

# GRAMMAR

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Grammar is the scaffolding of language; the framework that words fit into that helps them **make sense**. Having **good grammar is key to improving your academic writing ability**. Getting to **know the common mistakes** students make in their writing is key to **avoiding them**. Coming to terms with common grammar problems can seem daunting, but the more you apply these tips, the easier it becomes to avoid these mistakes.

## TOP TIP

If there is a specific mistake you make frequently, make a note of it somewhere you can see - such as a post-it note - to help remind you to avoid it in the future.

## Grammatical Terms

When dealing with grammar, there are a few terms you should be familiar with. These terms refer to the different roles played by words in a sentence, and the different roles have different grammatical rules associated with them.

**Nouns** - A noun is any word that refers to a **person, place or thing**. Nouns include words like 'Sarah', 'Cork' and 'Cathedral'

**Pronouns** - Pronouns are **general** words that stand in for **specific** nouns. For example, 'She' and 'He' are pronouns that can stand in for nouns like 'Sarah' or 'Daniel'

**Conjunctions** - Any word that **joins two sentence fragments** into a bigger sentence is a conjunction. These are words like 'but', 'and', 'or' and 'yet'

**Verb** - Verbs are words that **describe an action or state**; they are doing words. Verbs include words like 'to go' or 'going'

## Common Mistakes

While grammar is complicated and sometimes confusing, there are a handful of mistakes that native English speakers often make in their writing and being able to identify these will help improve your writing.

## Apostrophes (')

Apostrophes are an important part of grammar, but they can often be confusing. Apostrophes can do one of two jobs: **possession** or **contraction**.

### Apostrophes - Possession

Apostrophes can be used to denote **ownership**. This is always done by putting a **'...s...'** after the noun doing the owning. For example, in **'Mary's house'**, the **'...s...'** here shows that the first noun (Mary) owns the second noun (the house). We can even have multiple chains of ownership, such as **'Mary's brother's house'**, which means 'The house owned by the brother owned by Mary'.

When the noun doing the ownership is **plural**, however, the apostrophe works slightly differently. In this case, the apostrophe comes **after the s**. If Mary has more than one brother who owns the house, we might say **'Mary's brothers' house'**.

### Apostrophes - Contractions



Apostrophes can also be used to show that one word has been shortened and joined together with the previous word. **'Don't'** is a joining together of the words **'Do not'**. The letters that are dropped in the contraction are usually vowels.

#### **TOP TIP**

Avoid using contractions where possible in your academic writing. They can make your writing seem colloquial or unprofessional.

### Singular and Plural Verbs

Since all verbs are doing words, all verbs must be associated with someone or something. Many verbs **change depending on how many people they apply to**. If the verb is being done by a **group**, then the verb is **plural**, but if it's only being done by **one person**, the verb is **singular**.

-  Each of us **is**
-  Each of us **are**

'Us' is **plural**, and so we need the plural form of the verb: **are**, not **is**.

## 🔍 TOP TIP

Always bear in mind how many people you're talking about, and whether you're talking about them as individuals (Neither you nor I is) or as a group of individuals (Each of us are).

### Example:

**Annie** and her **brothers** (is, are) at school. ✓ are (plural)

Either my **mother** or my **father** (is, are) coming to the meeting. ✓ is (singular)

## Homonyms

Homonyms are words which are **pronounced the same** but are **spelt differently**. Because of these homonyms, we often make grammatical mistakes that are more like **spelling mistakes**. We might call them grammar mistakes, because when we change the spelling of some words it changes their function in a sentence. There are lots of homonyms in English, but you should be aware of the most **common mistakes** in order to avoid them, and to prevent yourself from losing marks unnecessarily.

## 🔍 TOP TIP

Homonyms are not synonyms! Synonyms are words that mean approximately the same thing, but just because two words are pronounced the same, doesn't mean they mean the same thing.

There are four types of **common homonym mistakes**.

- **Accept vs Except:** **Accept** is a verb that means 'to consent to' or 'to receive something', **except** is a preposition or conjunction that means 'aside from'.
- **Affect vs Effect:** **Affect** is a verb that means 'to influence something', **effect** is a noun that means a change which is a result of another action. It is possible to affect an effect!
- **-c- and -s- words:** Some words are a noun or a verb depending on how they're spelled. Pract**ice** is a noun, Pract**ise** is a verb.
- **-able vs -ible:** Some words end in '-able', and some in '-ible'. Both of these have the same function, but it is important to be aware of them. For example, 'elig**ible**' and 'person**able**' - it would be incorrect to say 'eligable', even though the meaning of the word doesn't change.

## - Application

A good way to avoid these common mistakes in the future is to develop a **strategy**. There are a few different types of strategies, and you should choose the one that best suits you.

- **Strategy 1:** Look back on an essay (either a current one or one that has already been corrected) and look at the grammar and spelling in one paragraph.
- **Strategy 2:** Make an inventory of the mistakes you notice in a copy book and keep adding to it as you write more essays.
- **Strategy 3:** Exchange an essay with a friend and correct each other's grammar and punctuation.
- **Strategy 4:** Decide how you will manage grammar in the essay, in the future. For example, will you write it up and then check it afterwards or just write a section and dedicate time to checking it before you move on?

## Useful Links

- <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/tips-grammar-punctuation-and-style>
- <https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/writing/how-to-write-an-essay.html>
- <https://www.lexico.com/grammar/writing-help/writing-essays>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgkRoYPLhts>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TesbMy\\_Uq8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TesbMy_Uq8)

## Other Relevant PDFs

- Academic Style
- Assignment Writing Essentials
- Essay Planning and Structure
- Paragraph Structure
- Proofreading