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**Geraldine Woods**

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# English Grammar Workbook

3rd Edition with Online Practice

**by Geraldine Woods**

Grammarian

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand

# English Grammar Workbook For Dummies®, 3rd Edition with Online Practice

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# Introduction

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**D**oes this resemble the inside of your head when you're preparing to talk with an Authority Figure (teacher, boss, mother-in-law, parole officer, whatever)?

*Glad to have met . . . to be meeting . . . to . . . Uh oh. Maybe just Hi! How's it going? Nope.  
Too friendly. New direction: You asked to see whoever. . . um . . . whomever wrote . . . had  
written . . . the report.*

If you answered yes, you're in the right place. *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, helps you navigate the sea of grammar without wrecking your grades, your career, or your mind. I mention grades and career because the ability to speak and write according to the rules of Standard English gives you an advantage in school and in the working world. Even if you feel relatively comfortable in everyday situations, you still may benefit from practicing some of the trickier grammar points, especially if you're facing high-stakes exams such as the SAT, ACT, or AP. Some of these tortures (sorry, I mean *tests*) focus entirely on English skills, and some require you to use those skills to answer questions on other subjects. *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, helps you prepare for both situations.

This book presents the latest guidelines for Standard English. Yes, latest. When an English teacher is pounding them into your head, the rules of Standard English usage seem set in stone. But language isn't static. It moves along just as people do — sometimes quickly and sometimes at the speed of a tired snail. To keep you sharp in every 21st-century situation, *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, presents information and then practice with the current, commonly accepted language of texts, tweets, emails, and presentation slides, as well as what's proper in more traditional forms of writing.

*English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, doesn't concentrate on the sort of grammar exercise in which you circle all the nouns and draw little triangles around prepositions. You'll find identification problems in this book, but only a few. A closely guarded English-teacher secret is that you don't need to know too much terminology to master grammar. Instead, most of the practice problems concentrate on how to express meaning in real-life speech and writing.

Each chapter begins with a quick explanation of what's acceptable — and what's not — in Standard English. Next, I provide an example and then hit you with a bunch of questions. After completing the exercises, you can check your answers at the end of the chapter. I also tell you why a particular choice is correct to help you make the right decision the next time a similar issue pops up. Sprinkled liberally throughout the book and online are comprehensive exercises, so you can apply your knowledge to the material in an entire chapter. In the appendix, you find editing exercises that rely on skills you've honed throughout the entire book. The callout numbers pointing to the corrections in the answer key for these exercises correspond with the numbered explanations in the text.

# Foolish Assumptions

In writing the *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, I assume that you . . .

- » know some English but want to improve your skills
- » aspire to at least one of these: a better job, higher grades, and improved scores on standardized tests
- » hope to become more comfortable if you're an English-language learner
- » wish to communicate clearly and effectively
- » prefer to follow the conventions of Standard English or to ignore them with a specific purpose in mind
- » want to write within tight word limits (in tweets or texts, for example) while still expressing exactly what you mean
- » seek information on how to adjust the level of formality so that you are confident and appropriate in every context

The most important assumption I've made is that you have a busy life. Who doesn't? With this fact in mind, I've tried to keep the explanations in this book clear, simple, and short. For more complete explanations, pick up a copy of the companion book, *English Grammar For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, or, if you need to review the fundamentals, *Basic English Grammar For Dummies*, written by yours truly and published by Wiley. In those books, I go into much more detail and provide more examples, accompanied by step-by-step explanations.

## Icons Used in This Book

Icons are the cute little drawings that attract your gaze and alert you to key points, pitfalls, and other helpful things. In *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, you find these four:



TIP

I live in New York City, and I often see tourists staggering around, desperate for a resident to show them the ropes. The Tip icon is the equivalent of a resident whispering in your ear. Psst! Want the inside story that will make your life easier? Here it is!



WARNING

When you're about to walk through a field riddled with land mines, it's nice to have a map. The Warning icon tells you where the traps are so you can avoid them.



EXAMPLE

The Example icon alerts you to (surprise!) an example and a set of exercises so you can practice what I just finished preaching.



TEST ALERT

If you're getting ready to sweat through a standardized test, pay extra attention to this icon, which identifies frequent fliers on those exams. Not a student? No worries. You can still pick up valuable information when you see this icon.

# Beyond the Book

As they say on late-night television commercials, “Wait! There’s more!” Look online at [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) to find a cheat sheet for *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, where you can zero in quickly on crucial information. Competitive? You can also test yourself with online quizzes oriented to a single chapter or to a heftier amount of information.

To gain access to the online practice, all you have to do is register. Just follow these simple steps:

**1. Find your PIN access code:**

- **Print-book users:** If you purchased a print copy of this book, turn to the inside front cover of the book to find your access code.
- **E-book users:** If you purchased this book as an e-book, you can get your access code by registering your e-book at [www.dummies.com/go/getaccess](http://www.dummies.com/go/getaccess). Go to this website, find your book and click it, and answer the security questions to verify your purchase. You’ll receive an email with your access code.

