

Contrastive Grammatical Problems

KISS: Keep It Short & Simple

- You should be **explicit** & **concise**: every word should be included for a reason!
- Avoid long and complex sentences!
- Focus on **action** rather than states: **strong verbs are often better than weaker nouns**:

Development → *Develop*

Understanding → *Understand*

Realization → *Realize*

Discussion → *Discuss*

Calculation → *Calculate*

Expansion → *Expand*

Recommendation → *Recommend*

Approval → *Approve*

Source: *Write with Confidence*; See also: <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/wordines.html>

Strunk, William Jr. 1918: *Elements of Style*; <http://www.bartleby.com/141/strunk5.html>

The Use of Tense and Aspect in Academic & Technical Texts

The Present Tense

To report generalizations, general truths and to organize metatext.

→ **Conclusions** (general truths based on the things observed)

The Perfect

To claim generality of past literature; to refer to continued discussion; to refer to general areas of inquiry.

→ **Backgrounding** (present perfect: changes and trends from the past to now)

→ **Introductions**

The Past Tense

To report research results that are often non-supportive, claimed to be non-general; to report specific experiments. Things that are now finished.

→ **Aims** (chosen at the beginning)

→ **Methods**; experiments (done before the report was actually written)

→ Findings & **Results**

ARTICLES

Common Nouns

General		Limited			
∅		Unknown	Known		
		<i>a/an</i>	<i>the</i>		
Mass	Plural	Singular	Singular	Mass	Plural
Indefinite			Definite		

Articles (1)

- Is the noun the **name** of a person, a country or a city? → **Most names of things and people do not take an article.**
- Are you talking about a **particular** (definite) thing or a **general** (indefinite) thing? → **Particular things will often take definite articles.**
- Is the noun **countable** or **uncountable** here? → **Uncountable nouns, when used in a general sense, do not have an article.**
- Is the noun **singular** or **plural**? → **Singular, countable nouns must have an article or a word such as *my, this*, and so on. Plural nouns, when used in a general sense, have no article.**
- Is it **new information** or **old information** that has been mentioned before? → **New information often has an indefinite article, but things that have been mentioned before have a definite article.**
- Is the thing referred to **unique**? → **The definite article is used before some words which imply that X is unique.**

Articles (2)

Remember:

- **The** is **not** used with noncountable nouns referring to something in a general sense: *Tea is a popular drink.*
- **The** is used with noncountable nouns that are made more specific by a **limiting modifying phrase or clause**: *The tea in my cup is too hot to drink.*
- **The** is also used when a noun refers to something **unique**.
- Remember to use **the** before:
 - Rivers, oceans and seas
 - Points on the globe (The Equator)
 - Geographical areas (The Middle East)
 - Deserts, forests, gulfs and peninsulas

 - The United States

Articles (3): The Definite Article

- **Second mention**
- **Superlatives** or **ordinal numbers** (not when numbers name parts)
- **Specifiers** (*same, sole, only, chief, principal, next*)
- **Shared** knowledge or **unique** reference
- *Of*-phrases or other forms of **post-modification**: *The price of gold fluctuates.*
- **Plural objects in partitive of-phrases**: *None of the projects was satisfactory.*
- **Names of theories, effects, devices, scales**, and so on, **modified by a proper name used as an adjective**
- Names of **countries and institutions that are plural in form or that contain descriptive nouns** (federation, kingdom, nation, republic, state, union)

Articles (4): Generic vs. Specific

Specific nouns and noun phrases refer to something real, whether concrete or abstract:

- *A painting hung on the wall.*
- *Tigers came down from the mountains.*
- *Water filled the city's basements.*

A generic noun or a noun phrase can represent an entire class or can be one representative of a class of objects, people, quantities or ideas:

- *The tiger is in danger of becoming extinct.*
- *A tiger can move at high speeds.*
- *Tigers tend to sleep through most of the day.*
- *Without water, none of us could survive for long.*

Articles (5): Generic nouns in academic writing

Generic nouns are important for academic writing, because:

- They more frequently occur in **formal** English;
- They are more likely to occur in **introductions** and **conclusions**, because they are associated with **generalizations** (often abstract);
- They are often associated with **initial (and topic) sentences in paragraphs**; and
- They tend to occur in the **subject position** in sentences.

