GRAMMAR
TIPS
POSTERS
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the grammar underground

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Beware

The Old Enemy

Concord

Alias Agreement of Subject and Verb
He is lurking behind every sentence you write!

Check your work

Don’t make silly mistakes such as:

He write … it is writes
She are … it is is
They is … it is are

You have got to know what is the subject of the sentence and which is the verb. If the subject of the sentence is singular (one) then the verb form must be singular. If the subject is plural (more than one) the verb form must correspond. Watch out for 3rd person singular (aargh!) It takes that s.

The boy, the girl, the dog, the cat etc run s.
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

**BEWARE**

**Sentence Fragments**

A full sentence must have a **subject** and a **finite verb**. *(Aargh!)*

A finite verb is complete and states a definite time. *Coming* is not a finite verb but a Present Participle *(groan)*. It needs an auxiliary verb *(groan groan)* – is coming, was coming etc. – to be finite.

**Being a good man** is a **phrase**, not a sentence.

**It cannot stand alone** *(poor thing)*.

The man who was wearing a red shirt is an incomplete sentence. Where is the verb for *the man*? A subject without a verb! *(Aargh!)*

The words “who was wearing a red shirt” are a subordinate clause *(groan groan)*. They cannot stand by themselves. *(Poor Things)*

They need a main sentence to hang onto *(Pathetic)*. The word *who* joins the subordinate clause to the main sentence. *Who* is a relative pronoun *(aargh!)*.

**Students must know basic grammar.**

**So must the teaching staff!**

*Sob!* Oh terror!
You have had a poster on Sentence FRAGMENTS
(remember? Groan! sob!)
These were incomplete sentences
(subject and finite verb) Aargh!
But some sentences can ramble on too far! (woe! mourn! grief!)
The man came gradually closer and they could see that he
was carrying a gun, they hid in the bushes, hoping that they
would not be spotted at last he went away.
This is babble. (Aargh!) The commas are not enough. We call this kind of
comma the comma splice. (Aargh!) These are separate sentences
that have been run-on into one another. They should be divided into
separate sentences.
The man came gradually closer and they could see that he
was carrying a gun. They hid in the bushes, hoping that they
would not be spotted. At last he went away.
Try a full-stop and a capital letter.
(snort!)
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

DO YOU KNOW

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN

DEFINING AND NON-DEFINING CLAUSES?

1. The man who/that was wearing a red shirt ran away.
2. The man, who was wearing a red shirt, ran away.

The commas make a difference to the meaning.
In sentence 1. the relative clause (Aargh!) is defining – it picks out one man from others. In sentence 2. the relative clause is non-defining – there may not be others present, but a descriptive detail is added.

What is a relative clause? A relative clause describes, so it is adjectival (Aargh!). It starts with a relative pronoun (Groan!). The relative pronouns are who, whom, whose, which, that.

One can use that in place of who in sentence 1. – for the defining clause. The non-defining clause in sentence 2. cannot take that.
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT

THE PRESENT TENSE?

There are two forms: the Simple Present and the Continuous Present (Aargh!)

I work. I am working.
The continuous form has the ing ending!

When do you use which form?

Simple Present. For laws, rules, what always or usually happens.
Water boils at 100°C.
She usually walks to school.
I eat porridge for breakfast.

Continuous Present. For what is happening right now.
The water is boiling. Let's make tea.
She is walking to school at this moment.
I am eating porridge this morning.

Beware Stative Verbs (Aargh!) This is a group that usually does not take the continuous form. They imply a state, not an action or event. Have (own), want, smell etc.

I am having a problem. WRONG (Aargh!)
I am wanting help. WRONG (Aargh!)
I am smelling burning. WRONG (Aargh!)

But you can say: I am having (taking) a bath.
I am having (holding) a party.
The dog is smelling (sniffing) the lamppost.
O confusion! Now they are no longer stative!

What a language!
Do you neglect the Present Perfect Tense?

This is the Tense with HAS/HAVE

It is much neglected and little understood (Poor Dear!)

Don’t muddle it with the Simple Past (Shame!)

He has lived in Cape Town for ten years. (and still does)
He has lived in Cape Town. (at some time in the past)
He went to Cape Town last week. (Simple Past)

The Present Perfect is used for a time span that comes from the past up to the present. It is called the Present Perfect because it relates to PRESENT time.

*Compare:*
He once lived in Cape Town.
He lived in Cape Town from 1985 to 1990.
He went to Cape Town last week.

