GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AND EDITING

PAULINE BROOK & CAROL HUNTER

A STUDY GUIDE
STUDENT LEARNING CENTRE
University of Otago

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

The Otago Study Guides are intended as primers or self-help tutorials to assist you in developing the various skills required to learn at University. *Writing and editing* is not intended as a book of comprehensive grammar. Rather, it focuses on some basic aspects of paragraph and sentence structure, common writing errors, and editing techniques.

As with other Otago Study Guides, we have tried to provide a model that you can follow. The Guide is interactive. Work through the various exercises and then practise some of the suggestions as you write your next assignment. At first, as you try new ways of writing, you may find that the process is a bit slow, so give yourself some time. Plan to tackle an assignment a little earlier than usual. Good writing skills take time to develop. If you need to follow up any points in the Guide, please contact the Student Learning Centre (SLC):

email: slc.reception@otago.ac.nz
website address: http://www.otago.ac.nz/slc
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Carol Bond
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Series Editors

INTRODUCTION

Unclear!

Clarify!

Punctuation?

Hard to follow!

What were you trying to say here?

Where's your argument?
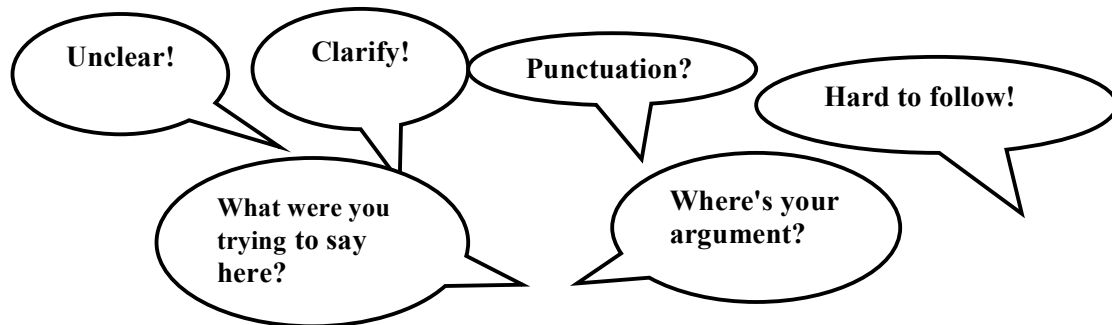
Are these phrases familiar to you? Do you often receive comments like these on your written work? Are you losing marks because of your writing? A well-written essay or report will undoubtedly receive a better grade because it communicates clearly and grammatically, and grammatical accuracy is expected in university writing.

This Guide focuses on the correct construction of paragraphs and sentences using the different parts of speech (e.g., verbs, nouns and adjectives), effective punctuation (e.g., commas, full stops, and colons) and the rules that govern their use. At the same time, we use a basic non-technical approach. If you are unsure of the meaning of some terms you should work through Appendix 1 before starting the Guide.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on paragraph and sentence construction. The remaining chapters are concerned with improving writing and editing drafts of written work.

Each chapter includes exercises that reinforce the main ideas. Answers to the exercises are included at the end of each chapter.

CHAPTER 1: PLANNING AND DEVELOPING PARAGRAPHS

STRUCTURING PARAGRAPHS

The paragraph forms the basic structural element of a typical university assignment, such as a report, essay, or literature review. Typically, each paragraph should have a single focus or "*one* main idea" so that "it is easy to read and understand" (Oshima & Hogue, 1991, p. 17). How long should a paragraph be? Within reason, a paragraph should be as long or as short as it needs to be to express and support a main or central idea. In academic writing, paragraphs should be longer than one or two sentences but no longer than about six or seven.

Usually, though not always, the main or central idea is expressed in the first sentence of the paragraph. Subsequent sentences expand on the central idea, with evidence or examples as appropriate. A final sentence might summarise the paragraph, but is not always necessary. If you find your paragraph changing focus to a new central idea, you should begin a new paragraph. Within a paragraph, sentences should follow a logical progression, for example, chronological order or order of importance. The progression you choose will depend on what is appropriate for your topic so that the reader can see how one idea links to the next. A typical structure for the order of sentences in a paragraph is set out in Table 1.

Table 1: A typical structure of a paragraph

Structure	Function
Topic or key sentence	Introduces the main idea of the paragraph.
A. First supporting point	An explanation, or expansion of the main idea.
B. Second supporting point	Further expansion of the main idea—for example, evidence from your reading that supports your explanation.
C. Third supporting point	This may include further evidence, an example, or other detail.
D. Concluding sentence	Restatement or summary of main points or a final comment. Concluding sentences for body paragraphs are not always necessary.

(Adapted from Oshima & Hogue, 1991, p. 34; 2007, p. 147)

Note: The number of supporting points (A, B, C) will vary widely from paragraph to paragraph.

Exercise 1: Using the information from the table above, find the topic, supporting, and concluding sentence(s) in Box 1.

Box 1: An example of a well-structured paragraph

World population is increasing at an alarming rate. In fact, according to the United Nations, by the year 2060, the Earth will have 10 billion people. Governments, particularly governments of developing countries, will face four major challenges to provide for their expanding populations. The first challenge will be to provide an adequate food supply. Hungry, undernourished people lack the energy, the time and the will to improve their lives. A second challenge is to build adequate housing. The population needs access to affordable housing to keep people off the streets. Another challenge is to provide jobs. Since rural areas provide only limited job opportunities, many people migrate to the cities in hopes of finding employment. If employment is not available, these people quickly become burdens on the urban society. The final and most important challenge is to provide education for all the people. As the population increases, more schools will have to be built, and good teachers and administrators will have to be trained to operate these schools. Not only do young people need an education, but adults also need training in various skills and trades that will translate into jobs to benefit themselves and their countries. In conclusion, the challenges of rapid population growth must be met by all countries, especially developing ones.

(Source: Oshima & Hogue, 1991, p. 60)

USING CONNECTIVES (SOMETIMES CALLED 'SIGNPOSTS')

Connectives, or 'signposts', are words or phrases that help to improve the clarity of a paragraph, show how ideas are related, and achieve a smooth flow by providing a logical transition from one point to the next.

Example: The lecturer was ten minutes late for the lecture. Consequently, he could not cover all the material. However, he covered the remaining material the following week.

In this example, the word *consequently* implies cause and effect between the first and second sentences. The word *however* modifies the effect.

Table 2 provides a useful summary of some common signpost words and phrases and their function.

Table 2: Examples of signpost words and phrases

Function	Signpost words and phrases
Adding more to a point already made, or introducing a new point	above all; again; also; as a consequence; as for; as to; as well (as); besides; consequently; correspondingly; following this; further; furthermore; in addition; indeed; in fact; in regard to; in the meantime; in the same way; in reality; in respect to; moreover; neither...nor; not only...but also; respecting; regarding; similarly; subsequently; then again; too; what is more
Reinforcing a point, or stating it in a different way	in other words; that is to say; to put it more simply; with this in mind; in view of this
Conceding a point	admittedly; after all; all the same; at any rate; granted; however; in any case; in spite of; it is true that; nevertheless; still; to be sure
Indicating stages in a process or chronological order	first; second; third; to begin with; next; following this; another; in addition; concurrently; simultaneously; meanwhile; in the meantime; moreover; subsequently; consequently; before that; earlier; previously; by that time; at last, after that; at length; finally; in conclusion; to conclude Time expressions such as: before the war; since 1960; in 2005.
Explaining, introducing examples	that is to say; in other words; for example; for instance; namely; an example of this is; as in the following examples; such as; particularly; in particular; especially; notably; chiefly; mainly
Showing conditions	in this event; in these circumstances; under such circumstances; this being so; provided that; in spite of; nonetheless; nevertheless; at the same time; even if; unless; otherwise; although; even though; despite; possibly; probably; apparently; presumably
Showing cause and effect	therefore; accordingly; as a result; from this it can be seen that; it is evident; because of this; thus; hence; for this reason; owing to; this suggests that; it follows that; it must then follow that; in other words; otherwise; in that case; this implies
Comparing and contrasting	in contrast; in comparison; on the one hand; on the other hand; here again; in the same way; conversely; on the contrary; alternatively; although; neither...nor; however; instead; in spite of; despite; otherwise; rather than; still; yet; yet again
Stressing a point, showing conviction	after all; at least; evidently; certainly; conceivably; conclusively; doubtless; no doubt; surely; undoubtedly
Summing up, concluding	therefore; my conclusion is; in short; in conclusion; to conclude; in all; on the whole; to summarise; to sum up; in brief; altogether

