GUIDE TO COMMON ERRORS IN OFFICIAL WRITING

Civil Service Training & Development Institute
English & Communication Unit
(Edited by English Centre, University of Hong Kong)
INTRODUCTION

This guide aims to help civil servants write accurate English. Designed to highlight the common grammatical errors and show how to correct them, the guide is useful for anyone who has to write at work.

The examples used are taken from memos, minutes and reports collected over the years from various departments in the civil service. The guide therefore directly addresses the common errors made in official writing within the government.

Entries in this guide are arranged alphabetically by grammar topics. Each topic focuses on a grammatical area which HK users of English often have difficulty with. A brief explanatory note on some of the basic principles of that topic is followed by examples highlighting the mistakes and then sentences showing how the mistakes can be corrected.
HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

Common Errors In Official Writing works like a grammar reference guide. Each entry is indicated by a word/expression in bold type. Under the entry, a sentence containing an underlined grammatical error is followed by an improved version where the error has been corrected in bold type.

Complain

✗ I am writing to complain on the excessive noise from piling works.

✓ I am writing to complain of/about the excessive noise from the piling works.

(✗ indicates an error, ✓ indicates a correct version)

There are three different ways to check a certain word and its correct usage:

1. Table of Content

Since the entries have been grouped into topics according to the type of mistake they represent, think about what grammar area the key word or the usage is and then look up the content page for the appropriate chapter.
For example, to check the word consider, you can think of the grammar area for consider and then try the content page on Page 4 or click the [ ] of the toolbar. As it is a verb, go to the chapter on verb patterns for the correct usage of consider. When you find the chapter, you will be able to find the word quite easily as the entries are arranged in alphabetical order.

2. Index
   (a) Look it up in the [ ] of the toolbar.
   (b) Click index and to look for the appropriate page for the usage of the word

3. Find
   (a) Click [ ] of the toolbar
   (b) Key in the word you like to check
   (c) Click OK, then the screen where the word appears will be shown; to continue, click Find Again to locate other possible usages of the word.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Active / Passive

2. Articles

3. Conditional Clauses

4. Confused Words

5. Linking Words

6. Parallel Structure

7. Phrasal Verbs

8. Prepositions

9. Reported Speech

10. Subject-verb Agreement

11. Verb Patterns

12. Writing about the Past - Tenses
ACTIVE /PASSIVE

When to use the passive

Verbs can be used in active or passive form. This depends on whether you would like to emphasize the performer of an action or that someone or something is affected by an action.

(Passive) He was forced to resign. (Here the emphasis is on the he being affected by the resignation.)

(Active) The senior management forced him to resign. (Here the senior management is emphasized as the performer or the initiating party of the resignation.)

The passive is also used when the performer is unknown or, too obvious to mention or when the action is more important than the performer. Such cases are often seen in law, medicine or scientific reports.

However, for general use, especially when communicating with members of the public, you should avoid overusing the passive. Use the active voice whenever possible, this helps you to create a more direct, personal and forceful tone in writing.
Verbs with no passive

Some verbs do not have a passive form. Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs without Passives:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>break out</td>
<td>let</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>die</td>
<td>occur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disappear</td>
<td>pass away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>escape</td>
<td>race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exist</td>
<td>resemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flee</td>
<td>suit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get</td>
<td>survive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happen</td>
<td>take place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some common errors in the use of active and passive are as follows:

admit (to take into hospital to receive treatment)

✗ The driver admitted to hospital after the traffic accident.

✓ The driver was admitted to hospital after the traffic accident.

We use the passive form for the verb admit here because the driver does not perform the action.
The report based on research of various educational systems in South East Asia.

We use the passive form for the verb base because the report cannot perform this action.

The orientation programme will be begun early next week.

We use the active form for the verb begin when referring to the start of a programme, lesson, film etc. because this is considered to be the natural outcome of a plan rather than an event caused by outcome.
break out

1. ✗ A fire was broken out on the third floor of the Tai Hing Building.
   ✔ A fire broke out on the third floor of the Tai Hing Building.

2. ✗ A quarrel was broken out between the lorry driver and the motorcyclist.
   ✔ A quarrel broke out between the lorry driver and the motorcyclist.

There is no passive form for the phrasal verb break out.

cease

✗ The doubling appointment will be ceased when his supervisor resumes duty.

✔ The doubling appointment will cease when his supervisor resumes duty.

There is no passive form for the verb cease.
**decrease**

✗ The unemployment rate has been decreased by 1%.

✓ The unemployment rate has decreased by 1%.

We use the active when talking about numbers falling because the event is not usually deliberately caused by someone; it is a natural progression of events.

**disappear**

✗ When the police arrived at the scene, they found the suspects were disappeared.

✓ When the police arrived at the scene, they found the suspects had disappeared.

There is no passive form for the verb disappear.
discharge (to release from hospital, prison or the armed forces)

✗ As she recovered very quickly, she discharged from hospital the following week.

✓ As she recovered very quickly, she was discharged from hospital the following week.

We use the passive form for the verb discharge because the patient does not perform the action.

end

✗ The meeting was ended at 2:30pm.

✓ The meeting ended at 2:30pm.

We use active form of the verb end when talking about activities such as meetings, exhibitions, presentations.
exist

✗ Tenancy holders must provide documents to prove that the factory *was existed* before the implementation of the redevelopment plan.

✓ Tenancy holders must provide documents to prove that the factory *existed* before the implementation of the redevelopment plan.

There is no passive form for the verb *exist*.

happen

✗ The accident *was happened* when the shop owner arrived at his shop at around 10:00 am.

✓ The accident *happened* when the shop owner arrived at his shop at around 10:20 am.

There is no passive form for the verb *happen*. 
increase

✗ The number of cars in the territory has been increased significantly in the past three years.

✓ The number of cars in the territory has increased significantly in the past three years.

We use the active when talking about numbers rising because the event is not usually deliberately caused by someone; it is a natural progression of events.

occur

✗ A traffic accident was occurred at the junction of Nathan Road and Prince Edward Road this morning.

✓ A traffic accident occurred at the junction of Nathan Road and Prince Edward Road this morning.

There is no passive form for occur.
rise

✗ Latest statistics show that the inflation rate was risen by 2%.
✓ Latest statistics show that the inflation rate rose by 2%.

There is no passive form for rise.

start

✗ The District Board Election will be started at nine tomorrow morning.
✓ The District Board Election will start at nine tomorrow morning.

We use the active form for start when referring to activities e.g. election, meetings, press conferences.
A ribbon-cutting ceremony was taken place at the site to commemorate the opening of the new exhibition centre.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony took place at the site to commemorate the opening of the new exhibition centre.

There is no passive form for the expression take place.
ARTICLES

If you are unsure whether to use a, an or the, consider the following:

Use of a or an

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. before a singular countable noun</td>
<td>She is a member of our Finance Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. when a person/thing is mentioned for the first time</td>
<td>An in-house seminar will be held next Tuesday. Three representatives from the Human Resources Association will speak at the seminar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. in exclamations</td>
<td>What a memorable event it was!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. before words which begin with a vowel sound</td>
<td>an interesting idea, an overloaded truck, an honest officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Use of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. before nouns of which there is only one</td>
<td>The police force in HK is one of the most efficient forces in the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. when a person/thing is mentioned for the second/third time and so on</td>
<td>A proposal was discussed in the annual general meeting. Three members voted against the proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. before superlative, adjectives, adverbs and ordinal numbers</td>
<td>Mr Chan is the most experienced clerical officer in our unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. before some adjectives used as nouns</td>
<td>This policy aimed to help the mentally-handicapped / the unemployed / the blind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. before plural place names or names which include the words Republic, Kingdom or States</td>
<td>the New Territories the United Kingdom the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. before names of ships</td>
<td>the Queen Mary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. in some time phrases
   in the year the war began
   in the morning
   in the afternoon
   in the middle of the night

Omission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. after prepositions in some common expressions</td>
<td>to/in/into/ out of hospital/prison/bed by car/bicycle/bus/plane/train to/at/from work out of town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. in some time phrases</td>
<td>in 1990 (year), in summer (season), since April (month), at Christmas (festival) on Monday (day of week), at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. before the names of continents and countries</td>
<td>Have you been to China?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. before names of cities, towns and villages</td>
<td>The police have monitored the number of drink-related accidents since the introduction of a ban on drinking and driving in Hong Kong. Pollution in Shatin is being closely monitored by EPD. The Police Headquarters is in Wanchai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. before the names of streets, districts, parks and bridges</td>
<td>The Lunar New Year Festival will be held in Victoria Park. The post office in Hennessy Road is a listed building.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following are some examples of errors in the use of articles:

**a or an?**

1. ✗ It was a interesting proposal.

