

# Chapter 8:

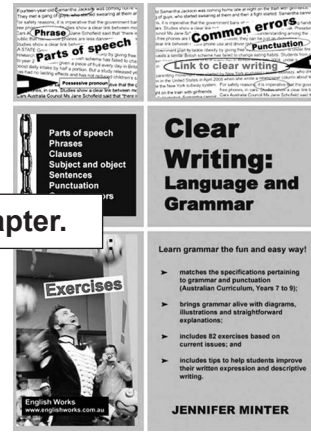
# How to write clear sentences



- 1. A clause must have a subject-verb combination**  
Each sentence must have at least one clause with a subject and a finite verb. Beware of “dangling phrases”, non-finite clauses, compound predicates; there is/there are constructions.
- 2. Verb-object: transitive verbs must have an object**  
Some verbs are transitive and some are intransitive (objectless)
- 3. Tenses must be consistent**  
Tenses: past, present and future time changes.
- 4. Pronoun references must agree in number**  
Pronouns must agree with the preceding noun/pronoun in number. Clear pronoun references minimise confusion.
- 5. Dependent clauses cannot “stand alone”**  
Some clauses can (independent), and some cannot (dependent), stand alone; ensure correct punctuation of clauses.
- 6. Relative pronouns must be consistent**  
Aim for clarity: the difference between “who”; “that” and “which” and correct punctuation
- 7. Use a combination of clause structures**  
Be aware the differences between an independent, compound and complex clause; avoid clauses that lack a clear subject.
- 8. Use active rather than the passive voice**  
The difference between the active and passive voices; overuse of the passive can lead to awkward grammar.
- 9. Use nominals to increase formality**  
Use nominals (noun phrases) rather than awkward “how” and “that” clauses
- 10. A list must consist of the same parts of speech**  
Listing devices include tripling and compound predicates.

# Key grammatical terms

Choose a chapter.



Sentences are the building blocks of each of your paragraphs. If words and phrases are put together in a muddled way, the sentence, and hence your message, will be unclear. A sentence must have one clause with a subject-(finite) verb combination.

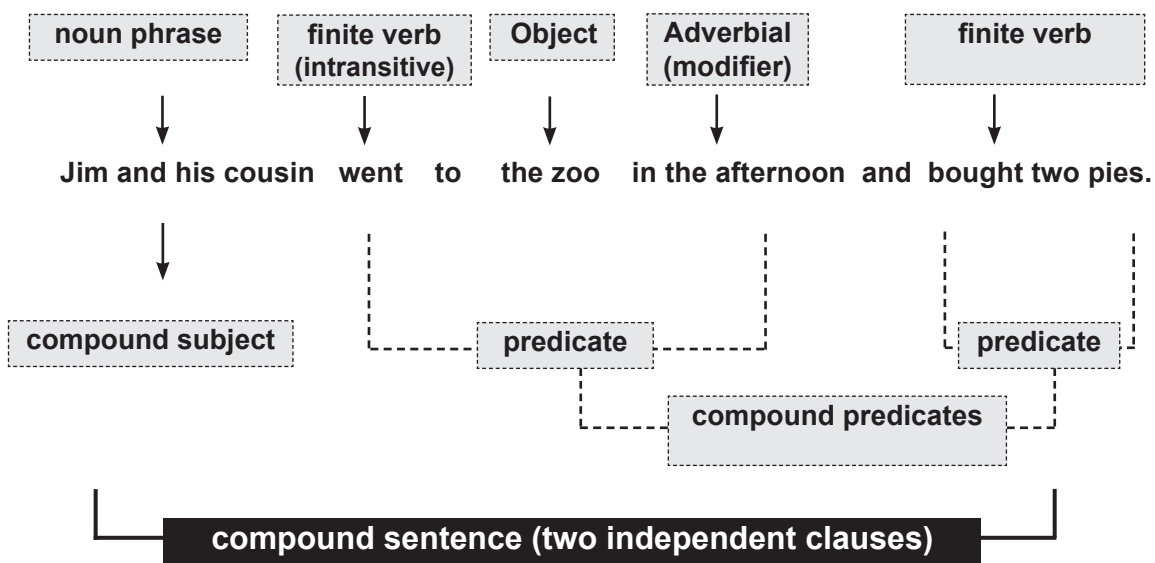
A **phrase** is a group of related words that act together as a single part of speech. A phrase does not have a subject-verb combination and cannot function as a sentence because its message is not complete. Phrases add information to the sentence and enhance its meaning. There are different types of phrases. The most common are noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases, adjective phrases and adverb phrases.

