c) “He has no choice but to call off the trip.”
d) “The neighbor’s dogs are acting up again.”

Conjunctions

Definition

Conjunctions are used to express relationships between things in a sentence, link different clauses together, and to combine sentences.

Without conjunctions, we would be forced to use brief, simple sentences that do not express the full range of meaning we wish to communicate. Only using simple sentences would sound unnaturally abrupt and disjointed.

By using different kinds of conjunctions, however, we are able to make more complex, sophisticated sentences that show a connection between actions and ideas.

There are four main types of conjunctions: **coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions**, and **conjunctive adverbs**. We’ll briefly examine each kind below.

Coordinating Conjunctions

The most common conjunctions are the **coordinating conjunctions**: *and, but, or, yet, for, so* and *nor*. We use coordinating conjunctions between:

Individual words

• “I like to run **and** swim.”

• “Do you want pepperoni **or** anchovies on your pizza?”

Phrases

• “The president has been praised for both his willingness to negotiate **and** his strength in defending his principles.”

• “I am a big fan of playing sports **but** not watching them.”

Independent clauses

• “It was raining, **so** I took an umbrella.”

• “We went for a hike, **but** I didn’t bring the right shoes.”

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions connect a subordinate clause to an independent clause.
For example:

• “**Although** it was raining, I didn’t take an umbrella.”

• “**Even though** she didn’t like pepperoni, she still ate the pizza.”

• “I went to work **in spite of** being sick.”
• “I intend to go to South America next month, **provided that** I can get the time off work.”

Correlative Conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions are pairs of conjunctions that work together to indicate the relationship between two elements in a sentence. For example:

• “Sports are a great way to bring people together, **whether** you like to play **or** just watch.”
• “I like **neither** pepperoni **nor** anchovies on my pizza.”

Conjunctive Adverbs

Conjunctive adverbs join two independent clauses. These can either be two separate sentences, or they can be joined into a single complex sentence with a semicolon. For example:

• “The English language school offers discounted English language courses. There’s **also** a library where you can study and borrow books.”
• “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; **nevertheless**, she recommended it to her friend.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What can **coordinating** conjunctions link together?

a) words
b) phrases
c) independent clauses
d) all of the above

2. How are independent clauses joined with **conjunctive adverbs**?

a) As separate sentences
b) As two independent clauses joined by a comma
c) As two independent clauses joined by a semicolon
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) B & C

3. How are independent clauses joined with **coordinating conjunctions**?

a) As separate sentences
b) As two independent clauses joined by a comma
c) As two independent clauses joined by a semicolon
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) B & C

4. What kind of conjunction is used in the following sentence?

“You can either take the exam again or receive a score of 0.”

a) Coordinating conjunction

b) Subordinating conjunction

c) Correlative conjunction

d) Conjunctive adverb

Coordinating

Conjunctions Definition

Coordinating conjunctions are used to join two or more words, phrases, or independent clauses. The two elements being joined must be grammatically equal or similar in both importance and structure. There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English, which can be remembered using the acronym FANBOYS:

For

And

Nor

But

Or

Yet

So

Some coordinating conjunctions are more flexible than others. For example: *and, but, or*, and *yet* can join words, phrases, or independent clauses; *for*, *nor*, and *so* are more limited, as we'll see.

Let's look at each coordinating conjunction separately:

For

For is used to give a reason for something. It can normally only join two independent clauses, introducing the second clause as the reason for the first one. We can use *for* whenever we mean *because*, but it's considered quite formal, literary, and even antiquated. For example:

- "I believe you, **for** you have never lied to me before."
- "He didn't come to the party, **for** he felt sick."
- "I wish you had been there, **for** we had a wonderful time."

And

And is used to add one element to another. It can join words, phrases, and entire independent clauses. For example:

- "James **and** Jack are coming to the party."
- "He ran, swam, **and** played with the other children."

• “Her beautiful long hair **and** dark brown eyes caught their attention.”

• “The family moved into the new house, **and** the neighbors welcomed them warmly.”

Nor

Nor is one of the most limited coordinating conjunctions. It’s used to present an additional negative idea when a negative idea has already been stated. For example:

• “He *doesn’t like* football, **nor** does he enjoy hockey.”

• “I’ve *never seen* that movie, **nor** do I want to see it.”

• She *hasn’t been* to Paris, **nor** has she travelled to Rome.”

Note that when *nor* is used to join two independent clauses, as in the examples above, **negative inversion** must be used in the second clause.

There is disagreement over whether *nor* should be used to join two elements that are *not* independent clauses. Therefore, the examples below would be considered *correct* according to some style guides and *incorrect* according to others:

• “I haven’t seen **nor** heard from Mike in days.”

• “He can’t play football **nor** basketball.”

• “She said she wasn’t going to sing **nor** dance at the party.”

For those who consider the above sentences to be incorrect, *or* would be the preferred coordinating conjunction, as in:

• “I haven’t seen **or** heard from Mike in days.”

• “He can’t play football **or** basketball.”

• “She said she wasn’t going to sing **or** dance at the party.”

But

But is used to present a contrast with previous information. It can be used to join an independent clause to a phrase or another independent clause. For example:

• “I want to go shopping **but** I can’t.”

• “He was upset **but** didn’t cry.”

• “I would love to travel more, **but** I just don’t have the time.”

Or

Or is used to present alternative choices or options. For example:

• “Would you like the chicken, the pork, **or** the beef?”

• “Which sport do you think is more exciting, football **or** hockey?”

• “We can go to the movies tonight, **or** we can just hang out at home.”

Yet

Yet, like *but*, is used to present contrast. However, there is a subtle implication when we use *yet* that the information is surprising in light of what we already know. For example:

• "The movie was depressing **yet** uplifting at the same time."

• "It's poured rain all day, **yet** they haven't canceled the football game."

• "I've read thousands of books since high school, **yet** *The Catcher in the Rye* is still my favorite."

So

So is generally only used to join two independent clauses, where the second clause is a result of the first. For example:

• "He was exhausted, **so** he went to bed early."

• "She was the most qualified candidate, **so** we gave her the job."

• "He's been working harder lately, **so** his grades are improving."

Punctuation

Between independent clauses

When a coordinating conjunction joins two independent clauses, a comma normally precedes it, as in:

• “They moved into the new house**, and** the neighbors welcomed them warmly.”

• “I’ve never seen that movie**, nor** do I want to see it.”

• “We can go to the movie theater**, or** we can just hang out at home.”

Although it’s never *incorrect* to use a comma between two independent clauses, the comma is optional if the two clauses are very short and concise, and there is no possibility of confusion for the reader. For example:

• “He plays sports, and he’s fit.”

or

• “He plays sports and he’s fit.”

Between words or phrases

When coordinating conjunctions are used to join words or phrases that are not independent clauses, we don’t use a comma. For example:

• “James **and** Jack are coming to the party.”

• “Would you like the chicken **or** the beef?”

• “The movie was depressing **yet** uplifting at the same time.”

Before the last item in a list

A coordinating conjunction, usually *and*, is often used before the last item in a list. When we use a comma before this coordinating conjunction it is called a **serial comma** or **Oxford comma**. There are strong opposing opinions over whether this comma should ever be used. Neither side is right or wrong; it's simply a stylistic preference. Therefore, all of the following sentences could be considered correct:

- "I like apples, bananas, pears, and figs.
- "I like apples, bananas, pears and figs.
- "She's smart, beautiful, and witty."
- She's smart, beautiful and witty."
- "We have always wanted to buy a boat, sell everything, and set sail."
- "We have always wanted to buy a boat, sell everything and set sail."

It should be noted that certain varieties of English use the serial comma more than others. For example, most American English style guides recommend its use. On the other hand, the majority of British English style guides recommend against it, with the most important exception being the *Oxford Style Manual* (from which the "Oxford comma" received its name).

Beginning a sentence with a coordinating conjunction

Many of us have been taught at some point that we should never begin a sentence with a

coordinating conjunction. However, most grammarians and nearly all style guides state that this is not a grammatical rule, but a personal preference.

Writers often begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction to emphasize an afterthought, lengthen a pause, or signify a shift in thinking. Commas are not used after coordinating conjunctions when they start sentences. For example:

• "She's smart and beautiful. **And** she's witty, too."

• "We've never won anything before. **So** I doubt we'll win this time."

• "I think we should get Indian food. **But** maybe I want Italian instead."

When we do start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction, we must take extra care that the sentence is not a fragment, but contains a subject, verb, and complete thought.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Coordinating conjunctions are used to join _____.

a) words
b) phrases
c) independent clauses
d) A & B
e) all of the above

2. Which of the following words **is not** a coordinating conjunction?

a) for
b) and
c) therefore
d) but

3. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** coordinating conjunction: "I had studied a lot, _____ I did really well on the test."

a) so
b) for
c) but
d) yet

4. Which of the following sentences is written **correctly**?

a) "He has hiked, climbed, and kayaked all over the country."
b) "He has hiked, climbed and kayaked all over the country."
c) "He has hiked, climbed, and, kayaked all over the country."
d) A & B
e) All of the above

5. Which of the following sentences is written **correctly**?

a) “I have never seen a bat, nor have I seen an owl.”
b) “I have never seen a bat nor I have seen an owl.”
c) “I have never seen a bat or I have seen an owl.”
d) “I have never seen a bat nor have I seen an owl.”

Correlative

Conjunctions Definition

Correlative conjunctions, or **paired conjunctions**, are sets of conjunctions that are always used together. Like **coordinating conjunctions**, they join words, phrases, or independent clauses of similar or equal importance and structure. Unlike coordinating conjunctions, they can only join two elements together, no more. Some of the most common correlative conjunctions are:

- both … and
- either … or
- just as … so
- neither … nor
- not … but
- not only … but also
- whether … or

Functions of correlative conjunctions both … and

We use *both … and* when we want to put emphasis on two elements that are true in a sentence. We could also use the coordinating conjunction *and*, but it doesn't achieve the same emphatic effect. Compare:

• "This house is large and cozy."
• "This house is **both** large **and** cozy."
• "She cleaned her room and washed the dishes."
• "She **both** cleaned her room **and** washed the dishes."
• "My mother and father are bookworms."
• "**Both** my mother **and** my father are bookworms."

In the above examples, the sentences using *both … and* are more emphatic. Note, however, that the *both … and* construction doesn't join independent clauses, only words or phrases.

either … or

We use *either … or* to present two options. Again, it emphasizes the fact that the choice is limited to only the two given options. For example:

• "I want to paint the house **either** white **or** green."

• “Let’s **either** go swimming **or** go shopping.”

• “**Either** your father will pick you up, **or** you’ll get a ride home with a friend.”

neither … nor

We use *neither … nor* to negate two options. For example:

• “I have **neither** the time **nor** the patience for silly TV programs.” (I don’t have time, and I don’t have patience.)

• “**Neither** James **nor** Mike enjoys playing basketball.” (James and Mike both do not enjoy playing basketball.)

• “**Neither** does he understand, **nor** does he care.” (He doesn’t understand, and he doesn’t care.)

Note that when *neither* and *nor* begin two independent clauses, we must use **negative inversion** (the reversal of the subject and auxiliary verb) for each, as in the third example.

not … but

We use *not … but* to express a contradiction, negating the first option while emphasizing the second. For example:

• “He’s **not** happy **but** thrilled!”

• “She did **not** like **but** loved her new earrings.”

• "**Not** just one friend turned up to help, **but** the entire team arrived."

not only … but also

We use *not only … but also* to emphasize an additional element in the sentence, especially when its occurrence seems contradictory or surprising in light of what we already know. For example:

• "This house is **not only** large **but also** cozy." (The speaker believes that large houses are not usually cozy.)

• "She **not only** cleaned her room, **but she also** washed the dishes." (The speaker is surprised that she did both chores.)

• "**Not only** is she an award-winning singer, **but** she **also** runs track." (The speaker is impressed that she is able to do these two unrelated activities.)

Note that when *not only* is used to introduce an independent clause, as in the third example, we must use negative inversion (like with *neither … nor*). When *but* begins the second independent clause, the subject comes between it and *also*.

just as … so

We use *just as … so* to indicate that the two elements being joined are similar. Usually, *just as* begins an independent clause, and *so* is followed by a second independent clause. Traditionally, the clause after *so* should be inverted, as in:

• "**Just as** I love films, **so** *does my brother love* sports."