Articles (6): abstract vs. concrete generics

Generics can generally be divided into two different types: the **abstract generic** and the **concrete generic**.

- Abstract generics require ***the*** and refer to the entire class.
- Singular concrete generics require ***a*** and refer to a generalized instance of a class.
- Finally, plural concrete generics and uncountable generics are not accompanied by any articles and do not allow for such a clear distinction between class and representative. They can, however, be used when referring to a generalized instance.

Articles (7): Choosing the proper generic form

There is a tendency in academic writing to use the abstract generic (*the* + SG noun) more often than the concrete. Even so, generic use will often depend on your field of study and on the type of noun you are using. Become familiar with the use of **generics in your own field of study**.

- **In medicine and biology, generics are common;** the parts of the body are referred to with abstract generics (*the heart, the brain*). On the other hand, in medical English, the names of diseases tend not to involve generics, except for colloquialisms (*the flu*).
- **In the sciences and engineering, plural concrete generic reference and no-article concrete generics are common in many contexts** (*lasers, quantum wells, bonds, atoms, combustion, catalysis*). The abstract generic is mainly used with instruments and devices (*The optical scanner*).

Articles (8): No Article!

- There are nouns that **cannot be used with a(n) or one** and that **cannot normally be used in the plural**: *accommodation, advice, behaviour, bread, chaos, equipment, evidence, furniture, information, knowledge, luggage, news, permission, progress, research, scenery, traffic, trouble, weather, wildlife, work, ...*

Other uncountables: languages, areas of study, emotions, solids, liquids, gases, foodstuffs.

Exercise from Swales & Feak 1994.

- **Read this passage and fill in the blanks with the article when necessary:**

Much has been learned about ___ brain in ___ last 150 years. ___ brain, ___ most complicated organ of ___ body, contains ___ ten billion nerve cells and is divided into ___ two cerebral hemispheres – one on ___ right and one on ___ left. Interestingly, ___ left hemisphere controls ___ movements on ___ right side of ___ body, while ___ right hemisphere controls ___ movements on ___ left. →→

→ researchers also know that specific abilities and behaviours are localized; in other words, they are controlled by specific areas of brain. Language, it seems, is highly localized in left hemisphere. In 1860s Dr. Paul Broca discovered that damage to front left part of brain resulted in telegraphic speech similar to that of young children. Soon thereafter, Karl Wernicke found that damage to back left part of brain resulted in speech with little semantic meaning. These two regions in brain are now referred to as Broca's area and Wernicke's area.

Although there is some debate surrounding specialization of brain, researchers generally agree that speech is controlled by left side. There is no debate that in great majority of cases, injuries to left side nearly always have impact on speech.

Prepositions (1a)

This is a list of verb-preposition clusters that you may find in academic texts:

account for, add to, adjust to, act on, have an effect on, agree on, agree with somebody, agree to something, aim at/for, allow for, amount to, apply for, apply to, associate with, believe in, belong to, comment on, comply with (obey), conceive of, concentrate on, conform to, consent to, consist of, contribute to, correlate with, decide on, depend on, focus attention on, focus on, insist on, interfere with, object to, refer to, relate to, rely on, remark on, resort to, suffer from, search for, succeed in,...

Prepositions (1b)

- **A similar list with adjectives/past participles +preposition clusters:**

be absent from, be accustomed to, be capable of doing, be characteristic of, be consistent with, be convinced of, be dependent on, be different from/than, be essential to, be exclusive of, be foreign to, be in accord with, be in accordance with, be in connection with, be in parallel with, be in tune with, be independent of, be interested in, be prepared to, be similar to, be typical of,...

