

# CHAPTER 15

## Agreement

**Agreement** helps readers understand the relations between elements in a sentence. Subjects and verbs agree in number and person:

More Japanese Americans live in Hawaii and California than elsewhere.      subject      verb

Daniel Inouye was the first Japanese American in Congress.  
subject      verb

Pronouns and their **antecedents**—the words they refer to—agree in person, number, and gender:

Inouye makes his home in Hawaii.  
antecedent      pronoun

Hawaiians value his work for them.  
antecedent      pronoun

### 15a Make subjects and verbs agree in number.

Most subject-verb agreement problems arise when endings are omitted from subjects or verbs or when the relation between sentence parts is uncertain.

**Note** A grammar and style checker will catch many simple errors in subject-verb agreement, such as *Addie and John is late*, and some more complicated errors, such as *Is Margaret and Tom going with us?* (should be *are* in both cases). But a checker failed to flag *The old group has gone their separate ways* (should be *have*) and offered a wrong correction for *The old group have gone their separate ways*, which is already correct.

#### 1 The -s and -es endings work differently for nouns and verbs.

An *-s* or *-es* ending does opposite things to nouns and verbs: it usually makes a noun *plural*, but it always makes a present-tense verb *singular*. Thus a singular noun as subject will not end in *-s*, but its verb will. A plural noun as subject will end in *-s*, but its verb will not. **Between them, subject and verb use only one -s ending.**

Singular	Plural
The boy plays.	The boys play.
The bird soars.	The birds soar.

The only exceptions to these rules involve the nouns that form irregular plurals, such as *child/children*, *woman/women*. The irregular plural still requires a plural verb: *The children play*.

If your first language or dialect is not standard American English, subject-verb agreement may be problematic, especially for these reasons:

- Some English dialects follow different rules for subject-verb agreement, such as omitting the *-s* ending for singular verbs or using the *-s* ending for plural verbs.

Nonstandard	The voter resist change.
Standard	The voter resists change.
Standard	The voters resist change.

The verb *be* changes spelling for singular and plural in both present and past tenses. (See also p. 276.)

Nonstandard Taxes is high. They was raised just last year.  
 Standard Taxes are high. They were raised just last year.

*Have* also has a distinctive *-s* form, *has*:

Nonstandard The new tax have little chance of passing.  
 Standard The new tax has little chance of passing.

v **Some other languages change all verb phrases to match their subjects**, but in English only the helping verbs *be*, *have*, and *do* change for different subjects. The modal helping verbs—*can*, *may*, *should*, *will*, and others—do not change:

Nonstandard The tax mays pass next year.  
 Standard The tax may pass next year.

The main verb in a verb phrase also does not change for different subjects:

Nonstandard The tax may passes next year.  
 Standard The tax may pass next year.

## 2 **Subject and verb should agree even when other words come between them.**

When the subject and verb are interrupted by other words, make sure the verb agrees with the subject:

A catalog of courses and requirements often baffles [not baffle] students.

The requirements stated in the catalog are [not is] unclear.

**Note** Phrases beginning with *as well as*, *together with*, *along with*, and *in addition to* do not change the number of the subject:

The president, as well as the deans, has [not have] agreed to revise the catalog.

If you really mean *and* in such a sentence, use it. Then the subject is compound, and the verb should be plural: *The president and the deans have agreed to revise the catalog.*

## 3 **Subjects joined by *and* usually take plural verbs.**

Two or more subjects joined by *and* usually take a plural verb, whether one or all of the subjects are singular:

Frost and Roethke were contemporaries.

Frost, Roethke, Stevens, and Pound are among the great American poets.

**Exceptions** When the parts of the subject form a single idea or refer to a single person or thing, they take a singular verb:

Avocado and bean sprouts is a California sandwich.

When a compound subject is preceded by the adjective *each* or *every*, the verb is usually singular:

Each man, woman, and child has a right to be heard.

But a compound subject *followed* by *each* takes a plural verb:

The man and the woman each have different problems.

## 4 **When parts of a subject are joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb agrees with the nearer part.**

When all parts of a subject joined by *or* or *nor* are singular, the verb is singular; when all parts are plural, the verb is plural.