• "**Just as** Americans love baseball, **so** *do Europeans love* soccer."

• "**Just as** French is spoken in France, **so** *is English spoken* in England."

However, it's also common (especially in informal writing and speech) for this structure to occur *without* inversion, as in:

• "**Just as** I love films, **so** *my brother loves* sports."

• "**Just as** Americans love baseball, **so** *Europeans love* soccer."

• "**Just as** French is spoken in France, **so** *English is spoken* in England."

whether … or

We use *whether … or* to express doubt between two possible options. *Whether* has the same meaning as *if* in this regard. For example:

• "I don't know **whether** the white paint **or** the green paint is better."

• "He's not sure **whether** he'll be able to attend the game **or** not."

We also use *whether … or* to indicate that something will happen no matter which choice is made. For example:

• "**Whether** we stay home and eat a pizza, **or** we go out and watch a film, I'm sure we'll have a good time."

• “I’m going to help you **whether** you like it **or** not.”

Using correlative conjunctions

Parallel Structure

When we use correlative conjunctions, it’s important to use **parallel structure**, especially in formal writing. Parallel structure requires both elements that are joined by the correlative conjunction to be equal. For example:

• “This house is **both** *large* **and** *cozy*.” (Two adjectives are joined.)

• “Let’s **either** *go swimming* **or** *go shopping*.” (Two verb phrases are joined.)

• “**Either** *your father will pick you up*, **or** *you’ll get a ride home with a friend*.” (Two independent clauses are joined.)

Using correlative conjunctions to join non-parallel structures is considered incorrect. For example:

✖ “It was both *a long movie* **and** *boring*.” (Incorrect—a noun phrase is joined with an adjective phrase.)

✖ “I’m not sure **whether** *the white paint* **or** *painting it green* would be better.” (Incorrect —a noun phrase is joined with a verb phrase.)

✖ “**Either** *your father will pick you up* **or** *a friend*.” (Incorrect—an independent clause is

joined with a noun phrase.)

Although the sentences above may be heard in everyday speech, they are considered incorrect.

Punctuation

When we use a correlative conjunction to join two independent clauses, we separate the two clauses with a comma, as in:

• "**Either** your father will pick you up, **or** you'll get a ride home with a friend."

• "**Not only** is she an award-winning singer, **but** she **also** runs track."

• "She **not only** cleaned her room, **but she also** washed the dishes."

We generally do not use commas when the two elements being joined *are not* independent clauses. For example:

• "This house is **both** large **and** cozy."

• "I want to paint the house **either** white **or** green."

• "**Neither** James **nor** Mike enjoys playing basketball."

Subject-verb agreement

When we join two subjects with a correlative conjunction, subject-verb agreement can be tricky. Luckily, there are some widely accepted rules to help us.

Two singular subjects

In general, when we join two *singular* subjects using a correlative conjunction, the verb that follows should be singular. For example:

• "Neither the plumber nor the electrician *is* here yet."

• "Not only Mike but also Daniel *is* coming with us."

One exception to this rule is when using *both … and*. In this case, we use a plural subject:

• "Both Mike and Daniel *are* coming with us."

Two plural subjects

When we join two *plural* subjects, the verb that follows should also be plural. For example:

• "Neither the plumbers nor the electricians *are* here yet."

• "Not only Mike's friends but also Daniel's friends *are* coming with us."

One singular and one plural subject

Sometimes, we join a singular subject to a plural subject. In this case, the majority of style guides state that the verb should agree with the noun that is closest to it. For example:

• "Every day both the cat and the dogs *wake* me up." (*Wake* is plural because *the dogs* is plural.)

• “Neither my cousins nor my mom *likes* swimming.” (*Likes* is singular, because *mom* is singular.)

However, there are also those who believe that if *either* of the subjects is plural, then the verb should also be plural. According to this preference, the second sentence above would require the plural form of the verb because the first subject, *my cousins*, is plural:

• “Neither my cousins nor my mom *like* swimming.”

If this is confusing or you’re not sure which style you should use, you can avoid the problem entirely by switching the order of the subjects so that the plural subject comes closest to the verb. In this way, we satisfy both styles:

• “Neither my mom nor my cousins *like* swimming.”

Pronoun agreement

Just as we have to take extra care with subject-verb agreement, we also have to be careful with pronoun agreement when using correlative conjunctions.

Two singular subjects

When we join two *singular* subjects, we should use a singular pronoun. For example:

• “Neither Mike nor Daniel found *his* shoes.”

• “Not only Jen but also Sara lost *her* book.”

Again, *both … and* presents an exception. We normally use a plural pronoun with this correlative conjunction:

• "Both Mike and Daniel found *their* shoes."

Two plural subjects

When we join two *plural* subjects, we should use a plural pronoun to refer back to them. For example:

• "Neither Mike's friends nor Daniel's friends brought *their* shoes."

• "I don't know whether the girls or the boys have had *their* breakfast."

One singular subject and one plural subject

When we join a singular subject and a plural subject, we run into the same problem that we had with subject-verb agreement. Again, the most widely accepted practice is that the pronoun should agree with whichever noun is closest to it. For example:

• "Neither Mike nor his friends stated *their* opinion." (*Their* agrees with *his friends*.)

• "Neither Mike's friends nor Mike stated *his* opinion." (*His* agrees with *Mike*.)

As with subject-verb agreement, the other side of the argument is that if either of the subjects

is plural, the pronoun should be plural. In this case, the second example above would be rewritten as:

• "Neither Mike's friends nor Mike stated *their* opinion."

Again, we can avoid the issue entirely by rewriting the sentence so that the plural subject is closest to the pronoun:

• "Neither Mike nor his friends stated *their* opinion."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Correlative conjunctions are conjunctions that join _____ together.

a) one element
b) two elements
c) three elements
d) three or more elements

2. Which of the following word pairs is **not** a correlative conjunction?

a) either … or
b) neither … nor
c) not only … but also
d) and … but

3. Complete the following sentence with the correct correlative conjunction:
"_____ my friend studied a lot _____ he's a genius, because he got an A+ on the test."

a) Either … or
b) Neither … nor
c) Not only ... but also
d) Not … but

4. Complete the following sentence with the correct correlative conjunction:
"He's _____ a great rock climber _____ an expert skier."

a) just as … so
b) whether … or
c) not only … but also
d) all of the above

5. Which of the following sentences **must** have a comma?

a) "Not only Mike but also Daniel is coming with us."
b) "I think that we should not only go skiing but also go kayaking."
c) "The house is not only large but also cozy."
d) "Not only do I need you to come home early but I also need you to pick up dinner."

Subordinating Conjunctions Definition

Subordinating conjunctions are used to create **complex sentences** containing one **independent clause**, or **main clause**, and one **dependent**, or **subordinate**, clause. The subordinating conjunction does two things: it introduces and **subordinates** the dependent clause (telling the reader that it's less important than the independent clause), and it explains what relationship it has to the independent clause. Consider the following example:

• "I went to the supermarket. We were out of milk."

Both of these sentences can stand on their own. However, there is no clear relationship between them. Instead, we can join them together with a subordinating conjunction, which would sound more natural:

• "I went to the supermarket **since** we were out of milk."

The subordinating conjunction *since* transforms the second clause from an independent clause into a dependent clause—it *subordinates* it. "*Since we were out of milk*" can no longer stand alone, but is dependent on the independent clause that it's now connected to.

The word *since* also clarifies that the relationship between the two clauses is one of cause and effect, and it tells the reader that the independent clause, "*I went to the supermarket*," is more important.

Structure and punctuation

When we use subordinating conjunctions to join two clauses, it doesn't matter which clause comes first: the subordinating conjunction may appear either at the beginning or in the middle of the new sentence. Therefore, the following two sentences are both correct:

• "I went to the supermarket **since** we were out of milk."

• "**Since** we were out of milk, I went to the supermarket."

Note that if when we place the subordinate conjunction in the middle of the sentence, as in the *first* example, we normally *don't* need a comma. On the other hand, when we place the subordinating conjunction at the beginning of the sentence, as in the *second* example, we normally *do* need to use a comma.

For the sake of consistency, the independent clause will appear first in the examples we look at below, but remember that this order is reversible.

Functions of subordinating conjunctions

As mentioned, one of the jobs of a subordinating conjunction is to establish the relationship between the two clauses—which conjunction we use depends on the nature of that relationship. Below are some of the most common subordinating conjunctions and their functions:

Cause	Comparison / Concession	Condition	Place	Reason	Time
as	(just) as	even if	where	in order that	after
because	although	if	wherever	so that	before
since	even though	as long as			as soon as
	though	in case			once
	whereas	provided that			until
	while	providing			when
					whenever
					while

Examples of subordinating conjunctions Cause

We use *as, because,* and *since* interchangeably to state the cause of something. For example:

• "The project was successful **as** you all worked very hard."

• "The project was successful **because** you all worked very hard."

• "The project was successful **since** you all worked very hard."

Each of the three examples expresses the same causal relationship, although *as* is a bit more formal in tone than *because* or *since*.

Comparison and concession Similarities

We can use *as* to state that two ideas are similar. We can also use *just as* to add extra emphasis to this statement. For example:

• "It's pouring rain, **as** I thought it would."

• "She was late again, **just as** we expected."

• "He didn't turn up, **as** you told me he wouldn't."

Note that the examples above flow better with a comma, even though the subordinating conjunction is not in the initial position.

Expressing contrasts and concessions

While and *whereas* both express contrast. For example:

• "My brother worked really hard, **while** I didn't make much of an effort."

• "I can't stand watching tennis, **whereas** I love watching basketball."

While and *whereas* can be used interchangeably, but *whereas* is often considered more formal. Note also that, like with *(just) as* above, we use a comma between the clauses even though these subordinating conjunctions are not in the initial position.

We use *although, though,* and *even though* to say that something occurred in spite of something else. *Though* and *although* are interchangeable, while *even though* adds extra emphasis. For example:

• "I went to that restaurant **though/although** I was told it wasn't very good."

• "I went to that restaurant **even though** I was told it wasn't very good."

Condition

We use the subordinating conjunctions *even if, if, as long as, in case, provided that,* and *providing* when referring to a **hypothetical** situation.

If is the most common conjunction for hypothetical sentences. We use it when one action is required for another to occur. For example:

• “I will buy you a pizza **if** you help me move my furniture.”

• “You should buy a new TV **if** you get a bigger apartment.”

As long as, *provided*, *provided that*, and *providing* all mean the same as *if*, but they emphasize the requirement of the conditional action. We can use them interchangeably:

• “I will buy you a pizza **as long as/provided** you help me move my furniture.” (I will *only* buy you a pizza if you help me.)

• “You should buy a new TV **providing/provided that** you get a bigger apartment.” (You should *only* buy a new TV if you get a bigger apartment.)

We use **even if** when an outcome will occur despite a hypothetical action. For example:

• “I will buy you a pizza **even if** you don’t help me move my furniture.” (I will buy the pizza anyway.)

• “He’s going to pass his test **even if** he doesn’t study.” (He will pass despite not studying.)

We use *in case* to suggest a precaution against a hypothetical possibility. For example:

• “I’m bringing an umbrella **in case** it starts raining.” (I’m worried it might rain, so I’m bringing an umbrella.)

• “She put her phone on silent **in case** it rang during the movie.” (She was concerned her phone would ring in the middle of the movie, so she silenced it.)

Place

When the dependent clause is related to a place, we use *where* and *wherever*, but they are not interchangeable.

For most situations, we use *where*, as in:

• "He lives **where** it's always sunny." (He lives in a place that is sunny.)

• "Can we go **where** it's a little quieter?" (Can we go to a place that is quieter?)

We use *wherever* to emphasize that we mean any or every place, rather than a specific location. For example:

• "I want to go **wherever** it's quieter." (I want to go to any place quieter; I don't mind where.)

• "He bikes **wherever** he goes." (He bikes to every place that he goes.)

Reason

We use *in order that, so that*, and *so* to give a reason. They are interchangeable in meaning, but differ in formality. Compare the following sentences:

• "Our boss asked us to take detailed notes **in order that** nothing would be forgotten." (formal)

• "Our boss asked us to take detailed notes **so that** nothing would be forgotten." (neutral)

• "Our boss asked us to take detailed notes **so** nothing would be forgotten." (less formal)

Time

Previously

To state that the action of the independent clause occurred first, we use *before*. For example:

• "I went shopping **before** I came home." (I went shopping first.)