✓ It was an interesting proposal.

   We use an before words which begin with a vowel sound and a before words which begin with a consonant sound.

2. ✗ The briefing session lasted for a hour.

✓ The briefing session lasted for an hour.

3. ✗ The specialist gave an one-hour talk on drug abuse among secondary school students.

✓ The specialist gave a one-hour talk on drug abuse among secondary school students.

Remember that it is always the first sound of the next word which is important, not the first letter. For words beginning with a vowel sound, use an eg. an unexpected call. Where the letter is a vowel, but the sound is that of a consonant, use a eg. a union.
a or the?

1. ✗ A reference number for the file on Five Year Forecasts is T22/04/55.

✓ The reference number for the file on Five Year Forecasts is T22/04/05.

2. ✗ Further to a letter of 4 July, I am writing to inform you of the investigation results.

✓ Further to the letter of 4 July, I am writing to inform you of the investigation results.

With singular, countable nouns, use a to refer to any one but the to refer to the particular one, often one that has already been mentioned.

3. ✗ ‘Effective Writing Course’ manuals are distributed to participants only.

✓ The ‘Effective Writing Course’ manuals are distributed to participants only.

With plural, countable nouns, omit the article when talking in general but use the when talking about something in particular.
No article / a / the

1. ✗ Seminar on ‘Crime Prevention’ will be held on 20.11.96 at the Exhibition Centre.

   ✓ A seminar on ‘Crime Prevention’ will be held on 20.11.96 at the Exhibition Centre.

2. ✗ The social work assistant scheduled counselling session for Mr Ho.

   ✓ The social work assistant scheduled a counselling session for Mr Ho.

   We use a before a singular, countable noun.
Special Cases

1. ✗ Our clerical officer was transferred to Housing Department last month.
   ✔ Our clerical officer was transferred to the Housing Department last month.

   We use the before names of government departments.

2. ✗ The investigation committee is having a meeting with District Board.
   ✔ The investigation committee is having a meeting with the District Board.

   It is also common to use the before names of agencies and organisations.

3  a. Miss Chan has contacted us several times to enquire about the progress of her application.

   b. A Miss Chan has contacted us several times to enquire about the progress of her application.

   Example (a) is used when the person is known to the writer and example (b) is used when the person is unknown.
CONDITIONAL CLAUSES

There are basically three types of conditional clauses:

TYPE 1
Probable Situations

If clause + Main clause
simple present will / shall

eg. If we purchase a new computer, we will be able to process 500 more applications per month.

TYPE 2
Improbable or Imaginary Situations

If clause + Main clause
simple past would/ should / could

eg. I think the committee would approve our proposal if we could shorten the time for the phase 1 redevelopment plan.

TYPE 3
Past Possibilities

If clause + Main clause
past perfect would/ should/ could + have + past participle

eg. We would have completed the project by now if there had not been a delay.
Common errors in conditional clauses mostly concern the wrong use of verb tense. Here are some typical examples.

Type 1
Real Possibility

1. ✗ If you attend 80% of the sessions, you would receive a certificate of attendance at the end of the course.
   ✔ If you attend 80% of the sessions, you will receive a certificate of attendance at the end of the course.

2. ✗ If you send us your applications this week, we would let you know of the results in two weeks’ time.
   ✔ If you send us your applications this week, we will let you know of the results in two weeks’ time.

3. ✗ If you will attend the meeting tomorrow, you will meet representatives from the Research Centre.
   ✔ If you attend the meeting tomorrow, you will meet representatives from the Research Centre.

When referring to something that is likely to happen, we use present tense in the if clause and future tense in the main clause.
Type 2

a. Improbable Situations

1. ✗ If the meeting would be cancelled, they would ring.

    ✔ If the meeting was cancelled, they would ring.

2. ✗ If I would do it, I would do it this way.

    ✔ If I did it, I would do it this way.

When referring to something that is possible but unlikely to happen, we use past tense for the if clause, and would / could for the main clause.

b. Imaginary Situations

    ✗ If I am you, I will take the offer.

    ✔ If I were you, I would take the offer.

    ✔ If I was you, I would take the offer.(Less Formal)

When talking about imaginary situations, we use past tense in the if clause and would/could in the main clause.
Type 3
Past Possibilities

1. ✗ If you were not late for the press conference, you would have heard the Director’s speech.
   ✓ If you had not been late for the press conference, you would have heard the Director’s speech.

2. ✗ If the project was not delayed, we would have finished it by now.
   ✓ If the project had not been delayed, we would have finished it by now.

When referring to something which could have happened but did not, we use past perfect in the if clause and would have + past participle in the main clause.
False Conditionals

There are sentences which use `if’, that are not truly conditionals. Eg. ‘If you leave the room, turn off the light.’ Here the if can be replaced by when; it is not a true conditional.

Common errors with this type of sentence again mostly concern the use of verb tense.

1. ✗ If you press this button, the machine would switch off automatically.
   
   ✔ If you press this button, the machine switches off automatically.
   
   ✔ If you press this button, the machine will switch off automatically.

When we refer to things that always happen, we use simple present in both clauses or simple present in the if clause and simple future in the main clause.
2. ✗ If you will update the file with new data, enter the password before inputting any new information.

✓ If you update the file with new data, enter the password before inputting any new information.

When we are giving advice that may be needed, we use the simple present in the ‘if’ clause and the imperative in the main clause.
CONFUSED WORDS

Many words which look or sound similar are often confused.

**accept or except**

1. ✗ The head of grade **excepted** his application for transfer.
   
   ✔ The head of grade **accepted** his application for transfer.

2. ✗ All suggestions raised in the meeting have been reviewed **accept** the one on flexi-time time arrangements.

   ✔ All suggestions raised in the meeting have been reviewed **except** the one on flexi-time time arrangements.

Accept is used as a verb meaning take something that is offered. Whereas except is used as a preposition or conjunction meaning all but one.
Affect or effect

1. ✗ Studies show that team morale effects output of work.
   ✔ Studies show that team morale affects output of work.

2. ✗ Members of the public are writing in to express their views on the affects of the new policy.
   ✔ Members of the public are writing in to express their views on the effects of the new policy.

Affect (the verb) means influence. Effect (the noun) means the results of something.
afterwards or later

1. ✗ We conducted a survey of your department last week and will send you a detailed report afterwards.

✓ We conducted a survey of your department last week and will send you a detailed report later.

2. ✗ Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire and later, their views will be compiled into a report.

✓ Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire and afterwards their views will be compiled into a report.

3. ✗ The office will be refitted three weeks later.

✓ The office will be refitted in three weeks.

We use afterwards when the second situation occurs very soon or immediately after the first. Later refers to an unspecified date in the future.
ago or before

1. ✗ Mr Chan worked in the personnel section four years before and was transferred to our unit this month.

✓ Mr Chan worked in the personnel section four years ago and was transferred to our unit this month.

2. ✗ Last year, the Department moved to Central Government Offices where it had been based three years ago.

✓ Last year, the Department moved to Central Government Offices where it had been based three years before.

Ago means before now e.g. ‘I joined the Government three years ago.’ Before means before another time in the past.
Since the price quoted was very expensive, we are looking for an alternative supplier.

We use alternative when we mean another / an option to the present one. Alternate refers to every other or every second in a sequence.
at the back or behind

1. ✗ The new computer area is behind the room.
   ✓ The new computer area is at the back of the room.

2. ✗ Please queue up for an application form at the back of the registration counter.
   ✓ Please queue up for an application form behind the registration counter.

We use at the back of to indicate the position of something inside a room. We use behind to indicate the position of one thing/person in relation to another thing/person.
amount or number

1. ✗ The amount of robbery cases in this district has rapidly increased over the past year.
   ✓ The number of robbery cases in this district has rapidly increased over the past year.

2. ✗ The number of space needed for our new office furniture is estimated to be 200 sq. ft.
   ✓ The amount of space needed for our new office furniture is estimated to be 200 sq. ft.

We use number for countable nouns and amount for uncountable nouns.
**appearance or outlook**

❌ The speaker had an attractive outlook.