**2. Go to [Dummies.com](http://Dummies.com) and click *Activate Now*.**

**3. Find your product (*English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, 3rd Edition) and then follow the on-screen prompts to activate your PIN.**

Now you’re ready to go! You can come back to the program as often as you want. Simply log in with the username and password you created during your initial login. No need to enter the access code a second time.

# Where to Go from Here

To the refrigerator for a snack. Nope. Just kidding. Now that you know what’s where, turn to the section that best meets your needs. If you’re not sure what would benefit you most, take a moment to think about the aspects of writing or speaking that make you pause for a lengthy head scratch. Do you have trouble picking the appropriate verb tense? Is finding the right word a snap but placing a comma cause for concern?

After you’ve done a little grammatical reconnaissance, select the sections of this book that meet your needs. Use the table of contents and the index to find more detail about what’s where. If you aren’t sure whether a particular topic is a problem, no problem! Try a couple of sentences and check your answers, or whip through an online quiz. If everything comes out okay and you understand the answers, move on. If you stub your toe, go back and do a few more questions in the book or from the online quiz until the grammar rule becomes clear. Or, if you like to start with an overview, hit the exercises in the appendix first. Then zero in on the sections that address the errors you made in those exercises.



# 1

## **Building a Firm Foundation: Grammar Basics**

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Adapt language to suit your situation, audience, and purpose.

Identify the basic elements of a sentence: the subject, verb, and complement.

Sort verbs into “action” and “linking” categories.

Examine the proper format for statements, commands, questions, and negative remarks.

Form noun plurals properly.

Ensure that your sentences are complete.



- » Distinguishing between formal and informal language
- » Choosing the correct level of formality in speaking and writing

## Chapter **1**

# Tailoring Language to Suit Your Audience and Purpose

**W**hen it comes to language, one size does *not* fit all. The way you tell an Authority Figure (teacher, boss, emperor, whatever) about an app you invented differs from the way you explain your brainchild to a friend. If you're like most people, you probably switch levels of formality automatically, dozens of times a day. But sometimes you may find yourself wondering how to express yourself, especially in emails, texts, and tweets. If you hit the wrong note, your message may not receive the reaction you'd hoped for. Very few investors react positively to someone who writes, "Yo, want in on this?" Nor will you find it easy to get a date if you ask, "Would you consider dining with me at an informal Italian restaurant that offers relatively good pizza?" In this chapter you practice identifying levels of formality and examine situations in which each is appropriate.

# Climbing the Ladder of Language Formality

Proper English is important. The only problem with that statement is the definition of “proper.” Language has many levels of formality, all of which are “proper” at times and completely unsuitable at others. Many gradations of formality exist, but to make things easier, I divide English into three large categories: what I call “friendspeak” (the most casual), “conversational” (one step up), and “formal” (the equivalent of wearing your best business attire). Take a look at these examples:

c u in 10 (friendspeak)

There in ten minutes. (conversational)

I will arrive in ten minutes. (formal)

All three statements say the same thing in very different ways. Here’s the deal:

- » **Friendspeak** breaks some rules of formal English on purpose, to show that people are comfortable with each other. Friendspeak shortens or drops words and often includes slang and references that only close friends understand. (That’s why I call it “*friendspeak*.”) No one has to teach you this level of English. You learn it from your pals, or you create it yourself and teach it to your buddies.
- » **Conversational English** sounds relaxed, but not too relaxed. It’s the language equivalent of jeans and a T-shirt. Conversational English is filled with contractions (*I’m* instead of *I am*, *would’ve* instead of *would have*, and so forth). Not many abbreviations appear in conversational English, but you may confidently include those that are well established and widely understood (*etc.*, *a.m.*, *p.m.*, and the like). You may also see acronyms, which pluck the first letter from each word of a name (*NATO* for the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* or *AIDS* for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*, for example). Conversational English may drop some words and break a few rules. The example sentence for conversational English at the beginning of this section, for instance, has no subject or verb, a giant no-no in formal writing but perfectly acceptable at this level of language.
- » **Formal English** is the pickiest location in Grammarland. When you speak or write in formal English, you follow every rule (including some you never heard of), avoid slang and abbreviations, and trot out your best vocabulary.

Think about your audience when you’re selecting friendspeak, conversational English, or formal English. What impression are you trying to give? Let your goals guide you. Also consider the situation. At work you may rely on conversational English when you run into your boss at the coffee machine, but not when you’re submitting a quarterly report. At school, choosing conversational English is okay for a teacher–student chat in the cafeteria, but not for homework. More on situation and language appears in the next section, “Matching Message to Situation.”

