

# Grammar and punctuation

## Further explanations and practice

---

### Sentence Structure

When considering sentence structure we can divide sentences into 3 types:

- Simple sentences
- Compound sentences
- Complex sentences

#### A. Simple Sentences

The common basic units of a simple sentence are subject, verb, object, circumstances.

E.g. He wrote the book in less than a week.  
s v o c

The shortest possible sentence in written English consists of a subject and a verb.

E.g. We waited.

(We is the subject. Waited is the verb.)

If a sentence is written without a subject or without a main or full verb, it is considered ungrammatical and therefore incorrect.

#### Common mistakes with Simple Sentences

1. One common mistake made by students is to write a sentence without a subject or without a verb. Students often do this because they think that a dependent clause can stand alone as a sentence.

*E.g. Thus giving rise to accusations of plagiarism.*

This sentence has no subject and the verb used, "giving", is not a main (or full) verb; it is a participle. To make grammatical sense this needs to become part of another sentence:

*E.g. The scientists omitted to acknowledge some of their original sources, thus giving rise to accusations of plagiarism.*

2. Another common mistake is to use a transitive verb without an object. Students often do this because they are writing fast and don't leave enough time to proof-read their work.

*E.g. This demonstrates without any doubt.*

The verb *demonstrates* in this context is transitive, so needs an object to make sense.

## Practice

1. Identify the problem in the following simple sentences, by choosing from A, B or C.

**A: No main verb**

**B: No subject for main verb**

**C: Transitive verb with no object**

2. Suggest a possible correction.

- (i) Therefore indicates a high level of achievement.
- (ii) Humans have been exploiting for thousands of years.
- (iii) Using the process of discussion to clarify students' thoughts.
- (iv) In this study: the analysis of Shakespeare's sonnets.

## Answers

- (i) B  
This therefore indicates a high level of achievement
- (ii) C  
Humans have been exploiting their environment for thousands of years.  
OR  
Humans have been exploited for thousands of years.

- (iii) A  
Using the process of discussion clarifies students' thoughts.  
OR  
We use the process of discussion to clarify students' thoughts.
- (iv) A  
This study analyses Shakespeare's sonnets.  
OR  
In this study there is an analysis of Shakespeare's sonnets.

## B. Compound Sentences

A compound sentence is made up of two independent clauses, (or two simple sentences) joined with a linking word such as *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *so*.

E.g. The area is still largely undeveloped **and** the city council is considering various proposals.

## C. Complex Sentences

A complex sentence consists of more than one clause. One of the clauses in a complex sentence must be independent, (or main), i.e. it could stand alone as a sentence, and the others can be dependent, i.e. they rely on the independent clause for their meaning.

e.g. Having taken into consideration all the risks, the joint venture is not  
dependent clause (can't stand alone) independent

going to be a viable option.  
clause (can stand alone as a sentence)

### 2. Identify and correct the problems in the following compound and complex sentences:

- (i) Grayling (210) claims that reading "*extends the moral imagination*" and "*giving us insights into...other lives*".
- (ii) Don Quixote, a satirical romance by Cervantes, published in 1605, a second part coming out ten years later.

- (iii) The lyrical quality of the poem and the skill of its construction are universally acknowledged, and is agreed to be one of the greatest poems of the period.
- (iv) Svalbard means “cold edge” in old Norse, is an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean north of Norway.
- (v) This project is a Learning Technology Development funded project undertaken in the Faculty of Learning and Information Services implement a coherent framework to support the development of student i-skills.

### Answers:

- (i) Two possible corrections are:

Grayling (210) claims that reading “*extends the moral imagination*” and **gives us** “*insights into...other lives*”.

OR

Grayling (210) claims that reading “*extends the moral imagination*”, “**giving** us *insights into...other lives*”.

***The second verb “giving” must either agree with the subject: reading, or become part of a dependent clause, separated with a comma. If you have to change the form of a verb in a quote you must remove it from inside the quotation marks.***

- (ii) One possible correction is:

Don Quixote, a satirical romance by Cervantes, **was** published in 1605, a second part coming out ten years later.

***This gives the sentence a main verb, which was missing.***

- (iii) One possible correction is:

The lyrical quality of the poem and the skill of its construction are universally acknowledged, and **it** is agreed to be one of the greatest poems of the period.

***This gives a subject to the verb is agreed, which was missing.***

(iv) Three possible corrections are:

Svalbard means “cold edge” in old Norse, **and** is an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean north of Norway.

OR

Svalbard, **meaning** “cold edge” in old Norse, is an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean north of Norway.

OR

Svalbard, **which means** “cold edge” in old Norse, is an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean north of Norway.

***The subject Svalbard cannot take both verbs unless they are separated with a conjunction, e.g. and, (in the first possible correction), or expressed as a participle in a dependent clause, e.g. meaning, (second correction), or a full verb in a relative clause, e.g. which means, (third correction).***

(v) One possible correction is:

This project is a Learning Technology Development funded project undertaken in the Faculty of Learning and Information Services **to** implement a coherent framework **that** supports the development of student i-skills.

**The verb implement has no subject. If we add to we turn it into an infinitive expressing purpose. The second change, from to support to that supports is not technically necessary, but it sounds better if we do not repeat the infinitive.**

## Punctuation

Four areas of punctuation tend to cause problems for students. These are the apostrophe, the semi-colon, the colon and the comma.