In contrast to a phrase, a **clause** is a group of words that contain both a subject (or subject phrase) and a predicate (verb-object phrase). There are two types of clauses: independent, which can stand alone, and the dependent clause, which cannot.

A pronoun is a word used in place of a noun. It fulfils the same role or function as a noun.

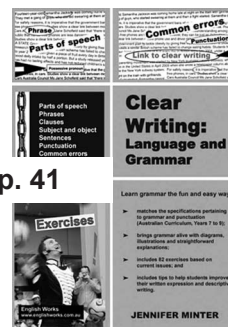
Subjects and predicates. A sentence is composed of two parts. The part of the sentence that contains the subject of the verb is called the subject. The part of the sentence that contains the verb and the object of the verb (if there is one) is called the predicate. The predicate tells what the subject does or is.

Verbs are also a clue to meaning and can help you write with precision. Verbs may be finite or non-finite. Finite verbs have a subject and a number (singular-plural) and a tense (future, present, past). **Non-finite verbs** include: present participles (sharing, doing); past participles (shared and did) and infinitives (to help, to share).



# 1.

## Subject-verb combinations



See p. 41

Typically, your key message in a sentence should be in the: subject-verb-object position. **The subject** of the verb (and sentence) is always a noun or a pronoun. The part of the sentence that contains the verb and the object of the verb (if there is one) is called **the predicate**.

- » **Example:** “Three nights later old Major died peacefully in his sleep.” (*Animal Farm*)
  - » You can find the subject by asking “who” or “what” before the verb.  
Who died? “Major”
  - » Generally, you can find the predicate by asking “what” did Major do?  
The predicate is “died peacefully in his sleep”.

Subject (nouns and pronouns) must agree in number with the verb in the predicate. A plural noun (“the men”/“the women”) or a compound subject (“the man and the lady”) must take a plural verb.

- » Jim swims to the boat; The men swim to the boat; Jim and Lucy swim to the boat.

If the subject has two predicates, both verbs must be in the same format.

- » **Example:** “*Beula* puckered her lips and raised her eyebrows.” (*The Dressmaker*)
  - » This sentence has compound predicates.
  - » “Beula” is the subject of “puckered her lips” and “raised her eyebrows”.
  - » Both verbs, “puckered” and “raised”, are in the simple past tense.

In “there is” or “there are” sentences, the subject comes after the verb and determines number (singular or plural)

- » **Example:** “My mother had bought a large coffee-table book with beautiful images of Korea inside. There *were* tranquil countryside *landscapes* and serene *images* of cherry blossoms falling on courtyards. In one of these, there *was* an elderly *woman* hunched over and gazing at the camera.” (Model 5)

### Task 1: Identify the subject (S) and the predicate (P) of each clause (Sentences from *My Brilliant Career: Model 2*)

1. My ambition was as boundless as the mighty bush in which I have always lived.
2. The summer sun danced on.
3. He seemed to glory in his power, relentless and untiring, as he swung boldly in the sky.
4. In conjunction with this brand of hell, I developed a reputation of cleverness.
5. During the following fortnight I saw Harold a good many times at cricket matches.
6. She pushed me from her in anger and I turned and strode housewards without a word.
7. On returning from her walk Grannie came to my room.
8. The situation amused me exceedingly.

## Control your “subject”

Grammatical errors often arise when a subject is not correctly linked to the verb/phrase/predicate.



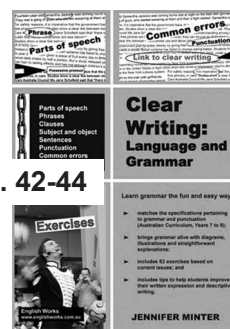
See pp. 20; 25; 65

- » ***A non-finite clause:*** a non-finite verb/phrase often causes grammatical problems because it does not have a direct subject. Non-finite verbs include: present participles (sharing, doing); past participles (shared and did) and infinitives (to help, to share).
  - » Incorrect: Having an unusual pain, the cancer spread rapidly throughout his body.
  - » Correct: The cancer spread rapidly throughout his body causing unusual pain.
  