• "He won first prize in a spelling bee **before** starting fifth grade." (He won the prize first.)

Concurrently

When two actions occur at the same time, there are several subordinating conjunctions we can use, but each has a slightly different meaning. If we are not adding any particular emphasis, we use *when*:

• "I was sleeping **when** the phone rang."

• "I saw my brother **when** he was out with his friends."

However, to emphasize that two actions occurred (or will occur) at exactly the same time, or in rapid succession, we use *once* or *as soon as*:

• "Please clean your room **once** you get home."

• "Call me back **as soon as** you can."

Subsequently

When the action of the independent clause happens second in a series of actions, we use *after*:

• "I went shopping **after** I finished work." (I finished work first, then went shopping.)

• "He won first prize in a spelling bee **after** he started fifth grade." (He started fifth grade first, then won a spelling bee.)

Up to a certain time

To state that one action stops when another one begins, we use *until*. For example:

• "He ran track **until** he moved here." (He stopped running track when he moved here.)

• "You can borrow my jacket until I need it." (You must stop using it when I need it.)

Any time or every time

Finally, we use *whenever* to state that the time doesn't matter, or that two actions always happen together. For example:

• "Call me **whenever** you get home." (Call me when you get home, but I don't mind when that is.)

• "She cries **whenever** she sees a sad movie." (She cries every time she sees a sad movie.)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Subordinating conjunctions are conjunctions that join _____ together.

a) two words

b) two independent clauses

c) an independent clause and a dependent clause

d) A & B

2. Which of the following words **is not** a subordinating conjunction?

a) and

b) if

c) when

d) because

3. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** subordinating conjunction: “You can only play outside _____ your father gets home.”

a) because

b) whereas

c) until

d) in case

4. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** subordinating conjunction:
"I'd rather not see that movie again _____ we just saw it last week."

a) where
b) as soon as
c) though
d) because

5. Which of the following sentences is punctuated **correctly**?

a) "He worked harder in order that he would get the promotion."
b) "In order that he would get the promotion he worked harder."
c) "In order that he would get the promotion, he worked harder."
d) A & B
e) A & C

Other parts of speech

In addition to the seven **primary** parts of speech—**nouns**, **pronouns**, **verbs**, **adjectives**, **adverbs**, **prepositions**, and **conjunctions**—there are several classes of words that have unique grammatical functions but do not fit neatly into a single specific category. They often share characteristics with one or more other parts of speech, but do not properly belong to the same class.

We'll give a brief introduction to these **other parts of speech** below; continue on to their

individual sections to learn more about each.

Particles

A **particle** is a word that does not have semantic meaning on its own, but instead relies on the word it is paired with to have meaning. It is very similar to a preposition—in fact, they are almost always identical in appearance. However, prepositions are used to establish a relationship between their objects and another part of a sentence, while particles are only used to create **infinitives** and to form certain **phrasal verbs**.

Articles

There are three grammatical **articles**: *the*, *a*, and *an* (though *a* and *an* are sometimes considered a single article with two forms).

The **definite article** *the* is used to identify a specific or unique person, place, or thing, while the **indefinite articles** *a* and *an* identify nonspecific or generic people, places, or things.

Determiners

Determiners are used to introduce a noun or noun phrase and give determining information about it. Determiners often behave similarly to **adjectives** in that they modify the noun they precede, but they differ in how they signal that a noun will follow.

Gerunds

Gerunds are nouns that are formed from verbs. They are identical in appearance to present participles (the base form of the verb + "-ing").
Because they function as nouns, gerunds can be subjects or objects, and they can also act as **adjective complements**.

Interjections

Interjections are words, phrases, or sounds used to convey emotions such as surprise, excitement, happiness, or anger. They are grammatically unrelated to any other part of a sentence, so they are set apart by commas. They are also often used alone as **minor sentences**.

Particles

Definition

A **particle** is a word that does not have semantic meaning on its own, but instead relies on the word it is paired with to have meaning. A particle cannot **inflect**—that is, its form does not change to reflect grammatical person, number, case, gender, tense, mood, aspect, or voice.

A particle is very similar to a preposition—in fact, they are almost always identical in appearance. However, prepositions are used to establish a relationship between their objects and another part of a sentence, and so they have a unique lexical meaning of their own. Particles, on the other hand, are only used to create **infinitives** and to form **phrasal verbs**.

Infinitive *to*

The particle *to* is the only particle in English that can be used to create the **infinitive form** of a verb.

To is paired with the **base form** (uninflected form) of a verb to create the infinitive, which can function as a noun, adjective, or adverb. For example:

- "**To love** another person is a wonderful thing." (noun—subject)
- "I would like **to be** alone." (noun—direct object)
- "I'm going to the store **to buy** milk." (adverb—modifies the verb *going*)
- "This is a good place ***to start* reading**." (adjective—modifies the noun *place*)

(Go to the section on **Infinitives** in the **Verbs** chapter to learn more about how they are used.)

Phrasal Verbs

A **phrasal verb** consists of a verb followed by either a preposition or a particle to create a unique, idiomatic meaning. Since particles and prepositions look identical, it can be tricky to know when a phrasal verb is using one or the other.

However, particles are used more like adverbs, modifying and uniquely expanding the meaning of the verbs they are paired with. For this reason, particles are sometimes referred to as adverbial particles, or even just adverbs. The key difference between particles and prepositions is that particles do not (and cannot) introduce a **prepositional phrase**, while the preposition in a phrasal verb always will.

Take the following sentence, for example:

• "My table **takes up** too much room." (The table occupies too much space.)

Takes up is made up of the verb *take* + *up*. *Up* changes the meaning of the verb, but it does not introduce a prepositional phrase expressing direction, location, time, or possession— therefore, it is functioning as a particle.

Let's look at another example:

• "Please **look over** the proposal and let me know what you think." (Please quickly examine the proposal.)

Again, the particle *over* is changing the meaning of the verb *look*, but it is not introducing a prepositional phrase.

Here are some other examples of phrasal verbs formed with particles:

• "I can't believe that you're **giving up**!" (I'm surprised that you're going to stop trying.)

• “We have to wait for the fire to **die down** before we can enter the building.” (We have to wait for the fire to become less intense.)

• “The plane **took off** an hour late.” (The plane began its flight later than scheduled.)

• “She is always **making up** excuses.” (She is always inventing excuses that are not true.)

Now let’s look at some examples of phrasal verbs made with **prepositions** so we can see the difference more clearly:

• “He has been **looking *after*** *his mother*.” (He has been caring for his mother.)

• “I **came *across*** *that old watch* of mine when I was cleaning out the drawers.” (I found my old watch unexpectedly.)

• “Stop **picking *on*** *your brother* like that!” (Stop teasing or harassing your brother in that way.)

We can see that the phrasal verb in each of the above examples is formed using a preposition rather than a particle, because the information that comes immediately after the phrasal verb completes a prepositional phrase (in *italics*). Without these prepositional phrases, the sentences would be incomplete.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the only particle that can be used to create **infinitives**? a) on

b) in
c) to
d) with

2. Which of the following is something a particle **cannot** do?

a) Conjugate to reflect tense
b) Introduce a prepositional phrase
c) Pair with a noun or adjective
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

3. Is the word in **italics** in the following sentence functioning as a particle or a preposition? "My husband **cared *for*** me while I was sick."

a) Particle
b) Preposition

4. Is the *italicized* word in the phrasal verb (in **bold**) in the following sentence functioning as a particle or a preposition?
"We're looking for a substitute teacher to **fill *in*** next semester."

a) Particle
b) Preposition

Articles

Definition

Articles identify whether a noun is **definite** (specific or particular) or **indefinite** (general or unspecific). For this reason, articles are divided into two categories: the **definite article**, *the*, and the **indefinite articles**, *a* and *an*.

The

The definite article *the* is used to identify a specific person, place, or thing. For instance:

• "I'm looking forward to **the** game." (There is a specific game that the speaker is looking forward to.)

• "Would you pass me **the** phone?" (There is a specific phone that the speaker is asking for.)

• "She turned on **the** lamp next to her bed." (There is a specific lamp next to her bed that she turned on.)

• "He's going to **the** play later." (There is a specific play that he is going to see.)

We can also use *the* to refer to plural nouns, when they are being referenced specifically, as in:

• "**The** dogs next door keep me awake with their barking."

• “She’s looking for **the** papers she printed last night.”

• “I see that **the** students have already arrived.”

A/An

A and *an*, on the other hand, are used to identify a person or thing that is unspecific or generic—the speaker is not referring to someone or something in particular, or the person or thing may not be specifically known to the speaker. Unlike *the*, *a/an* can only be used before **singular** nouns. For instance:

• “I’m looking for **a** pen.” (There is not a specific pen that the speaker is looking for.)

• “Would you please turn on **a** light?” (There is not a specific light the speaker is asking to be turned on.)

• “There is **an** angry student waiting to speak with you.” (Although there is a particular student, he or she is unknown to the speaker.)

• “I’m waiting for **an** answer.” (There is not one specific answer the speaker is waiting for.)

Other parts of speech

Articles always modify nouns. For this reason, they are often considered a sub-class of **determiners**. However, an article can also precede a **noun phrase**, even if it begins with an adjective or an adverb. For example:

• “That was **an *exciting night***.” (noun phrase beginning with an adjective)

• “**The *truly remarkable thing*** is how long the deal took to happen.” (noun phrase beginning with an adverb)

Articles **can’t** precede verbs, however, as verbs are not used to create noun phrases.

Vowel Sounds vs. Consonant Sounds

We use the indefinite article *a* when it precedes a word beginning with a consonant sound, and we use *an* when the article precedes a word beginning with a vowel sound. Note that this rule applies to the sound of the noun, rather than the specific spelling. For example:

✖ “What **a *unusual*** discovery!” (incorrect)

✔ “What **an *unusual*** discovery!” (Correct—the word begins with the vowel “u,” and it makes the vowel sound “uh.”)

✖ “What **an *unique*** discovery!” (incorrect)

✔ “What **a *unique*** discovery!” (Correct—the word begins with the vowel “u,” but it makes the consonant sound “yu.”)

✖ “It is **a *honor*** to meet you.” (incorrect)

✔ “It is **an *honor*** to meet you.” (Correct—the word begins with the consonant “h,” but it makes the vowel sound “ah.”)

✖ “There was **an *heap*** of food left over.” (incorrect)

✔ "There was **a *heap*** of food left over." (Correct—the word begins with the consonant "h," and it makes the consonant sound "he.")

Here are a few other examples where a word's spelling goes against its pronunciation:

- **an *hour*** — makes the vowel sound "ow"
- **an *honest man*** — makes the vowel sound "awh"
- **a *university*** — makes the consonant sound "yu"
- **a *European* citizen** — makes the consonant sound "yu"
- **a *once-in-a-life-time* chance** — makes the consonant sound "wuh"

Herbs and History

One area of difficulty comes from dialectical differences between different speakers of English.

For example, the word *herb* is pronounced as "erb" (ɜːrb) in American English, with a silent "h," so we would say "an herb." However, in British English, *herb* is pronounced with a hard consonant "h" as "herb" (hɜːb), so "a herb" would be correct.

Similarly, some people pronounce the word "historic" and "historically" with a silent "h" in certain contexts. It is not unusual to read or hear "an historic moment" or "an historically important event," for instance. Uniquely, the "h" is **never** silent if these words are preceded by anything other than an indefinite article, as in "the moment is historic" or "the historically significant moment."

Some writers and grammarians believe it is never correct to pronounce *historic* or *historically* with a silent "h," though, insisting that it can only take the indefinite article *a*, rather than *an*. In more formal or professional writing, it is advisable to follow this more strict guideline and always use the indefinite article *a*.

There are plenty of other oddities regarding spelling and pronunciation in the English language. To learn more about the various conventions, exceptions, and irregularities, see the guide on **English Spelling and Pronunciation**.

Other uses

Identifying a profession

In addition to identifying an unspecific noun, we also use the indefinite article *a/an* to talk or inquire about someone's profession.