Here we have the Simple Past. The action is finished in the past.
Note the adverbial phrases (Aargh!): once, from, last week.

The Present Perfect is used with *for, since, ever, never, recently, just, already, yet, up to now.*

I just done it. WRONG (Aargh!)
I have just done it.

**BUT**
I did it a moment ago.
I have lived in Cape Town since 1985.
I have not done it yet.
Have you ever been to Cape Town?
He has already done it.
He already done it. WRONG (Aargh!)

Don’t forget the HAS for the 3rd person singular. (Aargh!)

*Remember the old enemy Concord. (Hiss! Boo!)*

Check your work!
YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD ABOUT THE

Present Perfect Tense

You remember? (Aargh!) It relates to present time. It uses has/have.

Now for the

Past Perfect

It uses had.

It relates to time past.

When the big bad wolf jumped out of bed to gobble up Little Red Ridinghood, she knew just what to do. Early that morning, when she had packed her little basket, she had put in her Colt .45. Now she just drilled the wolf right between the eyes.

The had is used for time that is before what already is past. 
It is used a lot in history (Aargh!) and in story telling (Hurrah!) and in writing the minutes of a meeting (Sob!)

Do you know that in English minutes are written in the past tense (not the present tense)?

The chairman expressed concern about the rise in expenditure. He said that he had investigated the balance sheets over the past three years and that the figures showed excessive escalation.

Always consider and check your tenses.
And never underestimate Little Red Ridinghood!
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

**What is Do Support?**

**AARGH!**

What are the AUXILIARY VERBS? (Aargh! Terror!)

- **TO BE** (i.e. am, is, are, was, were)
- **HAS/HAVE** (for Present Perfect)
- **HAD** (with Past Perfect)

And – wait for it – **DO**!

**DO** is used with the **Simple Present** (Aargh!) and **Simple Past** (Aargh! Grief!) to ask questions and to make negative statements.

- I work at night.  
  Do I work at night?  
  I do not work at night.

- He works at night.  
  Does he work at night?  
  He does not work at night.

- I worked at night.  
  Did I work at night?  
  I did not work at night.

- He worked at night.  
  Did he work at night?  
  He did not work at night.

Here are some **Student mistakes**. (Aargh!) What is wrong?

- He does not works.
- He did not worked.
- He thinks she did not heard him.

The DO does all the work! Relax (Grief!) The DO gives the tense.

The main verb does not change its form!

P.S. Note the **does** for 3rd Person Singular.

Beware our old enemy CONCORD!
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

Beware

Misrelated and Unrelated (Dangling) Participles

The reporter saw several dead soldiers walking across the battlefield.

DEAD MEN DON’T WALK!

The participle “walking” is misrelated. (Aargh!)
It seems to apply to “soldiers” and should apply to “reporter”.

1. Walking across the battlefield, the reporter saw several dead soldiers.
   (NOTE THE COMMA)

2. The reporter saw several dead soldiers while (he was) walking across the battlefield.

No 1. places the participial phrase (Aargh!) in the right place, so that it applies to “the reporter”.
No 2. introduces the conjunction (Aargh!) “while”. This helps to show that it is “the reporter” that does the “walking”. If you put in “he was”, you have a clause (Aargh!) and not a phrase. (Aargh!)

A phrase does not have a finite verb. (Remember the first poster?)
(Grief! Woe! Alas!) A clause has a finite verb – but it needs a main sentence to hang on to (Poor Thing!) and is joined to it by the conjunction

Students must know basic grammar.

So must the teaching staff!
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

MORE ABOUT

THE OLD ENEMY

CONCORD

(Aargh! Hiss! Boo!)

Do you remember the basic rule?
Agreement of subject and verb
Subject singular – Verb singular
Subject plural – Verb plural

SO YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHICH IS THE SUBJECT OF
THE SENTENCE AND WHICH IS THE VERB.

Beware of Distractors! (Aargh!)

The incidence of road accidents has/have increased.
The subject is incidence, not accidents.
So the verb is has.

Don’t forget that s in the 3rd Person Singular (Aargh!)

The building of houses, shops and flats continues/continue rapidly.
Your subject is building. Therefore the verb is continues.

An important cause of traffic congestion is/are the huge office blocks in
the city center.
Your subject is cause.
This time you guess the verb. (Aargh!)
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

YET MORE CONCORD

(Aargh! What again! I can't stand it!)