(Adapted from Bate & Sharpe, 1996, p. 29; Bright, 2002, p. 59; Oshima & Hogue, 1991, pp. 255-257)

Exercise 2: Return to Box 1 above and identify all the signpost words and phrases in the paragraph.

Exercise 3: This exercise involves inserting appropriate signposts into text. The paragraph in Box 2 below flows poorly because it lacks sufficient signposts. Improve it by using some of the words and phrases from Table 2.

Box 2: A paragraph with inadequate signposting

Arthur Miller writes in his autobiography, *Timebends*, of a blatant hypocrisy in the press towards Marilyn Monroe. Before her death she was treated as a caricature of 'the dumb blonde'. She was apparently well aware of the contempt. These same journalists benefited by promoting her as the embodiment of desire. They pandered to the dehumanising stereotype expected by the public. After her death from a drug overdose, the media focused on the human dimension of her tragedy, yet few were prepared to consider how they might have contributed to it.

(Adapted from Bate & Sharpe, 1996, p. 30).

ANSWERS TO EXERCISES IN CHAPTER 1

Exercises 1 and 2

The structure of the paragraph is shown in the right hand column of Box 3.

Box 3: An illustration of paragraph structure

World population is increasing at an alarming rate. <u>In fact</u>, according to the United Nations, <u>by the year 2060</u>, the Earth will have 10 billion people. Governments, particularly governments of developing countries, will face <u>four</u> <u>major</u> challenges to provide for their expanding populations. The <u>first</u> challenge will be to provide an adequate food supply. Hungry, undernourished people lack the energy, the time and the will to improve their lives. A <u>second</u> challenge is to build adequate housing. The population needs access to affordable housing to keep people off the streets. <u>Another</u> challenge is to provide jobs. Since rural areas provide only limited job opportunities, many people migrate to the cities in hopes of finding employment. If employment is not available, these people quickly become burdens on the urban society. The <u>final</u> and most important challenge is to provide education for all the people. As the population increases, more schools will have to be built, and good teachers and administrators will have to be trained to operate these schools. <u>Not only</u> do young people need an education, <u>but</u> adults <u>also</u> need training in various skills and trades that will translate into jobs to benefit themselves and their countries. <u>In conclusion</u>, the challenges of rapid population growth must be met by all countries, especially developing ones.	The first or topic sentence introduces the paragraph. The second sentence expands on the topic sentence. The third sentence identifies the scope of the paragraph and what will follow. All sentences follow a logical progression, with each new point supporting the topic sentence. The final sentence summarises the paragraph.

(Source: Oshima & Hogue, 1991, p. 45)

Signposts in the text are underlined. Note two things. First, not every sentence needs to start with or include a signpost. Second, signposts should be selected to fulfill a specific role, that is, to clarify or enhance meaning, or add emphasis. For example, the signposts *first*, *second* and *another* in the above text are used to structure/organise the text for the reader. Consider the roles that the other signposts play (see also Table 2).

Exercise 3

In this exercise you were asked to insert possible signposts into the text. An example is provided in Box 4 below. The signposts that you have chosen may differ from those in Bate and Sharpe's (1996) example, but if you have followed the information in Table 2 your passage is also likely to be correct.

Box 4: An example of the use of signposts to improve the flow of text

Arthur Miller writes in his autobiography, *Timebends,* of a blatant hypocrisy in the press towards Marilyn Monroe. <u>For example</u>, <u>before</u> her death she was treated as a caricature of 'the dumb blonde', <u>and</u> she was apparently well aware of the contempt. <u>Meanwhile</u>, these same journalists benefited by promoting her as the embodiment of desire; <u>thus</u>, they pandered to the dehumanising stereotype expected by the public. <u>However</u>, <u>after</u> her death from a drug overdose, the media focused on the human dimension of her tragedy, <u>yet</u> few were prepared to consider how they might have contributed to it. (Bate & Sharpe, 1996, p. 30).

Before you proceed to the next chapter, you may wish to practise some of the ideas we have just explored. Choose some text from a current assignment and check the paragraph structure and use of signposts.

CHAPTER 2: WRITING SENTENCES

No matter how well you understand a topic, you will not do justice to your ideas if your sentences are poorly formed (ungrammatical) and/or lack clarity. In this chapter we look at the structure of basic sentences, more complex sentences, and common errors. If you find that you are unfamiliar with some of the terms and ideas, refer to Appendix 1 again, read the sections below several times, and work through the examples provided. Think of your own examples, and use a current assignment to try out some of the suggestions.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE — FIRST STEPS

A quick check to find out whether a sentence is grammatical is to ask yourself two questions (Rose, 2001):

- does the sentence make sense as a complete thought unit?

- does it contain at least a subject and a verb?

<u>Subjects and verbs</u>: Sentences should include a *subject* and a *verb*.

Example: The student laughed.

In most sentences the *subject* is the thing or person that carries out the action or 'does the doing'; the *verb* is the action being done (Northedge, 1990). So using the example above:

<u>What</u> is the action? Answer: laughing. So *laughed* is the verb.
<u>Who</u> or <u>what</u> is doing the action? Answer: The student. So *The student* is the subject.

Exercise 1: Now ask the same questions of the following sentences and identify the subject and the verb.

a)   The lecturer explains the concept well.
b)   Students were writing in the library.
c)   The assignment will be hard.

<u>Subjects, verbs, and objects</u>: Usually, a sentence also contains an *object*.

Example: The student paddled the canoe down the river.

A way to identify the object is to ask: <u>who</u> or <u>what</u> is the person or thing on the receiving end of the action or the 'doing'?

Using the example above, <u>What</u> is the action? Answer: paddling. So *paddled* is the verb. <u>Who</u> or what is doing the paddling? Answer: The student. So the subject is *The student*. <u>What</u> is being paddled? Answer: the canoe. So *the canoe* is the object of the sentence.

The object in the example, and in exercise 2, is called the *direct object* because it is directly related to the action.

Exercise 2: Using the same questioning strategy, identify the subject, verb and object in the following sentences.

a)   The lab demonstrator conducted the experiment.
b)   Jane found her diary in the library.
c)   He entered the data regularly.

<u>Subjects, direct objects and indirect objects</u>: As well as a *direct object*, a sentence may also include an *indirect object*. A sentence will only make sense as a complete thought unit if the object and indirect object are used correctly.

Example: The lecturer gave an assignment to the students.

An indirect object is affected by the action associated with the direct object. First, use the questioning strategy to find the verb, subject and object in the example above.

<u>What</u> is the action? Answer: giving. So *gave* is the verb. <u>Who</u> or what is doing the giving? Answer: The lecturer. So *The lecturer* is the subject. <u>What</u> is being given? Answer: an assignment. So *an assignment* is the direct object. <u>Who</u> or <u>what</u> is affected by the action associated with the object? That is, who is the assignment being given to? Answer: *the students* receive the assignment and therefore they are the indirect object.