✅ The speaker had an attractive appearance.

Appearance means the way one looks to other people.

Outlook can mean

(i) one’s attitude towards life eg. ‘He has a positive outlook towards change.’ or

(ii) the impression which a certain situation gives, eg. ‘The Director will deliver a speech on the economic outlook of Asia at the conference.’
big or old

× Parents whose children are big enough for primary education but have not applied for a place at any primary school should do so by the end of this month.

✓ Parents whose children are old enough for primary education but have not applied for a place at primary school should do so by the end of this month.

We use old to refer to age and big to refer to size.

borrow or use

1. × Can I borrow your computer for the morning?

✓ Can I use your computer for the morning?

2. × The committee is planning to borrow the conference room for next Friday’s meeting.

✓ The committee is planning to use the conference room for next Friday’s meeting.

We borrow things that are removable. If something is a fixture and cannot be taken away, we use it not borrow it.
bring or take

1. ✗ The OA brought the file from our office to the personnel section.

✓ The OA took the file from our office to the personnel section.

2. ✗ The clerk took me the file on Estimates & Five Year Forecasts.

✓ The clerk brought me the file on Estimates and Five Year forecasts.

We use bring to indicate an action towards the speaker. We use to take to indicate an action away from the speaker.
close or turn off

✗ The speaker closed the overhead projector after he finished his presentation.

✓ The speaker turned off the overhead projector after he finished his presentation.

✓ The speaker switched off the overhead projector after he finished the presentation.

We turn off or switch off for an electrical appliance, a piece of equipment or a light. We use open/close for non-mechanical items and also door or book.

costly or expensive

✗ Public transport is becoming more and more costly.

✓ Public transport is becoming more and more expensive.

Expensive is used to refer to things people pay for, such as food, clothes and entertainment. Costly is used to refer to something which has a very negative or serious effect on resources. eg. ‘The finance committee’s decision to shelve the project was a costly error of judgement.’
especially or specially

✗ The orientation programme was specially useful for new recruits.

✓ The orientation programme was especially useful for new recruits.

We use especially to mean in particular. We use specially to mean for a special reason or purpose. e.g. ‘The induction programme was specially organised for new officers with MPS 16 or above.’

enter or join

✗ All students above the age of 10 are welcome to join the poster design competition.

✓ All students above the age of 10 are welcome to enter the poster design competition.

We use enter to mean become a participant in a contest or competition. We use join to mean become one of the group/party.
except or unless

✗ Children under the age of 18 are not allowed here except they are accompanied by their parents.

✓ Children under the age of 18 are not allowed here unless they are accompanied by their parents.

We use unless to introduce a condition. We use except to mean not including, e.g. ‘All the members except (for) the Secretary have supported the initiative.’

few or a few

1. ✗ Our typist’s work is always accurate with a few errors.

✓ Our typist’s work is always accurate with few errors.

2. ✗ Unfortunately, the project has a few supporters.

✓ Unfortunately, the project has few supporters.

Few means hardly any and is therefore negative in meaning. A few means a small number and therefore has a more positive meaning.
few or little

✗ Few time was spent doing research for this project.

✓ Little time was spent doing research for the project.

✓ Only a few hours have been spent doing research for the project.

We use few with countable nouns and little with uncountable nouns.
finally or at last

1. ✗ At last, I would like to thank you all for coming to the seminar today.

✓ Finally, I would like to thank you all for coming to the seminar today.

2. ✗ Finally, having discussed the case for several hours, the jury managed to reach a verdict.

✓ At last, having discussed the case for several hours, the jury managed to reach a verdict.

We use finally when making the last point in a sequence of points. We use at last to indicate that something happens after a long period of time or after alternative possibilities.
from or onwards

✗ The new computers are available at prices HK $20,000 onwards.

✓ The new computers are available at prices from HK $20,000.

We use from when indicating upwards of an amount of money or a figure. We use onwards to indicate from a particular time on into the future, eg. ‘Mr Lee will be on pre-retirement leave from 13.7.96 onwards’.

good or well

✗ Mr Chan handles public enquiries good.

✓ Mr Chan handles public enquiries well.

✓ Mr Chan is good at handling public enquiries.

We use good as an adjective and well as an adverb. Compare ‘She is a good writer’ but ‘She writes well’.
**hope or wish**

❌ I wish you can give us your comments before the end of this month.

✔️ I hope you can give us your comments before the end of this month.

Wish and hope both refer to a desire for something to happen in the future. Hope is generally connected with the idea of greater confidence of the desire being fulfilled. Wish cannot be followed by a verb in the present, present perfect or future tense.

**large or big**

❌ Our unit has processed the biggest number of applications this year.

✔️ Our unit has processed the largest number of applications this year.

We use large/small to modify amount or number, not big/little.
lay or lie

1. ✗ The victim was found laying on the floor unconscious.
   ✓ The victim was found lying on the floor unconscious.

2. ✗ Earlier, the cadets lay out their weapons for inspection.
   ✓ Earlier, the cadets laid out their weapons for inspection.

We use lay (to lay, laying, laid, laid) to mean to put something down carefully or to put something down flat. We use lie (to lie, lying, lay, lain) to mean to be in a flat or in a horizontal position.
live or stay

✗ According to statistics, the majority of the Hong Kong people who have emigrated to Canada are now staying in Toronto or Vancouver.

✓ According to statistics, majority of the Hong Kong people who have emigrated to Canada are now living in Toronto or Vancouver.

We use live to refer to a permanent place of residence. We use stay to refer to temporary accommodation even if it is long-term. eg. ‘Some Vietnamese refugees have been staying in HK for over 10 years’.

past or passed

✗ Walk passed the bank and you will find the Post Office on your left.

✓ Walk past the bank and you will find the Post Office on your left.

Passed is the past participle of the verb pass. Past is an adverb or preposition.
1. ✗ A domestic helper in HK earns an average monthly pay of $3,850.

✓ A domestic helper in HK earns an average monthly salary of $3,850.

2. ✗ Civil servants in HK get very good salary.

✓ Civil servants in HK get very good pay.

Pay is an uncountable noun. We use salary to specify an amount of money given in return for work.
personal or personnel

1. ❌ Our department looks for dedicated, dynamic and versatile personal.
   ✔ Our department looks for dedicated, dynamic and versatile personnel.

2. ❌ We should not let our personnel matters affect our work.
   ✔ We should not let our personal matters affect our work.

We use personnel to refer to people who work for a company. We use personal to mean something private or belonging to an individual.
principle or principal

1. ✗ She stated that, in principal drivers of the emergency team work two shifts per week.

✓ She stated that, in principle drivers of the emergency team work two shifts per week.

2. ✗ The principles of several government secondary schools were also invited to attend the meeting.

✓ The principals of several government secondary schools were also invited to attend the meeting.

A principle is a type of rule, standard or moral law. Principal, as a noun, means headmaster or headmistress. Principal, as an adjective, means main eg. ‘Her principal reason for resigning was domestic problems.’
**protect or prevent**

- **✗** Installing the anti-virus system *would prevent* our computers from virus infection.

- **✓** Installing the anti-virus system *would protect* our computers from virus infection.

We use *protect* to mean keeping someone/something safe. We use *prevent* to mean to stop something from happening.

**proof or prove**

- **✗** The alleged suspect *could not proof* that he was not at the scene of the crime that night.

- **✓** The alleged suspect *could not prove* that he was not at the scene of the crime that night.

- **✓** There was no *proof* that the alleged suspect was not at the scene of the crime that night.

*Prove* is a verb. *Proof* is a noun.
say or tell

✗ The Departmental Secretary *said* the committee members that funds were available for the purchase of two personal computers for the Prosecution Section.

✓ The Departmental Secretary *told* the committee members that funds were available for the purchase of two personal computers for the Prosecution Section.

We use *tell* to mean to give someone information or explain something about it. We use *say* to mean to report someone’s words.

see or watch

✗ During the training session, we *saw a video* on how to handle difficult customers.

✓ During the training session, we *watched a video* on how to handle difficult customers.

We use *see* to mean notice or recognize something using our eyes. We use *watch* if we want to indicate looking deliberately with concentration.
sometime or sometimes

1.  ✗ Sometime we receive letters of appreciation from the public commending the quality of our service.

✓ Sometimes we receive letters of appreciation from the public commending the quality of our service.

