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Subject-verb agreement

Fragment: Subject and verb must both exist.

Missing of working verb: The electron named in 1894.

Connecting word and no main clause: Because the dog was never mine/ Which will be approved tomorrow.

Sense: Subject and verb must make sense together.

Wrong: The proliferation of computer games designed to involve many players at once were first developed before the widespread availability of high-speed internet connections.

Right: Computer games designed to involve many players at once have proliferated; such games were first developed before the wide spread availability of high-speed internet connections.

Number agreement: Subject and verb must agree in number

Additive phrases

Or, either...or, neither...nor: nearest

Collective nouns: almost always singular

Indefinite pronouns: usually singular

SANAMM words: some; any; none; all; more; most;

Some of the money was stolen from my wallet;

Some of the papers were stolen from the bank.

Each and every

Every dog and cat has paws.

Each of these shirts is pretty.

They each are great tennis players.

Quantity words and phrases

A number of

The number of

Subject phrases and clauses: always singular

Having good friends is a wonderful thing.

Whatever they want to do is fine with me.

Parallelism

Parallel markers

Markers	Structures
And	X and Y X, Y and Z
Both/and	Both X and Y
Or	X or Y
Either/or	Either X or Y
Not/but	Not X but Y
Not only/but also	Not only X but also Y
Rather than	X rather than Y
From/to	From X to Y

Parallel elements

Elements	Examples
----------	----------

Nouns	Her expression reflected both anger and relief.
Adjectives	The park was neither accessible nor affordable. We collected both second and third-grade books.
Verbs	The custodian cleaned the basement and washed the windows.
Infinitives	We would like not only to hear your side of the story but also to provide a response.
Participles	The actor left quickly, shunning fans and ducking into a car.
Prepositional	It was important to leave the money in the drawer rather than on the table.
Subordinate clauses	They contended that the committee was biased and that it should be disbanded.

You can split apart the expressions:

The division **was** opening offices, hiring staff and investing in equipment.

The railroad **can** either lose more money or solve its problems.

They **wanted to** increase awareness, spark interest, and motivate purchases.

Parallel clauses should start with the same word

Wrong: I want to retire to a place where I can relax and that has low taxes.

Right: I want to retire to a place where I can relax and where the taxes are low.

Wrong: Ralph likes both those who are popular and who are not.

Right: Ralph likes both those who are popular and those who are not.

Lists with AND

Be careful as you tally items:

Wrong: She argues that the agency acts with disregard for human life and property and reckless abandon and it should therefore be shut down.

Right : She argues **that** the agency acts **with** reckless abandon and **with** disregard for human life and property and **that** it should therefore be shut down.

Idioms with parallel structure

Superficial parallelism vs. actual parallelism

Wrong: Sal applied himself in his new job, arrived early every day, skipped lunch regularly, and left late every night.

Right: Sal applied himself in his new job, arriving early every day, skipping lunch regularly, and leaving late every night.

Watch out for linking verbs

To BE	Other linking verbs	
Is	Appear	Seem
Are	Become	Smell
Was	Feel	Sound
Were	Grow	Stay
Am	Look	Taste
Been	Remain	Turn
Be	Represent	
Being	Resemble	

Treat any linking verb as a parallel marker.

Wrong: The bouquet of flowers was a giving of love.

Right: The bouquet of flowers was a gift of love.

And they have to make sense.

Wrong: Upon being nominated, this politician represents a step forward in urban-rural relations in this country.

Right: The nomination of this politician represents a step forward in urban-rural relations in this country.

Pronouns

Antecedent must exist: as a noun

Wrong: The park rangers discussed measures to prevent sever wildfires, which would be devastating to it.

Right: The park rangers discussed measures to prevent sever wildfires, which would be devastating to the park.

Antecedent and pronoun must make sense together

Wrong: Although the term “supercomputer” may sound fanciful or exaggerated, it is simply an extremely fast mainframe that can execute trillions of calculations every second.

Right: Although the term “supercomputer” may sound fanciful or exaggerated, it simply **refers to** an extremely fast mainframe that can execute trillions of calculations every second.

The antecedent must be unambiguous

Wrong: Researchers claim to have developed new “nano-papers” incorporating tiny cellulose fibers, which they allege give them the strength of cast iron.

Right: researchers claim to have developed new “nano-papers” incorporating tiny cellulose fibers, which allegedly give these materials the strength of cast iron.

The antecedent and pronoun must agree in number

Pronoun case

Watch out for parallelism

Supernovas destroy their immediate environments in vast explosions, but by synthesizing heavy chemical elements, **they** provide the universe with the possibility of biochemistry-based life as we know it.

's is often poor antecedent

Wrong: The board is investigating several executives' compensation packages in order to determine how much may have been improperly awarded to **them**.

Here THEM refers to "packages", so it is wrong.

Right: The board is investigating the compensation packages of several executives in order to determine how much these executives may have been awarded.

The deadly five: it, its, they, them, their

Wrong: Whenever a student comes, take down their information.

Right: Whenever a student comes, take down his or her information.

Right: Whenever students come, take down their information.

This, that, these, and those

Adjectives:

New "nano-papers" incorporate fibers that give these materials strength.