Exercise 3: Using the questioning strategy identify the subject, verb, object and indirect object in the following sentences.

a)   I'll take the admission fees from the students.
b)   She is writing her aunt a letter.
c)   James sent his admission forms to the student administration office.

MANAGING MORE COMPLEX SENTENCES

So far, we have looked at examples of simple sentences. However, many sentences are more complex and not only contain a direct and indirect object but also verbs other than the main verb. When we confuse the direct object with the indirect object, or the main verb with other verbs, the sentence often fails to convey the meaning that we intend. There are some useful strategies for checking whether your sentences convey what you intend and are grammatically correct.

Example: The lecturer lost his place in the lecture and became embarrassed.

In this example, the subject is *the lecturer*. The main verb is *lost*. What did the lecturer lose? Answer: his place. So *his place* is the object of the sentence. However, in this example, there is a second verb—*became*, and an adjective—*embarrassed*. A simple way to check that a sentence is correct is to say it aloud and insert a 'dummy' subject (try: he, she, it or they) before the second verb. So the sentence above now becomes:

Example: The lecturer lost his place in the lecture and [he] became embarrassed.

When you write the sentence you can leave out the 'dummy' subject as the sentence is grammatically correct without it.

Now look at the following example. It resembles the last example but it has been changed in a significant way. Find the subject and main verb:

Example: The lecturer who lost his place in the lecture became embarrassed.

One way to identify the main verb is to see if you can strike through other material and still have the sentence keep its basic meaning focused on the main action.

Example:

a)   The lecturer ~~who lost his place in the lecture~~ became embarrassed.

b)   The lecturer who lost his place in the lecture ~~became embarrassed.~~

As with our previous example, the two verbs are *lost* and *became*. However, the writer has changed the meaning. Using the strike-through strategy, version a) makes sense as a complete thought unit but version b) does not, and so the main verb can only be *became*. Who became embarrassed? Answer: The lecturer. So *The lecturer* is the subject.

Exercise 4: Analyse the following sentences. First, find the verbs and then using the strike-through strategy identify the main verb. Then identify the subject, object and indirect object.

a)   The students who had spent all their allowance borrowed more money from their parents.

b)   The students who formed the group each donated two hours of their time to the task.

c)   The students' association, which was located on campus, found the funding for the occasion.

ANSWERS TO EXERCISES IN CHAPTER 2

Exercise 1

a)   The lecturer explains the concept well.

What is the action? Answer: explaining. So *explains* is the verb.
Who or what is doing the action? Answer: The lecturer. So *The lecturer* is the subject.

b)   Students were writing in the library.

What is the action? Answer: writing. So *were writing* is the verb. Who is doing the writing? Answer: Students. So the subject is *Students*.

c)   The assignment will be hard.

Will be is the verb. *The assignment* is the subject.

Exercise 2

a)   The lab demonstrator conducted the experiment.

What is the action? Answer: conducting. So the verb is *conducted*. Who is conducting? Answer: The lab demonstrator. So *The lab demonstrator* is the subject of the verb *to conduct*. What is being conducted? Answer: the experiment. So *the experiment* is the object.

b)   Jane found her diary in the library.

The verb is *found*. The subject is *Jane*. <u>What</u> did Jane find? Answer: *her diary*. So *her diary* is the object of the sentence.

c)   He entered the data regularly.

The verb is *entered*. The subject is *He*. The object is *the data*.

Exercise 3

a)   I'll take the admission fees from the students.

The verb is *take*. The subject is *I*. The direct object is *the admission fees*. Who or what is affected by the action on the direct object? Answer: the students have the fees taken from them. So *the students* are the indirect object.

b)   She is writing her aunt a letter.

The verb is *to write*. The subject is *She*. The direct object is *a letter*. Who or what is affected by the action on the direct object? Answer: her aunt will receive the letter. So the indirect object is *her aunt*.

c)   James sent his admission forms to the student administration office.

The verb is *to send*. The subject is *James*. The direct object is *his admission forms*. Who or what is affected by the action on the direct object? Answer: *the student administration office* is the indirect object.

Note that the indirect object often includes a preposition such as *from* or *to* (see Appendix 1 for more information on prepositions), but this is not always the case, as in the discussion for exercise 3b) above.

Exercise 4

a)   The students ~~who had spent all their allowance~~ borrowed more money from their parents.

The verbs are *spent* and *borrowed*. However, using the strike-through strategy the main verb can only be *borrowed* because without it the sentence does not make sense. Who borrowed? Answer: The students. So the subject is *The students*. <u>What</u> did they borrow? Answer: more money. So *more money* is the object of borrowed. But what about the rest of the sentence: *from their parents*? This phrase is an indirect object. You can test for the indirect object in the same way as for the subject and direct object — ask <u>what</u> was borrowed? The students did not borrow their parents: so *their parents* must be an indirect object.

b)   The students ~~who formed the group~~ each donated two hours of their time to the task.

The verbs are *formed* and *donated* but the main verb is *donated*. The subject is *The students*; the object is *their time*; and the indirect object is *the task*.

c)   The students' association, ~~which was located on campus,~~ found the funding for the occasion.

The verbs are *was located* and *found* but the main verb is *found*. *The students' association* is the subject; *the funding* is the object; and *the occasion* is the indirect object.

In the sections above, we looked at some basic sentence structures to help avoid the common writing faults that are covered in the next section. If you would like to know more about subjects and objects and correct sentence structures, refer to the grammar books in the Student Learning Centre (SLC) resource room. You could also visit an online web site, many of which are interactive, allowing you to test your grammar skills and receive immediate feedback.

CHAPTER 3: COMMON FAULTS IN WRITING

In this section we explore some common writing faults such as:

- leaving out an essential part of a sentence;
- verbs and *-ing* endings;
- confusing the *past*, *present* and *future* tenses of verbs;
- poor use of pronouns *it*, *this*, and *they*; and,
- a lack of agreement between subject and verb.

These kinds of faults tend to occur together and so create considerable confusion. Therefore, this chapter will be particularly useful as a guide for editing a draft of an assignment. The faults are described in order so that each section builds on the previous one.

LEAVING OUT AN ESSENTIAL PART OF A SENTENCE

This fault relates to the two questions we posed previously. Does the sentence make sense as a complete thought unit and does it contain at least a subject and a verb? When either the subject or the verb is missing, the result is an incomplete sentence, or what is known as a *sentence fragment*. Unfortunately, a fragment is not always easy to spot.

Example: In his 1972 study, Clause discovered that earthworms lived in family groups. But found no evidence to suggest hierarchical structures. Not even a parent/off-spring relationship.

Can you see the sentence fragments in the example? If you are unsure, read the sentences aloud to yourself. Do all the sentences include a subject and a verb? Look at the second sentence: *But found no evidence to suggest hierarchical structures*. Taken on its own, it does not make sense because it does not say who did the finding and so the subject is missing. Similarly, the sentence, *Not even a parent/off-spring relationship* would not make sense to a listener without more information. This sentence lacks both a subject and a verb as there is no action and no person to do the action. Therefore, both sentences are fragments.

So how can these sentences be corrected? Obviously, by putting in the parts that are missing — and, as in our corrected versions below, there are various ways to do this which might involve words, punctuation, or both. We provide two possibilities for correcting the sentences, but there may be other options that are equally appropriate.

Option 1: Re-form the passage into one long sentence, with commas to separate the various components (see comma use in Chapter 5):

Example: In his 1972 study, Clause discovered that earthworms lived in family <u>groups, but</u> found no evidence to suggest hierarchical <u>structures, not</u> even a parent/off-spring relationship.

