Writing correct sentences

Introduction

All languages have standard rules for writing called grammar. People don’t always use the correct grammar when they speak but you should use the correct rules of grammar in your writing to make it easy for your readers to follow and understand.

This activity helps you to use grammar correctly in your writing

You will learn:
- about verbs and verb tenses
- about subjects in sentences
- about subject-verb agreement in sentences.
Writing correct sentences

Verbs and verb tenses

Verbs describe an action, feeling or state, for example, walks (action), imagines (feeling), is or am (state) are all verbs.

Verbs change their tense to show when something happened or will happen. Look at these examples:

**Present tense**: shows actions and feelings that are true now and habits (for example, I get up at 6.00). Here are some more examples:

- I walk to work. I get up early. I feel tired. I am late.

**Past tense**: shows actions that have finished, that are in the past.

- I walked to work. I felt tired. I was late.

Past tenses of regular verbs are formed by adding an -ed ending. Irregular verbs change their spellings and sound completely in the past tense. For example, feel/felt, take/took, catch/caught, break/broke.

**Future**: expresses actions, feelings or states in the future.

- I will walk to work. I will feel tired. I will be late.

The future can also be shown by using ‘going to’ like this:

- I am going to walk to work. I am going to feel tired. I am going to be late.

You need to use tenses consistently when you write, and check that you are using the correct tense. It can be easy to change tense without realising. Look at this example:

The man walked down the street and waves at me.

The writer should use the past tense for both actions to show that the events happened in the past:

The man walked down the street and **waved** at me.

**Practice 1**

Write the correct tense of the verbs in brackets into the spaces in the sentences.

Last year I ...................... (go) to Italy for my summer holiday but I usually ..................... (visit) my parents. I ...................... (save) all my extra pay to go to Italy. I really ...................... (enjoy) the holiday though. Next year I ...................... (visit) my parents again. It ...................... (to be) cheaper after all! I ...................... (spend) my money on a new car instead.
Writing correct sentences

Subjects in sentences

The subject of a sentence is the person or thing that the sentence is about.

The subject can be singular (one). For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the table</td>
<td>a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>she</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>a dog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

or plural (more than one):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>several tables</td>
<td>the men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>Sally and Sunita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>the dogs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The spelling and sound of the verb in a sentence can change depending on the subject.

Look at these examples. The verbs are all in the present tense – notice how the ending of the verb is different depending on the subject. This is how most regular verbs change in the present tense.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I walk</td>
<td>We walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You walk</td>
<td>You walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The man walks</td>
<td>The men walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He walks</td>
<td>They walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally walks</td>
<td>Sally and Sunita walk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the past and future tense the verb *stays the same* whether the subject is singular or plural.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I walked</td>
<td>I will walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You walked</td>
<td>You will walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The man walked</td>
<td>The man walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She walked</td>
<td>She will walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We walked</td>
<td>We will walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They walked</td>
<td>They will walk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It helps to read the sentence aloud as you can often tell when it sounds wrong.

Practice 2

a. Underline the subjects in these sentences.

   The women dance with the men.
   Susie often visits her grandmother.
   The sun will shine tomorrow.
   Yesterday Johan played the drums.
   Lots of girls and boys play football.
   The bag of books was too heavy to carry.

b. Tick the sentences that have plural subjects.
Writing correct sentences

Subject-verb agreement

To write correctly, the subject and verb in your sentences must agree.

Here are some sentences where the subject and verb do not agree:

| She eat chocolate | We likes fruit | Sunita walk home | They jogs every day |

Practice 3

Rewrite the sentences above so that the subjects and verbs agree.

Use the information on the last page to help you.

Some common errors

People sometimes have problems in subject-verb agreement with the verb ‘to be’. This is partly because the way we speak is sometimes different to the way we write. For example, you might hear people say things like:

- She were with her husband when I got there.
- You was wrong about me.