New copy

The money spent by her parents is less than **that** spent by her children.

The money spent by her parents is more than it **was** expected to by.

Agree in number with previous version

Wrong: Her company is outperforming those of her competitors.

Right: Her company is outperforming the companies of her competitors.

This, these, that, and those cannot be used as nouns.

Wrong: Her products are unusual; many consider these unique.

Right: Her products are unusual; many consider them unique.

Modifiers

Adjectives and adverbs

Adjective + adjective + noun

Both adjectives modify the noun.

Wrong: James Joyce is Max's supposedly Irish ancestor.

Right: James Joyce is Max's supposed Irish ancestor.

Adverb + adjective + noun

The adverb modifies the adjective.

Wrong: Max's grandmother is his supposed Irish ancestor.

Right: Max's grandmother is his supposedly Irish ancestor.

Noun modifiers

Type	Position	Example
Adjective	Before noun	The lazy cat took a nap.
	After noun	The cat, lazy from overeating, took a nap
Proposition	Before noun	On the couch, the cat took a nap.
	After noun	The cat on the couch took a nap.
Past participle	Before noun	The tired cat took a nap.
	After noun	Tires from chasing mice, the cat took a nap.
Present participle without commas	Before noun	The sleeping cat took a nap.
	After noun	The cat sleeping on the couch is named "Sue".
Relative pronoun	After noun	The grey cat, which loves tuna, took a nap.
		The cat that lives next door is noisy.
		The person who lives next door is noisy.
		The city where I live I noisy.
Another noun	Before noun	A lover of mice, my cat hunts night and day.
	After noun	The cat, a tabby raised on a farm, took a nap.

Misplaced modifier

Wrong: Jim biked along an old dirt road to get to his house, which cut through the woods.

Right: To get to his house, Jim biked along an old dirt road, which cut through the woods.

Dangling modifier

Wrong: Resigned to the bad news, there was no commotion in the office.

Wrong: There was no commotion in the office, resigned to the bad news.

Right: Resigned to the bad news, the office workers make no commotion.

Also true for verb modifiers:

Wrong: Using the latest technology, the problem was indentified.

Right: Using the latest technology, the engineer indentified the problem.

Modifiers have to make sense.

Wrong: Only in the past century has origami's development, a ceremonial activity invented millennia ago, into a true art form taken place.

Right: Origami-a ceremonial activity invented millennia ago- has developed into a true art form only in the past century.

Noun modifiers with relative clause

That or whom can be dropped when acting as the objective

The security guard we met was nice.

The movie we watched last Friday was scary.

"Where" cannot be used to modify a metaphorical place

Such as condition, situation, case, circumstance, or arrangement

Wrong: We had an arrangement where he cooked and I cleaned.

Right: We had an arrangement in which he cooked and I cleaned.

Essential vs. non-essential noun modifiers

Verb modifiers

Type	Position	Example
Adverb	Before verb	Frequently, I walk to the store.
	After verb	I frequently walk to the store.
Preposition	Before verb	I walk frequently to the store.
	After verb	On Mondays, I walk to the store
Subordinator	Before verb	I walk to the store on Mondays.
	After verb	When my car is broken, I walk to the store.

Some modifiers can modify both the subject and the verb.

Type	Position	Example
Present participle with comas	Before verb	Whistling "Beat it", I lifted the weight.
	After verb	I lifted the weight, whistling "Beat it".
Preposition + simple gerund	Before verb	By concentration, I lifted the weight.
	After verb	I lifted the weight by concentration.
Infinitive of purpose	Before verb	To free my leg, I lifted the weight.
	After verb	I lifted the weight to free my leg.

Verb tense, mood and voice

Tense

Simple tense

Simple present tense is often used to express "eternal" states or frequent events.

Use simple present to define general definitions.

Use simple present with state verbs such as KNOW and SIGNIFY

Progressive tense

Keep verb tense consistent

If you want to switch tense, make it clear:

Right: He is thinner now because he spent the last six months on a strict diet.

Present perfect: still in effect

Present perfect indicated either continued action or continued effect of a completed action.

Right: The child drew a square in the sand, but the ocean erased it.

Right: The child drew a square in the sand, but the ocean has erased it.

Awkward: The child has drawn a square in the sand, but the ocean has erased it.

If you want to talk about a specific, completed time period, use the simple past:

Wrong: Veronica has traveled all over the world in 2007.

Right: Veronica travelled all over the world in 2007.

Past perfect: the earlier action

You should use past perfect only to clarify or emphasize a sequence of past events.

If the sequence is already obvious, we do not need to use past perfect.

Right: Antonio drove to the store and bought some ice cream.

When you see BEFORE Or AFTER, don't use the past perfect.

Right: Laura locked the deadbolt before she left for work.

Tense sequence

Scientist: The supercollider **is** ready, it **did not** cost too much, and it **will** provide new insights into the working of the universe.

Report: The scientist announced that the supercollider **was** ready, that it **had not** cost too much, and that it **would** provide new insights into the workings of the universe.

Avoid mixing present tense with conditional tense:

Right: The scientist believes that the machine will be wonderful.

Right: The scientist believed that the machine would be wonderful.