Can you identify levels of formality? Before you hit the questions, check out this example:



EXAMPLE

**Q.** Place these expressions in order of formality, from the most formal to the least. Note: Two expressions may tie. For example, your answer may be A, B and C — in which case expression A is the most formal and expressions B and C are on the same, more casual level.

- A.** sketchy block
- B.** That is a dangerous neighborhood.
- C.** Where gangs rule.

**A.** B, C, A. Expression B is the most formal because it follows all the conventions of English. Every word is in the dictionary, and the sentence is complete. (See Chapter 3 for more practice with complete sentences.) Expression C, on the other hand, is an incomplete sentence and is therefore less formal. Also, in Expression C the verb *rule* has an unusual meaning. Your readers or listeners probably understand that gangs aren't official authorities but instead wield a lot of unofficial power. The statement is more conversational than formal. Expression A employs slang (*sketchy* means "slightly dangerous"), so it's closer to friendspeak than to formal English.

1

- A.** regarding your proposal
- B.** in reference to your proposal
- C.** about that idea

2

- A.** like, earlier
- B.** heretofore
- C.** until now

3

- A.** Please do not abbreviate.
- B.** abbreevs not ok
- C.** I prefer that you write the entire word when you text me.

4

- A.** Awkward!!!!
- B.** Your behavior disturbs me.
- C.** Calm down, guys!

5

- A. Are you into electronic dance music?
- B. edm 2nite?
- C. Tonight that club features electronic dance music. Would you care to go?

6

- A. M left J's FOMO
- B. Mike left John's house when he got a text from Fran about her party.
- C. M = gone FOMO F's party

7

- A. #newbaby #thanxmom #notkillingmewhenIcriedallnight
- B. Dead tired. Baby cried all night. Feeling grateful to my mom.
- C. Now that I'm caring for my new baby, I am grateful to my mother for tolerating me when I was an infant.

8

- A. In retrospect, jumping into the pool blindfolded was foolish.
- B. broken ankle but YOLO
- C. No water in the pool. Who knew? Broken ankle!

9

- A. 2G2BT
- B. 4real?
- C. u sure?

10

- A. ATM card not working.
- B. My bank card was rejected.
- C. ATM?!?!?

## Matching Message to Situation

When you're listening or reading, you probably note the difference between formal and informal language constantly — maybe unconsciously. Knowing levels of language, however, isn't enough. You also need to decide what level of formality to employ when you're speaking and writing. Before you choose, consider these factors:

- » **Your audience.** If your message is going to a person with more power or higher status than you (an employee writing to a boss or a student to a teacher, for example), you should probably be more formal. If you're speaking or writing to someone with less power or lower status than you, conversational English is fine. In a higher-to-lower situation, however, the person with more authority may wish to employ formal English in order to serve as a role model or to establish a professional atmosphere. When you're dealing with peers, conversational English is a good bet. Only your closest friends rate — and understand — friendspeak.
- » **The situation.** At the company picnic or in the cafeteria, most people opt for less formal speech. Similarly, at get-togethers with family and friends, formal language may sound stiff and unfriendly. When you're in an official meeting with a client or teacher, however, formal English is safer.
- » **The format.** When you're speaking you have more leeway than when you're writing. Why? Unless you're reading prepared remarks, you probably can't produce perfect sentences. Not many people can! The writing in texts, tweets, and instant messages tends to be in conversational English or, with your buddies, in friendspeak. Exceptions occur, though. A text to a client should be more formal than one to a friend, and journalists or officials often tweet in formal English. Email can go either way. Because it's fast, the dropped or shortened forms of conversational English are generally acceptable, but if you think the reader expects you to honor tradition (the written equivalent of a curtsy or a hat-tip), go for formal English. Always employ formal English for business letters, school reports, and similar paper-based communication.

Listen to those around you or read others' work that appears in the same context you're navigating. Unless you want to stand out, aim for the same level of formality you hear or see.



Think about the audience, situation, and format. In the following example, decide whether the writing or speech is appropriate or inappropriate.

EXAMPLE

**Q.** Text from a department head to the CEO requesting a salary increase:

greenlight \$20K or I walk

**A. Inappropriate.** Think about the power ladder here. The CEO is on the top rung, and the department head somewhere farther down. Even though texts tend to be informal, this one is about money. When you ask for money, be polite! To be polite in Grammarland is to use formal, correct language. The department head should have written something like "If you cannot raise my salary by \$20,000, I will seek employment elsewhere."

11 Email from student to professor about the assigned reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

Best. Play. Ever.

12 Chat between friends:

There's this prince, he's named Hamlet. He's freaking out about his mother's marriage to his uncle only a couple of months after Hamlet's father died.