The old enemy takes STRANGE FORMS (Aargh!)
The news is bad.
Politics is the art of the possible.
Mathematics is a difficult subject.
Don't be confused by the s on politics and mathematics. They are regarded as singular nouns.

BEWARE DISTRIBUTIVES (Aargh!)
Each, every, everybody, everyone, everthing, anybody, either, neither, nobody.

THEY ARE SINGULAR
Each of them has a book.
Everybody is here.
Every woman and child has to be protected.

Another problem area is COLLECTIVES.
Family, crew, team, congregation, committee, band, army, flock, mob, crowd, senate, party.

These can be either singular or plural, depending on how you look at things. Be consistent, watch out for pronouns.
The party have lost their way.
The party has lost its way.

NB Its has no apostrophe. (Aargh!)
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

**How do we use the Past Continuous**

(*Aargh!*)

was/were + *ing*

WRONG I was ringing the bell six times.
WRONG He was always treating us well.
WRONG I was shouting and crying for help.

RIGHT I was walking home when I saw the accident.
RIGHT Q. What were you doing at 10 o’clock last night?
A. I was watching TV.

For the PAST CONTINUOUS you need a *when* clause. (*Aargh!*) Or you talk about something that was going on at a point of time in the past.

**IN GENERAL BEWARE CONTINUOUS TENSES.**

Those with *ing.*

**REMEMBER THE STATIVE VERBS.**

(*Aargh!*)

They cannot be use in the continuous form.

Have (own), possess, want, smell, understand.

WRONG I am having a problem.
WRONG I am wanting help.
WRONG I am smelling burning.
WRONG I am not understanding.
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

When do you use Commas?

(Aargh!)

1. Any word, phrase or clause at the beginning of a sentence.
   However,…
   Although he held strong views, he expressed them moderately.
   Running down the steps, I fell.

2. Any word, or phrase or clause that interrupts the flow of a sentence.
   He was, however, of the opinion that…
   He was a man who, although he held firm beliefs, expressed them with moderation.
   He was, as I have said before, a man of strong beliefs.
   (Remember the second comma! Aargh!)

3. Lists and strings of adjectives. Note where the comma is left out.
   We bought chocolate, chips, Cokes and pies.
   He was a bold, bad, shameless ruffian.

DO NOT USE COMMAS TO SEPARATE SUBJECT FROM THE VERB! (Aargh!)

WRONG The many present, voted in favour.
WRONG That he was there, was not his dispute.

OR THE VERB FROM OBJECT! (Aargh!)

WRONG John said, that he had found the book.
WRONG Curiosity killed, the cat.
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

**DO YOU FORGET THE APOSTROPHE?**

(Aargh! I confess! Guilty! Grovel!)

’s the student’s work – ONE (Singular Aargh!)
s’ the students’ work – MANY (Plural Aargh!)

The people’s voice. (People is already plural.)
The children’s toys. (Plural not made with an s)

**If the word ends in s, then double the s.**

King Charles’s head. Dickens’s novels.

(he lost it Aargh!) (whose?) (what?)


Biblical names: Moses’ commandments (there were 10! Aargh!)

**The apostrophe is used to mark where a letter has been dropped.**

Does not: doesn’t do not: don’t did not: didn’t

O’clock (of the clock) I’d (I would/should)

NB: who’s = who is but whose = of who

NB: It’s = it is but its (without apostrophe) = of it

NB: he’s = he is but his = of him
The Grammar Underground strikes again.

**DO YOU UNDERSTAND PRONOUN AND ANTECEDENT?**

Please leave the restrooms as you’d like to find it.

*Where is the mistake? (Aargh!)*

Please leave the restrooms as you’d like to find them.

Restrooms is plural. (Aargh!) It is singular.

Restrooms is the antecedent of the pronoun *it*.

Pronoun = pro + noun: a pronoun stands in for a noun.

1. The pronoun must agree with the noun.
2. It must be clear which noun a pronoun relates to.

*If not your meaning will not be clear! (Aargh!)*

**ALWAYS CHECK FOR PRONOUN AND ANTECEDENT**

Stephen, stunned, said that he could not find work elsewhere. Bounderby’s power and his hold in Coketown is shown when Stephen said that he could not find work elsewhere, they were completely dependent on him.

Who are “they”? Who is “him”?

Also, note the Run-On Sentence. (Aargh!)

**Students who write like that should fail. (Aargh!)**
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