2.  ✗ After collecting views from all the members, the committee will hold another meeting sometimes in June to work out the implementation plan.

✓ After collecting views from all the members, the committee will hold another meeting sometime in June to work out the implementation plan.

Sometimes means occasionally. Sometime without an ‘s’ refers to an unspecified / unknown time.
trouble or troubles

✗ Delay in registration could cause a lot of troubles for the administration unit.

✓ Delay in registration could cause a lot of trouble for the administration unit.

We use trouble without ‘s’ to mean extra work or inconvenience. Troubles is the plural to mean personal problems or worries.
**work or works**

1. ✗  The purchase of a franking machine could save time and increase *works output*.

   ✓  The purchase of a franking machine could save time and increase *work output*.

2. ✗  The *construction work* in Sai Ying Pun will start early next month.

   ✓  The *construction works* in Sai Ying Pun will start early next month.

We use *work* as an uncountable noun to mean things we normally do, say at home, school or in the office. We use *works* with an `s’ to mean the work of industry or construction. eg. public *works* refers to buildings or roads provided by the government.
LINKING WORDS

Linking words show how two or more ideas are connected. The words are not, however, interchangeable in all situations just because they have the same function of a particular connector can be decided by levels of formality and the grammatical construction of the sentence.

1. **Showing an addition of ideas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>and</th>
<th>moreover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>both ... and</td>
<td>not only...but also..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furthermore</td>
<td>together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in addition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Introducing an illustration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>for example</th>
<th>such as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>for instance</td>
<td>that is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in particular</td>
<td>to illustrate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. **Showing a contrast in ideas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Although</th>
<th>On the contrary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But</td>
<td>On the other hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite</td>
<td>In spite of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even though</td>
<td>On the contrary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>However</td>
<td>On the other hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Showing a comparison of objects, persons or situations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As</th>
<th>Like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As if</td>
<td>Likewise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As well as</td>
<td>Similarly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. **Indicating an alternative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatively</th>
<th>Instead of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Either ... or ...</td>
<td>Neither ... nor...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. **Indicating a sequence of points or ideas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finally</th>
<th>Next, then</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First, second, third</td>
<td>To begin with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. **Showing a method or a way**

- by
- through
- by means of

8. **Indicating a conclusion or a summing up**

- accordingly
- in fact
- as a result
- therefore
- consequently
- to conclude
- in conclusion
- to sum up
COMMON ERRORS

Some of the common errors in the use of linking words are shown in the following sentences.

**After/Before**

✗  After clarify the details with him, we will issue a confirmation letter.

✓ After clarifying the details with him, we will issue a confirmation letter.

✓ After we have clarified the details with him, we will issue a confirmation letter.

After / Before are followed by a clause or a phrase beginning with the ‘ing' form of the verb.
Despite

✗ Despite she is eligible for public assistance, she refused to apply for it.

✓ Despite her eligibility for public assistance, she refused to apply for it.

✓ Despite being eligible for public assistance, she refused to apply for it.

Despite is followed by a phrase beginning with a noun or by the ‘ing' form of verb.

In spite of

✗ In spite the workload was increased, Miss Lam was able to complete all her tasks on time.

✓ In spite of the increase of workload, Miss Lam was able to complete all her tasks on time.

In spite of is followed by a phrase beginning with a noun.
On the other hand

✗ The new machine is useful and easy to operate. On the other hand, the price is reasonable.

✓ The new machine is useful and easy to operate. On the other hand, it is extremely expensive.

On the other hand is used to introduce a contrasting idea, not a similar one.
Because of /due to /owing to

1. ❌ Because of he has experience in accountancy, Mr Chan handled the figure work efficiently.

   ✔️ Because of his experience in accountancy, Mr Chan handled the figure work efficiently.

   Because is followed directly by a noun or noun phrase, not by a whole clause.

2. ❌ The meeting was cancelled due to five members were absent.

   ✔️ The meeting was cancelled due to the absence of five members.

   Due to is followed by a phrase beginning with a noun, not by a whole clause.
3. **✗** Owing to funds are not available, the project has to be shelved.

✓ Owing to insufficient funds, the project has to be shelved.

Owing to is followed directly by a noun or noun phrase, not by a whole clause.

4. **✗** The project has to be shelved due to the following reasons:

   a) high personnel costs
   b) insufficient funds
   c) lack of expertise to monitor the progress of the project.

✓ The project has to be shelved due to:

   a) insufficient funds
   b) high personnel costs
   c) lack of expertise to monitor the progress of the project.

Linking phrases due to / owing to / because of already include the meaning of reason, so the reason that is redundant.
PARALLEL STRUCTURE

What?

Using parallel structure means repeating similar grammatical structures to achieve consistency in language use.

Why? Parallel structure helps to:
- Group or link related ideas
- Make writing more concise
- Bring out emphasis
- Achieve balance and harmony

How? Repeat one part of the verb
- Repeat the infinitive structure
- Keep voices consistent
Here are some examples which break the rule of parallel structure.

**Listing**

1. ✗ The Chairman reiterated that the holder of this new post should **spend about four hours per day in receipt, safekeeping, release and checking of tender duplicates.**

   ✓ The Chairman reiterated that the holder of this new post should spend about four hours per day receiving, safekeeping, releasing and checking tender duplicates.

   The ‘ing' form of the verb is used for all the action involved in the job being described.
2. ❌ It was suggested that the duties of the new officer would be the Head of the Inspection Team, serve as departmental representative on outside committees, to take charge of a service unit, and assisting in running of in-house training programmes.

✓ It was suggested that the duties of the new officer would be to head the Inspection Team, to serve as Departmental representative on outside committees, to take charge of a service unit, and to assist in the running of in-house training programmes.

To + infinitive is used for all the actions in the job being described.
3. ✗ To maintain the new computer system, all unit heads should:
   (a) Train the staff concerned;
   (b) Defining the audit objectives and scope of work; and
   (c) To carry out system maintenance work as laid down in the Audit Guide Book.

✓ To maintain the new computer system, all unit heads should:
   (a) Train the staff concerned;
   (b) Define the audit objectives and scope of work; and
   (c) Carry out system maintenance work as laid down in the Audit Guide Book.

The same form of the verb is used to begin each item in the list.
Comparing

1. ✗ Members shared the view that providing too much was better than to provide too little.
   ✓ Members shared the view that providing too much was better than (providing) too little.

2. ✗ The Committee wanted to organise a seminar rather than having an exhibition.
   ✓ The Committee wanted to organise a seminar rather than to have an exhibition.

The same form of the verb is used when making comparisons.
PHRASAL VERBS

Phrasal verbs are special groups of verbs which consists of two or three words. By combining a verb with an adverb or preposition, you can extend the usual meaning of the verb or create a new meaning different from that the verb has on its own. In other words, the addition of an adverb or preposition to a verb can completely change the meaning of the writer's message. Some common errors in this area are as follows:

approve /approve of

1. ✗ The committee decided to approve of the proposal after three hours of discussion.

✓ The committee decided to approve the proposal after three hours of discussion.

2. ✗ She did not approve the way her subordinate handled the problem.

✓ She did not approve of the way her subordinate handled the problem.

Approve means give sanction/permission for; Approve of means think favourably of.
attend / attend to

1. ✗ Officers interested in attending to the seminar please put your name and post on the attached sheet.
   
   ✓ Officers interested in attending the seminar please put your name and post on the attached sheet.

2. ✗ The special investigation team is attending the landslide case.
   
   ✓ The special investigation team is attending to the landslide case.

Attend means participate in. Attend to means pay attention to or deal with.

consult

✗ When in doubt, we should always consult with a dictionary.

✓ When in doubt, we should always consult a dictionary.

Consult is generally not followed by a preposition.
cut /cut in /cut out

1. ✗ The Finance Committee decided to cut down the budget for the next quarter.

✓ The Finance Committee decided to cut the budget for the next quarter.

When cut means to reduce in amount of money or time, it is not followed by a preposition.

2. ✗ Enquiries revealed that the accident happened because the motorbike cut on the lorry.

✓ Enquiries revealed that the accident happened because the motorbike cut in on the lorry.

We use cut in to mean one vehicle overtook another in a dangerous way.
3. **✗** The speaker reminded participants to cut the reply slip from the invitation letter and send it back to him for a free copy of the annual report.