- 13 Portion of an essay about the play, written as a homework assignment:  
The Queen's new husband is not a sympathetic character. Dude, he's a murderer!
- 14 Cover letter from a job applicant to a potential employer, a tech start-up:  
Attached please find my resume, pursuant to your advertisement of July 15th.
- 15 Instant messages between classmates, discussing their grades:  
A+!!!  
sick  
ttyl  
ok bfn
- 16 Portion of a letter to the editor of the town paper from a citizen:  
The lack of a stoplight on that corner has led to several car crashes. The city council is right to think about the expense of installing one, but what about the cost of human life and suffering?
- 17 Comment on social media post about a tax to finance improved traffic flow:  
You morons should stop stealing our money. We coulda bought five stoplights made outta gold for the amount of money you spent on office furniture. To conclude, shut up!
- 18 Email to the mother of a potential tutoring client:  
I have an advanced degree in mathematics and many years of experience teaching algebra. My rates are on a par with those of other tutors in the area. Also, I get along well with kids!
- 19 Tweet from the president to the members of the local garden association:  
Meeting tonight at 8 p.m. #springplanting
- 20 Speech by the class president to fellow students at graduation:  
We made it! We're out of this place! But Roger and May are gonna totally ship anyway!

# Answers to “Tailoring Language to Suit Your Audience and Purpose”

In this section you find all the answers you’re looking for. Well, maybe not the answers to “What is the meaning of life?” or “Why is the sky blue?” but definitely the right responses to the questions in this chapter.

- 1 A and B, C.** Both A and B are formal English expressions. Each employs businesslike vocabulary (*regarding, proposal, and in reference to*). Expression C takes the formality level down a notch, substituting *idea* for *proposal* and *about* for *regarding* and *in reference to*.
- 2 B, C, A.** Expression B sounds fancy, and it is. You find *heretofore* in legal documents and in many other types of formal English writing. (It means “before this time,” by the way.) Expression C is something you probably hear and say all the time. It’s conversational. Expression A might be conversational without *like*, but adding that little word puts this one in the friendspeak category.
- 3 C, A, B.** Expression C hits the top of the formal meter, and B is at the bottom. (You probably already guessed that *abreevs* isn’t a real word. Also, B breaks its own rule by including *ok* instead of *okay*.) In between expressions C and B is A, which is grammatically correct without being stuffy.
- 4 B, C, A.** Expression B is a complete sentence, and so is C. But *guys* isn’t formal, so C slips into conversational English. Expression A pops up in friendspeak, whenever someone does something impolite or embarrassing. The four exclamation points (three too many in standard, formal English) also situate this one in friendspeak.
- 5 C, A, B.** Expression C features two complete sentences, and every word is in the dictionary. Expression A is also a complete sentence, but asking if someone is *into* this type of music (or anything else) brings slang to the sentence. Slang is never formal. Expression B has an abbreviation (*edm* = electronic dance music) and a “word” (*2nite*, or “tonight”) that is okay only when you’re texting, and sometimes not even then.
- 6 B, A and C.** Both expressions A and C are written in friendspeak. They use abbreviations and an acronym: *M* and *J*’s stand for names — probably *Mike* and *John*’s — and *FOMO*, which is “fear of missing out.” This usage shows up only in the least formal situations, usually texts between friends. Expression B is a full sentence with all the words written correctly and completely.
- 7 C, B, A.** Expression C explains the speaker’s situation in clear, Standard English. Expression B has half-sentences (probably because the speaker is sleep-deprived), so it’s less formal, in the category of conversational English. Expression A, with its hashtags (the # sign) is the sort of communication only friends will appreciate. It’s written in friendspeak.
- 8 A, C, B.** Expression A is a complete sentence and employs some sophisticated vocabulary (*retrospect*). It’s formal English. Expression C has incomplete sentences (*No water in the pool* and *broken ankle*). The one complete sentence is a humorous, short comment (*Who knew?*). For these reasons, C stands for conversational English here. Expression B is friendspeak; *YOLO* is an acronym for “you only live once.”
- 9 A and B and C.** Did I catch you here? All three of these texts are in friendspeak. Expression A expresses doubt with an abbreviation for “too good to be true.” Expression B asks if something is “for real.” Expression C also asks for confirmation, saying, “Are you sure?”