For example:

✖ "Are you teacher?" (incorrect)
✔ "Are you **a** teacher?" (correct)

✖ "John is engineer." (incorrect)
✔ "John is **an** engineer." (correct)

We only use the definite article *the* if we are referring to a particular person in that profession. For instance:

• “Are you *a* doctor?” (Unspecific—inquires about the person’s profession in general.)
• “Are you **the** doctor?” (Specific—inquires if this person is a particular doctor that the speaker was waiting or looking for.)
• “Mary is *a* technician for the gas company.” (Unspecific—Mary’s general profession is as a technician for the specific gas company.)
• “Mary is **the** technician for the gas company.” (Specific—Mary is either the *sole* technician for the gas company, or else she is a specific technician the speaker is referencing.)

Uncountable nouns

In addition to **plural nouns**, the indefinite article *a/an* cannot be used with **uncountable nouns** (also known as **mass nouns** or **non-count nouns**). These are nouns that cannot be divided or counted as individual elements or separate parts. They can be tangible objects (such as substances or collective categories of things), or intangible or abstract things such as concepts or ideas.

For example:

✖ “Would you like ***a*** **tea**?” (incorrect)
✔ “Would you like **tea**?” (correct)
✖ “Do you have ***an*** **information**?” (incorrect)
✔ “Do you have (***some/any***) **information**?” (correct)

(We often use the words *some* or *any* to indicate an unspecified quantity of uncountable nouns.)

Uncountable nouns can sometimes take the definite article *the*, as in:

• "Have you heard ***the*** **news**?"

• "***The*** **furniture** in my living room is old."

However, this is only the case if a specific uncountable noun is being described. For example:

✖ "I am looking for ***an*** **accommodation**." (incorrect)

✖ "I am looking for ***the*** **accommodation**." (incorrect)

✔ "I am looking for **accommodation**." (correct)

✔ "I am looking for ***the*** **accommodation** listed in this advertisement." (correct— references specific accommodation)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which article is usually used when something specific is being referenced?

a) the
b) a
c) an

2. Complete the following sentence with the correct article: “I know you have ___ long way to travel.”

a) the
b) a
c) an

3. Complete the following sentence with the correct article: “Have you seen ___ blue pen that I like.”

a) the
b) a
c) an

4. Which of the following can the indefinite article *a/an* **not** precede?

a) noun phrases
b) adjectives
c) adverbs
d) uncountable nouns
e) all of the above
f) none of the above

5. Which of the following can the definite article *the* **not** precede?

a) noun phrases
b) adjectives
c) adverbs
d) uncountable nouns
e) all of the above
f) none of the above

Determiners

Definition

Determiners are used to introduce a noun or noun phrase. There are several classes of determiners: **articles, demonstrative adjectives, possessive adjectives, interrogative adjectives, distributive determiners, pre-determiners, quantifiers**, and **numbers**.

Determiners do two things. First, they signal that a noun or noun phrase will follow. Then, they give information about the item. They may tell us whether the item is general or specific, near or far, singular or plural; they can also quantify the item, describing how much or how many are referred to; or they can tell us to whom the item belongs. We'll look at each class of determiners separately.

Articles

There are two types of articles in English: the **definite article**, *the*, and the **indefinite**

article, *a/an*. We're just going to cover the basic rules regarding when to use definite and indefinite articles. If you would like to learn more, please see the section on **Articles**.

The

In general, we use the definite article, *the*, to refer to an item or individual that is specific and unique. For example:

• "Close **the** *door* quietly; the baby is sleeping." (There is a specific door.)

• "Please pass **the** *salt*." (The speaker is requesting specific salt.)

• "Jen is **the** *woman* wearing red." (There is a unique individual wearing red clothing who is identified as Jen.)

A/an

The indefinite article, *a/an*, is used to precede a noun that is *not* a specific person, place, or thing. Instead, it indicates that it is a general member of a class of nouns. For example:

• "I'd love to have **a** *pet dog*." (No specific or unique dog is being discussed.)

• "I heard that **a** *famous musician* is going to be there." (The musician is unspecified because he or she is unknown.)

• "She had never been in **an** *airplane* before." (The speaker is talking about airplanes in general, rather than a specific aircraft.)

Note that *a* is used before consonant sounds, and *an* is used before vowel sounds.

Demonstrative Adjectives

Demonstrative adjectives, or **demonstrative determiners**, are used to specify which item or individual is being referred to when it could be confused with others of the same type. There are four demonstrative adjectives, which we choose from based on whether they introduce a singular noun or a plural noun, and whether the item is near or far in relation to the speaker.

	Near	**Far**
Singular	this	that
Plural	these	those

For example:

• "**This** *pen* is mine." (The pen is nearby, perhaps in my hand.)

• "**That** *pen*is mine." (The pen is far away, perhaps across the room.)

• "**These** *pens* are mine." (The pens are nearby.)

• "**Those** *pens* are mine." (The pens are far away.)

To learn more, go to the section on **Demonstrative Adjectives** in the chapter about **Adjectives**.

Possessive Adjectives

Possessive adjectives, also known as **possessive determiners**, are used to indicate whom an item belongs to. The possessive adjectives are:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	my	our
2nd person	your	your
3rd person	his / her / its	their

For example:

• "**My** *house* is on Steven Street." (The house belongs to me.)

• "Please give your sister back **her** *pencil*." (The pencil belongs to her.)

• "Look at the dog! **Its** *tail* is wagging like crazy!" (The tail belongs to the dog.)

• "Can you fix the table? **Its** *leg* is wobbly."* (The leg belongs to the table.)

*Note that according to certain styles, *its* is typically only used when the owner is **animate**,

such as *the dog* in the example above. To avoid using *its* with inanimate objects, some writers would use the … of the … structure. For example:

• "The *leg of the table* is wobbly. Can you fix it?"

In addition to the possessive adjectives listed, we can also create possessive determiners from nouns using **apostrophes**. We attach the possessive apostrophe to the end of the noun or pronoun that names the owner. If the noun is singular, the apostrophe is usually followed by an "s."

This possessive noun introduces and modifies the owned object, and so it is considered a determiner as well. For example:

• "Dave**'s** *car* could use a bit of work." (The car belongs to Dave.)

• "Could you help me find Jen**'s** *keys* for her?" (The keys belong to Jen.)

• "My parents**'** *house* is on a beautiful lake." (The house belongs to my parents.)

To learn more about using apostrophes to indicate possession, see the chapter on **Apostrophes**.

Interrogative Adjectives

Like all adjectives, **interrogative adjectives** (also known as **interrogative determiners**) modify nouns and pronouns. English has three interrogative adjectives: *what, which*, and *whose*. They are called "interrogative" because they are usually used to ask questions. For example:

• "**What** book are you reading?

• "**Which** shirt are you going to buy?"

• "**Whose** computer is this?"

In each of the examples, the interrogative adjective modifies the noun it immediately precedes: *book, shirt,* and *computer*.

To learn more, please see the section on **Interrogative Adjectives** in the chapter about **Adjectives**.

Distributive Determiners

Distributive determiners, also known as **distributive adjectives**, are used to refer to individual members within a group or within a pair. The distributive determiners are *each, every, either* and *neither*. They are used to modify singular nouns or noun phrases.

Each

Each is used when one condition applies to all members of a group equally. For example:

• "**Each** *student* must attend a meeting with a guidance counselor."

• "**Each** *person* in my family does a fair share of the chores."

• "Please give a pen and paper to **each** attendee."

Every

Every is also used when a condition applies to all members of a group. It can normally be used interchangeably with *each.* For example:

• "**Every** *student* must attend a meeting with a guidance counselor."

• "**Every** *person* in my family does a fair share of the chores."

• "Please give a pen and paper to **every** attendee."

However, *every* puts a slight emphasis on the group as a whole, while *each* emphasizes the individual.

Either

Either is used when a condition applies to one or the other in a pair. When we use *either*, we imply that there are two options.

• "**Either** girl could win this competition." (There are two girls. One will win.)

• "We could give the new collar to **either** dog." (There are two dogs. One will receive the new collar.)

• "**Either** book would be a great present." (There are two books. One will be chosen as a gift.)

Neither

We use *neither* to state that not one or the other option is viable. For example:

• "**Neither** book would be a great present." (There are two books; both would be unsuitable as gifts.)
• "**Neither table** will fit in our kitchen." (There are two tables; both are too large for the kitchen.)
• "**Neither** question is easily answered." (There are two questions; both have difficult answers.)

Pre-determiners

Pre-determiners are words that come before *another determiner* to give us more information about the noun that follows. They usually come before the articles *a/an* and *the*. Pre-determiners can be **multipliers, fractions, intensifiers**, or the words *both* and *all*.

Multipliers

Multipliers are words and expressions that modify uncountable nouns and plural countable nouns by multiplying quantity. For example:

• "I now earn **double** my previous wage."

• “For this recipe, we need **three times** the sugar.”

• “This airplane holds **twice** the passengers as the other model.”

Fractions

Fractions are similar to multipliers, but instead of multiplying the quantity of the noun, they divide it. We usually use *of* between the fractional expression and the other determiner, but it is not always necessary. For example:

• “I used to earn **half (of)** *my* current salary.”

• “For this recipe, we need **a quarter (of)** *the* sugar as last time.”

• “**One-tenth of** *the* respondents answered ‘yes’ to my question.” (*Of* is necessary in this construction.)

Intensifiers

The most common intensifiers are *what, quite, rather,* and *such*. For example:

• “**What** a gorgeous horse!”

• “She’s **such** a sweet girl.”

• “It’s **quite** a beautiful house, don’t you think?”

• “They’re **rather** a nice group of students.”

Usage note: The words *quite* and *rather*, when used as intensifiers, are much more common in certain varieties of English than in others. For example, British English uses them often, while American English uses them much less frequently.

Both & all

Both and *all* can also occur as pre-determiners. *Both* is used when we refer to two out of two options, while *all* is used to refer to an entire amount. We often use *of* between *both/all* and the other determiner, but it is not required. For example:

• "**Both** (of) my brothers are coming with me." (I have two brothers, and each one is coming.)

• "**Both** (of) the books have beautiful illustrations." (There are two books and each one has beautiful illustrations.)

• "**All** (of) my brothers are coming with me." (I have several brothers; every one of them is coming.)

• "**All** (of) the books have beautiful illustrations." (There are many books, and they all have beautiful illustrations.)

Quantifiers

Quantifiers are used to indicate the number or quantity of the noun being referred to. The quantifier we choose depends on whether it introduces a **countable noun** (sometimes called

a **count noun**), or an **uncountable noun** (also known as a **mass noun**). Below, we'll look at some of the most common quantifiers:

With countable nouns

These are some of the most common quantifiers for countable nouns only, listed in order from largest to smallest quantity:

- many
- each
- several
- a few*
- a couple (of)
- both
- few*
- not many
- none of the

Note that when we use quantifiers with countable nouns, we use the plural form of the noun after the quantifier.

For example:

• "There are **many** *private schools* in this town."

• "**Both** *girls* went to the party."

• "**Not many** *people* came to the book launch."

*Usage Note: There is an important distinction between *a few* and *few*. While *a few* has a more positive connotation of signifying that there is enough of an item, *few* has the more negative connotation of signifying that there is not enough of an item. Compare the following two sentences:

• "There were **a few** *people* at the meeting." (more positive)

• "There were **few** *people* at the meeting." (more negative)

With uncountable nouns

These are some of the most common quantifiers for uncountable nouns only, in order from largest to smallest quantity:

- a good/great deal of (formal)
- a load of / loads of / heaps of / tons of (informal)
- a lot of (neutral)
- a (little) bit of
- a little*
- little*
- not much

For example:

• "We have **a lot of** *coffee* already, so don't buy anymore."

• "Could you lend me **a bit of** *sugar*?"

• "**Not much** *effort* is needed."

*Usage Note: *A little* and *little* have the same important distinction as *a few* and *few*. *A little* has the positive connotation of signifying that there is enough of an item, while *little* has the negative connotation of indicating that there is not enough. Compare the following two sentences:

• "We still have **a little** milk left." (We have enough, but not much.)

• "We have **little** milk left." (We need more.)