- **Note also:** *prior to, subject to, the effect of x on y,...*

Prepositions (2): Exercise

(From: The British National Corpus at <http://sara.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/lookup.html>)

Now use the phrases on the previous slides to fill in the spaces:

1. She was very depressed, until they moved house, which gave her something to _____ (pay particular attention to), so she could settle down to the fact that she had retired.
2. Although the Act does _____ (take into consideration the fact that) children to be _____ (away from) Hearings under the circumstances already _____ (mention), they should still be notified of the Hearing, and an explanation of why it is taking place should be given.
3. To change tack slightly, I am not equipped to _____ (express an opinion about) Dr Oliver's critique of conductive education's theoretical base.
4. I _____ (imagine) the brain as like a colour television screen whose many particles light up to form pictures.
5. Many who did not _____ (oppose) this in principle disliked the high-handed way it was adopted.
6. We must therefore _____ (use, adopt) more indirect methods, such as ...
7. In physics this is a simple matter, because when the efficiency of a system is measured, both input and output _____ (comprise, be composed of) the same quantity: energy.
8. By no means all priests were _____ (not independent of) income from the Church.

Prepositions (3): The KEY

1. She was very depressed, until they moved house, which gave her something to concentrate on, so she could settle down to the fact that she had retired.
2. Although the Act does allow for children to be absent from Hearings under the circumstances already referred to, they should still be notified of the Hearing, and an explanation of why it is taking place should be given.
3. To change tack slightly, I am not equipped to comment on Dr Oliver's critique of conductive education's theoretical base.
4. I conceive of the brain as like a colour television screen whose many particles light up to form pictures.
5. Many who did not object to this in principle disliked the high-handed way it was adopted.
6. We must therefore resort to more indirect methods, such as ...
7. In physics this is a simple matter, because when the efficiency of a system is measured, both input and output consist of the same quantity: energy.
8. By no means all priests were dependent on income from the Church.

Prepositions of Time

- **AT:** Exact point of time; Night, weekend; Festivals: *At ten o'clock, at half past six, at noon, at midnight, at night, at the weekend (BrE), at Christmas, at Easter*
- **IN:** Times of the day and night; Months; Years; Decades; Centuries; Seasons: *In the morning; in October, in December; in 1990; in the 1990's; in the 20th century; in spring, in autumn; in the fall; how soon something happens: in two weeks*
- **ON:** Days; Holidays, duty, call; Times of the day and night with definition: *On Monday, on my birthday; on Christmas Eve / Day; on the 10th of June; on holiday, on duty, on call; on Saturday evening; on a cold morning; on the weekend (AmE)*
- **BY:** With a deadline: *By Monday morning*
- **DURING:** While something takes place: *During the weekend*
- **FOR:** Duration, length of time: *For two weeks / a fortnight*
- **FROM:** Temporal starting point: *From Monday to Friday; from eight till ten o'clock*
- **IN:** Within a specific amount of time: *In a week, in a fortnight*
- **SINCE:** From the temporal starting point onwards: *Since 1982, since July*
- **NOTE!** No preposition is used before this, last, next, every, one

Word Order (1a)

Basic Word Order: SUBJECT – VERB – OBJECT/COMPLEMENT - ADVERBIAL

(I) Adverbial position: Normal order: MANNER, PLACE, TIME

Not as free as in e.g. Finnish!

- *He played well there in January this year. / Hän soitti siellä hyvin tämän vuoden tammikuussa.*
=> More specific time adverbials (*in January*) before less specific (*this year*)
=> TIME & PLACE at the beginning or the end, depending on the emphasis (cf. Virtanen 1992)
- *He accepted the task with great enthusiasm. / Hän otti erittäin innostuneesti tehtävän vastaan.*
=> MANNER usually at the end.
- *We sometimes play cards on Saturdays. / Me pelaamme joskus korttia lauantaisin.*
- *He has always come before. / Hän on aina ennen tullut.*
=> FREQUENCY (How often?) in the mid-position: after the simple form of **be**, before the simple form of other verbs, if several verbs, after the first auxiliary; don't place adverbs/adverbials between the verb and its direct object. **THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES MADE BY FINNS!** OK, if long, heavy objects, however.
- *Our new neighbour also came to the party. / Meidän uusi naapurimme tuli myös kutsuille. / Myös uusi naapurimme tuli kutsuille. => Also, too, as well:
 - **Also** usually modifies a verb and generally comes in front of it. It is not so commonly used in front of a noun or pronoun. If *also* modifies the whole sentence, it can be placed at the beginning and should be marked off by a comma.
 - **Too** normally comes after the word it modifies, or at the end of the clause.
 - **As well** always takes the end position in the clause.
 - **As well as** cannot be split up.
 - In translations **myös** & **-kin** can often be left out.*