- 10 **B, A, C.** Expression B is a complete, correct sentence, so it's formal English. Expression A drops a couple of words, so it's more conversational. Expression C makes sense only if you know that the person who texted this stops for cash often and freaks out when the card doesn't work. It's friendspeak (and maybe a request for a loan!).
- 11 **Inappropriate.** Professors and teachers aren't your friends. They're in charge of your education. English teachers in particular — even the ones who show up in class wearing jeans and sneakers — value language. True, the message may appeal, because English teachers tend to think that everything they assign is worthy material. However, the message may fail (and the student also) if the teacher expects formal language.
- 12 **Appropriate.** This chat is a good example of conversational English that's perfectly fine. The friends are conversing — your first clue. They break a few rules, such as illegally stringing together two complete sentences: *There's this prince, he's named Hamlet.*
- 13 **Inappropriate.** Homework assignments have no room in them for *Dude*, unless you're writing fiction and a character says that word. The first sentence establishes a formal tone; the second sentence should match, not lower, the level of formality.
- 14 **Inappropriate.** Surprised? Job applicants should be formal, but they should also avoid out-dated expressions and overly stuffy language, especially for a tech start-up where innovation and rule-breaking are valued. "Attached please find" should be "Attached is." "Pursuant to" would be better as "in response to."
- 15 **Appropriate.** This one's in friendspeak, entirely proper for two pals sending information quickly via instant messages. Translated for those who need actual words, this exchange reads as follows:
- Friend 1: I got an A+.
- Friend 2: That's great. (*Sick* is slang for "excellent, wonderful.")
- Friend 1: I will talk to you later. (The first letter of each word creates this expression.)
- Friend 2: All right (or okay). Bye for now.
- 16 **Appropriate.** This paragraph is quite formal, and its purpose is to persuade readers that a stoplight is needed. To convince someone, you want to sound informed, sane, and thoughtful. Formal English fills that slot!
- 17 **Inappropriate.** Social media has a reputation as an "anything goes" sort of medium, but before you post, think about your purpose. Who would pay attention to this writer? To persuade someone not to tax, or to persuade someone of anything, you need a real argument, not just a set of insults like *morons*, *stealing*, and *shut up*. Proper grammar isn't essential, but if your goal is to be taken seriously, mistakes such as *coulda* (instead of *could have*) and *outta* (instead of *out of*) don't help.
- 18 **Appropriate.** Job applicants usually want to sound competent, and those seeking teaching roles should be even more formal than others. Why? Because language in academic situations is generally formal. You may have wondered about the last sentence, which includes the informal term *kids*. Here, the writer breaks into conversational English, but with a reason: to show that the writer can relate to and be comfortable with the child to be tutored.
- 19 **Appropriate.** Tweets may have no more than 280 characters, so the number of spaces, letters, and symbols can't go above that number. Dropping words is fine in this format, as is directing people who are interested in attending the meeting to other tweets about spring planting.
- 20 **Inappropriate.** Unless you're in a school that prizes informality to an extreme degree (and those places do exist), a graduation speech should be something that appeals to the entire audience. Roger, May, and the speaker may know that *ship* means to be in a romantic relationship, but Roger's grandmother probably doesn't.



#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Finding verbs in statements and questions
- » Distinguishing between action and linking verbs
- » Adding meaning with helping verbs
- » Locating the subject in every type of sentence
- » Forming noun plurals
- » Identifying complements and objects

## Chapter 2

# Identifying the Major Elements of a Sentence

Cops trying to crack a case often create a line-up. A possible suspect appears with several other people who could not have committed the crime. Behind one-way glass, a witness stares at the group and then chooses — *That's him!* When you crack a sentence, you face a line-up too — the words in the sentence. In this chapter, you practice identifying the major criminals . . . er, I mean *elements* of a sentence: the verb, the subject, and the complement or object. Because subjects are often nouns and you frequently need to determine whether you have a singular or plural subject, I throw in a little practice with noun plurals as well.

## Going to the Heart of the Matter: The Verb

Before you do anything to a sentence — write, analyze, or edit — you have to locate its heart, also known as the verb. The words that express action or state of being are verbs; they pump meaning into a sentence, just as a real heart pumps blood into veins and arteries. In this section, you practice identifying verbs, sorting out types of verbs, and examining the role of helping verbs. For information on another important verb characteristic, tense, read Chapter 4.

## Treasure hunt: Finding the verb

To find the verb, think about the meaning of the sentence. Ask two questions: What’s happening? What is, was, or will be? The first question gives you an *action verb*, and the second question yields a *linking verb*. An action verb expresses action. (How shocking!) Action verbs aren’t always energetic, however. *Sleep, dream, realize, and meditate* are all action verbs. Think of a linking verb as a giant equal sign. This sort of verb links a person, place, or thing to a description or an identity. In the sentence “Mary is tired,” *is* links *Mary* and *tired*. Most linking verbs are forms of the verb *be* or one of its close cousins (*seem* or *remain*, for example). Verbs that express sensation — *taste, feel, sound, and smell*, for instance — are also linking verbs if they can be replaced by a form of *be* without completely changing the meaning of the sentence.



TIP

You may find more than one verb in a sentence. For example, this morning I showered and washed my hair. In that last sentence, *showered* and *washed* are both verbs. Sometimes a single verb is formed with two or more words. Keep your eye out for forms of the verb *do* and *have*, as well as the word *will*. They may show up next to the verb or a couple of words away. You have to locate all the parts of a verb in order to understand how the sentence functions. (More on other types of multi-word verbs appears in “Aiding and abetting: Helping verbs” later in this section.)