In this example, *Clause* is the subject of the entire passage, and *found* can serve as the verb for both the second and third sections of the sentence.

Option 2: Form the passage into two sentences. The two fragments can be combined by inserting a subject (*he*) and a comma:

Example: In his 1972 study, Clause discovered that earthworms lived in family groups. <u>He found</u> no evidence to suggest hierarchical <u>structures, not</u> even a parent/off-spring relationship.

Each sentence now has a subject and verb, and makes sense as a complete thought unit.

Exercise 1: Now try to find the sentence fragments in the following passage and suggest a correct alternative.

'Crime and Punishment' is Dostoevsky's most famous work. Originally a newspaper serial. Dealing with issues of good and evil in human nature.

VERBS AND THE *-ING* PROBLEM

When identifying sentence fragments, words ending in *-ing* can be a particular problem. On its own, an *-ing* word cannot take the place of a normal verb. Look at the following sentence.

Example: The students studying furiously.

Using the read-aloud strategy mentioned previously, it is clear that something is missing – the sentence is not a complete thought unit. The problem is that *studying* is incorrectly used as a verb; it needs a helper verb:

Example: The students <u>were</u> studying furiously.

Or, we can replace *studying* with its verb form*, study* or *studied*:

Example: The students <u>studied</u> furiously.

Exercise 2: Now correct the following sentences which include *-ing* words acting as verbs:

a)   The lawyers arguing the case for their client.
b)   The regulations favouring the student's rights.
c)   The library being old.

CONFUSING PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE TENSE

Verbs are used to convey *when* something occurs by using the appropriate *tense* (Rose, 2001). *Tense* refers to the time frames of past, present and future. Consider the time frames in the following examples.

Example: The author <u>stated</u> that the results <u>confirmed</u> her first assumptions.

In this example, the *past* tense indicates that something has already happened. In the following example, the *present* tense is used to indicate that something is happening currently.

Example: The author <u>states</u> that the results <u>confirm</u> her first assumptions.

Or, the tenses can be changed to indicate the future.

Example: The author <u>will state</u> that the results <u>will confirm</u> her first assumptions.

If verb tenses are used inconsistently, changing from past to present in the same sentence or paragraph, the message may appear disjointed or even illogical. So as a general guide, if you are writing about the past, use the past tense. If you are writing about the present, use the present tense and do not change from one to the other unless you have good reason to do so (Northedge, 1990).

Exercise 3: Using the information provided above, correct the inconsistencies in the following passage.

In the distant past, men were responsible for gathering food while women were responsible for cooking and childcare. From the women's point of view, this is not a satisfactory situation as they feel that the division of labour is unfair.

Note: Sometimes it is appropriate and acceptable to use the present tense to describe events in the past. The 'historical present' may be adopted to discuss works of literature or art as the ideas they represent are ongoing.

Examples:

Shakespeare <u>uses</u> the storm to reflect the character's inner tension.

Picasso <u>depicts</u> the turmoil he sees around him.

The present tense can also be used for historical events, providing it makes sense in the context in which you are writing.

Example: In 1893, New Zealand <u>leads</u> the rest of the world when it <u>introduces</u> the right for women to vote.

However, in these examples you could also use the past tense — the point is to be consistent.

CONFUSING USE OF PRONOUNS

Pronouns (e.g., *they*, *this, these, their, it*) are used to stand in for nouns (see more about pronouns in Appendix 1). One rule of grammar is that a pronoun should generally refer to the closest previous noun (Rose, 2001).

Example a): The lecturer placed   his   lecture notes on the web site.
                     noun   **pronoun**

In example a) the pronoun *his* closely follows the noun *the lecturer*, to which it refers. However, when this rule is not followed, the meaning often becomes unclear or ambiguous.

Example b): The new lecturer for the course taught with the professor. He placed his lecture notes on the web site.

In example b) it is not clear whether the pronoun *He* at the beginning of the second sentence refers to the lecturer or the professor. It would be more correct to write: 'The lecturer placed his lecture notes on the web site'.

Exercise 4: In the text below underline the pronouns and identify the nouns to which they refer. Using the rule outlined above, write a revised version.

Many factors were involved in setting up earthworm farming ventures. These included consumer demand both in New Zealand and overseas and the competition where it was already established. This meant that they needed to undertake extensive market research to ensure their viability.

LACK OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN A SUBJECT AND ITS VERB

In an earlier section we established that subjects and verbs were essential parts of a sentence. Not only are they necessary, but they also have to *agree*.

A singular noun subject requires a singular verb:

Example a):   The similarity   was   astounding.
                     singular   **singular**
                     noun   **verb**
                     subject

A plural noun subject requires a plural verb:

Example b):	The similarities	were	astounding.
	plural	**plural**	
	noun	**verb**	
	subject		

Examples a) and b) are relatively straightforward. But consider when there is both a singular and plural noun in front of the verb.

Example:	The similarities in	the assignment	were	astounding.
	plural	**singular**	**plural**	
	noun	**noun**	**verb**	

In this example, the verb *were* must agree with the first noun *similarities* because this word is the subject. There is a simple way to check which verb and noun must agree. Try striking through the other parts of the sentence.

Example: The similarities ~~in the assignment~~ were astounding.

In this sentence, the assignment is not the thing that is astounding: it is *the similarities*. *Similarities* and *astounding* belong together so the verb *were* should agree with similarities, and be plural.

Exercise 5: Now try correcting the subject verb agreement in the sentences below.

a)   A library full of books and computers were a huge asset.
b)   A heap of books have to be read for the assignment.
c)   Last semester, the assignments was difficult.

Note: with nouns that refer to a collection of individuals or units, such as *staff, group, or team*, either a single or a plural verb may be appropriate, depending on whether the noun refers to a single unit, or to the individuals within a unit.

Examples:

The **team** <u>was</u> always practising, determined to win the competition. (One unit.)

The **team** <u>were</u> very keen to have a drink after the game. (Individuals within a unit.)

The **staff** <u>works</u> in unison, achieving good productivity. (One unit.)

The **staff** <u>divide</u> the profits equally, ensuring a fair outcome for each member. (Individuals within a unit.)

ANSWERS TO EXERCISES IN CHAPTER 3

Exercise 1

'Crime and Punishment' is Dostoevsky's most famous work. Originally a newspaper serial. Dealing with issues of good and evil in human nature.

The first sentence is correct as it has a subject: '*Crime and Punishment*', and a verb: *is*. However, the second sentence lacks a subject and a verb: there is no doer and no action. Furthermore, the third sentence lacks a subject, and *dealing* cannot stand on its own as a verb (see also the section on Verbs and the *–ing* problem above). Several options to correct this passage are available.

Option 1: Leave the first complete sentence and combine the second and third sentences, adding a subject *the novel*, and replace *dealing* with the verb *deals*.

Example: 'Crime and Punishment' is Dostoevsky's most famous work. Originally a newspaper serial, the novel deals with issues of good and evil in human nature.

Explanation: In this sentence structure, the second and third sentences combine and 'the novel' becomes the subject of the new sentence and 'deals' the verb. A comma between the two sentence fragments makes the first part of the new second sentence descriptive information.

Option 2: Make three separate sentences. Add the subject *it* and the verb *was*, and change the last verb form *dealing* to *deals*.

Example: 'Crime and Punishment' is Dostoevsky's most famous work. It was originally a newspaper serial. It deals with issues of good and evil in human nature.

Explanation: The above is correct, but it is more effective in academic writing to avoid a string of short sentences. It is preferable to combine two of the three sentences as in Option 1 or 3.