Either the painter or the carpenter knows the cost.

The cabinets or the bookcases are too costly.

When one part of the subject is singular and the other plural, avoid awkwardness by placing the plural part closer to the verb so that the verb is plural:

Awkward    Neither the owners nor the contractor agrees.

Revised    Neither the contractor nor the owners agree.

When the subject consists of nouns and pronouns of different person requiring different verb forms, the verb agrees with the nearer part of the subject. Reword if this construction is awkward:

Awkward    Either Juarez or I am responsible.

Revised    Either Juarez is responsible, or I am.

## 5 With an indefinite pronoun, use a singular or plural verb as appropriate.

An **indefinite pronoun** is one that does not refer to a specific person or thing. Most indefinite pronouns take a singular verb, but some take a plural verb and some take a singular *or* a plural verb.

The singular indefinite pronouns refer to a single unspecified person or thing, and they take a singular verb:

Something smells.            Neither is right.

The plural indefinite pronouns refer to more than one unspecified thing, and they take a plural verb:

Both are correct.            Several were invited.

The other indefinite pronouns take a singular or a plural verb depending on whether the word they refer to is singular or plural. The word may be stated in the sentence:

All of the money is reserved for emergencies.

All of the funds are reserved for emergencies.

The word referred to by the pronoun may also be implied:

All are planning to attend. [*All* implies “all the people.”]

All is lost. [*All* implies “everything.”]

See page 330 for the distinction between *few* (“not many”) and *a few* (“some”).

## 6 Collective nouns take singular or plural verbs depending on meaning.

A **collective noun** has singular form but names a group of individuals or things—for example, *army*, *audience*, *committee*, *crowd*, *family*, *group*, *team*. As a subject, a collective noun may take a singular or plural verb, depending on the context. When the group acts as one unit, use a singular verb:

The group agrees that action is necessary.

But when considering the group’s members as individuals who act separately, use the plural form of the verb:

The old group have gone their separate ways.

The collective noun *number* may be singular or plural. Preceded by *a*, it is plural; preceded by *the*, it is singular.

A number of people are in debt.

The number of people in debt is very large.

In English some noncount nouns (nouns that don't form plurals) are collective nouns because they name groups: for instance, *furniture, clothing, mail*. These noncount nouns usually take singular verbs: *Mail arrives daily*. But some of these nouns take plural verbs, including *clergy, military, people, police*, and any collective noun that comes from an adjective, such as *the poor, the rich, the young, the elderly*. If you mean one representative of the group, use a singular noun such as *police officer* or *poor person*.

### 7 The verb agrees with the subject even when the normal word order is inverted.

Inverted subject-verb order occurs mainly in questions and in constructions beginning with *there* or *it* and a form of *be*:

Is voting a right or a privilege?

Are a right and a privilege the same thing?

There are differences between them.

In constructions beginning with *there*, you may use *is* before a compound subject when the first element in the subject is singular:

There is much work to do and little time to do it.

Word order may sometimes be inverted for emphasis. The verb still agrees with its subject:

From the mountains comes an eerie, shimmering light.

### 8 A linking verb agrees with its subject, not the subject complement.

A linking verb such as *is* or *are* should agree with its subject, usually the first element in the sentence, not with the noun or pronoun serving as a subject complement (see p. 240):

The child's sole support is her court-appointed guardians.

Her court-appointed guardians are the child's sole support.

### 9 *Who, which, and that* take verbs that agree with their antecedents.

When used as subjects, *who*, *which*, and *that* refer to another word in the sentence, called the **antecedent**. The verb agrees with the antecedent:

Mayor Garber ought to listen to the people who work for her.

Bardini is the only aide who has her ear.

Agreement problems often occur with relative pronouns when the sentence includes *one of the* or *the only one of the*:

Bardini is one of the aides who work unpaid. [Of the aides who work unpaid, Bardini is one.]

Bardini is the only one of the aides who knows the community. [Of the aides, only one, Bardini, knows the community.]