Word Order (1b): Adverbs

- **Frequency adverbs** (How often?), e.g. *sometimes, never, always*, and some adverbs such as *also, almost, nearly, hardly, quite, probably*, have a special place in the sentence. Some rules on adverb placement can be found at: <http://www.englishclub.com/grammar/adverbs-frequency.htm>
- They stand *in front of* the main verb: He **often** goes to church on Sunday.
- They stand *after* the first auxiliary verb: She has **always** lived in London.
(**Exception:** They stand after *to be* in the simple present and past tense: *She was always very polite.*)

Adverbs: Exercise

Mark in the sentences below where the adverb in brackets should go:

1. *I take sugar in my tea. (usually)*
 2. *He has gone home early. (probably)*
 3. *Our television set has broken down. (never)*
 4. *She is late on Monday mornings. (often)*
 5. *He should have written a letter to her. (sometimes)*
- **Note:** In Finland this is **also** a serious problem.

Word Order (2)

(II) Inversion of Subject & Verb

- Only then did I realize what he meant to me.
- => Unusual in English; occurs only when a sentence begins with certain restrictive adverbs/adverbial phrases: *only, not only, not until, hardly ever, rarely, seldom, under no circumstances*, etc. Negative meaning; literary style.

(III) Coordinating Conjunctions

- He was not only a coward but also a bully.
 - He will either agree to your proposal or refuse to see you.
- => (E.g. *both ... and, either ... or, not only ... but also*) must be placed before the words they logically refer to, sentence elements linked by coordinating conjunctions must be parallel in form.

(IV) Direct & Indirect Objects

- I showed him his room.
 - I showed the photographs to the man sitting behind the desk.
- => The indirect object comes before the direct object unless the direct object is preceded by a preposition.

Word Order (3)

(V) Indirect Questions

- *He asked me how tall I was.*
 - *Joan asked if my sister was playing the piano.*
- => No inversion, the reported question is written as a statement, the subject before the verb.
Note: all the verbs must normally be in a past tense if the introducing verb is past.

(VI) Adjective Order

Adjectives in a noun group precede the head noun. If a noun is used as an adjective, its position is the next closest to the head noun.

- *An extraordinary old green hand-carved Thai basket chair.*
- => The normal order: (1) general / quality, (2) age, (3) colour, (4) participle, (5) style or provenance.
- *A friendly little 3-month-old black Alsatian puppy.*
- => The unstressed little comes after other quality adjectives.
- *A nice bright colour.*
- => Semantically weak adjectives, like nice, precede other quality adjectives.
- *The subjects discussed were interesting.*
- => Most participles used as adjectives are placed after the noun.

The Optimal Order of Noun Phrases

- **Put given information before new information, i.e.** place emphatic words of a sentence at the end (the new content) : The given serves as a frame within which the new is understood (The Common Ground is needed!) → improves coherence
- **Put topical information in subject position:** The information most closely related to the paragraph topic (cf. Topic Sentence)
- **Put “light” NPs before “heavy” NPs.** Heavy = long & complex. Improves readability (limitations of the processing capacity of the mind)

Huckin & Olsen 1983

How?

- **Passive-Active Alternation**
- **Equative Shift:** *Air pollution is one major form of pollution vs. One major form of pollution is air pollution*
- **Indirect Object Shift:** We are sending your branch office in London (Oid) a copy (Od) → We are sending a copy (Od) to your branch office in London (Oid)
- **Introductory “It”**
- **Existential “There”** (Check agreement!)
- **Animate-Inanimate Shift** “Figure 1 summarizes...”
- **Personal-Impersonal Shift:** “... are described...” → “We describe...”