**✓** The speaker reminded participants to cut out the reply slip from the invitation letter and send it back to him for a free copy of the annual report.

We use cut out to refer to removing something from printed matter or publications, for example, from magazines or newspapers.
deal in /deal with

1. ✗ Our department issues licences to manufacturers dealing with the export of garments to the United States.
   ✓ Our department issues licences to manufacturers dealing in the export of garments to the United States.

2. ✗ I do not recommend you deal that contractor as they are unreliable.
   ✓ I do not recommend you deal with that contractor as they are unreliable.

3. ✗ He asked his subordinate to deal the matter.
   ✓ He asked his subordinate to deal with the matter.

We use deal in to mean run business buying or selling products. We use deal with + a thing/situation to mean do what is necessary to get a result. We use deal with + a person /organisation to mean to have business with.
dress /dress up

1. ✗ At 7:00 am, all inmates have to get out of bed and dress up.
   ✓ At 7:00 am, all inmates have to get out of bed and get dressed.

2. ✗ Being the guest of honour, the Director dressed herself to attend the presentation ceremony.
   ✓ Being the guest of honour, the Director dressed herself up to attend the presentation ceremony.

We use dress to refer to putting clothes on. We use dress up to mean putting on smart or beautiful clothes for special occasions.
fill /fill in /fill out

1. ✗ We are currently recruiting two more officers to fill in the vacancies.

✓ We are currently recruiting two more officers to fill the vacancies.

2. ✗ Applicants need to fill an application form and send it to us by the end of this month.

✓ Applicants need to fill in an application form and send it to us by the end of this month.

We use fill without a preposition to mean to take up a position, when referring to a vacancy. We use fill in or fill out to mean to complete a form.
enter / enter into

1. ✗ The suspect entered into the building with his accomplices.
   ✓ The suspect entered the building with his accomplices.

2. ✗ Trainees are encouraged to learn more actively by entering discussions and contributing useful ideas.
   ✓ Trainees are encouraged to learn more actively by entering into discussions and contributing ideas.

   We use enter without a preposition to mean go into. We use enter into to mean participate in.

look at / look on / look upon

✗ The initiation of the new appraisal system was looked as a milestone in the department’s human resources management programme.

✓ The initiation of the new appraisal system was looked on / upon as a milestone in the department’s human resources management programme.

We use look to refer to the physical act of fixing one’s eyes on something. We use look on / upon to mean regard or consider.
pick or pick up

1. ✗  We need to pick up a new model of printer for the typing pool.
   ✓  We need to pick a new model of printer for the typing pool.

2. ✗  The pool car usually picks Mr Chan at his residence at 10 am every morning.
   ✓  The pool car usually picks up Mr Chan at his residence at 10 am every morning.

We use pick without a preposition to mean choose or select. We use pick up to mean go somewhere to collect someone.
put on / put up

1. ✗ The staff association puts up its annual variety show right before the Chinese New Year.

   ✔ The staff association puts on its annual variety show right before the Chinese New Year.

2. ✗ Due to the breakdown of the air-conditioning system, we have to put with the heat this morning.

   ✔ Due to the breakdown of the air-conditioning system, we have to put up with the heat this morning.

We use put on to mean arrange shows or performances. We use put up with to mean to bear with some adverse situations.
take / take up

1. ✗ Please take up all your personal belongings before you leave this room.
   ✔ Please take all your personal belongings with you before you leave this room.

2. ✗ The project has taken a lot of my time during the past year.
   ✔ The project has taken up a lot of my time during the past year.

   We use take to mean carry away with you. We use take up to mean use up or occupy, usually referring to time.
report/report for

1. ✗ He has to report for the incident to his senior officer as soon as the investigation is completed.
   ✔ He has to report the incident to his senior officer as soon as the investigation is completed.

2. ✗ Our new clerical officer will report duty on 20 October.
   ✔ Our new clerical officer will report for duty on 20 October.

   We use report to mean to give a verbal or written account of what happened. We use report for to mean be physically present to take up the duties of a certain post.
PREPOSITIONS

Though prepositions in English are mostly short and simple words, many civil servants regard their use as one of the most difficult areas in English. Some basic guidelines to the use of prepositions are as follows:

**Time**
- *at*: specific point in time
- *on*: day or date
- *in*: month or year

**Place**
- *at*: house no. or street no.
- *on*: street or road name
- *in*: city, district, province, country, nation
The following are some common errors in the use of prepositions:

(I) Verbs with Prepositions

Arrange

✗ Additional clerical support has been arranged to the unit for the past six months.
✓ Additional clerical support has been arranged for the unit for the past six months.

You arrange something for someone, or arrange for something to be done.

Arrive

1. ✗ The police officers arrived to the scene shortly after the robbery.
✓ The police officers arrived at the scene shortly after the robbery.

You arrive at a place.
2.  ❌ According to statistics, 10,000 Filipinos arrived to Hong Kong to work as domestic helpers in 1990.

✅ According to statistics, 10,000 Filipinos arrived in Hong Kong to work as domestic helpers in 1990.

3.  ❌ A delegation of 20 civil servants arrived Beijing yesterday for a two-week visit.

✅ A delegation of 20 civil servants arrived in Beijing yesterday for a two-week visit.

You arrive in a town, city, country.

Approach

❌ She approached to the department concerned to apply for welfare funds.

✅ She approached the department concerned to apply for welfare funds.

Approach, used as a verb, is not followed by a preposition.
Assist

✗ The Staff Relations Committee was set up last year to assist the management to handle personnel welfare matters.

✓ The Staff Relations Committee was set up last year to assist the management in handling personnel welfare matters.

Assist is followed by in plus the 'ing' form of the verb.

Complain

✗ I am writing to complain on the excessive noise from piling works.

✓ I am writing to complain of/about the excessive noise from the piling works.

Complain is followed by of or about.
Contact

✖️ I have contacted with the supplier regarding the purchase of 2 new colour printers.

✔️ I have contacted the contractor regarding the purchase of 2 new colour printers.

Contact, used as a verb, is not followed by a preposition.

Enquire

✖️ To enquire on the new pension scheme, please contact Mr Paul Chan at 2800 5426.

✔️ To enquire about the new pension scheme, please contact Mr Paul Chan at 2800 5426.

Enquire is followed by about.
Express

✗ They expressed about their wish to apply for public assistance.

✓ They expressed their wish to apply for public assistance.

Express, used as a verb is not followed by a preposition.

Familiarize

✗ The purpose of this guidebook is to familiarize with basic guidelines for writing Government correspondence.

✓ The purpose of the guidebook is to familiarize new recruits with basic guidelines for writing Government correspondence.

Familiarize is followed by a noun phrase plus with.
Insist

✗ The inmate insisted to appeal against his conviction.

✓ The inmate insisted on appealing for against his conviction.

Insist is followed by on plus the ‘ing' form of the verb.

Inform

✗ I am writing to inform you the latest arrangements for the in-house seminar scheduled for October this year.

✓ I am writing to inform you of/about the latest arrangements for the in-house seminar scheduled for October this year.

Inform is followed by of or about.
List

✖ Please list out your preferences in the space provided.

✔ Please list your preferences in the space provided.

List, used as a verb, is not followed by a preposition.

Next

✖ He will be posted to the Personnel Section in next week.

✔ He will be posted to the Personnel Section next week.

There is no preposition before time expressions beginning with next eg. next Monday, next month, next year.
Provide

1. ✗ They provided special flats to the elderly in convenient urban locations.

✓ They provided special flats for the elderly in convenient urban locations.

You provide something for someone.

2. ✗ The conference provides civil servants the opportunity to meet their counterparts from other Southeast Asian countries.

✓ The conference provides civil servants with the opportunity to meet their counterparts from other Southeast Asian countries.

You provide someone with something.
Report

1. **Report ... his superior**
   - ✗ He has to *report his superior* every Friday afternoon.
   - ✓ He has to report to his superior every Friday afternoon.

   When report means give information to, it is used as a verb and followed by to before a person.

2. **Report... duty**
   - ✗ The new typist will *report duty* on 1.6.97
   - ✓ The new typist will report for duty on 1.6.97

   Report, used as a verb, is followed by for before duty.
(II) Nouns with Prepositions

Difficulty

✗ Investigation revealed that the HO family had difficulty to solve their housing problem.

✓ Investigation revealed that the HO family had difficulty (in) solving their housing problem.