In phrases like those above beginning with *one of the*, be sure the noun is plural: *Bardini is one of the aides* [not *aide*] *who work unpaid*.

## 10 Nouns with plural form but singular meaning take singular verbs.

Some nouns with plural form (that is, ending in *-s*) are usually regarded as singular in meaning. They include *athletics, economics, mathematics, measles, mumps, news, physics, politics*, and *statistics*, as well as place names such as *Athens, Wales, and United States*.

After so long a wait, the news has to be good.

Statistics is required of psychology majors.

A few of these words take plural verbs only when they describe individual items rather than whole bodies of activity or knowledge: *The statistics prove him wrong*.

Measurements and figures ending in *-s* may also be singular when the quantity they refer to is a unit:

Three years is a long time to wait.

Three-fourths of the library consists of reference books.

## 11 Titles and words named as words take singular verbs.

When your sentence subject is the name of a corporation, the title of a work (such as a book), or a word you are defining or describing, the verb should be singular even if the name, title, or word is plural:

Hakada Associates is a new firm.

*Dream Days* remains a favorite book.

*Folks* is a down-home word for *people*.

### EXERCISE 15.1 Revising: Subject-verb agreement

Revise the verbs in the following sentences as needed to make subjects and verbs agree in number. If the sentence is already correct as given, circle the number preceding it. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

Each of the job applicants type sixty words per minute.

Each of the job applicants types sixty words per minute.

1. Weinstein & Associates are a consulting firm that try to make businesspeople laugh.
2. Statistics from recent research suggests that humor relieves stress.
3. Reduced stress in businesses in turn reduce illness and absenteeism.
4. Reduced stress can also reduce friction within an employee group, which then work more productively.
5. In special conferences held by one consultant, each of the participants practice making the others laugh.
6. One consultant to many companies suggest cultivating office humor with practical jokes such as a rubber fish in the water cooler.
7. When employees or their manager regularly post cartoons on the bulletin board, office spirit usually picks up.
8. When someone who has seemed too easily distracted is entrusted with updating the cartoons, his or her concentration often im-proves.
9. In the face of levity, the former sourpuss becomes one of those who hides bad temper.
10. Every one of the consultants caution, however, that humor has no place in life-affecting corporate situations such as employee layoffs.

### **15b Make pronouns and their antecedents agree in person, number, and gender.**

The **antecedent** of a pronoun is the noun or other pronoun to which the pronoun refers.

Homeowners fret over their tax bills.  
antecedent                      pronoun

Its constant increases make the tax bill a dreaded document.  
pronoun                                      antecedent

Since a pronoun derives its meaning from its antecedent, the two must agree in person, number, and gender.

**Note** Grammar and style checkers cannot help with agreement between pronoun and antecedent because they cannot recognize the intended relation between the two.

The gender of a pronoun should match its antecedent, not a noun that the pronoun may modify: *Sara Young invited her* [not *his*] *son to join the company's staff*. Also, nouns in English have only neuter gender unless they specifically refer to males or females. Thus nouns such as *book*, *table*, *sun*, and *earth* take the pronoun *it*.

### 1 Antecedents joined by *and* usually take plural pronouns.

Two or more antecedents joined by *and* usually take a plural pronoun, whether one or all of the antecedents are singular:

Mr. Bartos and I cannot settle our dispute.

The dean and my adviser have offered their help.

**Exceptions** When the compound antecedent refers to a single idea, person, or thing, then the pronoun is singular:

My friend and adviser offered her help.

When the compound antecedent follows *each* or *every*, the pronoun is singular:

Every girl and woman took her seat.

### 2 When parts of an antecedent are joined by *or* or *nor*, the pronoun agrees with the nearer part.

When the parts of an antecedent are connected by *or* or *nor*, the pronoun should agree with the part closer to it:

Tenants or owners must present their grievances.

Either the tenant or the owner will have her way.

When one subject is plural and the other singular, the sentence will be awkward unless you put the plural one second:

Awkward    Neither the tenants nor the owner has yet made her case.

Revised    Neither the owner nor the tenants have yet made their case.