With either countable or uncountable nouns

Finally, these are some of the most common quantifiers that can be used with either countable or uncountable nouns:

- all of the
- most of the
- a lot of / lots of / plenty of

- enough
- some
- a lack of
- no

For example:

• "**All of the** *recipes* call for sugar." (countable)
• "**All of the** *sugar* is needed." (uncountable)
• "Don't worry, we have **enough** *cars* to get us all there." (countable)
• "Don't worry, we have **enough** *time* to get there." (uncountable)

Numbers

Numbers can also be determiners when they are used to introduce and modify a noun. Both **cardinal numbers** (numbers signifying an amount of something) and **ordinal numbers** (numbers signifying rank or position in a list) are able to function in this way.

Cardinal numbers

Cardinal numbers are used to count the specific quantity of a noun. As such, they can only be used with countable nouns.

In writing, a common rule is to spell out the numbers *one* through *nine*, and use **numerals** for

the numbers *10* and higher. For example:

• "My father's company has **10** *cars* and **20** *drivers*."

• "I'm taking **12** *shirts* and **three** *pairs of jeans* on my vacation."

• "There were **160** *participants* in the competition."

An alternate rule is to spell out one-word numbers and use numerals for multi-word numbers. So, the examples above would be rewritten:

• "My father's company has **ten** *cars* and **twenty drivers**."

• "I'm taking **twelve** *shirts* and **three** *pairs of jeans* on my vacation."

• "There were **160** *participants* in the competition."

However, there are many variations of style for writing numbers. In the end, it is best to be consistent, or to follow the style guide best suited to the type of writing you are doing.

Ordinal Numbers

Ordinal numbers do not represent quantity, but are used to indicate the rank or position of a noun in a list or series. They have two written forms: spelled out, or *numeral + suffix*:

Spelling	Numeral & Suffix
first	1st

second	2nd
third	3rd
fourth	4th
fifth	5th
sixth	6th
seventh	7th
eighth	8th
ninth	9th
tenth	10th
eleventh	11th
twelfth	12th
thirteenth	13th
fourteenth	14th
fifteenth	15th

sixteenth	16th
seventeenth	17th
eighteenth	18th
nineteenth	19th
twentieth	20th
twenty-second	22nd
twenty-third	23rd
twenty-fourth	24th
thirtieth	30th
fiftieth	50th
hundredth	100th

Note that numbers ending in *one*, *two*, and *three* have different suffixes than the rest of the numbers. A common rule in writing is to spell out *first* through *ninth* and to use the *numeral*

+ *suffix* for numbers *10* and higher. For example:

• "He won **first** *prize*!"

• "I went to Las Vegas for my **30th** *birthday*."

• "I was the **42nd** *person* in line."

An alternate rule is to spell out one-word ordinal numbers, but to use the *numeral* + *suffix* equivalent for multi-word ordinal numbers. So, the examples above would be written as follows:

• "He won **first** *prize*!"

• "I went to Las Vegas for my **thirtieth** *birthday*."

• "I was the **42nd** *person* in line."

Again, no matter which way you choose to write them, the key is to be consistent.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Determiners introduce _____.

a) verbs
b) nouns
c) adjectives
d) clauses

2. Which of the following words **cannot** function as a determiner?

a) some
b) the
c) when
d) ten

3. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** determiner:

"Can you buy _____ more sugar? We don't have much left."

a) ten
b) a
c) the
d) some

4. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** determiner:

"I'm afraid we need to go shopping. There's very _____ milk left."

a) little
b) much
c) a lot
d) some

5. Complete the following sentence with the **correct** determiner:
"Please give me _____ glass of water. I can't reach it."
a) this
b) that
c) these
d) those

Possessive Determiners

Definition

Possessive determiners, also known as **possessive adjectives**, are a class of **determiners** that are used to modify nouns to denote possession. They take the place of the definite article *the*, and state *whom* or *what* an item belongs to. We use a different possessive determiner to correspond with each **personal pronoun**. The main possessive determiners in English are:

Personal Pronoun	Possessive Determiner
I	**my**
you	**your**
he	**his**

she	**her**
it	**its**
we	**our**
they	**their**

The word *whose* and the structure *noun + possessive apostrophe* also function as possessive determiners, as we will see.

Using Possessive Determiners

Sentence placement

Possessive determiners are usually placed in front of the noun they modify. For example:

• "You remember Hannah, right? This is **her** *brother*, Richard."

• "Please return **my** *books* as soon as possible."

• "Have they found **their** *tickets* yet?"

• "The Earth spins on **its*** *axis*."

If the noun is further modified by one or more other determiners, the possessive determiner

is placed first. For example:

• "You remember Hannah, right? This is **her** little *brother*, Richard."

• "Please return **my** three library *books* as soon as possible."

• "Have they found **their** train *tickets* yet?"

• "The Earth spins on **its** invisible *axis*."

(*Usage Note: A common mistake is to use an apostrophe with the word *it* when we want to indicate possession. *It's* is a **contraction** that we use instead of writing out *it is* or *it has*. If we want to denote possession, we must use *its* without an apostrophe.)

Whose*

Whose is used as a possessive determiner in **interrogative sentences** to inquire about possession, as well as in indirect questions when the identity of the owner is unknown. For example:

• "**Whose** *coat* is this?"

• "Do you know **whose** *idea* this was?"

• "I need to find out **whose** *car* this is. They keep parking in my spot."

(*Usage Note: Similar to the issue with *its*, a common mistake is to use *who's* rather than *whose* when we want to inquire about possession. *Who's* is a contraction of *who is*; if we want to denote possession, we must use the possessive determiner *whose*.

The possessive apostrophe

We can form possessive determiners from other pronouns, nouns, and noun phrases by adding the **possessive apostrophe** + "s" (or just the apostrophe for plural nouns). For example:

- "Caring for **one's** *family* is very important."
- "**Hannah's** *car* is parked outside; she must have already arrived."
- "The former **Attorney General's** *recommendations* were included in the report."
- "Our school takes **parents'** concerns very seriously."

Differences with possessive pronouns

Possessive determiners are often confused with **possessive personal pronouns** (*mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs*). Although some of the forms overlap, there are important distinctions between the two types of possessives.

While possessive pronouns can stand on their own, taking the place of a noun, possessive determiners cannot. For example:

- Speaker A: "Whose is this book?"

✔ Speaker B: "It's **mine**." (correct)

✖ Speaker B: "It's **my**." (incorrect)

The second example is incorrect because possessive determiners, such as *my*, can modify a noun, but cannot replace one. We would need to include the noun *book* in order to use the possessive determiner, as in:

• Speaker A: "Whose is this book?"

✔ Speaker B: "It's **my** *book*." (correct)

Note, however, that possessive determiners formed using "-*'s"* can function both as determiners **and** pronouns, as in:

• Speaker A: "Whose is this book?"

✔ Speaker B: "It's **Jane's** *book*." (correct)

or

✔ Speaker B: "It's **Jane's**." (correct)

Another distinction is that although the structure *of + possessive pronoun* can be used to create a possessive sentence, a possessive determiner gives the noun a more definite meaning. Compare the following two sentences:

• "A *friend of mine* is going to come with us."

• "**My** *friend* is going to come with us."

The first example gives the impression that either the speaker is unsure which friend is going to come, or that the listener has never met the friend. On the other hand, the second example, which uses the possessive determiner *my* to directly modify the noun *friend*, gives the impression that the speaker has a definite friend in mind, and/or the listener is familiar with this friend.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Possessive determiners modify _____.

a) nouns
b) verbs
c) adjectives
d) adverbs

2. Which of the following is a possessive determiner?

a) it’s
b) Hank’s
c) who’s
d) they’re

3. Which of the following words is **not** a possessive determiner?

a) my
b) his
c) their
d) hers

4. Complete the following sentence with the possessive determiner that is **most correct**: “Your sister is worried that _____ phone might be lost. She hasn’t been able to find it since last night.”

a) his
b) their
c) our
d) her

5. Complete the following sentence with the possessive determiner that is **most correct**: “We should go shopping; _____ fridge is looking empty.”

a) our
b) her
c) their
d) its

6. Complete the following sentence with the possessive determiner that is **most correct**: “Look at that dog! _____ eyes are so blue!”

a) your
b) my
c) its
d) their

Gerunds

Definition

A **gerund** is the "-ing" form of a verb when it functions grammatically as a noun in a sentence. Gerunds are identical in appearance to **present participles**, but they are not used to form tenses of the verb or provide adjectival information.

Gerunds can either stand alone, or they can take a noun (the object of the gerund) and/or modifier(s) to form a **gerund phrase**.

Functions in a sentence

Because they act like nouns, gerunds can be used as the subject of a sentence, the subject complement of the linking verb *be*, the object of a preposition, or the object of a verb. They can also be used to form **compound nouns**.

As the subject

Just like a normal noun, a gerund or gerund phrase can be the subject of a sentence. For example:

• "**Swimming** is an excellent form of exercise!" (gerund only)

• "**Eating vegetables** gives you a lot of extra energy." (gerund + object)

• "**Studying too hastily** will result in a poor grade." (gerund + adverb(s))

• "**Reading romantic literature** proves to be an unpopular pastime among academics." (gerund + adjective + noun)

• "**Working from home** allows me to spend more time with my family." (gerund + prepositional phrase)

Adverbs modifying gerunds

Notice that in our third example, the gerund *studying* is being modified by an adverb, *hastily* (itself modified by *too*). Likewise, *working* in the last example is modified by the adverbial prepositional phrase *from home*.

This may seem contradictory, since gerunds act like nouns, and adverbs **can't** modify nouns. However, in this case, it is the gerund *phrase* that is functioning as a noun, so the gerund itself can still be modified by an adverb in the same way as a normal verb.

Present participial clauses

It's often easy to confuse present participles for gerunds because they look identical and operate in very similar ways. For instance, the present participles of verbs can be used to create dependent clauses that modify the rest of the sentence. For example:

• "**Singing in the shower**, *I* was oblivious to the doorbell ringing." (I was singing.)

• "**Having seen** the movie before, I wouldn't want to see it again."

Although they look quite similar, these clauses function like an adjective, whereas the gerund phrases we looked at above act like nouns functioning as the **subjects** of their sentences.

As a subject complement

Like **predicative adjectives**, gerunds can act as subject complements after the linking verb *be*. In this case, the gerund acts as a kind of modifier that gives more information about the sentence's subject. For example:

• "My main responsibility here ***is*** **operating the forklift**." (*operating* complements the noun *responsibility*)

• "My favorite thing about being in Japan ***is*** **eating sushi**." (*eating* complements *thing*)

• "The best thing in life ***is*** **spending time with loved ones.**"

Again, we have to be careful that we don't mistake a gerund for the present participle of a verb. This can be easy to do, because the present participle is paired with the verb *be* to form the **present continuous tense** and the **past continuous tense** of verbs, as in:

• "I **am running** five miles tomorrow." (present continuous tense)

• "I heard you **are operating the forklift** at work now." (present continuous tense)

• "I **was singing** in the shower when the doorbell rang." (past continuous tense)

• "She **was eating** dinner when I called." (past continuous tense)

Remember that a gerund or gerund phrase functions as a noun—if the sentence still makes grammatical sense after the word or phrase is replaced by a normal noun, then we are dealing with a gerund; if it does not make sense after being replaced by a normal noun, then it is a present participle.

As objects

Of prepositions

Gerunds are used as the objects of prepositions to describe an action that modifies another action, thus creating **adverbial prepositional phrases**. These can occur at the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence. For example:

• "**After sneezing**, I always get the hiccups."

• "I'm going to improve my health **by running** six miles every night."

• "She started going crazy **from so much waiting**."

• "He's not **against marrying** me, he just isn't ready."

Of verbs

Gerunds can also act as the direct object of some verbs. Here a few examples:

• "Do you **mind watching** my seat for me while I go to the bathroom?"

• “I really **love hiking** in the mountains.”

• “I **enjoy eating** at restaurants, but Jenny **prefers cooking** at home.”

• “He **remembered turning** off the oven, but his husband thought he’d left it on.”

• “They **couldn’t help feeling** sorry for Bob.”

(If you want to see more examples, go to the section **Gerunds as Objects of Verbs**.)

Of phrasal verbs

Just like they do with normal verbs, gerunds can also function as the object of **phrasal verbs**. For example:

• “I am ***counting on*** **getting** tickets to that new movie.”

• “They’re ***looking forward to*** **meeting** you later.”