Wrong: The scientist believes that the machine would be wonderful.

Wrong: The scientist believed that the machine will be wonderful.

The subjunctive mood

Hypothetical subjunctive

If...then constructions

Type	Form	Example
General rule with no uncertainty	If present, then present	If Sophie eats pizza, then she becomes ill.
General rule with some uncertainty	If present, then CAN or MAY	If Sophie eats pizza, then she may become ill.
Particular case (in the future) with no uncertainty	If present, then future	If Sophie eats pizza tomorrow, then she will become ill.
Unlikely case (in the future)	If hypothetical subjunctive, then conditional	If Sophie ate pizza tomorrow, then she would become ill.
Case that never happened (in the past)	If past perfect, then conditional perfect	If Sophie had eaten pizza yesterday, then she would have become ill.

The command subjunctive

Bossy verb + that + subject + command subjunctive

Wrong: We propose the school board disband.

Wrong: We propose that the school board should disband.

Type	Word	Example
Verbs that take only the command subjunctive	Demand, dictate, insist, propose, recommend , request, stipulate, suggest	We demand that he be here.
Verbs that take only infinitive	Advise, allow, forbid, persuade, want	We allow him to be here.
Verbs that take either form	Ask, beg, intend, order, prefer, urge, require	We require that he be here. We require him to be here.
Nouns that take the command subjunctive	Demand, request	His demand that he be paid full severance was not met.
Adjectives that take the command subjunctive	Advisable, crucial, desirable, fitting, imperative, important,	It is essential that Gary be ready before soon.

mandatory, preferable, urgent,
vital

Avoid the use of the command subjunctive after WHETHER.

Wrong: I like ice cream, whether it be chocolate, vanilla, or any other flavor.

Right: I like ice cream, whether it is chocolate, vanilla, or any other flavor.

Active voice vs. passive voice

Do not use verbs besides BE to form the passive voice.

Wrong: the pizza must got eaten today.

Comparisons

Comparison signals	
Like	As
Unlike	As (adj.) as
More than	As much as
Less than	As little as
Faster than	As fast as
Different from	The same as
In contrast to/with	

Keeping comparisons parallel

Comparisons must be logically parallel

Wrong: Frank's build, like his brother, is broad and muscular.

Right: Frank's build, like his brother's, is broad and muscular.

Right: Frank's build, like that of his brother, is broad and muscular.

Right: Frank, like his brother, has a broad and muscular build.

Comparisons must be structurally parallel

Wrong: I like to run through forests more than I enjoy walking through crowds.

Right: I like running through forests more than walking through crowds.

Omitted words

Put in the omitted words or appropriate helping verbs only if you need to remove ambiguity.

Right: Vishal eats more carrots than donuts.

Wordy: Vishal eats more carrots than he dose donuts.

Ambiguous: I like cheese more than Yvette.

Right: I like cheese more than I do Yvette.

Right: I like cheese more than Yvette does.

Ambiguous: Tomas is more interested in video games than his girlfriend.

Right: Tomas is more interested in video games than his girlfriend is.

Right: Tomas is more interested in video games than in his girlfriend.

GMAT occasionally allows unnecessary Helping verbs.

Right: Apples are more healthy to eat than caramels.

Right: Apples are more healthy to eat than caramels are.

Comparative and superlative forms

Do not compare an adverb that ends in –ly by changing the ending to –er.

Wrong: Adrian runs quickly. He runs quicker than Jacob.

Right: Adrian runs quickly. He runs more quickly than Jacob.

However, some adverbs that do not end in –ly are made into comparatives by adding –er.

Right: Adrian runs fast. He runs faster than Jacob.

Do not use a comparative adjective unless you have a THAN in the sentence.

Wrong: With winter coming, I will have higher energy bills.

Wrong: I will have higher bills over last year.

Right: I will have higher bills than last year.

Idioms

Important idiom list

Act

The bay **acted as** a funnel for the tide. (function as)

My friend **acted like** a fool. (behave)

Agree

They **agree that** electrons exist.

Electrons are particles that physicists **agree exist.**

Aid

She **aids** her neighbor.

She **provides aid to** victims.

Aid for victims is available.

Her **aid in walking** the dog is appreciated.

Aim

We adopted new procedures **aimed at** reducing theft.

We adopted new procedures **with the aim of** reducing theft.

Anxiety

His **anxiety about** his company's future is ill-founded.

His **anxiety that** his company **may be sold** is ill-founded.

Appear

Imperfections **appear as** tiny cracks (show up as)

He **appears confused** (seems)

The dinosaurs **appear to have been** relatively smart.

It **appears that** the dinosaurs were smart.

As

As I walked, I became more nervous.(during)

As I had already paid, I was unconcerned. (because, since)

As we did last year, we will win this year. (in the same way)

As the president of the company, she worked hard.(in the role of)

As a child, I delivered newspapers. (in the stage of)

My first job was an apprenticeship **as** a sketch artist.

As part of the arrangement, he received severance.

As...as...

Cheese is not as great as people say.

We have three times as many pears as you.

His knowledge springs **not so much** from experience **as** from schooling.

Ask

I asked for her aid.

He asked her to go to the store.