### 3 With an indefinite word as antecedent, use a singular or plural pronoun as appropriate.

Indefinite words do not refer to any specific person or thing. They include **indefinite pronouns** such as *anyone*, *everybody*, and *no one* (see p. 309 for a list). They also include **generic nouns**, or singular nouns that refer to typical members of a group, as in *The individual has rights* or *The job requires a person with computer skills*.

Most indefinite pronouns and all generic nouns are singular in meaning. When they serve as antecedents of pronouns, the pronouns should be singular.

Everyone on the women's team now has her own locker.  
indefinite  
pronoun

Every person on the women's team now has her own locker.

generic

noun

Five indefinite pronouns—*all, any, more, most, some*—may be singular or plural in meaning depending on what they refer to:

Few women athletes had changing spaces, so most had to change in their rooms.

Most of the changing space was dismal, its color a drab olive green.

Four indefinite pronouns—*both, few, many, several*—are always plural in meaning:

Few realize how their athletic facilities have changed.

Most agreement problems arise with the singular indefinite words. We often use these words to mean something like “many” or “all” rather than “one” and then refer to them with plural pronouns, as in *Everyone has their own locker* or *A person can padlock their locker*. Often, too, we mean indefinite words to include both masculine and feminine genders and thus resort to *they* instead of the **generic he**—the masculine pronoun referring to both genders, as in *Everyone deserves his privacy*. (For more on the generic *he*, which many readers view as sexist, see p. 516.)

Although some experts accept *they, them, and their* with singular indefinite words, most do not, and many teachers and employers regard the plural as incorrect. To be safe, work for agreement between singular indefinite words and the pronouns that refer to them. You have several options:

#### 4 Collective noun antecedents take singular or plural pronouns depending on meaning.

**Collective nouns** such as *army, committee, family, group, and team* have singular form but may be referred to by singular or plural pronouns, depending on the meaning intended. When the group acts as a unit, the pronoun is singular:

The committee voted to disband itself.

When the members of the group act separately, the pronoun is plural:

The old group have gone their separate ways.

In the last example, note that the verb and pronoun are consistent in number (see also pp. 358–59).

Inconsistent	The old group has gone their separate ways.
Consistent	The old group have gone their separate ways.

In standard American English, collective nouns that are noncount nouns (they don't form plurals) usually take singular pronouns: *The mail sits in its own basket*. A few noncount nouns take plural pronouns, including *clergy, military, people, police, the rich, and the poor*: *The police support their unions*. (See also p. 310.)

#### EXERCISE 15.2 Revising: Pronoun-antecedent agreement

Revise the following sentences so that pronouns and their antecedents agree in person and number. Some items have more than one possible answer. Try to avoid the generic *he* (see opposite). If you change the subject of a sentence, be sure to change verbs as necessary for agreement. If the sentence is already correct as given, mark the number preceding it. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

Each of the Boudreaus' children brought their laundry home at Thanksgiving.

All of the Boudreaus' children brought their laundry home at Thanksgiving. *Or:* Each of the Boudreaus' children brought laundry home at Thanksgiving. *Or:* Each of the Boudreaus' children brought his or her laundry home at Thanksgiving.

1. Each girl raised in a Mexican American family in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas hopes that one day they will be given a *quin-ceañera* party for their fifteenth birthday.
2. Such celebrations are very expensive because it entails a religious service followed by a huge party.
3. A girl's immediate family, unless they are wealthy, cannot afford the party by themselves.
4. The parents will ask each close friend or relative if they can help with the preparations.
5. Surrounded by her family and attended by her friends and their escorts, the *quin-ceañera* is introduced as a young woman eligible for Mexican American society.

### EXERCISE 15.3 Adjusting for agreement

In the sentences below, subjects agree with verbs and pronouns agree with antecedents. Make the change specified in parentheses after each sentence, and then revise the sentence as necessary to maintain agreement. Some items have more than one possible answer. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The student attends weekly conferences with her teacher. (*Change The student to Students.*)

Students *attend* weekly conferences with their teacher.