Option 3: Combine the first and second sentences with a pair of commas. Provide the subject *the novel* and replace *dealing* with the verb *deals*.

Example: 'Crime and Punishment', Dostoevsky's most famous work, was originally a newspaper serial. The novel deals with issues of good and evil in human nature.

Explanation: In the new first sentence, the section *Dostoevsky's most famous work* is now descriptive information and the main sentence is: *Crime and Punishment was originally a newspaper serial*. Note in this example that the historic present is used for *the novel deals with….*

Exercise 2

Correction of a) and b) relies on the same strategy used in the example 'The students studying furiously'. Correct the sentences by adding a helper verb or using a verb form. Exercise 2 c) can only be corrected using the verb form. See examples below.

Examples:

a)   The lawyers <u>arguing</u> the case for their client.

The lawyers <u>were</u> arguing the case for their client. (helper verb, past tense)
The lawyers <u>are</u> arguing the case for their client. (helper verb, present tense)
The lawyers <u>will</u> argue the case for their client. (helper verb, future tense)
The lawyers <u>argued</u> the case for their client. (verb form, past tense)

b)   The regulations <u>favouring</u> the student's rights.

The regulations <u>are</u> favouring the student's rights. (helper verb, present tense)
The regulations <u>will</u> favour the student's rights. (helper verb, future tense)
The regulations <u>favoured</u> the student's rights. (verb form, past tense)
The regulations <u>favour</u> the student's rights. (verb form, present tense)

c)   The library <u>being</u> old.

The library <u>was</u> old. (verb form, past tense)
The library <u>is</u> old. (verb form, past tense)

Exercise 3

In the distant past, men <u>were</u> responsible for gathering food while women <u>were</u> responsible for cooking and childcare. From the women's point of view, this <u>is</u> not a satisfactory situation as they <u>feel</u> that the division of labour <u>is</u> unfair.

In this passage, the sense of *when* things happened is confused: the first sentence is set in the past, and the second is located in the present. This problem is easy to rectify by using the past tense consistently.

Example: In the distant past, men <u>were</u> responsible for gathering food while women <u>were</u> responsible for cooking and childcare. From the women's point of view, this <u>was</u> not a satisfactory situation as they <u>felt</u> that the division of labour <u>was</u> unfair.

If, after reading this chapter, you have questions about the use of verbs and tenses, please seek further help. For example, see Rose (2001, pp. 3-16) available in the Student Learning Centre Resource Room, or see a Learning Advisor at the Centre.

Exercise 4

Many **factors** were involved in setting up earthworm farming **ventures**. These included consumer **demand** both in **New Zealand** and **overseas** and the **competition** where it was already established. This meant that they needed to undertake extensive **market research** to ensure their viability.

The nouns are identified in **bold** and pronouns are underlined. Note how difficult it is to identify which noun the pronouns *these*, *it*, *this*, *they*, and *their* refer to. In each case, the rule about referring to the nearest previous noun is broken, and thus the passage is hard to follow. A corrected version is included below.

Example: Many factors were involved in setting up earthworm farming ventures. These factors included consumer demand both in New Zealand and overseas, and competition in countries where the industry was already established. Therefore, the management group undertook extensive market research to ensure the viability of the enterprise.

In the amended passage, the pronouns are dealt with in two ways. First, the noun to which the pronoun refers has been inserted: *These factors*. Second, the pronouns have been replaced with nouns, which not only solves the problem of ambiguity, but also results in a more precise and effective writing style.

Exercise 5

a)   A library ~~full of books and computers~~   were   a huge asset.
     singular   **plural**
     noun   **verb**
Using the strike-through strategy, this sentence can be corrected by making the verb singular:
Example: A library full of books and computers was a huge asset.

b)   A pile   ~~of books~~   have to be read   ~~for the assignment~~.
       singular   **plural**
       noun   **verb**
This sentence can be corrected by making the verb singular:
Example: A pile of books has to be read for the assignment.

c)   ~~Last semester~~,   the assignments   was difficult.
                          plural noun   **singular verb**
Corrected, this sentence becomes:
Example: Last semester, the assignments were difficult.

CHAPTER 4: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE

In the previous chapters we looked at basic paragraph and sentence structure. However, writing can also be improved in a number of other ways. The following strategies may help you to achieve a clear, unified, and balanced writing style.

USE THE *ACTIVE* FORM: *WHO* IS DOING *WHAT*

Verbs can be used either *actively* or *passively*. Compare the following sentences.

Example a): The lecturer read the student's essay.

Example b): The student's essay was read by the lecturer.

Sentence a) uses the active form of the verb *to read*. The sentence is clear and direct. Sentence b) uses a more passive form and is less clear and rather clumsy.

Therefore, as a general rule you should use the active form because it quickly tells your reader *who* the main character of your sentence is, and *what* they are doing.

Exercise 1: Now look at the following sentences and identify the active and passive forms.

a)   The lecturer spoke to the students about their assignments.
b)   Students were spoken to about their assignments by the lecturer.
c)   The University will fine students who flout skateboarding restrictions.
d)   Students who flout skateboarding restrictions will be fined by the University.

Sentences a) and c) are the active forms. If you are unsure, look at which of the sentences respond most directly to the question, Who does the action? In sentences a) and c) the answer is clear. It is *The lecturer* and *The University*. *Spoke* and *will fine* are active verb forms. In sentences b) and d) it is less clear who is doing the action because this information is at the end of the sentence.

Look also at what happens to the subject and object of the sentences in the different forms.

a)   The lecturer   spoke to   the students   about their assignments.
       subject   **active**   **object**
                        verb

b)   Students   were spoken to   about their assignments   [by the lecturer].
       subject   **passive verb**

c) The University   will fine   students   who flout skateboarding restrictions.
    subject   **active**   **object**
                      verb

d) Students who flout skateboarding restrictions   will be fined [by the University].
    subject   **passive verb**

In these examples the object of the active sentence becomes the subject in the passive version. Moreover, the 'doer' of the action (the lecturer or the University) becomes optional information in the passive forms.

Note, however, that there is a place for passive forms, especially when writing in science subjects. Your lecturer or tutor will be able to advise you on the style required in your subject. Furthermore, it is not always necessary or indeed appropriate to state the 'doer' of an action, especially when the action is the main piece of important information (e.g., *The University of Otago was established in 1869*).

PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Where possible, add balance to your writing by constructing sentences in parallel grammatical structures. In a parallel structure, the order of the words in one part of the sentence is mirrored in other parts of the sentence. This technique produces a more rhythmic effect and a smoother flow. In Table 3, the non-parallel structures in the left hand column are underlined. They are replaced with parallel structures in the right hand column.

Table 3: Examples of parallel and non-parallel forms *within* a sentence

Non-parallel	**Parallel**
Formerly, science was taught <u>using written textbooks</u>, <u>while</u> now the laboratory method is employed.	Formerly, science was taught by the textbook method; now it is taught by the laboratory method.
In spring, <u>and in</u> summer, <u>or in</u> winter...	In spring, summer or winter ... In spring, in summer, or in winter

(Adapted from Strunk & White, 2000, p. 26)

The non-parallel structures in the left hand column create an imbalance that interrupts the flow of the sentences and result in a 'jerky' effect. The parallel structures on the right produce a smoother effect through symmetry and balance.

Rules about parallel construction also apply across sentences (see Table 4).

Table 4: Examples of parallel and non-parallel forms *across* sentences

Non-parallel	Parallel
The lecturer advised the new students to use effective study methods <u>and especially that they should be good at</u> managing their time. On the other hand, <u>they were told by their friends</u> to do as little study as possible.	The lecturer <u>advised the students</u> to use effective study methods and good time management strategies. On the other hand, <u>their friends told them</u> to do as little study as possible.

