SPLASH Introduction to

Grammar

At university, you need to invest a little more time on your written work. You do not use the same language as you would in your emails, texts, and chat room conversations. Pay attention to detail; avoid making common grammar mistakes that can look unprofessional, give a poor impression of your ability, and make it difficult to read. It could make a difference to your grades. Here are some of the most common mistakes that students make. Look at the examples given in each case.

1. **Articles (a, an or the)**

Most singular nouns will need an article in front of them.

We use ‘a/an’ for something which is not specific or has been mentioned previously (a car, an accident) and ‘the’ for a specific or unique item or one which has been mentioned before (the car I saw earlier).

✗ This essay will focus on key issue for transport industry; that of Britain’s ever expanding population.

* This essay will focus on a key issue for the transport

industry; that of Britain’s ever expanding population.

1. **Subject and verb agreement**

✗ Recently, the number of websites offering essays for sale have increased dramatically

* Recently, the number of websites offering essays for sale has increased dramatically.

The number is the subject of this sentence; it is singular (one thing or ‘it’), therefore, it takes the verb ‘has’. We say it has or they have, it does or they do etc.

1. **Singular (one) and plural (more than one)**

Nouns are either grammatically singular or grammatically plural. Plural nouns usually have an ‘s’, ‘es’ or ‘ies’ to indicate that you are writing about more than one thing.

✗ There are many country which have not yet signed up to the Kyoto agreement.

* There are many countries which have not yet signed up to the Kyoto agreement.
1. **Spelling**

Always spell-check your work; many spelling errors can be picked up and corrected via the spell-check function on your computer. There are many words that are commonly confused with others which may look or sound similar. Unfortunately, your spell-checker will not know which word you want in these cases. If in doubt, use a dictionary, as well as read your work backwards.

**Commonly confused words**

Using then instead of than

**✗** The accounting department had more problems then the previous year.

* The accounting department had more problems than the previous year.

**Confusing affect (verb) with effect (noun)**

* Climate change will affect some regions more than others.

(verb – what will happen)

* The effect of climate change will be worse in some regions

than in others. (noun – the subject of this sentence)

**Using their and there incorrectly**

* Students should read their essay feedback carefully.

(belonging to)

* There are some useful lessons to be learnt from reading

feedback.

**It’s or its?**

* It’s not easy to spot your own mistakes. (it is)
* It’s been a long time since I learned English grammar. (it has)
* That dog you found – have you spoken to its owner yet?

(belonging to)

**Imply or infer? (verbs)**

* Imply means to convey meaning subtly or indirectly.
* Infer means to reach a conclusion from an experience or

looking at evidence in a text.

1. **Commas**

The most frequently misused type of punctuation is the comma. Many students use a comma where a full stop should be.

Compare the following:

Discrimination is the treatment of people on the basis of their group classification rather than their individual characteristics,

it is usually practiced by a group in power in order to preserve its privileges. (There are 2 sentences here not 1)

* Discrimination is the treatment of people on the basis

of their group classification rather than their individual characteristics. It is usually practiced by a group in power in order to preserve its privileges.

1. **Capital letters**

Proper nouns e.g., specific people (Fearne Cotton), places (Guildford) or objects such as planets, rivers (Mercury, The River Thames) must begin with capital letters.

**Additional Grammar support**

If English is not your first language, or you find it challenging to study at Higher Education in English please visit the English Language Support Programme.



Need more advice on how to improve the quality of your written work?

Go to the SPLASH website for more information: [**www.surrey.ac.uk/splash**](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/splash)

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