1. A biologist wishes to introduce captive red wolves into the Smoky Mountains in order to increase the wild population of this endangered species. (*Change A biologist to Biologists.*)
2. When freed, the wolf naturally has no fear of humans and thus is in danger of being shot. (*Change wolf to wolves.*)
3. The first experiment to release the wolves was a failure. (*Change experiment to experiments.*)
4. Now researchers pen the wolf puppy in the wooded area that will eventually be its territory. (*Change puppy to puppies.*)
5. The wolf has little contact with people, even its own keeper, during the year of its captivity. (*Change wolf to wolves.*)

### EXERCISE 15.4 Revising: Agreement

Revise the sentences in the following paragraphs to correct errors in agreement between subjects and verbs or between pronouns and their antecedents. Try to avoid the generic *he*. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

The writers Richard Rodriguez and Maxine Hong Kingston, despite their differences, shares one characteristic: their parents was immigrants to California. A frequent theme of their writings are the difficulties of growing up with two languages and two cultures.

A child whose first language is not English is often ridiculed because they cannot communicate "properly." Rodriguez learned Spanish at home, but at school everyone expected him to use their language, English. He remembers his childish embarrassment because of his parents' poor English. College and graduate school, which usually expands one's knowledge, widened the gap between Rodriguez and his Latino culture. His essays suggests that he lost a part of himself, a loss that continue to bother him.

Kingston spoke Chinese at home and also learned her first English at school. She sometimes write of these experiences, but more often she write to recover and preserve her Chinese culture. *The Woman Warrior*, which offer a blend of autobiography, family history, and mythic tales, describe the struggle of Kingston's female relatives. *China Men* focus on Kingston's male ancestors; each one traveled to Hawaii or California to make money for their wife back in China. Kingston's work, like Rodriguez's essays, reflect the tension and confusion that the child of immigrants often feel when they try to blend two cultures.

**Note** See page 331 for an exercise involving agreement along with other aspects of grammar.

# CHAPTER 16

## Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are modifiers that describe, restrict, or otherwise qualify the words to which they relate.

Many of the most common adjectives are familiar one-syllable words such as *bad*, *strange*, *large*, and *wrong*. Many others are formed by adding endings such as *-al*, *-able*, *-ful*, *-less*, *-ish*, *-ive*, and *-y* to nouns or verbs: *optional*, *fashionable*, *beautiful*, *fruitless*, *selfish*, *expressive*, *dreamy*.

Most adverbs are formed by adding *-ly* to adjectives: *badly*, *strangely*, *largely*, *beautifully*. But note that we cannot depend on *-ly* to identify adverbs, since some adjectives also end in *-ly* (*fatherly*, *lonely*) and since some common adverbs do not end in *-ly* (*always*, *here*, *not*, *now*, *often*, *there*). Thus the only sure way to distinguish between adjectives and adverbs is to determine what they modify.

**Note** Grammar and style checkers will spot some but not all problems with misused adjectives and adverbs. For instance, a checker flagged *Some children suffer bad* and *Chang was the most wisest person in town* and *Jenny did not feel nothing*. But it did not flag *Educating children good is everyone's focus*.

In standard American English an adjective does not change along with the noun it modifies to show plural number: *white* [not *whites*] *shoes*, *square* [not *squares*] *spaces*. Only nouns form plurals.

### 16a Use adjectives only to modify nouns and pronouns.

Adjectives modify only nouns and pronouns. Using adjectives instead of adverbs to modify verbs, adverbs, or other adjectives is non-standard:

Nonstandard	The groups view family values different.
Standard	The groups view family values differently.

The adjectives *good* and *bad* often appear where standard English requires the adverbs *well* and *badly*:

Nonstandard	Educating children good is everyone's focus.
Standard	Educating children well is everyone's focus.
Nonstandard	Some children suffer bad.
Standard	Some children suffer badly.

To negate a verb or an adjective, use the adverb *not*:

They are not learning. They are not stupid.

To negate a noun, use the adjective *no*:

No child should fail to read.

**16b Use an adjective after a linking verb to modify the subject. Use an adverb to modify a verb.**

A **linking verb** is one that links, or connects, a subject and its complement: *They are golfers. He is lucky.* (See also pp. 239–40.) Linking verbs are forms of *be*, the verbs associated with our five senses (*look, sound, smell, feel, taste*), and a few others (*appear, seem, become, grow, turn, prove, remain, stay*).

