun, descriptive adjectives commonly follow an order such as opinion, size, age, colour, origin, material and purpose.

Example. She carried a useful small black bag.
Natural order. Less natural without special emphasis: a black small useful bag.
For the intended meaning. More neutral: a useful small black bag.

Remember. This is a normal ordering preference, not an absolute ban. Contrast, emphasis and established expressions can change the order.

70 Do not double a comparative or superlative

Form a comparative or superlative with the appropriate ending or with more/most. Do not normally combine both methods for the same degree.

Example. This route is shorter. That explanation is more useful.
Incorrect. This route is more shorter.
Correct. This route is shorter.

Remember. Some adjectives allow alternative forms, such as simpler and more simple. Choose an established form without doubling the comparison.

71 Than versus as...as

Use a comparative with than. In the standard equality pattern, place the base adjective or adverb between as and as.

Example. She runs faster than I do. He is as careful as she is.
Incorrect. This room is as larger as that one.
Correct. This room is as large as that one.

Remember. Than me is normal English; than I do is a fuller clause. Do not reject an object pronoun after than without considering the construction.

72 Exclude the subject from its own comparison group

When comparing one member against all remaining members of its group, make the remaining group explicit with other or a suitable alternative.

Example. She is taller than any other player in her team.
Precise comparison. Intended meaning: she exceeds every teammate. Wording: She is taller than any player in her team.
For the intended meaning. She is taller than any other player in her team.

Remember. Other is unnecessary if she is not a member of the comparison group: She is taller than any player in the visiting team.

73 Compare like with like

Make clear whether you are comparing people, possessions, quantities or qualities. Use a possessive or a substitute such as that/those when needed.

Example. Riya’s score is higher than Aman’s.
Precise comparison. Imprecise comparison: Riya’s score is higher than Aman.
For the intended meaning. Riya’s score is higher than Aman’s.

Remember. That of can replace a singular noun phrase; those of can replace a plural one. Ellipsis is acceptable when the missing words are clearly recoverable.

74 Fewer versus less

Fewer normally describes a smaller number of countable items; less describes a smaller amount of something uncountable.

Example. We made fewer mistakes and used less fuel.
Incorrect. This vehicle uses fewer fuel.
Correct. This vehicle uses less fuel.

Remember. Less is also normal with measurements treated as amounts: less than ten kilometres, less than two hours and less than fifty rupees.

75 Many, much, too much and much too

Many accompanies plural countable nouns; much accompanies uncountable nouns. Too much modifies an amount; much too intensifies an adjective or adverb.

Example. There is too much noise. The music is much too loud.
Incorrect. The bag is too much heavy.
Correct. The bag is much too heavy.

Remember. Too many is used for a countable excess: too many bags. A lot of works with both countable plurals and uncountable nouns.

76 Hard/hardly and late/lately

Hard can mean with effort; hardly means almost not. Late means after the expected time; lately means recently.

Example. She works hard. She hardly ever arrives late.
Meaning check. Meaning: he makes a strong effort. Wording: He works hardly.
For the intended meaning. He works hard.

Remember. Do not assume adding -ly preserves meaning. Lately is commonly used with a perfect form: I have not seen him lately.

8 Prepositions and connectors

Match the construction to its grammatical complement.

Further reading: Prepositions · Between / among

CHECK WHAT FOLLOWS

PREPOSITION	COMPLEMENT	CONTRAST
despite	**the rain**	**although it rained**

77 At, on and in for time

Use at for clock times, on for days and dates, and in for months, years and longer periods in their ordinary time uses.

Example. The test starts at nine on Monday in November.
Incorrect. We met in Monday morning.
Correct. We met on Monday morning.

Remember. A general part of the day takes in: in the morning. Established expressions include at night and, in British English, at the weekend.

78 By versus until

By gives a deadline: at or before a time. Until marks continuation up to a time. Choose according to whether an action is completed or a situation continues.

Example. Submit the form by Friday. Stay here until noon.
Meaning check. Meaning: submission must be completed no later than Friday. Wording: Submit the form until Friday.
For the intended meaning. Submit the form by Friday.

Remember. Not...until delays an event: Do not leave until noon. That is different from an obligation to leave by noon.

79 During versus while

During is a preposition and normally takes a noun phrase. While is a conjunction and can introduce a clause describing a simultaneous activity.

Example. We spoke during the break. We spoke while we were waiting.
Incorrect. During we were waiting, the lights went out.
Correct. While we were waiting, the lights went out.

Remember. Reduced while-clauses are also possible: While waiting, we revised. During waiting is not the usual substitute for while we were waiting.