See also: <http://sana.tkk.fi/awe/>

The End-focus Technique (1)

- **The Common Ground:** A sentence should almost always present basic background information at the beginning: the who, where, when (how?, why?). This provides the reader with the orientation needed.
- The beginning of a sentence is, however, only the second most important position for a word or words. The end, the **what**, is the most important.

The End-focus Technique (2)

End-focus improves logic, clarity, flow, and cohesion.

Writing first-drafts with end-focus plus sentence-to-sentence linkage is almost impossible, however.

- ➔ **Start with a rough draft**: bad sentences are easiest to end-focus.
- ➔ Find the **most vital, novel word in the sentence**, the word containing the newest information.
- ➔ Place a **period** (full-stop) **after this word**. Move **all the words following** it to (a) **good position(s) preceding** it. Often the best place to insert words is **after any “that” or “which”**

The End-focus Technique (3)

Example: “It has been shown by previous research that an active role in the X process is played by substance Y (Aho 1999), which was found in our study to be greatly increased in the infants with this disorder.”

- ➔ “Research has shown that substance Y plays an active role in the X process (Aho 1999), and in infants with this disorder, it was greatly increased.” (26 words)
- ➔ “We found that substance Y – which plays an active role in the X process (Aho 1999) – in infants with this disorder was greatly increased.” (24 words)
- ➔ “In infants with this disorder, substance Y, playing an active role in the X process (Aho 1999), increased greatly.” (19 words)

The End-focus Technique (4)

Another example: Nothing is known about what happens to children who are given drug X. It was found that adults often have diarrhea if they are administered drug X. (27 words)

→ The effect of drug X in children is unknown. In adults, however, evidence indicates that X frequently leads to diarrhea. (21 words)

→ The effect of drug X is unknown in children. In adults, however, X frequently leads to diarrhea. (19 words)

Your turn; try this:

The effectiveness against anxiety of compound X was tested by our group. Compound X is effective, as was previously shown by Smith (Smith 1999) when mice, that were anxious, were administered drug X. Therefore, an experiment was carried out by our group. 65 male patients were collected, and to each of them a series of concentrations of product X were given. In this study material, mild anxiety had been diagnosed. With the administration of a dose of 10 mg per day, the lowering of their anxiety to a level considered in the literature to be normal was accomplished.

Exercise

Look at this sentence: *Finland, which sees itself as a ‘small’ country, is in the far north and has some five million citizens who speak a non-Indo-European language and enjoy going to sauna, as most guide books will tell you.*

Without removing any of the information in it, can you create five different versions, each of which will lead into one of the five sentences below?

- *Polar bears do NOT, however, walk the streets of Helsinki.*
- *For this reason, adult English-speaking foreigners rarely become fluent in Finnish.*
- *The only well-known Finnish word, in fact, is “sauna”.*
- *Italy is approximately the same geographical size.*
- *Unlike many countries of the world, its population is decreasing.*

(Source: CN, with modifications)

Modification

In languages like Finnish, there is a tendency to use a great deal of **premodification**: participle constructions for instance, can be placed fairly freely before the Finnish noun. **In English, however, the use of premodification is more restricted, and very often postmodification is used instead.**

- *The old **house** over the road is for sale.*
- *This is a frequently occurring **problem**, which always seems to defy solution.*

PREMODIFICATION in English

- Most adjectives function as premodifiers.
- Present and past participles can also premodify, but much less than in e.g. Finnish. They premodify if they indicate a permanent / characteristic feature of the noun. For specific temporary events, use postmodification:
 - *The bus **which arrived** was already full.*
 - *problems met with abroad*
- Noun + Noun compound premodification in some cases where the Finnish is using genitive for the first part:
 - *jalanjälki / a footprint*
 - *yliopiston päärakennus // the main building of the university*
- **PREMODIFYING NOUNS ARE ESPECIALLY COMMON IN SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ENGLISH!**