He **asked that** she **go** to the store.

Aware

Aware of the danger, he fled.

Aware that danger was near, he fled.

Ban

They passed a **ban prohibiting** us **from carrying** bottles.

Begin

The movement **began as** a protest. (was born as)

The movement **began with** a protest. (protest was the first part)

The protest **began** a movement. (caused)

Believe

She **believes that** Gary is right.

She **believes** Gary **to be** right.

It is believed that Gary is right.

Gary is **believed to be** right.

Borders

Within the borders of a country

But

I study hard but take breaks.

I study hard, but I take breaks.

Chance

I have **one chance in a thousand of** winning tonight.

Claim

They **claim that** they can read minds.

They **claim to be able to** read minds.

Compared/comparison

In comparison to/with horses, zebras are vicious.

A zebra can be **compared to** a horse in many ways.

Compared with a horse, a zebra is very hard to tame.

Confidence

We have **confidence that** the market will recover.

Conceive

He **conceives of** architecture **as** a dialog.

Consider

I consider her a friend.

I consider her intelligent.

I **consider illegal** the law passed last week by the new regime.

The law is considered illegal.

Contend

They contend that they can decipher the code.

Continue

The danger will **continue to grow**.

Cost

Pollution **cost** us billions **in** increased medical bills.

Create

You will **create** a team **to lead** the discussion.

Credit

Hugo **credits** sally **with** good taste.

Sally **is credited with** good taste.

Danger

We are **in danger of** forgetting the past.

Date

They **dated** the artifact **at** three centuries old.

Declare

I declared the election a fraud/ invalid.

I **declared invalid** the referendum that the new regime imposed.

Depend

The outcome **depends on whether** he can make friends.

Design

The window is **designed to open**.

Develop

The executive **developed** her idea **into** a project.

The idea **developed into a project**.

Difference

There is a **difference in** ability **between** us.

There is a **difference between** what you can do **and** what I can do.

There are **differences in** what you and I can do.

Disinclined

She is **disinclined to** write to her parents.

Distinguish/distinction

The investor **distinguished between** trends **and** fads.

There is a **distinction between** trends **and** fads.

Doubt

We **do not doubt that** the apples are ripe.

We have **no doubt that** the apples are ripe.

She **doubts whether** Jan will arrive on time.

Elect

She **elected to** withdraw her money early.

Enough

The book was **short enough (for me) to read** in a night.

Ensure

He ensures that deadlines are met

Equipped

They are **equipped to fight** on any terrain.

Even

I am **even richer than** a king.

I earn **as much** money **as even** the wealthiest king.

Expect

We **expect** the price **to fall**.

The price is **expected to fall**.

We **expect that** the price **will fall**.

It is **expected that** the price **will fall**.

There is an **expectation that** the price **will fall**.

Expend

We **expend** energy **on** neighborhood development.

Extent

We enjoyed the film **to some extent**.

"Thumbs part up" is the **extent to which** we enjoyed the film.

Fault

The criminals are **at the fault for** breaking the law.

Forbid

The law **forbids** any citizen **to vote** twice.

Goal

The **goal is to** expand the company.

Help

He helps (to) rake the leaves.

He helps me (to) rake the leaves.

His **help in raking** the leaves has been welcome.

Hold

The law holds that jaywalking is illegal.

Instead

We avoided the arcade and **instead** went to a movie.

Intent

I went with the **intent to leave** soon.

I went with the **intent/intention of leaving** soon.

Know

We **know** her **to be** brilliant.

She is **known to be** brilliant.

We **know** him **as** Reggie.

He is **known as** Reggie.

Lack

Old gadgets **are lacking in** features.

Old gadgets **lack** features.

The **lack of** features is upsetting.

Less

Less than 10%

Likely

My friend is **likely to eat** worm.

It is likely that my friend will eat worm.

My friend is **more likely than** my enemy **to eat** worms.

My friend is **twice as likely as** my enemy **to eat** worms.

More than likely, my friend **will eat** worms.

Loss

I have suffered a **loss of** strength. (decline in quality)

They have suffered a **loss in** the euro. (decline in investment)

Mandate

The general **mandated that** a trench **be** dug.

Mass

The truck **has** ten **times the mass of** a small car.

Means

Music education **is a means to** improved cognition.

Native

The kangaroo is **native to** Australia.

My friend is a **native of** Australia.

Not...but

She did not eat mangoes but ate other kinds of fruit.

A tomato is not a vegetable but a fruit.

Number

The number of dogs has fallen.

Owe

He **owes** money **to** government **for** back taxes.

Privilege

The academy gave senior cadets **dancing privileges**.

Worse: the academy gave senior cadets the privilege of dancing.

Pronounce

She pronounced the book a triumph.

Propose

They attorneys **proposed that** a settlement **be** reached.

The attorneys **proposed to meet** for lunch.

Rank

This problem **rank as** one of the worst we have seen.

Rate

The **rates for** bus tickets are good for commuters. (prices)

The **rate of** theft has fallen. (frequency or speed)

Rather than

He wrote with pencils rather than with pens.

Reason

I have a **reason to do** work today.

She has **a reason for** the lawsuit.