### 1. The Apostrophe:

Uses:

- a. To indicate possessive in a singular noun. It precedes the “s” of the possessor.  
e.g. *The boy’s hat.* (The hat belongs to the boy.)
- b. To indicate possessive in plural noun. Here the apostrophe follows the “s” of the possessors.  
e.g. *The boys’ hats.* (The hats belong to the boys.)  
*The girls’ room.* (The room belongs to the girls.)
- c. If the possessor is plural, but does not end in “s”, the apostrophe precedes the “s”.  
e.g. *The children’s playground.*

**Important Exception: its**

e.g. *The classroom was unpopular because of its low ceilings and lack of light.*

Other uses:

- a. To indicate that a letter is omitted:
  - i. It’s = It is
  - ii. It’s = It has
  - iii. You’re = you are (c.f. your)
  - iv. Doesn’t = Does not
- b. Has been used to express plural of certain groups of letters or numbers, e.g. GNVQ’s or 1970’s; this is less common now.

### 2. The Semi-colon;

Uses:

- a. To link two independent, but related clauses of a sentence.  
e.g. *The lecture was very useful; all the material was relevant and up-to-date.*  
The semi-colon acts as a shorter pause than a full-stop, but grammatically you could put a full-stop here and be correct.
- b. To show sub-groupings in lists.  
e.g. *The chief commodities are: butter, cheese, milk; lamb, beef, pork; oats, barley, rye and wheat.*

## The colon:

Uses:

1. To indicate that what follows is an explanation or amplification of what precedes it.  
e.g. *I have some news for you: England have lost.*
2. To introduce a list of items, often after expressions such as:  
e.g. *as follows, namely, such as, etc.*

## The comma,

The comma tends to indicate a short pause and as such can sometimes be optional. In the uses described below it is not optional.

Uses:

1. To separate items on a list.  
e.g. You need a pen, pencil and ruler.
2. To separate two or more clauses, especially in the cases below:
  - a) To separate a non-defining relative clause from the rest of a sentence.  
e.g. The tutors, who are overworked, are handing back the essays late.
  - b) To separate a participle clause from the rest of a sentence.  
e.g. Realising she was late, she began to run.
  - c) To separate two clauses of a conditional sentences starting with if  
e.g. If he had known, he would have informed me.
3. To separate adverbial expressions in the middle of a sentence  
e.g. They tried, in spite of my advice, to climb the mountain.
4. To separate some linking words from the rest of the sentence  
e.g. however, nevertheless, conversely, for example, notably.

## Practice

**Correct the punctuation mistakes in the following sentences:**

- 1. The student in question is Spanish, I have got a sample of her written English.**

2. The person **who's** details were lost has now left.
3. **Bridget Jone's** Diary was a bestseller.
4. The **babie's** names were mixed up.

### Answers

1. The student in question is Spanish; I have got a sample of her written English. (Each clause could stand alone as a sentence. They should therefore be separated with a semi-colon or a linking word such as and or but.)
2. The person **whose** details were lost has now left. (Who's = who is or who has.)
3. Bridget Jones**'s** diary was a best-seller. (Names ending in s can either be followed by an apostrophe + s, or just an apostrophe.)
4. The **babies'** names were mixed up. (More than one baby.)  
OR  
The **baby's** names were mixed up. (One baby with more than one name.)

### Further practice: Punctuation

Which sentence is correct?

- (i) A. Can you tell them whose coming tonight?  
B. Can you tell them who's coming tonight?
- (ii) A. Given that this character has previously revealed a violent side it is unwise to trust him with the care of the child.  
B. Given that this character has previously revealed a violent side, it is unwise to trust him with the care of the child.  
C. Given that this character has previously revealed a violent side; it is unwise to trust him with the care of the child.  
D. Given that this character has previously revealed a violent side: it is unwise to trust him with the care of the child.
- (iii) A. I'm meeting my husbands' boss this evening.  
B. I'm meeting my husband's boss this evening.



(Clue: How many husbands does the speaker have?)

- (iv) A. This is the book that the lecturer recommended.  
B. This is the book, that the lecturer recommended.
- (v) A. This book, which is stocked in the campus book-shop, is essential reading for the course.  
B. This book which is stocked in the campus book-shop, is essential reading for the course.  
C. This book, which is stocked in the campus book-shop is essential reading for the course.  
D. This book which is stocked in the campus book-shop is essential reading for the course.
- (vi) A. Students are required to bring the following; the reading text, a pen, some spare paper, and a dictionary.  
B. Students are required to bring the following, the reading text, a pen, some spare paper, and a dictionary.  
C. Students are required to bring the following: the reading text, a pen, some spare paper, and a dictionary.
- (vii) A. You need to be aware of this, plagiarism is a serious offence.  
B. You need to be aware of this: plagiarism is a serious offence  
C. You need to be aware of this; plagiarism is a serious offence

## Answers

- (i) B – because whose is a possessive pronoun. Who's means who is or who has.  
(ii) B – because the comma is used to join an independent clause (*it is wise...*) with a dependent one starting with a participle (*Given*).  
(iii) B if you have one husband. A if you have more than one husband working for the same boss.  
(iv) A – because this is a defining relative clause, i.e. the information introduced by “*that*” gives essential information which identifies what is being talked about in the main clause. When this is the case we can use “*that*”, or “*which*”, but there should be no comma.

- (v) A – because this is a non-defining relative clause, i.e. the information introduced by “*which*” gives extra information about the first clause. The information could be taken out and the sentence would still have meaning. The clause introduced by “*which*” must be separated from the rest of the sentence with commas. In this case it is not possible to replace “*which*” with “*that*”.
- (vi) C – because a colon is used to introduce a list.
- (vii) B - because a colon is used when the second clause is introduced by the first.