Difficulty is followed by the ‘ing' form of the verb. In is optional.
Interest

1. ✗ Thank you for your interest about the proposed parking spaces in Phase II of Hong Sun Estate.
   ✔ Thank you for your interest in the proposed parking spaces in Phase II of Hong Sun Estate.

   Interest is followed by in, plus a noun or noun phrase.

2. ✗ The department introduced a retraining programme for unemployed factory workers but they had no interest to join.
   ✔ The department introduced a retraining programme for the unemployed but they had no interest in joining.

   Interest is followed by in, plus the ‘ing’ form of the verb.
Lack

1. ✗ As the prosecution was lack of evidence, the case was closed.
   ✓ As the prosecution lacked evidence, the case was closed.

   Lack, used as a verb, is not followed by a preposition.

2. ✗ As there was a lack in interest, the course was cancelled.
   ✓ As there was a lack of interest, the course was cancelled.

   Lack, used as a noun, is not followed by of plus noun or noun phrase.

Objection

✗ The committee has no objection for individual officers applying for no pay study leave.

✓ The committee has no objection to individual officers applying for no pay study leave.

Objection is followed by to.
(III) Special Cases

**Between**

❌ The in-house training course on `Windows 6.0' will be held between 9:00 to 11:00 am.

✅ The in-house training course on `Windows 6.0' will be held between 9:00 and 11:00 am.

Between is used with and to join two people, places, things, times. We can also say ‘The in-house training course on `Windows 6.0' will be held from 9:00 to 11:00 am.’

**Despite**

❌ Despite of the increase in workload, Mr Chan was able to complete all his tasks on time.

✅ Despite the increase of workload, Mr Chan was able to complete all his tasks on time.

Despite is followed directly by a noun or noun phrase.
Difficult

✗ It is difficult the family to deal with the situation.

✓ It is difficult for the family to deal with the situation.

(i) Difficult, used as an adjective, is followed by for plus a person / group of people.
(ii) Difficult, used as an adjective, is followed by to plus an action.

Last / Next

✗ In last week, we processed more than 200 applications for the post of temporary Clerical Assistant.

✓ Last week, we processed more than 200 applications for the post of temporary Clerical Assistant.

There is no preposition before last / next / this plus day / week / year.
On

1. ❌ The Engineer inspected the site in the morning of 1.6.97.

✓ The Engineer inspected the site on the morning of 1.6.97.

Use in for expressions like in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening; but when such expressions are followed by a date use 'on' the morning of 15.5.96.

2. ❌ The Special Duties Unit officers arrested the robbers at the second floor of a 3-storey house in Sai Kung.

✓ The Special Duties Unit officers arrested the robbers on the second floor of a 3-storey house in Sai Kung.

Use on before a floor.

3. ❌ She told us through the phone that she was too busy to come for an interview.

✓ She told us on/over the phone that she was too busy to come for an interview.

Use on/over before the phone.
Prior

✗ We sought approval from the Buildings Department prior the commencement of works.

✓ We sought approval from the Buildings Department prior to the commencement of works.

Prior, followed by to something means before. Prior, without to, is an adjective meaning previously planned e.g. ‘He was absent from the meeting due to a prior engagement’.

Regard

✗ Thank you for your letter dated 2.4.97 in regard with the illegal structure at 8 Small Lane.

✓ Thank you for your letter dated 2.4.97 with/in regard to the illegal structure at 8, Small Lane.

✓ Thank you for your letter dated 2.4.97 regarding the illegal structure at 8, Small Lane.

We use in regard to, with regard to or simply regarding plus a noun or noun phrase.
Request

✗ I am writing to request for a new laser-jet colour printer.

✓ I am writing to request a new laser-jet colour printer.

Request, used as a verb, is not followed by a preposition. When it is used as a noun, it is followed by for.

Use of ‘at'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at night</td>
<td>at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at noon</td>
<td>at 4 Nathan Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at dawn</td>
<td>at the cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at sunset</td>
<td>at the office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>at the seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at midday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at 3 o'clock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at daybreak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at sunrise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at this moment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at New Year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at Christmas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at Ching Ming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of ‘on’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Saturday night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the afternoon of 10 June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Monday morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on 5 March 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on his birthday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on the desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the stage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of ‘in'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in a week</td>
<td>in January</td>
<td>in the afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a month</td>
<td>in 1997</td>
<td>in a week's time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a year</td>
<td>in a few hours</td>
<td>in the evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Autumn</td>
<td>in the night</td>
<td>in the morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in a taxi</td>
<td>in the street</td>
<td>in the hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the city</td>
<td>in Hong Kong</td>
<td>in the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the office</td>
<td>in the air</td>
<td>in bed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REPORTED SPEECH

Reported Speech is often used in writing meeting minutes, statements and case recordings etc. The most common error in the use of reported speech is the wrong use of verb tense. Here are some common reporting verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Reporting Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pointed out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suggested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remarked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reminded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>told</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>believed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>replied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>briefed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>felt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here are some guidelines for the conversion of verb tense when using reported speech:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Speech</th>
<th>Reported Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Simple</strong></td>
<td><strong>Past Simple</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I approve of these measures.&quot;</td>
<td>The Director said he approved of these measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Progressive</strong></td>
<td><strong>Past Progressive</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I am still considering the benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
<td>The Director told us that he was still considering the benefits of the new measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Simple</strong></td>
<td><strong>Past Perfect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I considered the benefits of the new measures&quot;</td>
<td>The Director reported that he had considered the benefits of the new measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Perfect</strong></td>
<td><strong>Past Perfect Progressive</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I have considered the benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
<td>The Director stated that had considered the benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Progressive</td>
<td>Past Perfect Progressive or Past Progressive (no change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I was considering the benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
<td>Use a reporting verb and then (1) The Director told us that he had been considering the benefits of the new measures. or (2) Give the sentence with no change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past Perfect</th>
<th>Past Perfect (no change)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I had considered the benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
<td>Use a reporting verb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>shall / will</th>
<th>should / would</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I will consider the benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
<td>The Director informed us that he would consider the benefits of the new measures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>can / may</th>
<th>could / might</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I can consider the benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
<td>The Director remarked that he could consider the benefits of the new measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should / could / might / would / ought</td>
<td>should / could / might / would / ought (no change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I might consider the new benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
<td>Use a reporting verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must</td>
<td>must (no change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I must consider the benefits of the new measures.&quot;</td>
<td>Use a reporting verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Use ‘if’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Will she consider implementing the new measures before the end of the year?&quot;</td>
<td>They asked if she would consider implementing the new measures before the end of the year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to strict grammarians, the verb tense should be changed according to the rules above, particularly when the reporting verb is in the past tense.

1. ✗ Mr Wong *informed* the meeting that the photocopying machine *needs* replacement.

   ✓ Mr Wong informed the meeting that the photocopying machine needed replacing.

2. ✗ The secretary *said* that renovation of the computer area *is* in progress.

   ✓ The secretary said that renovation of the computer area *was* in progress.

   When quoting indirectly with a reporting verb, you should link the main verb of the sentence and the subordinate verb in the same time sequence.

3. ✗ It *was expected* that the installation *will be completed* by early March next year.

   ✓ It was expected that the installation would be completed by early March next year.
4. ✗ The contractor stated that he will apply for temporary electrical supply from the department concerned.

✓ The contractor stated that he would apply for a temporary electrical supply from the department concerned.

We use would instead of will to indicate something said in the past to be done in the future.
Note: Exceptions to the Rules

The above rules only apply when the reporting verb is in the past. However, even when the reporting verb is in the past tense, the tense of the original words is sometimes not changed. This is often true when we are reporting on a state of affairs that is still true at the time of the report. In some other cases, if the reporting verb is present, future or present perfect, we do not change the tense of the speaker’s original words. The following are some examples:

1. "I will consider the benefits of the new measures."
   She has already told us that she will consider the benefits of the new measures.

2. "Will she consider implementing the new measures before the end of the year?"
   The journalists want to know if you will consider implementing the benefits of the new measures before the end of the year.

3. "Will you be resigning from the Government soon?"
   They will certainly ask you if you will be resigning from the Government soon.
Subject-verb agreement refers to the agreement in terms of singular or plural, between the subject of a verb and the verb itself. Problems often arise in deciding whether or not to use a singular or plural verb after an uncountable noun and where it is unclear if the subject is considered to be singular or plural.