This observation indicates a **reason that** he is here.

Rebel

The colonists **rebelled against** tyranny.

Recognize

They **recognized that** the entrance fee was a bargain.

They **recognized** the entrance fee **to be** a bargain.

The **recognized** the entrance fee **as** a bargain.

Refer

This term **refers to** a kind of disease.

Referring to the controversy, the politician asked for calm.

Require

She **requires** time **to write**.

She **requires** her friend **to do** work.

Her friend **is required to do** work.

She **requires that** her friends **do** work.

Restriction

The government imposed **restriction on** the price of gasoline.

Rule

The judge **ruled that** the plaintiff **was** in contempt.

Seem

This result **seems to demonstrate** the new theory.

It seems that/ as if this result demonstrates the new theory.

Show

A discovery shows that an object is strange.

A discovery **shows** an object **to be** strange.

So too

Bellbottoms are coming back in style, and **so too are** vests.

Substitute

We **substituted** parmesan cheese **for** mozzarella.

Such as

Matt drives fast cars, such as Ferraris.

Matt enjoys driving such cars as Ferraris.

Matt enjoy intense activities, such as driving fast cars.

Suggest

A study **suggests that** more work is needed.

We **suggest that** he **be** promoted.

This artwork suggests great talent.

Surface

Craters have been seen **on the surface of** the moon.

Targeted

This intervention **is targeted at** a specific misbehavior.

Think

She **thinks of** them **as** heroes.

She is **thought to be** secretly wealthy.

Tool

We have a **tool for** making progress.

We have a **tool to** make progress.

Twice

He is **twice as** tall **as** Alex.

Leaves fall **twice as** quickly **as** they grow.

Naomi wrote **twice as** many letters **as** Sara.

Naomi wrote ten letters, **doubling the number that** Sara wrote.

Naomi's income **doubled** in three years.

Naomi **doubled** her income in three years.

Variation

There are **variations in** sunspot frequency and strength over time.

Way

We proposed a **way of** reaching the goal.

The **way in which** we discussed the idea was positive.

The best **way to** reach the goal is **to focus** one's energy.

Odds and ends

Connecting words

Coordinating conjunctions: **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so**

Subordinations: **although, because, before, after, since, when, if, unless, that, though, while**

Run-on sentence: I need to relax, I have so many things to do!

Right: I need to relax, but I have so many things to do!

Fragment: The term "Eureka," meaning "I have found it" in ancient Greeks and famously uttered by Archimedes, and ever since then, scientists have exclaimed the same word upon making important discoveries.

Right: The term "Eureka," meaning "I have found it" in ancient Greeks was famously uttered by Archimedes, and ever since then, scientists have exclaimed the same word upon making important discoveries.

Only one connecting word at once:

Wrong: Although I need to relax, yet I have so many things to do!

Right: Although I need to relax, I have so many things to do!

Or: I need to relax, yet I have so many things to do!

Lookout for sentences that join a main clause to something that should be a clause, but is not actually a clause:

Wrong: Citizens of many countries are expressing **concern about** the environmental damage caused by the widespread release of green house gases **may be** impossible to reverse.

Right: Citizens of many countries are expressing concern **that** the environmental damage caused by the widespread release of green house gases **may be** impossible to reverse.

Right: Citizens of many countries are expressing concern about the environmental damage caused by the widespread release of green house gases, **damage that may be** impossible to reverse.

Connecting punctuation

Comma

Do not use a comma before AND to separate two verbs that have the same subject.

Wrong: Earl walked to school, and later ate his lunch.

Right: Earl walked to school and later ate his lunch.

Right: Ear walked to school, and he later ate his lunch.

Semicolon

Connects two closely related statements and each must be an independent sentence.

If it seems that the author originally meant to subordinate one part to the other, you must preserve that intent.

Wrong: The dam has created dead zones; fish have disappeared.

Right: The dam has created dead zones, where fish have disappeared.

The semicolon is often followed by a conjunctive adverb, such as HOWEVER, THEREFORE, or IN ADDITION. Note these elements are not true conjunctions like AND.

Wrong: Andrew and Lisa are inseparable, therefore, we never see them apart.

Right: Andrew and Lisa are inseparable; therefore, we never see them apart.

Colon

What comes before the colon must be able to stand alone as a sentence.

Wrong: I love listening to: classical, rock, rap, and pop music.

Right: I love listening to many kinds of music: classical, rock, rap, and pop music.

Whatever needs explanation should be placed as close to the colon as possible.

Wrong: Three factors affect the rate of a reaction: concentration, surface area, and temperature.

Right: The rate of a reaction is affected by three factors: concentration, surface area, and

temperature.

Dash

Very flexible

You can use it as an emphatic comma, semicolon or colon.

Quantity

MORE, MOST, ENOUGH and ALL work with both countable and uncountable nouns.

Be careful with dollars and gallons:

Right: We have less than twenty dollars.

THE NUMBER OF is singular and A NUMBER OF plural.

Right: The number of dogs is greater than that of cats.

Right: a number of dogs are chasing away the cats.

THE NUMBERS OF is almost always incorrect.

Wrong: The numbers of dogs in Montana are steadily increasing.

