



# WRITING WORKSHOP 2

Sponsored by the Office of  
Graduate Studies

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# Today's Topics

Nouns

Articles

Pronouns

Clauses

Subject/Verb Agreement

Word Usage

# NOUNS - Count

## Count Nouns:

- Things that exist as separate and distinct individual units. They usually refer to what can be perceived by the senses.
- Can take a plural form
- Examples:
  - cat → cats
  - season → seasons
  - method → methods
  - study → studies

# NOUNS - Noncount

## Noncount Nouns:

- Things that can't be counted because they are thought of as wholes that can't be cut into parts. They often refer to abstractions and occasionally have a collective meaning.
- Cannot take a plural form (usually)
- Examples:
  - milk
  - air
  - research
  - equipment

# NOUNS – Using Adjectives

Certain adjectives can only be used with count or noncount nouns.

<b>Count</b>	<b>Noncount</b>	<b>Both</b>
many	much	enough
few	little	a lot of/lots of
fewer (number)	less (amount)	plenty of
	a little bit of	some/any
		no

# NOUNS AND ARTICLES

	<b>a, an</b>	<b>the</b>	<b>this, that</b>	<b>these, those</b>	<b>no article</b>
Count singular	X	X	X		
Count plural		X		X	X
Noncount		X	X		X

## **Count Singular:**

I ate an apple.

I rode the bus.

Does she live in this house?

No, she lives in that house over there.

## **Count Plural:**

I like to feed the birds.

Do you want these books?

No, I want those books up there.

Cats are interesting pets.

## **Noncount:**

*The* water is cold.

*This* milk is going sour.

*Music* helps me relax.

# DO I NEED AN ARTICLE?

## Yes

Use an article when you classify...

- What job someone has  
*He's **a researcher** for NASA.*
- What class, group, or type something belongs to  
*The kangaroo is **a marsupial**.*
- What something is used for  
*The artist used the sidewalk as **a canvas**.*

## No

Don't use an article when you are writing about things in general and using uncountable, plural nouns

*The theater is showing ~~the~~ foreign films.  
Your brother studied ~~the~~ economics.*

# GENERAL RULES – *A/An* or *The*?

## *A/An*: Indefinite Article

When writing about something that is not specific or not known by both the speaker and the reader

*I need to buy **a** new wide-angle lens for my camera. (any wide-angle lens)*

## *The*: Definite Article

When writing about something that is specific or known by both the speaker and the reader

*Did you understand **the** art history lecture? (this specific lecture)*

# GENERAL RULES – *A* or *An*?

Once you've determined that you need an indefinite article, look at the word that follows to determine if you should use a or an.

The key in deciding is not the word's spelling but its pronunciation

- Use a when the word immediately after begins with a consonant sound
- Use an when the word immediately after begins with a vowel sound

# PRONOUNS – General Rules

Pronouns should agree in number

- Every one should complete his or her report by Monday.
- Neither of the options is satisfactory.

Pronoun case should correspond to its role in the sentence

- The coach picked he and I. ❌
- The coach picked him and me. ✅

A pronoun must refer clearly to the noun it represents

- Take the radio out of the car and fix it. ❌

# PRONOUNS – Unclear Reference

A possessive noun should not be the antecedent for a pronoun.

- Kevin's fingers were strumming the guitar when he winked at Donna. ❌
- As Kevin strummed the guitar, he winked at Donna. ✅

Use it with precision

- In our math textbook, it claims that statistics analysis will be one of the most important skills in the future. ❌
- Our math textbook claims that statistics analysis will be one of the most important skills in the future. ✅

Use they with precision

- The witness called the television station, but they didn't answer. ❌
- The witness called the television station, but the reporters didn't answer. ✅

# PRONOUNS – Using *They*

- English does not have a singular gender-neutral third person pronoun.
- In the past, the use of *he* was standard use, but is now unaccepted as a generic gender pronoun
- Conventions such as *s/he* are also not universally accepted
- The singular *they* is gaining prominence in informal speech, but it is still not the standard use for formal writing
- To avoid the problem, it is often best to use *he or she* or to change the sentence to plural if possible.
  - If a **student** has a question, he or she should raise his or her hand. ✓
  - If **students** have questions, they should raise their hands. ✓

# RELATIVE PRONOUNS – That/Which

**Restrictive Clauses:** contain essential information and are introduced with *that*

*The class **that** I want has a waitlist. (no commas)*

**Nonrestrictive Clauses:** contain “extra” information that can be omitted from a complete sentence

*Lab experiments, **which** can be dangerous, often lead to breakthroughs.  
(with commas)*

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

The subject of a sentence does not agree with the verb when they do not match in terms of the number.