- » ***“Hanging” modifiers:*** A modifier or adverbial is a phrase that modifies a key element in the sentence. A modifier should, in general, stand as close as possible to the word that it modifies. A phrase (or adverbial) is often “hanging” or “dangling” because it is not clear which word or phrase in the sentence is being modified.
  - » Incorrect: “**Mr Johnson** asserts that the wind farm is too noisy **in a dogmatic tone**.”
  - » Correct: In a dogmatic tone, Mr Johnson asserts that wind farms are noisy.
  
- » ***There is/there are:*** sentences starting with “there is” or “there are” may lead to errors. The subject comes after the verb and determines number. “There” functions as an adverb. It is not the subject of the sentence.
  - » Incorrect: There **is tables, chairs and a desk** in the living room.”
  - » Correct: There **are** tables, chairs and a desk in the living room.
  
- » ***Compound predicates:*** if a sentence has one subject and two predicates, both verbs must be in the same verbal format (tense).
  - » Incorrect: At 14, the young boy got cancer, and **making** us feel sympathy.
  - » Correct: At 14, the young boy **got** cancer and **made** us feel sad.
  
- » ***Subject/verb agreements:*** a common error is to match a singular noun or pronoun with a plural verb or a plural noun or pronoun with a singular verb.
  - » Incorrect: His daughters tries to dissuade him, but there are little vigour in their protests.
  - » Correct: His daughters try to dissuade him, but there is little vigour in their protests.

### Task 2: Identify the “hanging” phrase or incorrect predicate. Rewrite the sentence.

1. After the argument, he set off on his bike and road to the beach, cool, calm and collected.
1. We recognised the helplessness of our parents and translating letters for them.
2. Mr Smith condemns the increase of bike riders, and hence producing doubt about the Council’s scheme.
3. Contrastingly, Nancy accepts the norms of society and facing its reality in a sensible manner.
4. Voices pierced the closed door, angry and confronting.
5. These actions tend to overrule our parents hence needing to break free.
6. The author shames Mr Davis because failing to create a smoke-free society.

## 2. Verbs and objects



See pp. 42-44

Some verbs take an object. They are called “object verbs” or **transitive verbs (tr.)** This means that the action passes from the subject or doer to something else.

The direct object: ask “what” does the doer (of the verb) do. “The boys found a piglet in the creepers”. What did the boys find?

Please note: verbs such as “to condemn”, “to highlight”, “to express” are transitive verbs. They must take a grammatical object.

- » **Incorrect:** Ms Duff expresses that even simply by promising to make Naplan or homework illegal, most of the children would be happy to vote for such a candidate.
  - » The verb “expresses” is incorrect because it must have a direct object.
- » **Correction:** “Ms Duff expresses the point that even simply by promising to make Naplan or homework illegal, most of the children would be happy to vote for such a candidate.”

Verbs that do not take an object are called “no-object verbs” or **intransitive verbs (intr.)** Intransitive verbs usually show motion or location. They do not need an object. This means that no word receives the action of the verb; in other words, the action stops with the doer.

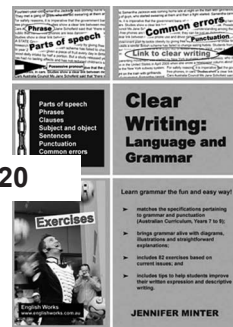
Intransitive verbs are often followed by a preposition: “He dives **off** the bridge.”

**Task 3: Underline the verb in each sentence. Is it an intransitive (I) verb or a transitive verb (T) + object?**

- » **Example:** The boys rushed forward and cried out in dismay.
- » The sentences are from Model 5: The Face in the Mirror by Blossom Beeby.