Right: The number of dogs in Montana is steadily increasing.

However, numbers is possible. If you wish to make a comparison, use GREATER THAN, not MORE THAN.

Wrong: The rare Montauk beaked griffin is not extinct; its **numbers** are now suspected to be much **more than** before.

Right: The rare Montauk beaked griffin is not extinct; its **numbers** are now suspected to be much **greater than** before.

Advanced strategy: GMC/S-V/PARALLELISM

Concision: specific patterns of wordiness

Verb > Adjective or adverb > Noun

Pattern 1: prefer a verb to an action noun

Wordy: The townspeople's revolution was against the king.

Better: The townspeople revolted against the king.

Wordy	Better
They are subject to the applicability of rules.	Rules apply to them.
His conception of money was as a goal.	He conceived of money as a goal.
The cost of storms to the country is billions.	Storms cost the country billion.
Her decision was to go.	She decided to go.
His example was an influence on me.	His example influenced me.
His example was an inspiration to me.	Her example inspired me.
They made a reference to the strike.	They referred to the strike.
The weight of the apple is a pound.	The apples weigh a pound.

Pattern 2: prefer a That-clause (with verbs) to a series of phrases (with nouns)

Wordy: The hypothesis about the composition of the universe as a largely dark energy seems strange.

Better: the hypothesis that the universe is largely composed of dark energy seems strange.

Such kind of "idea" nouns: **hypothesis, idea, suggestion, belief, discovery, evidence, indication, report**, lend themselves particularly well to this pattern.

Pattern 3: prefer a verb to an adjective.

Wordy: The artist was influential to the movement.

Better: the artist influenced the movement.

Wordy	Better
This rash is aggravating to the pain.	This rash aggravates the pain.
We are able to go to the store now.	We can go to the store now.
This signal is indicative of a problem.	This signal indicates the problem.
This painting is suggestive of calm.	This painting suggests calm.

Pattern 4: prefer an adjective to a noun

Wordy: There is an abundance of funds for school construction.

Better: funds for school construction are abundant.

Wordy	Better
She has the ability to juggle.	She is able to juggle.
She has the capability to juggle.	She is capable of juggling.
I am of the conviction that they are right.	I am convinced that they are right.
We have a disinclination to stay.	We are disinclined to stay.
He is in isolation.	He is isolated.

Pattern 5: prefer an adverb to a prepositional phrase

Wordy: Oil prices have fallen, but prices at the gasoline pump have not fallen to a comparable extent.

Better: Oil prices have fallen, but prices at the gasoline pump have not fallen comparably.

Wordy	Better
To a comparable extent	Comparably
To a significant degree	Significantly

Pattern 6: prefer an adjective to an adjective clause with be

Wordy: Marcos is a professor who is admirable.

Better: Marco is an admirable professor.

Wordy: Joan, who is a firefighter, works in Yosemite Park.

Better: Joan, a firefighter, works in Yosemite Park.

Pattern 7: remove IT IS...THAT

Wordy: It is without fear that children should play.

Better: children should play without fear.

Concision: don't make it too short

Pattern1: keep the prepositional phrase if you need to

Too short: I talked to the Boston soldier.

Better: I talked to the soldier from Boston.

Right: a wall of stone OR a stone wall

Too short	Better
Aegean Sea salt	Salt from the Aegean Sea
Ural Mountain ore	Ore from Ural mountains
Danube River access	Access to the Danube River
Population changes of honeybees	Change in the population of honeybees

For time period, quantity and measurement:

Too short	Better
Memorial Day week OR Memorial Day's week	The week of Memorial Day
The merger year	The year of merger
The oxygen amount	The amount of oxygen
The honeybee population density OR the honeybee population's density	The density of the honeybee population

Pattern2: keep THAT OF or THESE OF if you need to

Too short: the face I see in ads every day is a famous actor.

Better: the face I see in ads every day is that of a famous actor.

Also, avoid unnecessary THAT OF:

Wordy: The fields I most enjoy studying are those of physics and chemistry.

Better: The fields I most enjoy studying are physics and chemistry.

Pattern 3: keep THAT after a reporting verb

Too short: The study indicates the problem has vanished.

Better: the study indicated that the problem has vanished.

Report verb:

Agree, claim, contend, declare, find, indicate, reveal, rule, show, announce, assert, believe, confess, demonstrate, doubt, expect, hold, know, mention, observe, proclaim, reason, recognize, repeat, state, think, warn, be convinced, be certain, be assured.

With one exception: **SAY**

The water was so cold that people said polar bears would shiver.

Parallelism: concrete nouns and action nouns

In brief, there are three categories of nouns: 1. Concrete nouns, 2. Action nouns and complex gerunds, and 3. Simple gerunds. Do not mix these categories.

Simple gerund phrases are never parallel to complex gerund phrases.

Only complex gerunds can be parallel to action nouns.

Wrong: The rebels demanded the **withdrawal** of government forces from disputed regions, significant **reductions** in overall troop levels, **raising** the rebel flag on holidays, and a general **pardon**.

Right: The rebels demanded the **withdrawal** of government forces from disputed regions, significant **reductions** in overall troop levels, **the raising** the rebel flag on holidays, and a general **pardon**.