Forming compound nouns

Gerunds can be paired with regular nouns to become **compound nouns**, as in:

• “His new **running shoes** were already covered in mud.”

• “I’m hoping she can give me a **helping hand**.”

• “The **working conditions** are very poor here.”

These are distinct from *gerund* phrases, where the noun is functioning as the object of the gerund, as in our previous example of "**Eating vegetables** is good for your health."

They should also not be confused with present participles that are functioning as adjectives. Though they look quite similar, adjectival present participles imply *action* on the part of the noun being modified. For example:

- "She soothed the **crying** *baby*." (The baby is crying).
- "The **speeding** *car* crashed into the tree." (The car was speeding.)

As an object complement

For certain **factitive verbs**, gerunds can also act as **object complements**. Object complements function by renaming or reclassifying a direct object, or by stating what the direct object has become or is doing. Gerunds can only function as object complements that state what the direct object is or was doing.

In the following examples, the verb or phrasal verb is *italicized*, the direct object is <u>underlined</u>, and the gerund or gerund phrase (as object complement) is in **bold**:

- "We *came across* <u>him</u> **lying in the yard**."
- "My mother *noticed* <u>the baby</u> **walking by himself**."
- "I can't believe the bosses *caught* <u>you</u> **napping**."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In which of the following ways is a gerund **not** able to function?

a) As the subject of a sentence
b) As the object of a verb
c) As an adjective clause
d) As a subject complement

2. Which of the following linking verbs can a gerund follow as a **subject complement**?

a) be
b) become
c) seem
d) appear

3. In which of the following sentences is the word *talking* a gerund?

a) “I’ll be talking to your teacher after school.”
b) “I really love talking with my friends.”
c) “The talking students were oblivious to the principal.”
d) “Talking with her parents, it seems like there might be some issues at home.”

4. When gerunds function as the objects of **prepositions**, where can they occur in a sentence?

a) At the beginning
b) In the middle
c) At the end
d) All of the above
e) None of the above

5. Which of the following sentences does **not** use a gerund?

a) “His love of eating is going to lead to serious health problems.”
b) “One of the best things about spring is smelling all the flowers.”
c) “They had been driving for hours before they found a hotel.”
d) “We began shouting at the top of our lungs for the bus to stop.”

Gerunds as Objects of Verbs Definition

Gerunds very frequently function as the direct objects of “true” verbs. However, there are some verbs that are more likely to take gerunds as objects than others.

In this section, we’ll look at some common verbs that take gerunds as their direct object to get a sense of how they’re used.

Stative vs. Action Verbs Stative verbs that take gerunds

Stative verbs, also known as **verbs of feeling**, are very likely to take gerunds as their objects.

Here are some examples of common stative verbs that take gerunds (keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list):

Stative verb	Example with a gerund as an object
love	"I **love *going*** to the movies."
like	"I **like *living*** by the ocean."
enjoy	"Do you **enjoy *working*** in retail?"
mind	"Would you **mind *watching*** my seat for me while I go to the bathroom?"
feel like	"I **feel like *staying home*** tonight."
stand	"She can't **stand *being*** around him."

imagine	"**Imagine *winning*** the lottery. It would be great!"

Action verbs that take gerunds

Certain **action verbs** (also called **dynamic verbs**) can also take a gerund as their object if describing a secondary action. For instance:

Action verb	Example with a gerund as an object
admit (to)	"He **admitted (to) *cheating*** on the exam."
avoid	"He always tries to **avoid *doing*** his homework."
consider	"He is **considering *moving*** to London."
delay	"He **delayed *paying*** his phone bill."
deny	"He **denied *stealing*** the money."
insist on	"He **insisted on *giving*** me a ride to the train station."
keep/continue	"Please, **keep/continue *telling*** me your story."

mention	"She **mentioned *meeting*** him for a coffee earlier."
practice	"She **practices *speaking*** English whenever she gets the chance."
recommend	"I **recommend *going*** to the mountains in the summer."
resist	"She **resisted *sneaking out*** to the party down the road."
suggest	"They **suggested *staying*** at a five-star hotel."

Again, the above is not a complete list. There are many other dynamic verbs that will take a gerund as their object.

Gerunds vs. Infinitives

Gerunds and **infinitives** are both verb forms that can function as nouns, and, as such, they are both often used as the objects of "main" verbs. In many cases, we can use **either** the infinitive *or* the gerund in addition to "standard" nouns.

Some verbs, however, can only be followed by infinitives and **not** gerunds. In each example below, we can see how a gerund does not fit with the main verb:

✔ Infinitive (Correct)	✖ Gerund (Incorrect)

“They **promised *to be*** quiet in the car.”	“They **promised *being*** quiet in the car.”
“I **agreed *to leave*** him alone.”	“I **agreed *leaving*** him alone.”
“She **asked *to see*** the landlord about the faulty stove.”	“She **asked *seeing*** the landlord about the faulty stove.”

Likewise, some verbs are followed only by gerunds and **not** infinitives. In most cases, these are action verbs. For example:

✔ Gerund (Correct)	✖ Infinitive (Incorrect)
“I **recall *seeing*** an advertisement for that somewhere.”	“I **recall *to see*** an advertisement for that somewhere.”
“I **recommend *reading*** *Moby Dick* at some point in your life.”	“I **recommend *to read*** *Moby Dick* at some point in your life.”
“He’ll **consider *hearing*** your side of the story later, if he has time.”	“He’ll **consider *to hear*** your side of the story later, if he has time.”

Unfortunately, there is not a set of rules to determine which verbs can take which forms as their objects.

Verbs followed by both gerunds and infinitives

For other verbs, we can use **either** the infinitive **or** the gerund.

Most of the time, there is no difference in meaning when we substitute the infinitive for the gerund. This is especially true for **stative verbs**. For example, each of the following pairs mean the same thing:

Gerund	Infinitive
"I **like *hiking***."	"I **like *to hike***."
"I **love *swimming***."	"I **love *to swim***."
"I **prefer *going out*** on the weekend."	"I **prefer *to go out*** on the weekend."

With some verbs, we can use both the infinitive and the gerund, but the meaning of the sentence changes subtly as a result. In this case, we have to use context to understand the meaning completely. For example:

Infinitive	Gerund

“I **remembered *to close*** the window.” (I didn’t forget to do this)	“No, I didn’t leave the window open. I **remember *closing*** it.” (I recall doing this)
“I **forgot *to read*** this book for school.” (I didn’t remember to do this, so it didn’t happen)	“I **forget *reading*** this book for school.” (I don’t recall this fact)
“I’ve been **trying *to call*** you all day, but the line has been busy.” (Attempt to do something)	“**Try *calling*** my cell phone next time.” (This is a possible solution to the problem)
“I **stopped *drinking*** sugary drinks because of my health.” (I don’t drink sugary drinks anymore)	“I **stopped *to drink*** at the well.” (I interrupted what I was doing to drink from the well)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following verbs will **not** take a gerund as its object?

a) deny

b) neglect

c) recommend
d) love

2. Which kind of verb is **more likely** to take a gerund as its object?
a) linking verb
b) auxiliary verb
c) stative verb
d) dynamic verb

3. Identify the gerund in the following sentence.
"I am waiting to see if the doctor recommends getting a transplant."
a) waiting
b) to see
c) recommends
d) getting

4. True or false: All gerunds can be replaced by infinitives when they function as the objects of verbs.
a) true
b) false

Interjections

Definition

An **interjection**, also known as an **exclamation**, is a word, phrase, or sound used to convey an emotion such as surprise, excitement, happiness, or anger. Interjections are very common in spoken English, but they appear in written English as well. Capable of standing alone, they are grammatically unrelated to any other part of a sentence.

Primary Interjections

Primary interjections are interjections that are single words derived not from any other word class, but from sounds. Nonetheless, primary interjections do have widely recognized meaning. Some common primary interjections are:

Primary Interjection	Emotion
aah	fear
aha	triumph, sudden understanding
argh	frustration
brr	being cold

eww	disgust
grr	anger
hmm	thinking
ooh	amazement, being impressed
phew	relief
yay	approval, happiness

Secondary Interjections

Secondary interjections are interjections derived from words that *do* belong to other word classes—they may be adjectives, nouns, or entire clauses. Again, they have nothing to do with the grammar of the sentences that come before or after them. Some common secondary interjections are:

- bless you
- congratulations
- good grief
- hell

- hey
- hi
- oh my
- oh my God
- oh well
- shoot
- well
- what

Curse words (vulgar or offensive words; also called swear words) are also considered interjections when they are not linked grammatically with another part of a sentence.

Sentence Placement

Interjections are more commonly used in speech; however, we sometimes do need to express them through writing, especially if we are trying to capture dialogue. Usually, the interjection is placed before the sentence that explains the cause of the emotion. For example:

• "**Ooh**, that's a beautiful dress."

• "**Brr**, it's freezing in here!"

• "**Oh my God**! We've won!"

• “**Wow**! What a great achievement!”

Punctuation

As mentioned, interjections can stand alone. Therefore, they can be punctuated with a period, an exclamation point, or a question mark. The punctuation we choose depends on the emotion that we want to convey. However, since interjections are not complete sentences, some writers prefer to attach them to a complete sentence with a comma. Ultimately, it is up to preference.

Exclamation point

We use an exclamation point when the emotion we want to convey is very strong and is not a question. For example:

• “**Hooray!** I got accepted to my top choice university!”

• “**Yuck!** I hate coconuts!”

• “**Congratulations!** That was an impressive victory.”

Period or comma

When the expression is weaker, we can use a period or a comma. For example:

• “**Well**, isn’t that nice?”

• "**Oh well**, I'm sure we'll have better luck next time."

• "**Shoot.** I really thought we were going to win."

Question mark

If the interjection expresses disbelief, uncertainty, or is interrogative, we should use a question mark. For example:

• "**Huh?** You're not coming?"

• "**Well?** Are we going to watch a movie?"

• "**What**? You don't like coconuts?"

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Interjections are _____ to the grammar of the sentence that follows.

a) somewhat related
b) related
c) not related

2. Which of the following is a **primary interjection**? a) well

b) oh my god
c) ugh
d) hello

3. Complete the following sentence with the **most appropriate** interjection: "_____! I really thought we were going to lose!"
a) Phew
b) Oh no
c) Yuck
d) Argh

4. Complete the following sentence with the **most appropriate** interjection: "_____. I'm still not sure of the right answer."
a) Eew
b) Phew
c) Hmm
d) Congratulations

5. Complete the following sentence with the **most appropriate** interjection: "_____. That bread is all moldy."
a) Yay

b) Eww
c) Phew
d) Ooh

Inflection (Accidence)

Definition

Grammatical **inflection** (sometimes known as **accidence** or **flection** in more traditional grammars) is the way in which a word is changed or altered in form in order to achieve a new, specific meaning.

Verbs are the most commonly inflected words, changing form to reflect grammatical **tense**, as well as **mood**, **voice**, **aspect**, **person**, and **speech**. Collectively, this is known as **conjugation**.

The other parts of speech that can undergo inflection are nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs. These are categorized collectively under the term **declension**.

Most inflection is done according to consistent rules and patterns, but, as we'll see, there are many words that are **irregularly inflected**.

We'll look at the basics of conjugation and declension below, and then briefly discuss regular vs. irregular declension. Continue on to the individual sections to learn more about them in greater detail.

Conjugation

Below, we'll give a brief overview of the different elements used in **conjugation**. Continue

on to **Conjugation** or go to its individual sections to learn more about each.

Tense

When we discuss conjugating verbs, we are usually referring to how a verb changes according to **tense**—that is, when an action happened in time. Verbs in their basic form are naturally in the **present tense** (specifically known as the **present simple tense**). For example:

- "She **walks** to work."
- "We **live** in the city."
- "They **work** too hard."
- "He **sings** for an hour."