80 Between versus among

Between often presents distinct participants or individual relationships. Among places something within a group or describes a collective distribution.

Example. The agreement between the three countries was signed. The instructor stood among the cadets.
Usage check. Unnatural for a position inside an undifferentiated crowd: She stood between the crowd.
For the intended meaning. She stood among the crowd.

Remember. Between is not restricted to two participants. Three or more separately identified parties can have an agreement between them.

81 Position versus movement: in/into and on/onto

In and on commonly describe position; into and onto commonly express movement to an interior or a surface.

Example. She is in the room. She walked into the room.
Incorrect. The children are sitting into the classroom.
Correct. The children are sitting in the classroom.

Remember. In and on can also occur with movement verbs in established constructions. Choose the phrase from its actual meaning, not the verb alone.

82 Do not add an unnecessary preposition

A transitive verb can take its object directly. Common patterns include discuss the problem, enter the room and reach the station.

Example. We discussed the plan with our instructor.
Incorrect. They discussed about the schedule.
Correct. They discussed the schedule.

Remember. The related noun has a different pattern: a discussion about the schedule. Enter into an agreement is also valid; meaning determines the complement.

83 Avoid doubled ordinary conjunction pairs

In standard formal sentence patterns, although/though already supplies concession, and because supplies the reason. Do not mechanically add but or so for the same link.

Example. Although it rained, we continued. Because it rained, we stayed indoors.
Incorrect. Although he was tired, but he continued.
Correct. Although he was tired, he continued.

Remember. Alternatively: He was tired, but he continued. Different punctuation and discourse structures can permit combinations that a simple paired-rule exercise does not.

84 Because of, despite and in spite of

Because of, despite and in spite of normally take noun phrases or -ing complements. Because and although can introduce finite clauses.

Example. Despite the rain, we left. Although it was raining, we left.
Incorrect. Despite of the delay, we arrived on time.
Correct. Despite the delay, we arrived on time.

Remember. Despite the fact that he was tired is grammatical because the fact is a noun phrase followed by a clause.

85 Correlative connectors and parallel structure

Use established pairs such as either...or, neither...nor, both...and and not only...but also. Keep the linked elements structurally comparable.

Example. She is both patient and precise. He not only planned the route but also checked the timings.
Incorrect. Either we leave now nor we wait until morning.
Correct. Either we leave now or we wait until morning.

Remember. Place the first connector before the first item actually being paired. Agreement still depends on the subjects; see Concepts 12-15.

86 No sooner...than; hardly/scarcely...when

For one past event immediately following another, common formal patterns are no sooner had...than and hardly/scarcely had...when.

Example. No sooner had we arrived than the briefing began.
Incorrect. Hardly had she sat down than the phone rang.
Correct. Hardly had she sat down when the phone rang.

Remember. Fronting the negative expression triggers auxiliary-subject inversion. Without fronting: We had no sooner arrived than the briefing began.

9 Voice and reported speech

Change structure while preserving meaning and time.

Further reading: Passive voice · Reported statements

KEEP THE SAME EVENT

ACTIVE		PASSIVE		AGENT
The team built it.	→	**It was built**	→	**by the team.**

87 Passive voice needs a suitable object relationship

A normal active object can become the passive subject. Form the passive with an appropriate form of be and the main verb's past participle.

Example. The team repaired the bridge. The bridge was repaired by the team.
Incorrect. The parcel was arrived yesterday.
Correct. The parcel arrived yesterday.

Remember. Arrive is intransitive, so it has no object to promote. Not every active sentence has a natural passive equivalent.

88 Preserve tense and aspect in the passive

Change the arrangement of subject and object while retaining the intended time and aspect: is repairing becomes is being repaired; has repaired becomes has been repaired.

Example. They are checking the engine. The engine is being checked.
Incorrect. The engine has repaired by the mechanic.
Correct. The engine has been repaired by the mechanic.

Remember. Passive perfect-continuous forms are grammatical but often cumbersome. Rephrase naturally instead of forcing every sentence through a mechanical conversion.

89 Two-object and prepositional passives

Some verbs allow either object to become a passive subject. Others require their established preposition rather than an invented double-object pattern.

Example. She was given a certificate. A certificate was given to her.
Incorrect. I was explained the procedure.
Correct. The procedure was explained to me.

Remember. Explain something to someone differs from tell someone something. Select the construction licensed by the verb.

90 Passive modals and infinitives

Use modal + be + past participle for a simple modal passive. A passive to-infinitive has to be + past participle.