If appropriate action noun for a particular verb already exists, then avoid creating a complex gerund.

Wrong: The rebels demanded the **withdrawal** of government forces from disputed regions and

releasing certain political prisoners.

Wrong: The rebels demanded the **withdrawal** of government forces from disputed regions and **the releasing of** certain political prisoners.

Right: The rebels demanded the **withdrawal** of government forces from disputed regions and **the release of** certain political prisoners.

Infinitives

Wrong: It is critical to suspend activities, to notify investors and say nothing.

Right: It is critical to suspend activities, notify investors and say nothing.

Right: It is critical to suspend activities, to notify investors and to say nothing.

Adjectives and participles:

A mastodon carcass, **thawed** only once and still **fresh**, is on display.

Only a few feet **wide** but **spanning** a continent, the railroad changed history.

Common parallelism categories

Nouns	Other
Concrete nouns	Working verbs
Action nouns and complex gerunds	Infinitives
Simple gerunds	Adjectives and participles
	Clauses

Advanced strategy: pronouns and modifiers

Other pronouns

There

Acts like a pronoun. The antecedent is often referred to in a prepositional phrase and should be a noun.

Wrong: At current prices, Antarctic oil may be worth drilling for, if wells can be dug there and environmental concerns addressed.

Right: At current prices, oil in Antarctica may be worth drilling for, if wells can be dug there and environmental concerns addressed.

Itself, themselves:

After the agreement surfaced, the commission dissolved it.

Here IT can only refer to THE AGREEMENT. If you want to refer to the commission:

After the agreement surfaced, the commission dissolved itself.

DO SO versus DO IT

'DO SO' can refer to an entire action.

Quinn did not eat dinner quickly, but her brother did so.

Placeholder IT

1. Postpone infinitive subjects

It is futile to resist temptation.

2. Postpone That-clause subjects

It gave us encouragement that we scored at all.

3. Postpone infinitive or That-clause objects

She made it possible for us to attend the movie.

She made possible our attendance at the movie.

She made our attendance at the movie possible.

Nuances of pronoun reference:

1. Number
2. Gender
3. Repeats: repeated pronouns are presumed to refer to the same antecedent.
4. Proximity: The pronoun should normally refer to the closest eligible antecedent. Avoid “too close”
5. Case: the pronoun and the antecedent should agree in case if they are in parallel structures.

Modifiers: Exceptions to the Touch Rule

1. Mission Critical modifier

Right: He had a **way of dodging opponents** that impressed the scouts.

The modifier “that impressed the scouts” modifies the entire noun phrase “a way of dodging opponents”

Here THAT modifies the entire noun phrase A WAY OF DODGING OPPONENTS.

Right: An ice sheet covers **80 percent of the surface of the Greenland**, an area roughly the size of Alaska.

2. A very short predicate falls between, shifting a very long modifier back.

Right: A new CEO has been hired who will transform the company by decentralizing authority to various division heads while increasing their accountability through the use of public scorecards.

3. A short non-essential phrase intervenes and is set off by comas.

Right: Our system of presidential elections favors states, such as Delaware, that by population are over-represented in the Electoral College.

4. The modifier is part of a series parallel modifiers, one of which touches the noun.

Right: In heraldry, the term “tincture” refers to a color **emblazoned** on a coat of arms and **labeled** with a special French word.

Possessive Nuances

Wrong: The orca, a relative of the blue whales’, is found throughout the globe.

Right: The orca, a relative of the blue whales, is found throughout the globe.

Subgroup modifiers

Right: This model explains all known subatomic particles, some of which were only recently discovered.

Right: This model explains all known subatomic particles, some of them only recently discovered.

Right: This model explains all known subatomic particles, some only recently discovered.

Wrong: This model explains all known subatomic particles, of which some were only recently discovered.

More on relative clauses vs. participles

Right: The man who is cleaning the steps is my uncle.

Right: The man cleaning the steps is my uncle.

Present participles get their tense from the main verb in the sentence.

Past: I saw a man cleaning the steps.

Present: I see a man cleaning the steps.

Future: I will see a man cleaning the steps.

If different time, use the relative clause:

Wrong: I see the man cleaning the steps yesterday.

Right: I see the man who cleaned the steps yesterday.

Absolute phrases

Modify the **main clause** in some way.

Owen walked out of the store, his head held high.

Owen walked out of the store with his head held high.

In this case it modifies the verb.

Right: Scientists have found high levels of iridium in certain geological formations around the world, **results** that suggest the cataclysmic impact of a meteor millions of years ago.

Here, the noun RESULTS modifies HIGH LEVEL OF IRIDIUM or the act of finding.

Right: Scientists have found high levels of iridium in certain geological formations around the world, **suggesting** the cataclysmic impact of a meteor millions of years ago.

Advanced strategy: Verbs & comparisons

Helping verbs: BE, DO and HAVE

You can use helping verbs to stand for longer verbs or verb phrases.

Wordy: I have never seen an aardvark, but my father has seen an aardvark.

Better: I have never seen an aardvark, but my father has.

They must match in tense, though.

If you need to change tense, repeat the whole verb in the new tense.