Verbs can only be truly inflected for the **past tense** (specifically the **past simple tense**). Most verbs are changed by adding "-d" or "-ed" to their end (which also forms their **past participle** form). However, many verbs are considered **irregular** and have past tense and past participle forms that cannot be predicted. For example:

- "She **walked** to work." (regular verb)
- "We **lived** in the city." (regular verb)
- "He **sang** for an hour." (irregular verb)

Using **auxiliary verbs** and verb **participles**, we can also create the **continuous**, **perfect**, and

perfect continuous forms of either the past or present tense. For instance:

• "She **is walking** to work." (**present continuous tense**)

• "We **have lived** in the city." (**present perfect tense**)

• "They **had been working** too hard." (**past perfect continuous tense**)

• "He **had sung** for an hour." (**past perfect tense**)

Finally, we can also form an *approximation* of the **future tense**. Verbs do not have a specific form to reflect future action, so we use other verb constructions to achieve this meaning, usually the **modal auxiliary verb** *will*, as in:

• "She **will walk** to work." (**future simple tense**)

• "We **will be living** in the city." (**future continuous tense**)

• "They **will have worked** too hard." (**future perfect tense**)

• "He **will have been singing** for an hour." (**future perfect continuous tense**)

Aspect

Grammatical **aspect** is concerned with how an action, state of being, or event occurs in time; we use it with tense to create specific forms of verbs in relation to time.

Each verb tense has four aspects, or temporal structures: the *simple*, the *perfect*, the *continuous*, and the *perfect continuous*. These coincide with the different verb tenses we

looked at above. When we form the **present continuous tense** ("I **am walking**"), for instance, we are actually using the **continuous aspect** of the present tense.

Continue on to the **Aspect** section in this chapter to learn more about how aspect is used with verb tenses.

Mood

Most of the time when we speak or write, we are discussing or asking what is true, real, or actually happening. This is known as the **indicative mood**. For instance:

• "I ate breakfast at 3 o'clock."

• "We are going swimming this afternoon."

• "Will they be there tonight?"

When discussing an unreal, hypothetical, or desired situation, we use what's known as the **subjunctive mood**. This is usually marked by putting the verb in the past tense, as in:

• "I wish it **was/were*** Saturday."

• "If I **had** a million dollars, I **would** move to the Bahamas."

(*Traditionally, the verb *be* always conjugates to *were* in the subjunctive mood, regardless of the subject of the sentence. However, it is becoming common in modern English to use *was* if the subject is singular.)

When we make direct commands to someone, we use what's known as the **imperative mood**

to form **imperative sentences**. They have no subject (it is implied), and the verb is in the **base** or **bare infinitive** form. For example:

• "**Close** that window!"

• "**Sit** down, please."

Voice

Voice has to do with the relationship between a verb and its source of agency—the person or thing performing or controlling the action of the verb. This is usually **the subject** of the sentence or clause, which is known as being in the **active voice**. For instance:

• "He **wrote** the book."

• "The Millers **are preparing** dinner."

We can also construct sentences in which the subject of the sentence is **not** the agent of the verb, but rather the **object** of its action. If the agent is identified, it is only in a prepositional phrase at the end of the sentence. This is known as **passive voice**. For example:

• "The book **was written** (*by him*)."

• "Dinner **was prepared** (*by The Millers*)."

Grammatical Person

Grammatical **person** refers to whether the subject is the speaker or writer (first person),

someone being directly addressed (second person), or a person or thing that is being spoken or written about (third person). Each of these can be either singular or plural.

Almost all verbs are conjugated a specific way only if the subject is in the third person, is singular, and is in the present tense. We do so by adding an "-s" or "-es" to the end of the verb, as in:

- "I *walk* everywhere." (first-person singular)
- "She/he/it ***walks*** everywhere." (third-person singular)

The exception to this is the verb *be*, which has several unique conjugations for grammatical person and tense. For example:

- "I **am** outside." (first-person singular, present tense)
- "She/he/it **is** outside." (third-person singular, present tense)
- "I/she/he/it **was** outside." (first/third-person singular, past tense)
- "You/we/they **are** outside." (first/second/third-person plural, present tense)
- "You/we/they **were** outside." (first/second/third-person plural, past tense)

Speech

Speech refers to the quotation of or reference to something said or written by someone else. When we say exactly what someone said (known as **direct speech** or **direct quotation**), we use quotation marks, as in:

• Mary said, **“I want to have another baby,”** which took him by surprise.

When we are only paraphrasing or summarizing what someone said, it is known as **reported** or **indirect speech** and we do **not** use quotation marks. For example:

• Mary told me that **she hadn’t been serious**.

Declension

While conjugation only deals with the inflection of verbs, **declension** covers the inflection of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

Declension of nouns

Generally, we only *decline* nouns to mark **plurality**—that is, whether there is more than one person, place, or thing being discussed. We usually do so by adding an “-s” or “-es” to the end of the noun, as in *books, watches, toys, cars,* etc. There are a few other spelling patterns that apply, and there are a number of **irregular plurals** that do not follow any conventions at all—go to the section on **Plurals** to learn more.

We can also decline certain nouns to reflect **gender**, as in *prince* (masculine) vs. *princess* (feminine). However, the majority of nouns in English are **not** inflected for gender.

Declension of pronouns

For the most part, only **personal pronouns** are subject to inflection. We decline personal pronouns based on grammatical **person**, **number**, **gender**, and **case**. The pronouns *who* and *whoever* can also be declined to *whom* and *whomever* to reflect the **objective case**; however, this is becoming less common in everyday speech and writing.

The table below provides a quick breakdown of the various personal pronouns. (**Reflexive pronouns**, though not technically a type of personal pronoun, are so closely related in form that they have been included as well.) Continue on to the **Declension** chapter or go to their individual sections in the chapter on **Personal Pronouns** to learn more about how they are formed and when they are used.

Person	**Number**	**Gender**	**Subjective Case**	**Objective Case**	**Possessive Determiner**	**P P**
First Person	Singular	Masculine/feminine	I	Me	My	M
First Person	Plural	Masculine/feminine	We	Us	Our	O
Second Person	Singular/Plural	Masculine/feminine	You	You	Your	Y

Third Person	Singular	Feminine	She	Her	Her	H
Third Person	Singular	Masculine	He	Him	His	H
Third person	Singular	Neuter	It	It	Its	Its
Third person	Plural	Neuter (Gender Neutral)	They	Them	Their	T

Declension of adjectives and adverbs

We decline both adjectives and adverbs in the same way to create **comparative** and **superlative** forms. As the name suggests, comparative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare two people or things. Superlative adjectives and adverbs, on the other hand, identify someone or something with the highest (or lowest) degree of a certain attribute.

We inflect these modifiers by adding the suffix "-r" or "-er" to form the comparative degree, and "-st" or "-est" to form the superlative degree. Collectively, these are known as the **degrees of comparison**. For example:

Degrees of Comparison - Adjectives	Degrees of Comparison - Adverbs

“My cat has **sharp** claws.”	“I like to drive **fast**.”
“His cat has **sharper** claws than mine.”	“My sister drives **faster** than me.”
“Their cat has the **sharpest** claws of them all.”	“My dad drives the **fastest** in our family.”

For some modifiers, we simply add the words *more/less* or *most/least* rather than changing the adjective or adverb itself.

To learn the specific rules that govern the declension of adjectives and adverbs, go to the Degrees of Comparison section for **Adjectives** or **Adverbs**.

Regular and Irregular Inflection

Inflection is usually determined by clear, consistent rules or patterns. This is known as **regular inflection**. All the examples we’ve looked at so far have been according to regular inflection.

However, there are also many instances of **irregular inflection**, in which the way the word changes is completely unique and does not follow (or seem to follow) any predetermined rules.

For instance, irregular inflection occurs with many of the **plurals** of nouns. Words like

children or *mice* are irregular plural forms of *child* and *mouse*.

It also occurs with adjectives and adverbs when we decline them for the comparative and superlative forms. For example, the adjective *good* becomes *better* (comparative) and *best* (superlative), which are also the inflected forms of the adverb *well*.

Some adverbs that are formed from adjectives are also irregular—*well,* for instance, is the irregular adverb form of the adjective *good*.

Verbs are the most notorious for their irregular inflection, which is defined as having past tense and past participle forms that a) are different from one another, and b) have different spellings than the usual "-d" or "-ed" endings. For instance, the past tense of the verb *sing* is *sang,* while its past participle is *sung*.

Go to the section **Regular and Irregular Inflection** in this chapter to learn more about these tricky exceptions.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the purpose of inflection?

a) To modify a word with other words in order to create a new meaning

b) To change the form of a word in order to create new meaning

c) To create words that form the subject of the sentence

d) To create words that act as the objects of verbs

2. Which of the following is **not** something we conjugate verbs for?

a) Tense
b) Mood
c) Gender
d) Person

3. What is the most common reason **personal pronouns** are inflected?

a) To establish the gender of the pronoun
b) To establish the plurality of the pronoun
c) To establish the grammatical person of the pronoun
d) To establish the grammatical case of the pronoun
e) All of the above
f) None of the above

4. The **subjunctive mood** can be used to express which of the following?

a) Wishes
b) Statements of facts
c) Direct commands
d) All of the above

5. Which of the following is the term for inflection that does **not** follow predictable rules or

patterns?

a) Improper inflection
b) Inexact inflection
c) Irregular inflection
d) Implied inflection

Conjugation

Definition

Conjugation refers to the way we **inflect** (change the form of) verbs to create particular meanings.

When we discuss conjugating verbs, we usually refer to ways in which we change a verb in order to reflect grammatical **tense**, but we also conjugate verbs to reflect **aspect**, **mood**, **voice**, **person**, and **speech**.

We'll very briefly look at the ways verbs are conjugated below. Continue on to the individual sections in this chapter to learn more about each.

Tense

Grammatical **tense** refers to the conjugation of a verb to reflect its place in time—that is, when the action occurred.

There are technically only two grammatical tenses in English: the **past tense** and the **present tense**. Verbs in their basic form inherently describe the present time, and they can be conjugated into a unique form that describes the past.

Using **auxiliary verbs** and verb **participles**, we can also create the **continuous** (or **progressive**) **tenses**, the **perfect tenses**, and the **perfect continuous** (or **perfect progressive**) **tenses**. These are technically different **aspects** of tense, but they are commonly included among the verb tenses.

English has no future tense in the strict sense (there is no unique verb form to denote future action). Nevertheless, we commonly refer to several structures that are used for future meaning as belonging to the **future tense**.

We'll look at a couple of examples of each verb tense below, but each section has more information on how they are formed and used.

Present Tense

Present Simple Tense

- "I **go** to work every day."
- "He **works** in finance."
- "I **don't go** out very often."
- "**Do** you **eat** breakfast every morning?"

- “They **are** hungry.”

Present Continuous Tense

- “John **is sleeping** at the moment.”
- “**Am** I **wearing** the right uniform?”
- “Jack **isn’t coming** to the movie with us.”
- “**Are** you still **reading** that book?”
- “We**’re flying** to Spain tomorrow.”

Present Perfect Tense

- “I **have lived** in Italy for many years.”
- “She **has been** here since 8 o’clock.”
- “**Have** you **been** here since this morning?”
- “We **haven’t been** to the movies in a long
- time.” “**Have** you **seen** my jacket anywhere?”

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

- “I**’ve been writing** for over an hour.”
- “How long **have** you **been writing**?”

- “They **haven’t been living** in Spain for very long.”
- “She’s tired because she**’s been working** a lot.”
- “That bag looks new. **Have** you **been shopping**?”

Past Tense

Past Simple Tense

- “She **worked** in finance before this job.”
- “We **lived** in China for six years after I **graduated** from college.”
- “They **didn’t watch** the movie last night.”
- “I **went** to the park yesterday.”
- “I **was** their accountant at the time.”

Past Continuous Tense

- “I **was reading** a book when they arrived.” “What
- **were** you **talking about when I arrived?”**
  “She was worrying we wouldn’t be able to afford the
- **wedding.”** “I **wasn’t feeling** well.”
- “**Were you sleeping** when I called?”

Past Perfect Tense

- "The movie **had already ended** when I turned on the TV."
- "I was sad to leave the house I **had lived** in for so many
- years." "Until this morning, I **had never been** on a plane."
- "**Had** you ever **been** on a tractor before working on our farm?"
- "I **hadn't eaten** Parmesan cheese before going to Italy."

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

- "When I arrived at the bus stop, the other people there **had been waiting** for nearly an hour."
- "We **hadn't been talking** for very long before she had to leave."
- "My eyes were tired because I **had been working** on the computer."
- "**Had** she **been living** in Italy for a long time?"
- "He **had been feeling** unwell, so he went to lie down."