1. “They would look around listlessly and talk amongst themselves.
2. We lived in tolerant, white neighbourhoods.
3. The characters I read about in books and watched on television and in movies were white.
4. If we closed our eyes, we would see rosy white kids.
5. My mother had bought a large coffee-table book with beautiful images of Korea inside.
6. Parents who acquired ‘Made in Korea’ babies in the 1980s received scant care instructions.
7. My parents heeded the tag.
8. Asian people scared me silly.
9. My Asian-ness was pushed to a crevice in the back of my mind.
10. Asian adoptees often talk about their experiences with mirrors.
11. If we closed our eyes, we would see rosy white kids.
12. When we looked at our faces in the mirror, foreigners would appear.
13. I internalised my Asian face, but it didn’t mean that I liked it. I accepted it.”

# 3. Tenses must be consistent



See p. 20

A verb indicates time such as past, present or future. Time is also referred to as “tense”.

Be consistent with tenses (time periods). Do not switch between the past and the present tense without a logical reason. Some of the most frequent errors in a sentence occur because the verbs relate to different time periods.

- » Whenever he *went* to the shops, he *bought* some cheese.

In narrative recounts, an author may refer to different time sequences relating to the past. Sometimes the second past action occurs before the first past action.

- » “Throughout the year the animals *worked* even harder than they *had worked* in the previous year.”
- » “Clearly they *were* of the opinion that *Jack had done* the decent thing, *had put* himself in the right by his generous apology and Ralph, *obscurely*, in the wrong.”

When writing a discussion or analysis of a text, we tend to use the present tense to analyse an author’s views, values, message and intentions.

- » Orwell depicts Napoleon as a self-serving dictator, who proves his point that absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- » The conflict between Jack and Ralph reflects Golding’s view that it is difficult to maintain one’s sanity when faced with the loss of civilising rules.

## Task 4: Underline the verbs in each sentence. What tense are they?

(*A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens; See Model 2, p. 79)

1. “Business! cried the Ghost, writing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business ... The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business.
2. The school is not quite deserted,” said the Ghost. “A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.
3. The jocund travellers came on; and as they came, Scrooge knew and named them every one.
4. Scrooge’s former self grew larger at the words and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling and the naked laths were shown instead; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do.
5. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting house.
6. There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn’t believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration.
7. It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation.”

# 4. Noun and pronoun references

Pronouns replace nouns. They provide an efficient system of referencing, avoid repetition and help the flow of the sentence or paragraph. They should agree in number (singular/plural) and in person (you/he/she/it/they).



## Task 5: Underline the pronoun(s). To what noun does it refer?

» *Example:* Carrying *her* schoolbooks and lunch pack, *Helvi* ran home.

1. “The cat joined the Re-education Committee and was very active in it for some days. She was seen one day sitting on a roof and talking to some sparrows who were just out of her reach. She was telling them that all animals were now comrades and that any sparrow who chose could come and perch on her paw; but the sparrows kept their distance.” (Animal Farm)
2. “My brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. When it healed, and Jem’s fears of never being able to play football were assuaged, he was seldom self-conscious about his injury”. (3) .... Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was high and peeped in windows.. When people’s azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them.” (p. 9). To Kill a Mockingbird.)
3. “They found a piglet caught in a curtain of creepers, throwing itself at the elastic traces in all the madness of extreme terror. Its voice was thin, needlesharp and insistent. The three boys rushed forward and Jack drew his knife again with a flourish. He raised his arm in the air ... The pause was only long enough for them to understand what an enormity the downward stroke would be. Then the piglet tore loose from the creepers ... They were left looking at each other and the place of terror. Jack’s face was white under the freckles. He noticed that he still held the knife aloft. (p 40 Lord of the Flies)

## Task 6: Rewrite the sentences below. Make sure that the pronoun agrees with the noun.

1. Mixed gender relationships are vitally important for students because it can help to develop their social skills and interactions with different types of people.
2. Consumers, who shop online, feels that it is responsible for the decline in business.
3. Unlike other children, Carl is different and his different attitude in approaching situations are demonstrated when he helps Skip save the barge.
4. However Carl finds a way to help the red barge back on their feet.
5. The cards have people’s address and name on it,.
6. These laws are not just protecting non-smokers from inhaling second-hand smoke, but it is also protecting minors,
7. Steve Smith had a dream. They took him back to his childhood where he was walking up the street in Carlton.
8. Kyle and Jonathan were always the most active ones in the debate. He often put forward so many ideas that the other members of the committee was unsure of how to vote.
9. The work were planned well in advance so that the students knew how to plan their homework.