Wrong: I have never seen an aardvark, but last year my father did.

Right: I have never seen an aardvark, but last year my father saw one.

Rare case:

Our cars were designed to inspire envy, and they do.

Avoid redundant manner:

Wrong: This plan ensures that action must be taken.

Right: This plan ensures that action will be taken.

SHOULD and WILL are better than BE TO:

Wrong: We are to receive an invitation.

Right: We will receive an invitation.

OR: We should receive an invitation.

Finally, inverted construction is considered awkward:

Awkward: Should he pass the test, he will graduate.

Right: If he passed the test, he will graduate.

Infinitives

Noun: I love to swim.

Adjective: The person to meet is here.

Adverb: Sue paused to eat lunch.

Remember: the IN ORDER TO is not automatically too wordy; you should feel free to use IN ORDER TO.

Right: The contractors demolished the building to keep it from falling down.

Wrong: The building was demolished to avoid falling down accidentally.

Right: The building was demolished to keep it from falling down accidentally.

It refers to THE BUILDING. Since BUILDING is the object of the infinitive, the version above is fine as written.

Awkward: To err is human.

Right: It is human to err.

Gerunds

Subject of verb: Swimming is fun.

Object of verb: I love swimming.

Object of preposition: I dream of swimming.

Do not create a complex gerund if a more familiar action noun already exists:

Awkward: the quick eating of apples

Right: the quick consumption of apples

Suspect: I like Mike swimming.

Right: I like Mike's swimming.

Right: Mike swimming is a sight to behold. (Mike himself can be the sight)

Right: Mike's swimming is a sight to behold. (The swimming can be the sight)

All the same, try to avoid possessing a gerund at all if there is a better choice. If you must possess a gerund, try to use a personal pronoun such as ITS, THEIR, HIS or HER.

Participles

Verb (progressive tense): She is fixing the faucet.

Noun (gerund): Fixing the faucet is not fun.

Adjective (present participle): The person fixing the faucet is tired.

Adverb (present participle): She crouched under the sink, fixing the faucet.

Verb (perfect tense): She has broken the lamp.

Adjective (past participle): The broken lamp is on the chairs.

An ING form may be combined with a past participle:

Having broken the lamp, she has been worrying all night.

When to use which word

Compare the following two sentences:

Investors sold the stock rapidly, causing panic.

Investors sold the stock rapidly to cause panic.

The present participle expresses a result, and we know nothing about intention.

The infinitive expresses intention, and we know nothing about result.

Present participle: A technique alleviating pain is growing popular.

Relative clause: A technique that alleviates pain is growing popular.

Both indicate that the technique itself alleviates pain.

Infinitive: A technique to alleviate pain is growing popular.

It means that you can alleviate pain by means of this technique. Technique is not the subject of alleviate.

Another example: There is a book to read.

Unlikely: A plan conquering the world is in his files.

Unlikely: A plan that will conquer the world is in his files.

Probable: A plan to conquer the world is in his files.

We should use the infinitive.

More on LIKE and AS

The word LIKE can modify a noun or a verb. It means “similar” or “in a manner similar to”

A person like me

He ran like the wind.

Try to avoid ambiguity.

Ambiguous: I want to coach divers like Greg Louganis.

Right: I want to coach divers who are like Greg Louganis.

Or: I want to coach divers in the same way as Greg Louganis.

Right: I want to coach divers, like Greg Louganis.

= Like Greg Louganis, I want to coach dives. (he coaches divers, I want to do so.)

Conjunction AS appears with a clause.

Duration AS: As I strolled to the store, I smelled the air.

Causation AS: I will not tell you, as you already know.

Comparison AS: You should walk as she wants you to.

Right: Just as the trains were late yesterday, the buses are late today.

Right: Just as the trains were late yesterday, so too are they late today.

Comparison AS can also appear with a phrase, rather than a full clause.

Right: As in the previous case, the judge took an early break.

Preposition AS is used with a noun or noun phrase.

Function AS: As your leader, I am in charge.

Equation AS: I think of you as my friend.

Stage AS: As a child, I thought I could fly.

AS do not mean "similar to":

Right: I will jump up like a clown. (in a clownish manner)

Right: I will jump up as a clown. (in a clown suit!)

Don't use LIKE to introduce examples.

Wrong: I enjoy fast food like hamburgers.

Right: I enjoy fast food such as hamburgers.

Numbers in comparisons

Right: The man is five times as old as his grandson.

Wrong: The man is five times older than his grandson.

Use TIMES without AS or THAN to indicate direct multiplication.

Right: The cost of a ticket is \$12, six times the cost ten years ago.

Right: The concert was attended by 300 people, twice the previous attendance.

Of the words HIGH and LOW, they should only be used as adjectives.

Right: My bills are lower than they were last year.

Wrong: I spend lower than I did last year.

Right: I spend less than I did last year.

Other comparison constructions

Watch out for ambiguity, especially when more comes before an adjective plus a noun.

Ambiguous: we have even more efficient engines than before.

Right: We have even more engines that are efficient than before.

Right: We have engines even more efficient than before.

Right: In addition to taxes, death is inevitable.

Right: In addition to Munster Cheese, I like Swiss.