

How to use correct grammar

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Seven Wonders” by Lewis Thomas**

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 the exercise below, underline the correct answer from the choices enclosed in brackets.

Exercise

Incorrect

Using an academic yet personal writing style, **(Thomas shows us/Thomas show us)** that wonder is to be found in the most unexpected places.

Correct

Using an academic yet personal writing style, **Thomas shows us** that wonder is to be found in the most unexpected places.

1. Thomas is a “Renaissance man” **(that/which/who)** is at home in both the scientific and artistic cultures.
2. Between you and **(I /me)**, I couldn’t help but think that Lewis left out one of the most amazing wonders of science: black holes in space.
3. Humorous references **(is /are)** used in “Seven Wonders” and **(it/ they) (is/are)** aimed at readers **(who/which)** have experienced the difficulty of reaching consensus in meetings.
4. Every time the **(beetle/beetles) (bury/ buries)** eggs in the mimosa tree, it prunes the branch by “girdling” it.
5. Thomas **(left/leaving)** the most important wonder for the last; he **(describing/described)** our planet earth as, “the most wonderful and marvellous and mysterious” of all the celestial bodies.
6. Still too young, **(Lewis believes the human species is not to be trusted/ the human species is not to be trusted, according to Lewis).**
7. Lewis uses humour on one occasion, **(argues/arguing/argued)** that if you could get “any seven people to agree on a list of any such seven things” **(you’d/ he’d)** have the modern Seven Wonders there at the table.

8. I (**have only one/ have one only**) problem with Thomas's choices of wonders; he could have chosen (**at least one or two wonders from the artistic world/ one or two wonders from the artistic world at least**).
9. The beetle and the mimosa tree, (**working independently**), form a symbiotic relationship that is found pervasively in nature (**working independently**). (Underline the one that is in the right position in the sentence.)
10. If it came down to a choice between the termite and (**I /me**) in terms of architectural skills, I am certain the judge would choose the termite.

Answer key

1. Thomas is a “Renaissance man” **who** is at home in both the scientific and artistic cultures.
2. Between you and **me**, I couldn’t help but think that Lewis left out one of the most amazing wonders of science: black holes in space.
3. Humorous references **are** used in “Seven Wonders” and **they are** aimed at readers **who** have experienced the difficulty of reaching consensus in meetings.
4. Every time the **beetle buries** eggs in the mimosa tree, it prunes the branch by “girdling” it.
5. Thomas **left** the most important wonder for the last; he **described** our planet earth as “the most wonderful and marvellous and mysterious “of all the celestial bodies.
6. Still too young, **the human species is not to be trusted, according to Lewis.**
7. Lewis uses humour on one occasion, **arguing** that if you could get “any seven people to agree on a list of any such seven things,” **you’d** have the modern Seven Wonders there at the table.
8. I **have only one** problem with Thomas’s choices of wonders; he could have chosen **at least one or two wonders from the artistic world.**
9. The beetle and the mimosa tree **working independently** form a symbiotic relationship that is found pervasively in nature.
10. If it came down to a choice between the termite and **me** in terms of architectural skills, I am certain the judge would choose the termite.