EXAMPLE

**Q.** Find the verb(s) in this sentence and identify each as linking (LV) or action (AV):

Gloria was a tennis fanatic, so she rushed out to buy tickets to the championship match.

---

**A.** **was (LV), rushed (AV).** This sentence makes two statements, one about Gloria herself and one about her actions. To locate the verbs, ask your questions:

What’s happening? *rushed* This is an action verb because it explains what Gloria did.

What is, was, or will be? *was* This is a linking verb because it explains Gloria’s personality, “linking” *Gloria* to *tennis fanatic*.



TIP

Did you stumble over *to buy*? A verb with *to* in front is called an infinitive, the head of a verb family. Oddly, infinitives don’t function as verbs in a sentence. If you reread the statement about Gloria, you see that the sentence doesn’t say that she bought tickets. She *rushed*. Maybe she was successful, and maybe she wasn’t. Either way, *to buy* is an infinitive, not a verb.



EXAMPLE

**Q.** Identify the verbs in the sentence and label them linking (LV) or action (AV):

My cat sleeps all day because he has always been lazy.

---

**A.** **sleeps (AV), has been (LV).** When you ask *What’s happening?* the answer is *sleeps*, so you know that *sleeps* is a verb. Even though it doesn’t require much energy, *sleep* is something you do, so it’s an action verb. When you ask *What is, was, or will be?* the answer is *has been*. That verb, like all forms of *be*, is a linking verb. Did you include *always*? The word gives a time range, not a state of being or an action. It’s an adverb, not a verb, even though it’s tucked inside the verb *has been*.

- 1 The fire engine raced down the street.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Around the curve, just ahead of the railroad tracks, stood seven donkeys.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 One of the donkeys, frightened by the noise of the siren, ran away.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4 Another looked worried but did not move.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Was he brave or was he determined to defend his herd?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6 Most likely, the animal did not notice the noise or did not care.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7 Did you know that the donkey was eating George's lawn?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 8 George's house was not on fire, but several others on his street were burning.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 9 George left the donkey alone and went inside for an extra-long lunch.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 10 Because of the donkey, George did not mow his lawn.  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Choosing the correct verb for negative expressions

Three little letters — *not* — turn a positive comment (“I like your boots”) to a negative one (“I do not like your boots”). Apart from the fashion critique, what do you notice about the negative statement? The verb changes from *like* to *do like*. You need that extra part because “I not like” isn’t proper English. Negative verbs don’t always rely on a form of the verb *do*. Sometimes *have*, *has*, or *had* does the job. Sentences with a *be* verb can turn negative without any help at all. In this section you can try your hand at *not* creating the wrong negative verb.



EXAMPLE

**Q.** Rewrite the sentence as a negative expression.

Mark’s acting received an Academy Award.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**A.** **Mark's acting did not receive an Academy Award.** Two things change when the positive verb (*received*) becomes negative (*did not receive*). *Received*, a past-tense form, turns into the basic, no-frills, bare infinitive (*receive*). The helping verb *did* pairs with it. As you probably noticed, *not* is tucked between the two parts of this verb, its usual spot.

11 My phone buzzes like a bee.

---

12 Sheila is in love with bees.

---

13 She wanted to be a beekeeper.

---

14 Looking at bee hives gives her hives.

---

15 The bee flying near our picnic table left Sheila alone all afternoon.

---

16 Sheila will ask me to change my ringtone.

---

## Questioning with verbs

In many languages, you say the equivalent of “Ate the cookie?” to find out whether your friend gobbled up a treat. In English, you nearly always need a helping verb and a subject (the person or thing you’re talking about) to create a question: “Did you eat the cookie?” (The verbs *to be* and *to have* are the only exceptions.) Notice that the combo form (*did eat*) is different from the straight past tense (*ate*). Other question-creators, italicized in these examples, change the tense: “*Will* you eat my cookie?” or “*Do* you eat cookies?” (This last one suggests an ongoing action.) In nearly all questions, the subject follows the first (or only) verb.



EXAMPLE

Rewrite the statement so that it becomes a question. Add words or rearrange the sentence as needed.

**Q.** You found a wallet on the ground.

---

**A.** **Did you find a wallet on the ground?** The helping verb *did* comes before *you* in this question. The past-tense form, *found*, changes to *find*, the basic, bare infinitive.