Advice

✗ **Advices** from the committee members were included in the preliminary report.

✓ Advice from the committee member was included in the preliminary report.

Advice has no ‘s’ and is uncountable. It therefore takes a singular verb.
Anyone / Anybody

✗ The department is arranging a seminar for anyone who are interested in performance management.

✓ The department is arranging a seminar for anyone who is interested in performance management.

Anyone and anybody take singular verbs.

As well as

✗ Mr Wu, as well as his two colleagues, have been invited to attend the seminar.

✓ Mr Wu, as well as his two colleagues, has been invited to attend the seminar.

When there is the expression as well as between the subject and the verb, the verb agrees with the main subject.
Details

✗ Details of the new scheme is as follows . . . . .

✓ Details of the new scheme are as follows . . . . .

Details is a plural noun and therefore takes a plural verb.

Each

✗ Each workers have received two months' severance pay.

✓ Each worker has received two months' severance pay.

✓ Each of the two workers has received two months' severance pay.

Each and each of take a singular verb.
Either

✗ Either of the recommendations are practicable.

✓ Either of the recommendations is practicable.

Either of and either take a singular verb in a positive sentence. However, in a negative sentence a singular or plural verb is possible e.g. ‘The course co-ordinator does not think either of the part-time trainers is/are available.’

Facilities

✗ The facilities in our new branch office is very advanced.

✓ The facilities in our new branch office are very advanced.

Facilities takes a plural verb.
Information

✗ The informations included in this report are outdated.

✓ The information included in this report is outdated.

Information has no ‘s’, and is uncountable. It therefore takes a singular verb.

Installation

✗ The installation of the air-conditioning units are expected to be completed by next week.

✓ The installation of the air-conditioning units is expected to be completed by next week.

The subject of the sentence is installation not air-conditioning units, therefore the verb is singular.
Neither / Neither of / Neither ... nor ...

1. ✗ Neither officer have attended the seminar before.

✓ Neither officer has attended the seminar before.

Neither without of, is used before a singular noun and therefore takes a singular verb.

2. ✓ Neither of the candidates is suitable for the post.(Formal)

✓ Neither of the candidates are suitable for the post.(Informal)

Neither of is used before a plural noun. In formal use it takes a singular verb. In informal use it takes either a singular or plural verb.
3. Neither the supervisor nor his subordinate like to work overtime. (Informal)

✓ Neither the supervisor nor his subordinate likes to work overtime. (Formal)

✓ Neither the sergeant nor his constables have attended the course.

When using neither...nor, if both subjects are singular, the singular of the verb is more formal, but when the second subject is plural, the plural of the verb is used.

**A number / The number**

✗ A number of employees is interested in the new flexi-time arrangement.

✓ A number of employees are interested in the new flexi-time arrangement.

✓ The number of employees interested in the new flexi-time arrangement has increased.

A number of meaning several takes a plural verb. The number of meaning a particular figure / amount takes a singular verb.
One

× One of our colleagues have applied for early retirement.
✓ One of our colleagues has applied for early retirement.

One of is followed by a plural noun, but as it means only one among the group, it takes a singular verb.

Per cent (%)

× Twenty per cent of the survey have been completed.
✓ Twenty per cent of the survey has been completed.

× Nearly 90% of the applicants has over 7 years of work experience.
✓ Nearly 90% of the applicants have over 7 years of work experience.

The verb agrees with the noun after the percentage. If the noun is singular, the verb should also be singular. In the first example, survey is an uncountable noun, so the verb should be singular whereas in the second example, applicants is plural, so the verb is also plural.
Police

1. ✗ The police is very concerned about the increase in armed robberies.

✓ The police are very concerned about the increase in armed robberies.

The police is a plural noun and therefore takes a plural verb. The police here is considered to refer to individual policeman.

2. ✗ The Police Force have made considerable progress in their fight against drug abuse.

✓ The Police Force has made considerable progress in its fight against drug abuse

The Police Force and the Force are singular nouns and therefore take singular verbs. The police force is considered to refer to the whole organisation.
Premises

✗ The old office premises has to be demolished.

✓ The old office premises have to be demolished.

When premises is used to mean a building or group of buildings, it is a plural noun. It therefore takes a plural verb. The singular noun premise has a completely different meaning; it means a statement or idea on which reasoning is based.

Provision

✗ The provision of quarters and other benefits are persuading graduates to join the Police Force.

✓ The provision of quarters and other benefits is persuading graduates to join the Police Force.

The subject of the above example is provision (uncountable noun), not quarters, so the verb is singular.
Summons

✗ The summons have been served on the driver.

✓ The summons has been served on the driver.

Summons is a singular noun and therefore takes a singular verb. Its plural form is summonses.

Together with

✗ The guest of honour, together with his wife, have arrived.

✓ The guest of honour, together with his wife, has arrived.

The subject is the guest of honour so the verb is singular.
Note the following words which frequently cause problems in subject-verb agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With Singular Or Plural Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>family</td>
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<tr>
<td>firm</td>
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<tr>
<td>government</td>
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<tr>
<td>jury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Singular Verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apparatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>each of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luggage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>machinery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Singular Verb</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dollars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kilometres / Miles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fraction</td>
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<tr>
<td>The rest of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Many a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any one of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every one of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either of</td>
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<tr>
<td>One of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..... as well as .....</td>
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<tr>
<td>..... together with .....</td>
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<tr>
<td>..... in addition to .....</td>
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<tr>
<td>..... accompanied by .....</td>
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<tr>
<td>..... including .....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..... like .....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..... or .....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either ..... or .....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither ..... or .....</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VERB PATTERNS

When the main verb in a sentence is followed by another verb, several different constructions are possible. Some verbs are always followed by -ing form, some are followed by noun phrases and some by infinitives. With some verbs, it is possible to use more than one of the constructions, although the meaning of the sentence may change when a different construction is used.

A. Verbs which are followed by an object, plus ‘to’ plus infinitive:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>advise</th>
<th>defy</th>
<th>instruct</th>
<th>permit</th>
<th>tell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>allow</td>
<td>enable</td>
<td>intend</td>
<td>persuade</td>
<td>train</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask</td>
<td>encourage</td>
<td>invite</td>
<td>prefer</td>
<td>trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beg</td>
<td>expect</td>
<td>lead</td>
<td>press</td>
<td>urge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cause</td>
<td>forbid</td>
<td>leave</td>
<td>programme</td>
<td>use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenge</td>
<td>force</td>
<td>like</td>
<td>prompt</td>
<td>want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choose</td>
<td>get</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>recommend</td>
<td>warn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>command</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>oblige</td>
<td>recruit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compel</td>
<td>induce</td>
<td>order</td>
<td>remind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dare</td>
<td>inspire</td>
<td>pay</td>
<td>teach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Advise

✗ The consultant advised that we should reorganise the Administration Division.

✓ The consultant advised us to reorganise the Administration Division.

Advise is followed by an object, plus to plus infinitive.

Express

✗ They expressed that they wished to apply for public assistance.

✓ They expressed their wish to apply for public assistance.

Express is followed by an object plus to plus infinitive.
Remind

✗ The Chairman reminded the Committee set the date for the next AGM.

✓ The Chairman reminded the Committee to set the date for the next AGM.

Remind is followed by someone plus to.
B. Verbs which are followed by an object and -ing form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>catch</th>
<th>hear</th>
<th>like</th>
<th>prevent</th>
<th>spot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>describe</td>
<td>imagine</td>
<td>notice</td>
<td>save</td>
<td>stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel</td>
<td>keep</td>
<td>observe</td>
<td>see</td>
<td>want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find</td>
<td>leave</td>
<td>picture</td>
<td>send</td>
<td>watch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice

✗ The supervisor noticed him to leave early on several occasions.

✓ The supervisor noticed him leaving early on several occasions.

Notice is followed by an object plus ‘ing’ form.

Prevent

✗ The illness did not prevent her to go to work.

✓ The illness did not prevent her from going to work.