Future Tense

The most common constructions of the **future tenses** use the **modal auxiliary verb** *will* or the verb phrase *be going to*. We can also use the modal verb *shall* to create the future tense,

but this is generally reserved for more formal or polite English, and it is not very common in everyday speech and writing, especially in American English.

Future Simple Tense

- "The Queen **will be** in Rome tomorrow."
- "She **won't do** her homework."
- "**Will** they **be** late?"
- "I **am going to wash** my hair after dinner."
- "**Are** you **going to mow** the lawn today?"

Future Continuous Tense

- "I**'ll be flying** to Boston tomorrow, so I can't come to lunch."
- "People **are going be consuming** even more natural resources by the year 2030."
- "**Is** she **going to be working** from home now?"
- "I**'m not going to be living** in New York for much longer."
- "You shouldn't call their house now; they **will be sleeping**."

Future Perfect Tense

- "By October we **will have lived** in this house for 20 years."

- "After this next race, I **will have completed** 10 triathlons."
- "You **will have heard** by now that the company is going
- bankrupt." "**Will** they **have read** the memo ahead of the meeting?"
- "Why are you going to the airport so early? Her flight **will not have arrived** yet."

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

- "She**'ll have been waiting** for nearly an hour by the time we arrive."
- "I **will have been living** in this country for 10 years this November."
- "**Will** they **have been looking** through our tax returns for the last few years?"
- "How **will** he **have been coping** on his own for all these years?"
- "He **won't have been sleeping** for very long, but I have to wake him up."

Aspect

Grammatical **aspect** is often confused with **tense**. While **tense** is concerned with when an action, state of being, or event occurs (past, present, or future), aspect is concerned with how it occurs in time.

We use aspect with tense to reflect each construction of a verb in relation to time. When we form the **present continuous tense**, for instance, we are actually using a specific **aspect** of the present tense. It is through aspect that we understand whether an action takes place at a

single point in time, during a continuous range of time, or repetitively.

Perfective and imperfective aspect

The **perfective aspect** is used when we draw attention to an action as a whole, summarizing it. The perfective aspect may occur in past, present, or future actions and events. For example:

• "I **ate** dinner."

• "I **swim** like a fish."

• "We **will help** you tomorrow."

The **imperfective aspect**, on the other hand, is used to draw attention to the action as having an internal structure (rather than as a whole, complete action)—for example, an action that is in progress at the moment of speaking or which happened habitually in the past, as in:

• "I **was washing dishes** when she came through the door."

• "We used to go traveling a lot."

Aspects of verb tenses

Each verb tense has four aspects, or temporal structures: the *simple*, the *perfect*, the *continuous*, and the *perfect continuous*. These coincide with the different verb tenses we looked at above.

Aspects of the present tense

Aspect	Structure	Examples
Simple	Subject + present verb	“I **go** shopping on Tuesdays.” “She **runs** fast.”
Perfect	Subject + *have/has* + past participle	“I **have eaten** here before.” “She **has lived** here for a long time.”
Continuous	Subject + *is/are* + present participle	“We **are cooking** dinner.” “He **is singing** a song.”
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *have/has* + *been* + present participle	“He **has been thinking** about it.” “I **have been taking** an art class.”

Aspects of the past tense

Aspect	Structure	Examples

Simple	Subject + past verb	“I **went** shopping on Tuesday.” “She **ran** fast.”
Perfect	Subject + *had* + past participle	“I **had eaten** there before.” “She **had lived** here for a long time.”
Continuous	Subject + *was/were* + present participle	“We **were cooking** dinner.” “He **was singing** a song.”
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *had* + *been* + present participle	“He **had been thinking** about it.” “I **had been taking** an art class.”

Aspects of the future tense

Aspect	Structure	Examples
Simple	Subject + *will/be going to* + infinitive	“I **will go** shopping on Tuesday.” “She **is going to run** fast.”

Perfect	Subject + *will have* + past participle	"I **will have eaten** before arriving." "She **will have lived** here for a long time."
Continuous	Subject + *will/be going to* + be + present participle	"We **are going to be cooking** dinner." "He **will be singing** a song."
Perfect Continuous	Subject + *will/would* + *have* + been + present participle	"He**'ll have been thinking** about it." "I **would have been taking** an art class."

Mood

Grammatical **mood** refers to the way in which a verb is used to express certain meaning by the speaker or writer—that is, to express what is actually the case or what is unreal or hypothetical, or to command or request something to be done in the future.

There are three main grammatical **moods**: the **indicative mood**, the **subjunctive mood**, and the **imperative mood**.

Indicative mood

The **indicative mood** expresses facts, statements, opinions, or questions. It is used to form **declarative sentences** (i.e., statements or declarations) or **interrogative sentences** (i.e., questions). For example:

• "She **graduated** last year with a doctorate in neuroscience."

• "He **isn't taking** his exam at the new testing center."

• "**Are** you **going to give** your speech tomorrow?"

Subjunctive Mood

The **subjunctive mood** uses specific verb constructions to describe hypothetical or non-real actions, events, or situations, such as wishes, suggestions, or possible outcomes that depend on certain conditions.

For example:

• "I wish I **didn't have to go** to work." (wish)

• "I recommend that she **study** harder next time." (suggestion)

• "**If I had been more prepared**, I would have passed that test."

Imperative Mood

We use the **imperative mood** when we form **imperative sentences**, such as direct orders, commands, or general instructions.

When we make an imperative sentence, we use the infinitive form of the verb (without *to*), and, uniquely, we omit the subject of the verb.

For example:

• "Turn off the light before you leave."

• "Go to bed!"

• "Please close the door."

• "Pay attention!"

Voice

Grammatical **voice** describes the relationship between the verb and the subject (also known as the *agent*) in a sentence.

There are two main types of voice: **active voice** and **passive voice**. A third type called **"middle" voice** also exists, but it is less common.

Active Voice

A verb is in the **active voice** when the agent of the verb (the person or thing that performs the action specified by the verb) is also the subject of the sentence.

For example:

• "The boy **sang** a song." (*the boy* is the agent of the verb *sang*)

• "I **am watching** a movie." (*I* is the agent of the verb *am watching*)

• "Vivian **writes** well." (*Vivian* is the agent of the verb *writes*)

Passive Voice

A sentence uses the **passive voice** when the subject is acted upon by the verb. The object of the verb's action becomes the subject of the sentence, while the *agent* of the action (if there is one) is identified by the preposition *by*. For example:

• "A famous piano piece **will be performed** *by Angie* tomorrow night."

• "His new book **has already been read** *by thousands of people*."

• "The light bulb **was patented** in 1880." (no agent)

"Middle" Voice

The **"middle" voice** describes a type of voice in which the agent performs the verb's action on itself. Verbs in the middle voice are often followed by **reflexive pronouns**. For example:

• "*My girlfriend* always **checks** herself in the mirror before we go out."

• "*The dog* **bit** itself on the tail."

"Middle" voice can also be used to describe some **intransitive verbs** that act upon their agents. For example:

- "The **lasagna *cooked*** in the oven for several hours."
- "The **bicycle *broke*** without warning."

Grammatical Person

Grammatical person refers to the degree of involvement of a participant in an action, event, or circumstance. There are three degrees of grammatical person: **first person** (the speaker), **second person** (someone being spoken to), and **third person** (anyone/anything not being directly addressed).

The vast majority of verbs only conjugate for **third-person singular** subjects (e.g., *he*, *she*, and *it*) by taking the suffix "-s" or "-es," as in:

- "I *eat* pasta." (first-person singular)
- "We *eat* pasta." (first-person plural)
- "You *eat* pasta." (second-person singular/plural)
- "She/he/it ***eats*** pasta." (third-person singular)
- "They *eat* pasta." (third-person singular)

However, the verb *be* is unique in that it has **five different** conjugations according to the grammatical person of its subject and the **tense** of the verb.

• “I **am** happy.” (first-person singular, present tense)
• “I **was** happy.” (first-person singular, past tense)
• “We **are** happy.” (first-person plural, present tense)
• “We **were** happy.” (first-person plural, past tense)
• “You **are** happy.” (second-person singular/plural, present tense)
• “You **were** happy.” (second-person singular/plural, past tense)
• “She/he/it **is** happy.” (third-person singular, present tense)
• “She/he/it **was** happy.” (third-person singular, past tense)
• “They **are** happy.” (third-person plural, present tense)
• “They **were** happy.” (third-person plural, past tense)

To learn more about the way that other verbs conjugate for the third-person singular, go to the section on **Grammatical Person**

Speech

Grammatical **speech** refers to how we report what another person said, which affects the conjugation of the verbs that are used. We almost always use **reporting verbs** (such as *say*, *tell*, or *ask*) to form grammatical speech.

There are two primary types of speech: **direct speech** and **reported speech** (also known as

indirect speech). There are also two other sub-categories, known as free **indirect speech** and **silent speech**.

Direct speech

Direct speech, sometimes known as **quoted speech**, refers to the direct quotation of something that someone else said.

Because the quotation happened in the past, we put the reporting verb into the **past simple tense**, but we don't change the verbs used within the quotation.

When used in writing, we indicate the quoted speech with **quotation marks** (**" "**), and we usually set it apart with one or two commas (unless we are quoting a fragment that blends in with the overall sentence). For example:

• John *said*, **"I'll never live in this city again."**

• Mary *told* him, **"I want to have another baby,"** which took him by surprise.

• John *said* he feels **"really bad"** about what happened.

(There are a number of other nuances surrounding punctuating that occur when we use direct speech in certain circumstances, as well as if we are writing in **American English** or **British English**. Continue on to the section dealing with **Speech** to learn more.)

Reported (Indirect) Speech

In many instances, we merely paraphrase (or restate) what someone said, rather than directly quoting them. This is known as **reported** or **indirect speech**.

In reported speech, we do not use quotation marks. According to conventional rules, we must also shift the paraphrased information one degree into the past. If a statement was originally made in the **present simple tense**, for instance, we would shift it to the **past simple tense**. For example:

Non-reported sentence	Verb shift	Reported speech
I live in Germany.	**present simple tense** shifts to **past simple tense**	**He said *he lived*** in Germany.
I was a carpenter before I moved here.	**past simple tense** shifts to **past perfect tense**	**She said that *she had been*** a carpenter before she moved here.
He is writing a letter to our friend.	**present continuous tense** shifts to **past continuous tense**	**She told us *he was writing*** a letter to our friend.
She was sleeping when you called.	**past continuous tense** shifts to **past perfect continuous tense**	**He told me *you had been sleeping*** when I called.

However, in modern English, this rule is not always observed, and the meaning of your sentence would usually not be affected if you didn't shift the tense. To learn more about how we change (or do not change) the tense and wording of sentences, go to the section on **Reported Speech**.

Free Indirect and Silent Speech

Free indirect speech is used to indicate the thoughts or mental processes of a character, usually in the form of a rhetorical question. We do not use reporting verbs or quotation marks. For example:

• He had no money, no job, and no friends. **How had his life arrived to such a desperate point?**

Silent speech refers to something that is said internally (i.e., *silently*) by someone to him- or herself. We still use reporting verbs, but we can use either quotation marks or italics to indicate the silent speech, or nothing at all—it is up to the writer's preference. For example:

• **"I'm never coming back to this town again,"** he murmured to himself.

• She thought, ***What a beautiful country.***

• **It will be quiet around here when the kids go to college,** Dan thought.

Conjugation vs. Declension

Remember that conjugation is the specific term used for the inflection of verbs—no other part of speech is conjugated. For any kind of word that goes through inflection (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs), we use the term **declension**. Head to that section to learn more.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** something we conjugate verbs for?

a) Tense
b) Mood
c) Gender
d) Person

2. Which of the following types of conjugation describes **when** the action of a verb takes place in time?

a) Tense
b) Mood
c) Person
d) Speech
e) Voice

3. Which of the following types of conjugation describes the **relationship** between the verb and the agency of the verb's subject?

a) Aspect
b) Mood
c) Person
d) Speech
e) Voice

4. The **subjunctive mood** can be used to express which of the following?

a) Wishes
b) Suggestions
c) Hypotheticals
d) All of the above

5. Grammatical tense is used in conjunction with which other type of conjugation to describe a verb's relationship with **time**?

a) Mood
b) Aspect
c) Person
d) Speech
e) Voice