Some of these verbs may or may not be linking, depending on their meaning in the sentence. When the word after the verb modifies the subject, the verb is linking and the word should be an adjective: *He feels strong.* When the word modifies the verb, however, it should be an adverb: *He feels strongly about that.*

Two word pairs are especially troublesome in this context. One is *bad* and *badly*:

The weather grew bad.	She felt bad.
linking adjective verb	linking adjective verb

Flowers grow badly in such soil.  
verb adverb

The other pair is *good* and *well*. *Good* serves only as an adjective. *Well* may serve as an adverb with a host of meanings or as an adjective meaning only “fit” or “healthy.”

Decker trained well.	She felt well.	Her health was good.
verb adverb	linking adjective verb	linking adjective verb

**16c After a direct object, use an adjective to modify the object and an adverb to modify the verb.**

After a direct object, an adjective modifies the object, whereas an adverb modifies the verb of the sentence. (See p. 238 for more on direct objects.)

Campus politics made Mungo angry.  
adjective

Mungo repeated the words angrily.  
adverb

You can test whether a modifier should be an adjective or an adverb by trying to separate it from the direct object. If you can separate it, it should be an adverb: *Mungo angrily repeated the words.* If you cannot separate it, it is probably an adjective.

The instructor considered the student’s work thorough. [The adjective can be moved in front of *work* (*student’s thorough work*), but it cannot be separated from *work*.]

The instructor considered the student’s work thoroughly. [The adverb can be separated from *work*. Compare *The instructor thoroughly considered the student’s work.*]

**EXERCISE 16.1 Revising: Adjectives and adverbs**

Revise the following sentences so that adjectives and adverbs are used appropriately. If any sentence is already correct as given, mark the number preceding it. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The announcer warned that traffic was moving very slow.  
The announcer warned that traffic was moving very slowly.

1. King George III of England declared Samuel Johnson suitably for a pension.

2. Johnson was taken serious as a critic and dictionary maker.
3. Thinking about his meeting with the king, Johnson felt proudly.
4. Johnson was relieved that he had not behaved badly in the king's presence.
5. After living cheap for over twenty years, Johnson finally had enough money from the pension to eat and dress good.

## 16d Use the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs appropriately.

Adjectives and adverbs can show degrees of quality or amount with the endings *-er* and *-est* or with the words *more* and *most* or *less* and *least*. Most modifiers have three forms:

Positive The form listed in the dictionary	basic Comparative A greater or lesser degree of the quality	Superlative The greatest or least degree of the quality
<i>Adjectives</i>		
red	redder	reddest
awful	more/less awful	most/least awful
<i>Adverbs</i>		
soon	sooner	soonest
quickly	more/less quickly	most/least quickly

If sound alone does not tell you whether to use *-er/-est* or *more/most*, consult a dictionary. If the endings can be used, the dictionary will list them. Otherwise, use *more* or *most*.

### 1 Use the correct forms of irregular adjectives and adverbs.

Certain adjectives and adverbs are irregular: they change the spelling of their positive form to show comparative and superlative degrees.

### 2 Use either *-er/-est* or *more/most*, not both.

A double comparative or double superlative combines the *-er* or *-est* ending with the word *more* or *most*. It is redundant.

Chang was the wisest [not most wisest] person in town.  
He was smarter [not more smarter] than anyone else.

### 3 Use the comparative for comparing two things and the superlative for comparing three or more things.

It is the shorter of her two books. [Comparative.]  
*The Yearling* is the most popular of the six books. [Superlative.]

In conversation the superlative form is often used to compare only two things: *When two people argue, the angriest one is usually wrong*. But the distinction between the forms should be observed in writing.

### 4 Use comparative or superlative forms only for modifiers that can logically be compared.

Some adjectives and adverbs cannot logically be compared—for instance, *perfect*, *unique*, *dead*, *impossible*, *infinite*. These absolute words can be preceded by adverbs like *nearly* and *almost* that mean “approaching,” but they cannot logically be modified by *more* or *most* (as in *most perfect*). This distinction is sometimes ignored in speech, but it should always be made in writing:

Not He was the most unique teacher we had.  
But He was a unique teacher.

