

Editing and proof-reading: grammar checklist

Quick study guide

Checklist

Examples and comments

Subject verb agreement

Do subjects and their verbs agree in number, particularly when a long or complex subject precedes the main verb?

Incorrect

The lecturer, as well as some of the tutors, are planning a test.

Correct

The lecturer, as well as some of the tutors, is planning a test.

Tenses

Are your verb tenses consistent?

Is there a logical reason for you to change the tense?

The present tense is used for stating main points, stating a scientific fact, reporting the position of a writer, and for making your own statements.

The past tense is used to report or describe the contents, findings or conclusions of past research or events. Using past simple would suggest that a writer's research is not currently accepted.

Sentence fragments

Have you used complete sentences?

Sentence fragments lack a subject, a verb or both.

Run-on sentences

Have you divided run-on sentences into two by using either a full stop or a semi colon?

Incorrect

We can see changes but not learning itself, the concept is theoretical and hence not directly observable.

Correct

We can see changes but not learning itself; the concept is theoretical and hence not directly observable.

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Articles (a/an/the/zero article)

Is the noun countable or uncountable, specific or general?

Does the noun require an article, and if so, which one?

Normally, uncountable nouns cannot be pluralised in English: e.g. information, evidence, advice, knowledge, public. A specific countable noun normally requires 'the', while a non-specific one (one of many, not a particular one) would take 'a'.

Correct

In Australia, a bill can only become a new law if it is passed by a majority vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Parallel structures

Are components of your sentence grammatically equal? Are elements of your sentence, lists for example, made up of the same kinds of structures?

Incorrect

The following actions were taken: advertising the product, improve quality control and bring the retail price down.

Correct

The following actions were taken: advertising the product, improving quality control and bringing the retail price down.

Logical connectors

Have you over-used or under-used linking words?

Do they provide clear links between sentences and paragraphs?

For example, however, although, thus, as a result of, in comparison are some common linking words.

Pronouns

Do pronouns refer clearly to an antecedent?

If you leave the book on the table, you can take it after the class. Does the it refer to the table or the book?

Punctuation

Have you used apostrophes correctly?

Apostrophes show possession. For example: The company's after-tax profit fell in the second quarter of 2006. Contractions like it's and won't are rarely used in academic writing.

Spelling and capitalisation

Have you spelt the same word in the same (correct) way throughout? E.g. targeted, operationalise, honour.
Have you used capital letters consistently?

Use the spellcheck on your computer, but be warned: it will not find everything, and it will give you American spelling unless you set it to UK or Australian spelling.