If the subject is singular, the verb must also be singular.

*The **book** (singular subject) **contains** (singular verb) many chapters.*

If the subject is plural, the verb must be plural as well.

*The **particles** (plural subject) **are** (plural verb) suspended in the solution.*

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

1. When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by **and**, use a plural verb.

**She and her friends are** at the fair.

2. When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by **or** or **nor**, use a singular verb.

**The book or the pen is** in the drawer.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

3. When a compound subject contains **both a singular and a plural** noun or pronoun joined by **or** or **nor**, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is **closest to the verb**.

The boy **or** his friends **run** every day.

His friends **or** the boy **runs** every day.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

4. Doesn't is a contraction of does not and should be used only with a singular subject. Don't is a contraction of do not and should be used only with a plural subject. The exception to this rule appears in the case of the first person and second person pronouns I and you. With these pronouns, the contraction don't should be used.

He **doesn't** like it.

They **don't** like it.

I **don't** like it.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

5. Do not be misled by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb. The verb agrees with the subject, not with a noun or pronoun in the phrase.

**One** of the boxes **is** open

**The people** who listen to that music **are** few.

**The team captain**, as well as his players, **is** anxious.

**The book**, including all the chapters in the first section, **is** boring.

**The woman** with all the dogs **walks** down my street.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

6. The words each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone, and no one are singular and require a singular verb.

**Each** of these hot dogs **is** burned.

**Everybody** **knows** Mr. Jones.

**Either** **is** correct.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

7. Nouns such as civics, mathematics, dollars, measles, and news require **singular** verbs.

**The news** **is** on at six.

**Measles** **is** a highly contagious infection.

**Mathematics** **is** subdivided into the study of quantity, structure, space, and change.

Note: the word **dollars** is a special case. When talking about an amount of money, it requires a singular verb, but when referring to the dollars themselves, a plural verb is required.

**Five dollars** **is** a lot of money.

**Dollars** **are** often used instead of rubles in Russia.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

8. Nouns such as scissors, tweezers, trousers, and shears require **plural** verbs. (There are two parts to these things.)

These scissors **are** dull.

Those trousers **are** made of wool.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

9. In sentences beginning with there is or there are, the subject follows the verb. Since there is not the subject, the verb agrees with what follows.

There **are** many questions.

There **is** one question.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

10. Collective nouns are words that imply more than one person but that are considered singular and take a singular verb, such as group, team, committee, class, and family.

**The team** runs during practice.

**The committee** decides how to proceed.

**The family** has a long history.

**My family** has never been able to agree.

**The crew** is preparing to dock the ship.

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

11. Expressions such as with, together with, including, accompanied by, in addition to, or as well do not change the number of the subject. If the subject is singular, the verb is too.

**The President**, accompanied by his wife, **is** traveling to India.

**All of the books**, including yours, **are** in that box.

# WORD USAGE

**about/approximately:** *approximately* is preferred in the sciences. Avoid coupling *approximately* with other words like *guess* or *estimate*.

**afterward/afterword:** *afterward* means “later”; *afterword* means “an epilogue.” (Both *afterward* and *afterwards* are correct usages.)

**attain/obtain:** *attain* is to accomplish something; *obtain* is to gain possession. (You *attain* a degree but *obtain* a diploma.)

# WORD USAGE

**can/could:** *can* means “to be able to”; *could* is used for a sense of uncertainty or a conditional statement

**can/may:** *can* refers to physical or mental ability; *may* refers to possibility or permission

**in contrast/on the contrary:** *in contrast* is used to show the differences between two things or ideas; *on the contrary* is used to intensify a denial of what has just been implied or stated

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## **Pronouns**

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Rude, C. D., & Eaton, A. (2011). *Technical editing* (5th ed.). New York: Longman.

## **Singular “They”**

Chicago Manual of Style, 16<sup>th</sup> edition

## **Subject/Verb Agreement**

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/599/01/>

## **Word Usage**

Chicago Manual of Style, 16<sup>th</sup> edition

# UPCOMING EVENTS

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Mini Thesis/Dissertation Boot Camp	Mar. 2 & 3	Missouri 207A, Havener
Write-In	Mar. 4	Library 202
Formatting Your Thesis/Dissertation	Mar. 8	St. Pat's Ballroom A, Havener
Writing Workshop 3: Punctuation	Apr. 19	Norwood 208

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