In the example in the left hand column of Table 4, neither the individual sentences, nor the two sentences together, share a similar word order pattern, whereas in the right hand column, both the individual sentences, and the two together, follow a similar pattern, thus balancing the entire passage.

COHESION

Your ideas will be easier to follow if you begin a sentence (or paragraph) with information that is more general or that is already known to your reader before introducing new information. Look at the following examples (source: Williams, 1997, pp. 120-121).

Example a): The number of dead in the Civil War exceeded all other wars in American history. A reason for the lingering animosity between the North and South today is the memory of this terrible carnage.

In example a) the focus of the two sentences is vague and the relationship between one statement and the next is not immediately evident. The revised version in example b) shows an improved focus and relationship.

Example b): Of all the wars in American history, none has exceeded the Civil War in the number of dead. The memory of this terrible carnage is one reason for the animosity between North and South today.

The first sentence now starts with more general information and moves towards the more specific detail, and the second sentence starts with an event (*carnage*) and then moves towards its consequence (*animosity*). Note that the second sentence also follows chronological order, from the most distant action or event to the consequent action or event.

'LESS IS MORE'

Good academic writing is concise (Strunk & White, 2000, p. 23). Unnecessary words or phrases can irritate a reader and obscure meaning. Once you have a main draft, edit your writing carefully for unnecessary words. Such editing also helps to make the most of the word count: if you have reached the word limit of your assignment but have more to say, look for strings of words that you can replace with a single word, or eliminate altogether.

In Table 5, expressions in the left hand column use more words than necessary. The right hand column provides a more concise option.

Table 5: Examples of concise language

Less concise option	More concise option
…carried out a study into	…studied
…was indicative of	…indicated
…had an influence on	…influenced
…gave consideration to	…considered
…was of benefit to	…benefited
…in the implementation of	…in implementing
…despite the fact that	…despite
…the addition of	…adding

ACADEMIC TONE

University writing is relatively formal so avoid contractions (e.g., weren't), clichés (e.g., 'cool'), colloquialisms (e.g., 'she'll be right') and slang expressions (e.g., OK). When you edit your work look for such expressions (see the left hand column in Table 6 below) and replace them with a more formal option.

Table 6: Inappropriate expressions and formal options

Inappropriate expressions	Formal option
The argument put forward was a bit over the top.	The argument put forward was excessive.
These findings need to be taken with a pinch of salt.	These findings need to be read with some scepticism.
This wouldn't succeed in bringing the management team up to scratch.	This would not succeed in bringing the management team up to a suitable standard.
The findings of the study were truly awesome.	The findings of the study were groundbreaking.
The decision the management reached was a whitewash of the situation.	The decision the management reached deliberately concealed the situation.
The bottom line was that changes must occur.	The outcome was that changes must occur.
The team couldn't decide whether the policy would or wouldn't do the trick.	The team could not decide whether the policy would have the desired effect.
This brought both sides to a level playing field.	This brought both sides to positions of equal power.

CHAPTER 5: PUNCTUATION

Punctuation helps communicate ideas clearly and concisely. In this section, we look at some general rules that govern the use of the *comma*, *apostrophe*, *semi-colon*, and *colon*. Then, we look at some common problems that occur when punctuation is faulty.

THE COMMA

Commas may be necessary to avoid ambiguity — they can provide signals to the reader about intended meaning. Consider the difference a comma makes in the following sentence.

Example a): Whenever I sit down to study the television distracts me.

Example b): Whenever I sit down to study, the television distracts me.

In example a) the television could be the object of the verb *study* but in example b) the insertion of a comma after *study* makes the meaning clear.

Another ambiguity exists in the next example.

Example: The books advised the students were on the desk.

Commas can be inserted after *The books* and *the students* to surround extra descriptive information and make meaning clear:

Example: The books, advised the students, were on the desk.

In addition to helping to avoid ambiguity, commas serve other important purposes. General guidelines are set out in Table 7 below.

Table 7: General guidelines for the use of the comma (not a definitive list)

Role	Example
After an introductory word or words	However, the first answer was the correct one.
	When exams were finally over, the students celebrated.
Before co-ordinating conjunctions (*and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, *yet*) which join two sentences.	The student studied hard for both the written exam and the practical tests, but the lecturer who marked the exam was tough.
Exception: when sentences are short.	The student had studied hard but the lecturer was tough.

To off-set information not strictly required for meaning.	The introduction to the essay, <u>although rather long</u>, provided a good overview of the topic. The conclusion, <u>on the other hand</u>, was weak.
To separate items in a list or series.	The session covered the content of the course, the internal assessment procedures, and the examination process.
To ensure meaning is clear; to avoid ambiguity.	Wherever the sea looks green, sharks will be found.
To separate two parts of a sentence where the second part contrasts with or intensifies the statement in the first part.	Brown's study was weak, not at all conclusive. Her essay was good, even brilliant.
Before a quotation (note: a colon can also be used to introduce a quotation)	Professor Jones said, "Your assignment should be your first priority." According to the referee, "Otago thrashed the opposition."
With adjectives: use a comma between adjectives only if the comma can be replaced with *and*.	Susan is a hardworking, high-achieving student. (*and* could be inserted between *hardworking* and *high-achieving*.) Professor Johnson always wears a bright yellow cotton jacket. (No commas are required as it would be nonsense to write *bright and yellow and cotton jacket*.)

<u>When is the use of a comma incorrect</u>?

There are two situations when a comma is often used incorrectly.

1. It is incorrect to use a comma to off-set words in a sentence that qualify or provide essential meaning to the main subject.

Example a): The book <u>that I borrowed from you</u> is excellent.

Example b): The book, that I borrowed from you, is excellent.

In example a) the phrase *that I borrowed from you* qualifies the meaning of the subject, *The book*, and so it would be incorrect to off-set it with commas (as in example b).

Exercise 1: Look at the following examples. Which one is correct? See the end of the chapter for the answer.

a)   The boy in the blue car is my friend.
b)   The boy, in the blue car, is my friend.

2.   It is incorrect to use commas to separate two or more statements that on their own form a grammatically complete sentence. Such as error is called a *comma splice*. Consider the following example.

Example: The study was incomplete, the results were meaningless.

In this example, the statements *the study was incomplete* and *the results were meaningless* constitute grammatically complete sentences — each has a subject and a verb.

the study	was	incomplete.
the results	were	meaningless.
subject	**verb**	

A comma splice can be corrected in several ways, as set out in Table 8 below.

Table 8: To correct a comma splice

Option	Revised version
Replace the comma with a semi-colon (see semi-colons below)	The study was incomplete; the results were meaningless.
Form two sentences.	The study was incomplete. The results were meaningless.
Join the two statements with a co-ordinating conjunction (e.g., *and, so, or, for, nor, but, yet*)	The study was incomplete so the results were meaningless.
Omit the verb in the second half of the sentence	The study was incomplete, therefore the results meaningless.

Finally, a word of caution: commas sprinkled incorrectly, inappropriately, or too frequently throughout your text will interrupt its flow and confuse your reader. If in doubt, leave out.

Exercise 2: Using the information above, place commas appropriately in the following sentences:

1.   In trying to help the students the lecturer offered extra tuition.
2.   She passed the assignment on her third attempt but the lecturer was still unable to admit her to the course.
3.   His room which is always untidy is the only place he can study.
4.   The meeting was long boring of little relevance and the food was awful.
5.   To Brown Johnson's study missed the main point.
6.   The movie in spite of my fears was the best I have seen this year.
7.   The play that Carlos directed won several awards at the festival.
8.   At the windows she placed unattractive boring white net curtains.
9.   The instructions were complex not at all easy to understand.
10.   Brown added "The results are inconclusive."