17 You took the wallet to the police station.

---

18 The cops always accept lost items.

---

19 The wallet was stolen.

---

20 The detectives seemed interested.

---

21 They noticed seven credit cards, each with a different name.

---

22 The photo on the license matches a mug shot.

---

23 The police will act swiftly.

---

24 You want the reward for recovering stolen property.

---

## Aiding and abetting: Helping verbs

In addition to *has*, *have*, *had*, and the *be* verbs (*am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, and so on) you can attach a few other helpers to a main verb, and in doing so, change the meaning of the sentence slightly. Consider hiring the following helpers:

- » **Should and must add a sense of duty.** Notice the sense of obligation in these two sentences: "David *should* put the ice cream away before he eats the whole thing." "David *must* reduce his cholesterol, according to his doctor."
- » **Can and could imply ability.** *Could* is the past tense of *can*. Choose the tense that matches the tense of the main verb or the time period expressed in the sentence, as in these examples, "If Hanna *can* help, she will." or "Courtney *could* stray from the beaten path, depending on the weather."
- » **May and might add possibility to the sentence.** Strictly speaking, *might* is for past events, and *may* for present, but these days people interchange the two forms: "I *may* go to the picnic if I can find a bottle of ant-killer." "I told Courtney that she *might* want to bring some insect repellent."

» **Would usually expresses a condition or willingness.** This helper explains under what circumstances something may happen. (“I *would* have brought the cat had I known about the mouse problem.”) *Would* may also express willingness. (“He *would* bait the trap.”) *Would* sometimes communicates repeated past actions. (“Every Saturday he *would* go to the pet store for more mouse food.”) The present tense of *would*, the helping verb *will*, may also indicate a condition in the present or future. (“I *will* go if I *can* find a free ticket.”)



EXAMPLE

Add a helper to the main verb. The information in parentheses after the fill-in-the-blank sentence explains what meaning the sentence should have.

**Q.** Lisa said that she \_\_\_\_\_ consider running for Parks Commissioner, but she hasn’t made up her mind yet. (*possibility*)

**A.** **might** or **may.** The *might* or *may* shows that Lisa hasn’t ruled out a run.

25 The mayor, shy as ever, said that she \_\_\_\_\_ go to the tree-planting ceremony only if the press agreed to stay outside the forest. (*condition*)

26 Kirk, a reporter for the local radio station, \_\_\_\_\_ not agree to any conditions, because the station manager insisted on eyewitness coverage. (*ability*)

27 Whenever he met with her, Kirk \_\_\_\_\_ always urge the mayor to invite the press to special events, without success. (*repeated action*)

28 The mayor \_\_\_\_\_ make an effort to be more open to the press. (*duty*)

29 Lisa, who writes the popular “Trees-a-Crowd” blog, explained that she \_\_\_\_\_ rely on her imagination to supply details. (*possibility*)

30 Lisa knows that Kirk \_\_\_\_\_ leap to fame based on his tree-planting report, and she doesn’t want to miss an important scoop. (*ability*)

31 All good reporters \_\_\_\_\_ know that if a tree falls or is planted in the forest, the sound is heard by a wide audience only if a radio reporter is there. (*duty*)

32 Sound engineers, on the other hand, \_\_\_\_\_ skip all outdoor events if they \_\_\_\_\_ do so. (*condition, ability*)

## Zeroing in on the Subject

Every sentence needs a subject — the who or what performing the action or existing in the state of being expressed in the sentence. Subjects are usually *nouns* (words that name people, places, things, or ideas) or *pronouns* (words such as *he*, *it*, *who*, and so forth that substitute for nouns). Before you search for the subject, find the verb. Then place “Who?” or “What?” before the verb. For example, suppose the verb is *had parked*. Your subject questions are *Who had parked?* *What had parked?* The answer is the subject.



TIP

The subject often, but not always, appears before the verb. Don't scout location. Use logic and the questions and you'll find what you're looking for — the subject. Also, not every subject appears in the sentence. In commands (*Take out the garbage now*, for example), the subject is *you*, because the listener or reader is the one who is supposed to *take out the garbage*. Lucky you!



EXAMPLE

Locate the subject(s) of each verb in the sentence.

**Q.** Angelo raided his piggy bank because his car needed a new muffler.

---

**A.** **Angelo, needed.** In this sentence you find two verbs, *raided* and *needed*. When you ask *who raided?*, the answer is *Angelo raided*. *Angelo* is the subject of the verb *raided*. (You can ask *what raided?* also, but that question has no answer.) When you ask *who needed?*, you get no answer. The question *what needed?* gives you *car needed*, so *car* is the subject of the verb *needed*.

33 Ana and Max spend all their free time in the library.

---

34 Max has grown quite tall, but he has not adjusted to his new size.

---

35 Once he reached under a library table to pick up a book Ana had dropped.

---

36 Max stood up too quickly and smashed his head on the bottom of the table.

---

37 There is a dent in the table now.

---

38 Did you see a dent in Max's head?

---

39 Max's thick hair and equally thick skull protect him from most head injuries.

---

40 When Max hit it, the table fell over and broke Ana's toe.

---

## When one isn't enough: Forming noun plurals

When I was in elementary school, the only spell check was the teacher's ruler. "Don't you know you're supposed to change the *y* to *i* and add *es*?" Miss Hammerhead would inquire just before the ruler landed (*Bam!*) on a pupil's head. Hammerhead (not her real name) was teaching spelling, but she also was explaining how to form the plural of some *nouns*, the grammatical term

for words that name people, places, things, or ideas. Here are Miss Hammerhead’s lessons, minus the weaponry:

- » **Regular plurals pick up an s.** For instance, *one snob/two snobs* and *a dollar/two billion dollars*.
- » **For nouns ending in s, sh, ch, and x, tack on es to form the plural unless the noun has an irregular plural.** For example, *kindness/kindnesses*, *splash/splashes*, *catch/catches*, and *hex/hexes*. I tell you more about irregular plurals in a minute.
- » **For nouns ending in ay, ey, oy, simply add an s.** *Monkey* becomes *monkeys* and *boy* changes to *boys*.
- » **For nouns ending in y preceded by a consonant, change the y to i and add es.** *Butterfly/butterflies* and *mystery/mysteries* are two such examples.
- » **Hyphenated nouns become plural by changing the most important word.** You can have two *mothers-in-law*, but no *mother-in-laws*, because *mother* is the defining characteristic.
- » **When making the plural of a proper name, add s or es.** Don’t change any letters even if the name ends with a consonant-y combo (*Smithy*, perhaps). Just add s for the *Smiths* and the *Smithys*. If the name already ends in s, sh, ch, or x (*Woods*, for example), you can add es (*Woodses*).
- » **Irregular nouns cancel all bets: Anything goes!** Sometimes the noun doesn’t change at all, so the plural and singular forms are exactly the same (*fish/fish deer/deer*); other times the noun does change (*leaf/leaves* and *child/children*). When you’re unsure about an irregular plural, you can check the dictionary. The definition lists the plural form for each noun.



EXAMPLE

At the end of each sentence is a noun in parentheses. Write the plural in the blank, as in this example:

- Q.** When she was angry, Jennifer often sent dinner \_\_\_\_\_ flying across the room. (*plate*)
- A.** **plates.** Love those regular plurals! Just add s.
- 41 Jennifer works at one of the local mental-health \_\_\_\_\_. (*clinic*)
- 42 Jennifer refers to these establishments as “brain \_\_\_\_\_.” (*house*)
- 43 The town eccentric, Jennifer has dyed several \_\_\_\_\_ of her hair light green. (*thatch*)
- 44 Jennifer sees her unusual hair color as appropriate for all \_\_\_\_\_. (*woman*)
- 45 Few people know that Jennifer, an accomplished historian and mathematician, has created a series of \_\_\_\_\_ on the Hundred Years’ War. (*graph*)



- 46 Jennifer also knows a great deal about the role of \_\_\_\_\_ in colonial America. (*turkey*)
- 47 The \_\_\_\_\_ of envy at Jennifer's scholarship were quite loud. (*sigh*)
- 48 However, her paper did not impress her \_\_\_\_\_. (*brother-in-law*)
- 49 Some \_\_\_\_\_ in the Sullivan family opt for veterinary school. (*child*)
- 50 Danny went to dental school so he could work with \_\_\_\_\_ instead of dogs. (*tooth*)

## Adding Meaning: Objects and Complements

Three important elements — direct objects, indirect objects, and subject complements — don't always show up in a sentence, but when they do, they add information to the idea begun by the subject and the verb. To locate objects and subject complements, keep these points in mind:

- » After an action verb, you may find a word — or several words — answering the question *whom?* or *what?* begun by the verb. That's the direct object. For example, in the sentence *Lulu hates sports*, *hates* is the action verb and *Lulu* is the subject of *hates*. Ask *Lulu hates whom?* and you get no answer. Ask *Lulu hates what?* and the answer is *sports*. *Sports* is the direct object of the verb *hates*.
- » Action verbs also occasionally appear with a direct object and an indirect object. In the sentence *Lulu gave me an annoyed glance*, the subject-verb combination is *Lulu gave*. The direct object of the verb *gave* is *glance*, which answers the question *Lulu gave what?* The indirect object questions are *to whom?* *to what?* So now you have *Lulu gave an annoyed glance to whom?* The answer is *to me*, and *me* is the indirect object. (You don't get an answer when you ask *to what?*)
- » After a linking verb, simply ask *who?* or *what?* to find the subject complement. In the sentence *Lulu is a terrible basketball player*, the subject-verb combo is *Lulu is*. Now ask *Lulu is who?* *Lulu is what?* The answer is *a terrible basketball player*. The most important word in that answer is *player*, and *player* is the subject complement.



TIP

Most of the time the distinction between objects and complements doesn't matter. When a pronoun completes the thought begun by the subject and verb, however, you have to be alert. In formal English, the same type of pronoun that acts as a subject also acts as a subject complement. Subject pronouns and object pronouns don't always match. For more about subject and object pronouns, check out Chapter 6.



EXAMPLE

Locate the objects and subject complements in each sentence. Underline each one and label it as a direct object (DO), an indirect object (IO), or a subject complement (SC).