Example. The work must be completed. The form needs to be signed.
Incorrect. The report must be wrote today.
Correct. The report must be written today.

Remember. For a completed past action, use modal + have been + past participle: The report should have been sent yesterday.

91 Reported statements and optional backshift

After a past reporting verb, tense often shifts back to reflect a past viewpoint. Pronouns and time references change only as the reporting situation requires.

Example. She said, “I am tired.” She said that she was tired.
Reference check. Reporting a past statement about herself: Riya said that I was tired.
For the intended meaning. Riya said that she was tired.

Remember. If the information remains true or relevant, retaining a present tense can be valid: She said that she lives in Pune. Backshift is not compulsory in every context.

92 Say versus tell

For reported statements, tell normally takes a person as an object. Say does not take that person directly; use say to someone when needed.

Example. She told me that the test was postponed. She said that the test was postponed.
Incorrect. He said me that he was ready.
Correct. He told me that he was ready.

Remember. Said to me is also possible. Fixed patterns such as tell the truth and tell a story have their own objects.

93 Reported questions use statement word order

In an indirect question, put the subject before the verb. Use if or whether for a yes/no question, and retain the question word for a wh-question.

Example. She asked where I lived. He asked whether I was ready.
Incorrect. She asked where was the station.
Correct. She asked where the station was.

Remember. Do not retain question-support do/does/did merely because the original was a direct question.

94 Reported commands and requests

Use an appropriate reporting verb + object + to-infinitive. Put not before the infinitive for a negative instruction.

Example. The officer told us to wait. She asked me not to interrupt.
Incorrect. He ordered me that leave immediately.
Correct. He ordered me to leave immediately.

Remember. Choose a reporting verb that preserves the force of the original: asked, advised, warned, ordered or told do not all mean the same thing.

10 Sentence structure and emphasis

Check questions, clause boundaries and emphatic patterns.

Further reading: Question tags · Inversion · Suggest

CHECK THE CLAUSE ORDER

STATEMENT	QUESTION	REPORTED QUESTION
She is ready.	**Is she ready?**	**Ask if she is ready.**

95 Direct questions and subject questions

Ordinary questions often invert subject and auxiliary. Without another auxiliary, present/past simple questions commonly use do/does/did + base verb.

Example. Where does she work? Who wrote this report?
Incorrect. Where does he lives?
Correct. Where does he live?

Remember. A neutral subject question normally needs no do-support: Who came? Emphatic Who did come? is possible, so do not reject it automatically.

96 Question tags: auxiliary, polarity and pronoun

A normal confirmation tag repeats the appropriate auxiliary, reverses positive/negative polarity and uses a pronoun matching the subject.

Example. She is ready, isn't she? They did not leave, did they?
Incorrect. We are late, isn't it?
Correct. We are late, aren't we?

Remember. Common special patterns include I am late, aren't I? and Let's begin, shall we? Negative-meaning words such as never normally take a positive tag.

97 Fragments, run-ons and comma splices

In formal writing, give a complete sentence an independent clause. Do not normally join two independent clauses with only a comma; use coordination or suitable punctuation.

Example. The road was blocked, so we took another route.
Incorrect. The road was blocked, we took another route.
Correct. The road was blocked; we took another route.

Remember. A comma can introduce a dependent clause or accompany a coordinating conjunction. Literary comma splices exist, but they are not the neutral formal-writing model here.

98 Inversion after fronted negative or limiting expressions

Fronted expressions such as never, rarely and not until often require auxiliary-subject inversion in the main clause they limit.

Example. Never have I seen such a view. Only after the test did I relax.
Incorrect. Rarely she misses a class.
Correct. Rarely does she miss a class.

Remember. When only modifies the subject itself, there is no inversion: Only Riya knew the answer. Scope matters.

99 Mandative clauses after suggest or insist

A formal recommendation, demand or requirement can use that + subject + base verb. British English also commonly uses should + base verb.

Example. They recommended that he apply. They recommended that he should apply.
Incorrect. They demanded that he to attend.
Correct. They demanded that he attend.

Remember. Insisted that he was innocent asserts a fact and is grammatical. Distinguish that meaning from an instruction: insisted that he be present.

100 So...that versus such...that

Use so with an adjective or adverb, and such with a noun phrase. A singular countable noun after such normally retains a/an.

Example. It was so cold that we stayed inside. It was such a cold day that we stayed inside.
Incorrect. She spoke such quickly that I missed the details.
Correct. She spoke so quickly that I missed the details.

Remember. Standard quantity patterns include so many books and so much work. The formal pattern so difficult a task is also possible.