**EXERCISE 16.2 Revising: Comparatives and superlatives**

Revise the sentences below so that the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs are appropriate for formal usage. Mark the number preceding any sentence that is already correct. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

Attending classes full time and working at two jobs was the most impossible thing I ever did.

Attending classes full time and working at two jobs was imposs-ible [or the hardest thing I ever did ].

1. Charlotte was the older of the three Brontë sisters, all of whom were novelists.
2. Some readers think Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is the most saddest novel they have ever read.
3. Of the other two sisters, Charlotte and Anne, Charlotte was probably the more talented.
4. Critics still argue about whether Charlotte or Emily wrote more better.
5. Certainly this family of women novelists was the most unique.

**16e Watch for double negatives.**

In a **double negative** two negative words such as *no, not, none, neither, barely, hardly*, or *scarcely* cancel each other out. Some double negatives are intentional: for instance, *She was not unhappy* indicates with understatement that she was indeed happy. But most double negatives say the opposite of what is intended: *Jenny did not feel nothing* asserts that Jenny felt other than nothing, or something. For the opposite meaning, one of the negatives must be eliminated or changed to a positive: *She felt nothing* or *She did not feel anything*.

Faulty     The IRS cannot hardly audit all tax returns. None of its audits never touch many cheaters.  
Revised    The IRS cannot audit all tax returns. Its audits never touch many cheaters.

**EXERCISE 16.3 Revising: Double negatives**

Identify and revise the double negatives in the following paragraph. Each error may have more than one correct revision. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

Interest in books about the founding of the United States seems to vary with the national mood. Americans show hardly no interest in books about the founders when things are going well in the United States. However, when Americans can't barely agree on major issues, sales of books about the Revolutionary War era increase. During such periods, one cannot go to no bookstore without seeing several new volumes about John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and other founders. When Americans feel they don't have nothing in common, their increased interest in the early leaders may reflect a desire for unity.

**16f Use nouns sparingly as modifiers.**

We often use one noun to modify another. For example:  
child care     flood control     security guard

Such phrases can be both clear and concise, but overuse of noun modifiers can lead to flat, even senseless, writing. To avoid awkwardness or confusion, observe two principles. First, prefer possessives or adjectives as modifiers:

Not            A student takes the state medical board exams to become a dentist technician.  
But            A student takes the state medical board's exams to become a dental technician.

Second, use only short nouns as modifiers and use them only in two- or three-word sequences:

Confusing    Minimex maintains a plant employee relations improvement program.  
Revised      Minimex maintains a program for improving relations among plant employees.

## 16g Distinguish between present and past participles as adjectives.

Both present participles and past participles may serve as adjectives: *a burning building*, *a burned building*. As in the examples, the two participles usually differ in the time they indicate.

But some present and past participles—those derived from verbs expressing feeling—can have altogether different meanings. The present participle modifies something that causes the feeling: *That was a frightening storm* (the storm frightens). The past participle modifies something that experiences the feeling: *They quieted the frightened horses* (the horses feel fright).

The following participles are among those likely to be confused:

amazing/amazed	confusing/confused
amusing/amused	depressing/depressed
annoying/annoyed	embarrassing/embarrassed
astonishing/astonished	exciting/excited
boring/bored	exhausting/exhausted
fascinating/fascinated	satisfying/satisfied
frightening/frightened	shocking/shocked
frustrating/frustrated	surprising/surprised
interesting/interested	tiring/tired
pleasing/pleased	worrying/worried

### EXERCISE 16.4 Revising: Present and past participles

Revise the adjectives in the following sentences as needed to distinguish between present and past participles. If the sentence is already correct as given, mark the number preceding it. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The subject was embarrassed to many people.

The subject was embarrassing to many people.

- Several critics found Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* to be a fas-cinated book.
- One confused critic wished that Walker had deleted the scenes set in Africa.
- Another critic argued that although the book contained many depressed episodes, the overall impact was excited.
- Since other readers found the book annoyed, this critic pointed out its many surprised qualities.
- In the end most critics agreed that the book was a satisfied novel.