When you write you should use the correct grammar. The subject and verb in your sentences must agree. Look at the grammatically correct sentences below:

- She was with her husband when I got there.
- You were wrong about me.

Look at the way the verb ‘to be’ changes in the present and past tenses.

Present tense:
- I am
- you are
- he is
- she is
- it is
- we are
- they are

Past tense:
- I was
- you were
- he was
- she was
- it was
- we were
- they were

Practice 4

Tick the sentences that have correct subject-verb agreement.

a. I were sorry to hear about your accident.

b. It was a lovely day.

c. There is interesting walks in the area.

d. The most famous person born in the town are Darwin.
Writing correct sentences

Check your skills

1 Underline the **subject and the verb** in these sentences:

2 Change the **subject and verb** in each of these sentences to plural.
   a. The cat chases the mice.
   b. The bag of shopping was too big to fit in the car boot.
   c. The van arrived just after midday.

3 Tick the sentences where the subjects and verbs agree.
   a. The lady dances.
   b. The boys plays.
   c. Mohammed cycle.
   d. Jim and Freya swim.
   e. The best footballer in the game was Gerrard.
   f. Jane and Wendy are football fans but Brian like shopping.

4 There are four mistakes in this paragraph with subject-verb agreement. Rewrite the paragraph in the past tense, correcting the mistakes.

   It were a dreadful day yesterday. My friend and I was walking to town when it started raining. We were soaked through by the time we got to town and I were very cold. My friend were only wearing a thin coat too!

5 Write the correct version of the verb ‘to be’ in the spaces to complete these sentences correctly. The tense is given in brackets.
   a. The sun ....................... very hot yesterday. (past)
   b. The animals ....................... wild. (past)
   c. The boy ....................... happy because there ................. sweets. (past)
   d. These bananas ....................... bad. (present)
   e. My family ....................... already there. (present)
Writing correct sentences

Answers

Practice 1

Last year I went to Italy for my summer holiday but I usually visit my parents. I saved all my extra pay to go to Italy. I really enjoyed the holiday though. Next year I will visit/I am going to visit my parents again. It will be cheaper after all! I will spend/I am going to spend my money on a new car instead.

Practice 2

a. The subjects are underlined in the sentences below.

   The women dance with the men. ✔
   Susie visits her grandmother.
   The sun will shine tomorrow.
   Yesterday Johan played the drums.
   Lots of girls and boys play football. ✔
   The bag of books was too heavy to carry.

b. (The plural subjects are ticked above.)

Practice 3

She eats chocolate.
We like fruit.
Sunita walks home.
They jog every day.

Practice 4

The grammatically correct sentence is ticked. The other sentences are not correct.

a. I were sorry to hear about your accident.
   It was a lovely day. ✔
   There is interesting walks in the area.
   The most famous person born in the town are Darwin.
Writing correct sentences

Answers

Check your skills

1 The subjects and verbs are in bold.
   a. I will take my old black suitcase.
   b. Where are the children?
   c. The best thing in there was the desk.
   d. At least fifty pigeons ate the bread.

2 The cats chase the mice.
   The bags of shopping were too big to fit in the car boot.
   The vans arrived just after midday.

3 The grammatically correct sentences are ticked. The other sentences are not correct.
   a. The lady dances. ✓
   b. The boys plays.
   c. Mohammed cycle.
   d. Jim and Freya swim. ✓
   e. The best footballer in the game was Gerrard. ✓
   f. Jane and Wendy are football fans but Brian like shopping.

4
   It was a dreadful day yesterday. My friend and I were walking to town when it started raining. We were soaked through by the time we got to town and I was very cold. My friend was only wearing a thin coat too!

5 a. The sun was very hot yesterday.
   b. The animals were wild.
   d. The boy was happy because there were sweets.
   e. These bananas are bad.
   f. My family is already there.

(Note that ‘family’ is an example of a collective noun – it is singular. Ask your tutor about collective nouns.)