SEMI-COLON [;]

The semi-colon is another tool to help you communicate your ideas clearly. In general, semi-colons have three main uses.

1.   A semi-colon can replace a full-stop to join two separate sentences, provided the sentences are closely linked in meaning.

Example a): The text in the book was dense and difficult to read; the tutor suggested another text that provided an easier introduction to the topic.

Example b): The text in the book was dense and difficult to read; the tutor told the class not to be late for lectures.

In example a) the meaning in the first sentence relates closely to that of the second sentence. The first sentence indicates a problem, and the second sentence provides a solution to that problem. In this example the use of a semi-colon is correct.

In example b), unless there was some logical link between the advice from the tutor to the difficulties in reading the book, the use of the semi-colon is inappropriate.

Linking two related sentences with a semi-colon instead of a full-stop adds variety to your writing.

Examples: The subject is hard to learn; however, the course is excellent.

The complexities of the case were immense; only a lawyer could understand it.

2.   A semi-colon can be used to separate items in a list that already includes commas.

Example: Our group consisted of Susan, a waitress; John, a musician; Joe, a doctor; and Cindy, Joe's wife.

3.   A semi-colon can help your reader make sense of a complex list.

Example: The recipe required three cups of flour; two cups of skim milk; a cup-and-a-half of baking cocoa or chocolate; three teaspoons of baking powder; and a spoonful of baking soda.

COLON [:]

Like the semi-colon, the colon is also a useful punctuation mark. It serves a number of functions that help to guide the reader (see Table 9).

Table 9: Common uses of the colon

Common uses	Examples
To introduce a list or summary	Here is your shopping list: a packet of nuts, two pumpkins, and a kilogram of tomatoes.
To introduce a quotation (note: a comma can also be used to introduce a quotation)	Following the recent policy shake-up, Gordon challenged his opponents: "You must look to your principles and fight for justice."
To indicate a particular relationship between two statements — explaining or adding information	Morgan consistently undermined the study: the book was a disaster. He believed all New Zealanders would support his position: that, whichever party had power, the issues must be resolved.

Exercise 3: How could you improve the following sentences with a colon or semi-colon?

1.   The field trip took the group into unknown areas, they were lucky to survive.

2.   The director had three words of advice for the cast "learn your lines."

3.   The committee consisted of Barbara Jones Christchurch Gordon Smith Auckland and Roger Ingles Invercargill.

4.   Only one paper, the *Balclutha Times*, now carries the court news, even there, many of the cases are omitted.

5.   The Fielding version was much more convincing especially in one area, population studies.

APOSTROPHE [']

The apostrophe has two main purposes: to indicate the possessive form of a noun, where 'ownership' is involved (e.g., boys' bicycle), and to replace omitted letters in contracted words or phrases. The rules for possessive forms are explained below, followed by the rules for contracted forms.

1.   <u>Possessive forms</u>

Apostrophes are used to show ownership: that is, where one noun—person, place, concept, or thing—*has ownership of* another noun. (For more information on nouns see Appendix I).

Example: The student's book was red.

The student owns the book.

For an apostrophe to be used, ownership must be involved.

Example: The students booked the study room.

In this example, there is no apostrophe in *students* because the students *booked* the study room: they do not *own* 'booked the study room'.

The rules for possessive nouns and pronouns are set out below.

a)   Where to place the apostrophe—before or after *s*?

General rule: In a singular noun (i.e. there is only one owner), place the apostrophe before *s.*

Example: The lecturer's car was involved in an accident. (Who owns the car? The lecturer.)

General rule: In a plural noun (i.e., there is more than one owner), place the apostrophe after *s*.

Example: The lecturers' car was involved in an accident. (Who owns the car? The lecturers.)

General rule: In the possessive form of a singular or plural noun that normally ends in *s* (e.g., series, dress, Jones) place the apostrophe after *s*.

Example: The series' ratings indicate a high level of popularity with viewers. (Who owns the ratings? The series.)

When to include another *s* (e.g., Jones'**s**)? No hard and fast rule applies here but, as a general guideline, if the final *-es* is pronounced, another *s* can be placed after the apostrophe.

Example: The actress's house is on the corner.

Conversely, if the final *-es* is **not** pronounced, do not add another *s*.

Example: The Jeffries' house is on the corner.

General rule: In the possessive form of a plural noun that does not end in *s* (e.g. women, children) place the apostrophe after the base word, before *s*.

Examples:

The women's room (Who owns the room? The women.)

The children's blocks (Who owns the blocks? The children.)

General rule: As already mentioned at the beginning of this section, when a noun does not involve 'ownership' but is merely a plural, **do not** use an apostrophe.

Examples:

The groceries are in the cupboard. The pizzas will be delivered soon.

c)   The possessive pronoun

A possessive pronoun (*his*, *hers*, *theirs, yours*, *ours, its*) already indicates ownership and does not have an apostrophe.

Examples:

Ours is the tidiest flat in the block. Hers is always untidy. Whose place is it anyway?

d)   Possessive compounds

The apostrophes are determined by whether ownership is joint or individual.

Examples:

Susan and John's new car is in the car park. (There is one car.)

Greg's and Joan's new cars are in the car park. (They each have a car.)

Wentworth and Lawson's study found that .... (There was one study.)

Wentworth's and Lawson's studies found that .... (They each had a study.)

2.   Contracted forms

The apostrophe is used to indicate where part of a word or phrase has been omitted.

a)   Contracted words or phrases

Examples:

don't (do not); wouldn't (would not); you're (you are); who's (who is)

The cheque's in the mail. (The cheque is in the mail.)

b)   Contracted common expressions

Examples:

In the 'eighties, university fees were much lower than at present. (The 1980s.)

Students came to 'varsity assured of good financial support. (University.)

c)   The special case of its/it's

The distinction between *its* and *it's* requires special attention because these words are so often misused. An apostrophe is used only in the contracted form of *it is*:

Examples:

It's terribly hot. (It is terribly hot.)

It's a good flat but it's too expensive. (It is a good flat but it is too expensive.)

However, *its* without an apostrophe is a possessive pronoun and, as explained above, possessive pronouns (*ours*, *yours*, *hers*, etc.) do not have an apostrophe.

Examples: The department lost its funding after the group presented its findings.
Exercise 4: Correct the apostrophe errors in the following sentences:

1.   The dentists' are all busy — its terrible when youve got toothache.

2.   Tomato's are on sale today, and your all recommended to buy several bags'.

3.   Both star's children are appearing at the premiere.

4.   All the lecturers' agreed on the Universitys' policy.

5.   Dunedins long winters' help Scott and Ben's allergies to clear up.

6.   Winters a great time to order pizza's, especially ones' with anchovie's.

ANSWERS TO EXERCISES IN CHAPTER 5

Exercise 1

a)   The boy in the blue car is my friend.
b)   The boy, in the blue car, is my friend.

The correct version is a) because the phrase 'in the blue car' is necessary to identify the subject, 'The boy', and so it should not be off-set with commas.

Exercise 2

Commas are most appropriately placed as follows:

1.   In trying to help the students, the lecturer offered extra tuition.
2.   She passed the assignment on her third attempt, but the lecturer was still unable to admit her to the course.
3.   His room, which is always untidy, is the only place he can study.
4.   The meeting was long, boring, of little relevance, and the food was awful.
5.   To Brown, Johnson's study missed the main point.
6.   The movie, in spite of my fears, was the best I have seen this year.
7.   The play that Carlos directed won several awards at the festival.
8.   At the windows, she placed unattractive, boring white net curtains.
9.   The instructions were complex, not at all easy to understand.
10.   Brown added, "The results are inconclusive."

