

## 20 Grammar Rules

Here are 20 simple rules and tips to help you avoid mistakes in English grammar.

1. A sentence starts with a **capital letter** and ends with a **period/full stop**, a **question mark** or an **exclamation mark**.

- *The fat cat sat on the mat.*
- *Where do you live?*
- *My dog is very clever!*

2. The order of a basic positive sentence is **Subject-Verb-Object**. (Negative and question sentences may have a different order.)

- *John loves Mary.*
- *They were driving their car to Bangkok.*

3. Every sentence must have a subject and a verb. An **object** is **optional**. Note that an imperative sentence may have a verb only, but the subject is understood.

- *John teaches.*
- *John teaches English.*
- *Stop! (ie You stop!)*

4. The **subject and verb must agree in number**, that is a singular subject needs a singular verb and a plural subject needs a plural verb.

- *John works in London.*
- *That monk eats once a day.*
- *John and Mary work in London.*
- *Most people eat three meals a day.*

5. When two singular subjects are connected by **or**, use a singular verb. The same is true for **either/or** and **neither/nor**.

- *John or Mary is coming tonight.*
- *Either coffee or tea is fine.*
- *Neither John nor Mary was late.*

6. **Adjectives usually come before a noun** (except when a verb separates the adjective from the noun).

- *I have a big dog.*
- *She married a handsome Italian man.*
- *(Her husband is rich.)*

7. When using two or more adjectives together, the usual order is opinion-adjective + fact-adjective + noun. (There are some additional rules for the order of fact adjectives.)

- I saw a **nice French** table.
- That was an **interesting Shakespearian** play.

8. Treat collective nouns (eg committee, company, board of directors) as singular OR plural. In **BrE** a collective noun is usually treated as plural, needing a plural verb and pronoun. In **AmE** a collective noun is often treated as singular, needing a singular verb and pronoun.

- The committee **are** having sandwiches for lunch. Then **they** will go to London. (typically BrE)
- The BBC **have** changed **their** logo. (typically BrE)
- My family **likes** going to the zoo. (typically AmE)
- CNN **has** changed **its** logo. (typically AmE)

9. The words its and it's are two different words with different meanings.

- The dog has hurt **its** leg.
- He says **it's** two o'clock.

10. The words your and you're are two different words with different meanings.

- Here is **your** coffee.
- **You're** looking good.

11. The words there, their and they're are three different words with different meanings.

- **There** was nobody at the party.
- I saw **their** new car.
- Do you think **they're** happy?

12. The contraction **he's** can mean **he is** OR **he has**. Similarly, **she's** can mean **she is** OR **she has**, and **it's** can mean **it is** OR **it has**, and **John's** can mean **John is** OR **John has**.

- **He is** working
- **He has** finished.
- **She is** here.
- **She has** left.
- **John is** married.
- **John has** divorced his wife.

13. The contraction *he'd* can mean *he had* OR *he would*. Similarly, *they'd* can mean *they had* OR *they would*.

- *He had* eaten when I arrived.
- *He would* eat more if possible.
- *They had* already finished.
- *They would* come if they could.

14. Spell a proper noun with an initial capital letter. A proper noun is a "name" of something, for example **Josef, Mary, Russia, China, British Broadcasting Corporation, English**.

- We have written to **Mary**.
- Is **China** in **Asia**?
- Do you speak **English**?

15. Spell **proper** adjectives with an initial capital letter. **Proper** adjectives are made from proper nouns, for example Germany → German, Orwell → Orwellian, Machiavelli → Machiavellian.

- London is an **English** town.
- Who is the **Canadian** prime minister?
- Which is your favourite **Shakespearian** play?

16. Use the indefinite article a/an for countable nouns in general. Use the definite article the for specific countable nouns and all uncountable nouns.

- I saw **a bird** and **a balloon** in the sky. **The bird** was blue and **the balloon** was yellow.
- He always saves some of **the money** that he earns.

17. Use the indefinite article **a** with words beginning with a consonant sound. Use the indefinite article **an** with words beginning with a vowel sound.

- **a cat, a game of golf, a human endeavour, a Frenchman, a university** (*you-ni-ver-si-ty*)
- **an apple, an easy job, an interesting story, an old man, an umbrella, an honorable man** (*on-o-ra-ble*)

18. Use **many** or **few** with countable nouns. Use **much/a lot** or **little** for uncountable nouns.

- **How many dollars** do you have?
- **How much money** do you have?
- There are **a few cars** outside.
- There is **little traffic** on the roads.

19. To show possession (who is the owner of something) use an **apostrophe + s** for singular owners, and **s + apostrophe** for plural owners.

- The boy's dog. (one boy)
- The boys' dog. (two or more boys)

20. In general, use the active voice (Cats eat fish) in preference to the passive voice (Fish are eaten by cats).

- We **use** active in preference to passive.
- Active **is used** in preference to passive.

### Activity 1:

1. The first letter of the first word in a sentence should be

- ☐ a large letter ☒ a capital letter

2. The order of a basic positive sentence is

- ☒ Subject-Verb-Object ☐ Verb-Object-Subject

3. Every sentence must have a subject and

- ☒ a verb ☐ an object

4. A plural subject needs

- ☐ a singular verb ☒ a plural verb

5. When two singular subjects are connected by *or*, use

- ☒ a singular verb ☐ a plural verb

6. Adjectives usually come

- ☒ before a noun ☐ after a noun

7. If an opinion-adjective and a fact-adjective are used before a noun, which comes first?

- ☐ a fact-adjective ☒ an opinion-adjective

8. In British English, a collective noun is usually treated as

- ☐ singular ☒ plural

9. The terms "its" and "it's" have

- ☐ the same meaning ☒ different meanings

10. Which is correct?

- ☒ You're looking good ☐ Your looking good