Prevent is followed by an object plus ‘ing’ form.
C. Verbs which are directly followed by -ing form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>admit</th>
<th>defer</th>
<th>endure</th>
<th>keep</th>
<th>recommend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adore</td>
<td>delay</td>
<td>enjoy</td>
<td>lie</td>
<td>report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appreciate</td>
<td>deny</td>
<td>explain</td>
<td>mention</td>
<td>resist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoid</td>
<td>describe</td>
<td>fancy</td>
<td>mind</td>
<td>risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>celebrate</td>
<td>detest</td>
<td>finish</td>
<td>miss</td>
<td>sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commence</td>
<td>discontinue</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>postpone</td>
<td>stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consider</td>
<td>dislike</td>
<td>imagine</td>
<td>practise</td>
<td>stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contemplate</td>
<td>dread</td>
<td>intend</td>
<td>recall</td>
<td>suggest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider

✗ The department is considering to upgrade the pay of non-professional staff.

✔ The department is considering upgrading the pay of non-professional staff.

Consider when it means contemplate / think about is followed directly by ‘ing’.
The Board recommended to reshuffle the Training Unit.

The Board recommended reshuffling the Training Unit.

Recommend doing something.
Recommend someone to do something.
Recommend someone/something do something.
Suggest

1. ✗ The Chairman suggested to form a working group to look into the matter.
   
   ✔ The Chairman suggested forming a working group to look into the matter.

   Suggest doing something.

2. ✗ I suggest you contacting our Information Officer for more details of the new scheme.
   
   ✔ I suggest you contact our Information Officer for more details of the new scheme.

3. ✗ The social worker suggested he to apply for public assistance.
   
   ✔ The social worker suggested he apply for public assistance.

   Suggest (that) someone (should) do something.
D. Verbs which are followed directly by `to' plus infinitives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>afford</th>
<th>demand</th>
<th>intend</th>
<th>prepare</th>
<th>venture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>deserve</td>
<td>learn</td>
<td>pretend</td>
<td>volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aim</td>
<td>desire</td>
<td>live</td>
<td>promise</td>
<td>vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appear</td>
<td>endeavour</td>
<td>long</td>
<td>prove</td>
<td>vow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrange</td>
<td>expect</td>
<td>manage</td>
<td>reckon</td>
<td>wait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask</td>
<td>fail</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>refuse</td>
<td>want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempt</td>
<td>fight</td>
<td>need</td>
<td>resolve</td>
<td>wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care</td>
<td>forget</td>
<td>neglect</td>
<td>seek</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choose</td>
<td>grow</td>
<td>offer</td>
<td>seem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>claim</td>
<td>happen</td>
<td>opt</td>
<td>survive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consent</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>pay</td>
<td>swear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dare</td>
<td>hesitate</td>
<td>plan</td>
<td>tend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decide</td>
<td>hope</td>
<td>pledge</td>
<td>threaten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agree

✗ The Board members did not agree promoting him.

✓ The Board members did not agree to promote him.

Agree is followed directly by to plus infinitive.
Promise

✗ She promised repairing any damage she had done to the property.
✓ She promised to repair any damage she had done to the property.

Promise is followed directly by to plus infinitive.

E. Verbs which are followed by object plus infinitive (without to):

|           | have | let | make |

Let

✗ The police would not let anyone to enter the scene of murder.
✓ The police would not let anyone enter the scene of murder.

Let is directly followed by an object without to.
Make

✗ The defendant claimed his accomplice made him to steal the jewellery.

✓ The defendant claimed his accomplice made him steal the jewellery.

Make is followed directly by an object without to.
Note

That Clauses

Some of the above verbs can also be followed by ‘that’ clause instead of the constructions listed above. The following are some examples:

1. Suggest
   The social worker suggested that he apply for public assistance.

2. Promise
   She promised that she would repair any damage she had done to the property.

3. Consider
   The department considered that the pay of non-professional staff should be upgraded.
WRITING ABOUT THE PAST - TENSES

Civil servants often have to report on past incidents. The tenses commonly used for this purpose include past simple, present perfect and past perfect.

You have to use Past Simple with expressions indicating past time e.g. in 1996, last month, two years ago. However, if the event still has some present effect or importance, use present perfect but WITHOUT a time expression.

Let us take a look at some of the common errors in the use of these tenses.

Present Perfect vs Past Simple

1. ✗ A site investigation has been conducted on 10.8.96.

✓ A site investigation was conducted on 10.8.96.

✓ A site investigation has been conducted.

Use past simple when a definite time is stated (eg. on 10.8.96). Use present perfect to describe an action which happened in the past when no time is stated and you wish to stress that the past action still has an effect on the present.
2.  

Mr Lo worked in the administration unit since 1990.

✓ Mr Lo has worked in the administration unit since 1990.

✓ Mr Lo has worked in the administration unit for six years.

Use present perfect tense with `since' and `for' to stress that an event / action which started in the past, has continued to the present and may continue into the future.
3. An application has been submitted and was then referred to the personnel section.

We have held a meeting and solved the problem.

We inspected the site and have noted the following irregularities.

An application was submitted and (was then) referred to the personnel section.

We held a meeting and solved the problem.

We inspected the site and noted the following irregularities.

Use past simple to describe two completed actions joined by ‘and’.
Past Perfect

1. ✗ We had held a meeting to discuss ways of improving site safety.

✓ We held a meeting to discuss ways to improve site safety.

Past perfect is only used to stress that the event referred to in the past perfect occurred before another event which is also in the past. In the above example, there is only one past event, so past simple should be used.

2. ✗ Mr Chan had revealed to us that he had received compensation from the insurer prior to the court proceedings.

✓ Mr Chan revealed that he had received compensation from the insurer prior to the court proceedings.

In the above example, receiving compensation is the event that occurred earlier although it is the second event to be mentioned, so the past perfect should be used. The other verb `reveal' should be in past simple tense.

3. ✗ After leaving school in 1984, the defendant had worked as a clerk in various insurance companies.
After leaving school in 1984, the defendant worked as a clerk in various insurance companies.

In the above example, leaving school happened before the defendant worked as a clerk and the use of `after' shows the sequence clearly, so there is no need for the past perfect.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>at last</th>
<th>43</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>at the back</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accept</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>admit</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advise</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affect</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afterwards</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>33</td>
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</tr>
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<td>alternative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>amount</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an</td>
<td>15, 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anybody/one</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appearance</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approve</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrange</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrive</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>articles</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as well as</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>84</td>
<td></td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>because</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>32, 59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>begin</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behind</td>
<td>34</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>between</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>37, 45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>borrow</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complain</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conditional clauses</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consider</td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consult</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>costly</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| D | deal | 73 |

Index
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>decrease</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>from</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>despite</td>
<td>60, 94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>details</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult(y)</td>
<td>91, 95</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disappear</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>discharge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>happen</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
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<td>dress</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>hope</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>each</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>in</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effect</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>in spite of</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>either</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>increase</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>end</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>inform</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enquire</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>information</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enter</td>
<td>40, 76</td>
<td>insist</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>especially</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>installation</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>except</td>
<td>29, 41</td>
<td>interest</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exist</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>join</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expensive</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>express</td>
<td>86, 123</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilities</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>lack</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False Conditionals</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>familiarize</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>last</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>few</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>later</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fill</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>lay</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finally</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>let</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lie</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linking words</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>passive</td>
<td>5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>list</td>
<td>65, 88</td>
<td>past</td>
<td>47, 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>past perfect</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>live</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>past simple</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>pay</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—M—</td>
<td></td>
<td>per cent</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>personal</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personnel</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>phrasal verbs</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—N—</td>
<td></td>
<td>pick</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>police</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>next</td>
<td>88, 95</td>
<td>premises</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notice</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>prepositions</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>present prefect</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number (a/the)</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>prevent</td>
<td>51, 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—O—</td>
<td></td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objection</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>principle</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occur</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>prior</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>promise</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on</td>
<td>96, 99</td>
<td>proof</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>protect</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>prove</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onwards</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>provide</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outlook</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>provision</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owing to</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>put</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—P—</td>
<td></td>
<td>recommend</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parallel structure</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>regard</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Page(s)</td>
<td>Related Term</td>
<td>Page(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remind</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>tenses</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>report</td>
<td>80, 90</td>
<td>that</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reported speech</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>16, 20, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>request</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>together</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rise</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>trouble(s)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>turn off</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salary</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Type 1 Conditionals</td>
<td>23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Type 2 Conditionals</td>
<td>23, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Type 3 Conditionals</td>
<td>23, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometime(s)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specially</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>unless</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>start</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>use</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stay</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject verb agreement</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>128, 132</td>
<td>verb pattern</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summons</td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>watch</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>44</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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