Can you relate the location of the comma to the appropriate rule?

Exercise 3

Colons and semi-colons are most appropriately placed as follows:

1.   The field trip took the group into unknown areas; they were lucky to survive.
2.   The director had three words of advice for the cast: "Learn your lines."
3.   The committee consisted of Barbara Jones, Christchurch; Gordon Smith, Auckland; and Roger Ingles, Invercargill.
4.   Only one paper, the *Balclutha Times*, now carries the court news; even there, many of the cases are omitted.
5.   The Fielding version was much more convincing, especially in one area: population studies.

Exercise 4

Apostrophes are most appropriately placed as follows:

1.   The dentists are all busy — it's terrible when you've got toothache.
2.   Tomatoes are on sale today, and you're all recommended to buy several bags.
3.   Both stars' children are appearing at the premiere.
4.   All the lecturers agreed on the University's policy.
5.   Dunedin's long winters help Scott's and Ben's allergies to clear up.
6.   Winter's a great time to order pizzas, especially ones with anchovies.

EDITING EXERCISE

A friend has asked you to proof read an essay. The paragraph below includes a number of mistakes that have been referred to in different sections of the Guide. Try to identify the types of errors and then revise the paragraph.

Example a): An association of universities were set up to look at courses offered throughout the country. Their purpose being to prevent overlap and waste of resources. They will require input from lecturers, administrators and students. And business and industry. In other words, good communication between stakeholders. The costs of the project has to be kept to a minimum, universities are already under-funded. Eventually students will benefit. Although not in the near future.

Example b) shows one of a number of ways to improve the text. The amendments are annotated below.

Example b): An association of universities <u>was</u>[1] set up to look at courses offered throughout the country,[2] <u>its</u>[3] purpose being to prevent overlap and waste of resources. <u>The association</u>[4] will require input from lecturers, administrators and students<u>, and also from</u>[5] business and industry. In other words, <u>the aim is</u>[6] for good communication between stakeholders. The costs of the project <u>have</u>[7] to be kept to a minimum <u>as</u>[8] universities are already under-funded. <u>Eventually,</u>[9] students will benef<u>it, although</u>[10] not in the near future.

<u>Key to corrections</u>

[1] Subject-verb agreement: *association* is singular, therefore requires the singular verb *was*.

[2] A comma replaces the full-stop to correct a sentence fragment.

[3] Noun-pronoun agreement: *association* is singular, therefore requires the singular pronoun *its*.

[4] Re-stating the subject of the sentence makes it clear to whom the pronoun *they* refers.

[5] A sentence fragment has been connected to the previous sentence by a comma and the phrase, *and also*.

[6] A sentence fragment has been corrected by adding a subject and verb.

[7] Subject-verb agreement: *costs* is plural, therefore requires the plural verb *have*.

[8] A comma splice has been corrected by inserting the conjunction *as*. Other options: a full stop after *minimum*, with *universities* beginning a new sentence; or a semi-colon after *minimum*.

[9] A comma should follow introductory words or phrases.

[10] A sentence fragment has been connected to the previous sentence by a comma.

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APPENDIX 1: PARTS OF SPEECH

Parts of speech are the structures that make language work. This appendix draws particularly on Rose (2001, pp. 60-72) and Dolan (1996, pp. 7-10). However, there are many other sources that provide similar information. The following common parts of speech are ones that you should know in order to write well.

VERBS are 'doing' words and usually imply action. They are often used to describe the subject of a sentence. In the following examples, verbs are underlined and subjects are *italicized*):

Examples: *Heidegger* was a German philosopher.

Sometimes, *physics* is called a pure science.

I find chemistry difficult.

Alice played the piano particularly well in the concert.

We have been trying to finish the experiment.

NOUNS are words used for people, places and things (nouns are underlined):

Examples: Jane found several good sources in the library.

Photosynthesis is a process that uses light to build up complex compounds in plants.

PRONOUNS are often used in place of nouns to identify people or things that have just been mentioned in the text. Pronouns include *personal* pronouns (*I/me*, *you*, *he/him/she/her/it*, *we/us*, *you*, *they/them/their*). In the following, personal pronouns are used instead of names:

Examples: We played ball with them.

I wished him well as he left the department.

In the following, demonstrative pronouns (*this*, *these*, *that*, *those*) are used:

Examples: These are good apples.

That was a happy time.

ADJECTIVES are used to qualify or describe the particular nature or essential aspect of a noun. An adjective can often be identified by asking: *what* is the noun (see Table 10 below).

Table 10: Using adjectives in a sentence

Sentence	Noun	Adjective
The soup was cold.	soup	cold
The damaged muscles healed quickly.	muscles	damaged
They were noisy.	They	noisy
The quiet student sat unnoticed in the lab.	student	quiet
The city is very busy.	city	busy (very is an adverb)

Note the last example in Table 10. The adjective 'busy' is intensified by an adverb ('very'). Adjectives can be *marked* or *emphasised* by an adverb (e.g., *very*, *more*, *less*).

ADVERBS or adverbial groups of words modify or provide additional information about a verb, an adjective, or another adverb (Dolan, 1999, p. 13; Rose, 2001). Commonly, adverbs are used in three situations, as outlined below (adverbs are underlined):

i)   to describe a *verb*:

Example: The clothes dried rapidly in the warm wind.

How, in terms of time, did the clothes dry? They dried rapidly.

Example: The lecturer spoke critically about the report.

How did the lecturer speak? Critically.

Example: Students were lying sleepily in the sun.

How were the students lying? Sleepily.

ii)   to describe or qualify a *noun* or *adjective*:

Example: The people were very quiet.

Very describes the adjective quiet.

iii)   with other *adverbs*:

Example: They read very quietly in the library.

The adverb *very* modifies the adverb *quietly*.

CONJUNCTIONS are *joining* words. They are used to link one part of a sentence with another. Conjunctions are words such as *and*, *but*, *or*, *although*, *if*.

Examples: The clothes dried rapidly <u>because</u> the wind was blowing.

John went to the library <u>while</u> the others ate their lunch.

You can enrol in workshops at the Student Learning Centre by email <u>and</u> on the website, <u>or</u> you can visit us in the library building.

PREPOSITIONS are words such as *at*, *near*, *during*, *on*, *without*, *for*, *under*, *from*, *in*, *through*. They have several uses, but most often they are used before a noun or pronoun to connect it to another phrase in the sentence, or to position one part of a sentence in relationship to another.

Examples: <u>During</u> semester time, my parents look after my dog.

I like to go for a run <u>through</u> the Botanical Gardens <u>near</u> the Leith.

SUMMARY

Common parts of speech and some examples are summarised in Table 11.

Table 11: A summary of common parts of speech

Part	Forms
Nouns	Concrete: *people*, *places*, *things*, *brand names*.
	Abstract: *feelings*, *ideas*, *concepts*.
Pronouns	Used instead of nouns: e.g., *he*, *it*, *they*. In a paragraph, a pronoun should relate to the closest previous noun.
Adjectives	Describe nouns, e.g., *windy*, *wet*, *rugged*.
Verbs	Active doing words, e.g., *go* (*gone*), *be* (*been*), *have* (*had*), *write* (*wrote*), *learn* (*learned*).
Adverbs	Describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, e.g., *very*, *quite*. Often end in –*ly* e.g., *happily*, *sadly*, *loudly*.
Conjunctions	Connect two or more words or phrases, e.g., *and*, *but*, *so*, *because*.
Prepositions	Link different parts of the sentence together and often show relation, e.g., *on*, *during*, *at*, *near*.

(Adapted from Rose, 2001, p. 71)