

How to use correct grammar

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Powder” by Tobias Wolff**

Exit with Success and *The Bare Essentials Plus* (optional)

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **15 minutes**

Reminder

The following is reprinted before each of the exercises in Module 16 as it includes useful reminders for all the grammar exercises.

Grammar is one of the more difficult areas of the English language to perfect. There are many rules, verbs, verb tenses, pronouns, articles, agreement forms and other points of grammar to learn. In *Exit with Success* you will find explanations and examples of the typical errors students tend to make in grammar. As well, if you are using *The Bare Essentials Plus*, you will find a fuller review of grammar with exercises. If grammar is a particular area of weakness for you, do not hesitate to consult your tutor for extra tips and help. In the grammar exercise below you are going to review the following:

- **Subject-verb agreement**

- The most frequent subject-verb agreement error is in the third-person singular present: **he/she/it walks**
- The second most frequent error is caused when the writer thinks the subject of the sentence is in the prepositional phrase. Error: **The thought of cranes are enough to excite the depressed old man.** Correction: **The thought (subject) of cranes is enough to excite the depressed old man.**

- **Faulty use of pronouns**

- When the pronoun refers to the subject of the sentence, use the subject pronouns: **I, you, he/she/it/one, we, you, they**
- If the pronoun does not refer to the subject, use the object pronouns: **me, you, him/her/it/one, us, you, them**. Note this common error: **The boy is stronger than *him***. Correction: **The boy is stronger than *he (is)***.
- The pronoun must also agree with its antecedent. **The father supported *his son's* decision**. Remember that the pronoun reference must be clear. It should not be able to refer to more than one antecedent. Error: **The mother knows *her son* and *her father* so *she* probably knows *he* is the one who instigated the trip to see the cranes**. Revision: **The mother knows *her son and her father* so *she* probably knows *the old man* is the one who instigated the trip to see the cranes**.

- **Dangling and misplaced modifiers**

- A modifier is a word or phrase that adds description or explanation about another word in a sentence. The modifier must be placed as close as possible to the word it modifies. If it is placed incorrectly, it is a misplaced modifier: ***Only* the grandson can help him. /The grandson can help *only* him**. Here is another example: **Looking for redemption before he dies, the boy takes the grandfather to the slough**. Here the modifier is beside “the boy,” so the writer is inadvertently stating that it is the boy who is looking for redemption. Finally, the modifier is said to be dangling when it refers to something or someone that is absent from the sentence. Here is an example: **While riding to the slough, a crane flew into the sky**. Correction: **While riding to the slough, the grandfather and the boy saw a crane fly into the sky**.

- **Misuse of articles**

- The article before a noun indicates whether the noun is specific or non-specific. “The” is specific; “a” or “an” is non-specific. “An” is used before words beginning with a vowel sound or a silent “h.” **The hour has arrived for action. An hour is all that we require**.

- **Verb tense consistency**

- It is acceptable to write your analysis of the text in either the present or the past tense. Once you have decided which tense you will use, however, do not change tense unless the change is required for the meaning.

Instructions

In this exercise you should focus on pronoun-antecedent agreement, subject-verb agreement and verb tenses.

Exercise

Incorrect

Wolff is a prolific author who often **write/writes** about adolescents.

Correct

Wolff is a prolific author who often **writes** about adolescents.

Choose the correct answer from the choices in the brackets.

1. Everybody (**seem/seems**) against the father, even though he is trying his best to be a good father.
2. It does not seem fair that it is (**her/she**) who makes all the rules for the father and son.
3. The father does not believe that his son can drive better than (**him/he**).
4. The reader knows he is unhappy with the prospect of the divorce because he (**says/say**), “I want us all to be together again.”
5. The father and son ski downhill very smoothly and (**develop/developed**) a close bond.
6. It is clear to the reader that by the end of (**story/the story**) the son is pleased to have spent this exciting time with his father.
7. The mother, (**who/that/which**) we know about only from the remarks of the father and son, is probably a very responsible but over-protective woman.
8. Neither the troopers nor the son (**believes /believe**) that the road is safe; they (**are/were**) simply being cautious.
9. The reader can assume that after bringing his son home in time for Christmas supper, the father (**feel/feels**) a sense of satisfaction.
10. Is the father really adventurous and exciting, or (**places his son in danger/ does he place his son in danger**)?

Answer key

1. Everybody **seems** against the father, even though he is trying his best to be a good father.
2. It does not seem fair that it is **she** who makes all the rules for the father and son.
3. The father does not believe that his son can drive better than **he**.
4. The reader knows he is unhappy with the prospect of the divorce because he **says**, “I want us all to be together again.”
5. The father and son ski downhill very smoothly and **develop** a close bond.
6. It is clear to the reader that by the end of **the story** the son is pleased to have spent this exciting time with his father.
7. The mother, **who** we know about only from the remarks of the father and son, is probably a very responsible but over-protective woman.
8. Neither the troopers nor the son **believes** that the road is safe; they **are** simply being cautious.
9. The reader can assume that after bringing his son home in time for Christmas supper, the father **feels** a sense of satisfaction.
10. Is the father really adventurous and exciting, or **does he place his son in danger?**