## 16h Use *a*, *an*, *the*, and other determiners appropriately.

**Determiners** are special kinds of adjectives that mark nouns because they always precede nouns. Some common determiners are *a*, *an*, and *the* (called **articles**) and *my*, *their*, *whose*, *this*, *these*, *those*, *one*, *some*, and *any*. They convey information to readers—for instance, by specifying who owns what, which one of two is meant, or whether a subject is familiar or unfamiliar.

Native speakers of standard American English can rely on their intuition when using determiners, but speakers of other languages and dialects often have difficulty with them. In standard English the use of determiners depends on the context they appear in and the kind of noun they precede:

- ✓ A **proper noun** names a particular person, place, or thing and begins with a capital letter: *February*, *Joe Allen*, *Red River*. Most proper nouns are not preceded by determiners.
- ✓ A **count noun** names something that is countable in English and can form a plural: *girl/girls*, *apple/apples*, *child/children*. A singular count noun is always preceded by a determiner; a plural count noun sometimes is.
- ✓ A **noncount noun** names something not usually considered countable in English, and so it does not form a plural. A noncount noun is sometimes preceded by a determiner. Here is a sample of noncount nouns, sorted into groups by meaning:

*Abstractions:* confidence, democracy, education, equality, evidence, health, information, intelligence, knowledge, luxury, peace, pollution, research, success, supervision, truth, wealth, work

*Food and drink:* bread, candy, cereal, flour, meat, milk, salt, water, wine

*Emotions:* anger, courage, happiness, hate, joy, love, respect, satisfaction

*Natural events and substances:* air, blood, dirt, gasoline, gold, hair, heat, ice, oil, oxygen, rain, silver, smoke, weather, wood

*Groups:* clergy, clothing, equipment, furniture, garbage, jewelry, junk, legislation, machinery, mail, military, money, police, vocabulary

*Fields of study:* architecture, accounting, biology, business, chemistry, engineering, literature, psychology, science

A dictionary of English as a second language will tell you whether a noun is a count noun, a noncount noun, or both. (See p. 537 for recommended dictionaries.)

**Note** Many nouns can be both count and noncount nouns:

The library has a room for readers. [*Room* is a count noun meaning “walled area.”]

The library has room for reading. [*Room* is a noncount noun meaning “space.”]

Partly because the same noun may fall into different groups, grammar and style checkers are unreliable guides to missing or misused articles and other determiners. For instance, a checker flagged the omitted *a* before *Scientist* in *Scientist developed new processes*; it did not flag the omitted *a* before *new* in *A scientist developed new process*; and it mistakenly flagged the correctly omitted article *the* before *Vegetation* in *Vegetation suffers from drought*.

## 1 Use *a*, *an*, and *the* where they are required.

### ▼ With singular count nouns

*A* or *an* precedes a singular count noun when the reader does not already know its identity, usually because you have not mentioned it before:

A scientist in our chemistry department developed a process to strengthen metals. [*Scientist* and *process* are being introduced for the first time.]

*The* precedes a singular count noun that has a specific identity for the reader, for one of the following reasons:

#### ▼ You have mentioned the noun before:

A scientist in our chemistry department developed a process to strengthen metals. The scientist patented the process. [*Scientist* and *process* were identified in the preceding sentence.]

#### ▼ You identify the noun immediately before or after you state it:

The most productive laboratory is the research center in the chemistry department. [*Most productive* identifies *laboratory*. In *the chemistry department* identifies *research center*. And *chemistry department* is a shared facility.]

#### ▼ The noun names something unique—the only one in existence:

The sun rises in the east. [*Sun* and *east* are unique.]

#### ▼ The noun names an institution or facility that is shared by the community of readers:

Many men and women aspire to the presidency. [*Presidency* is a shared institution.]

The fax machine has changed business communication. [*Fax machine* is a shared facility.]

*The* is not used before a singular noun that names a general category:

Sherman said that war is hell. [*War* names a general category.]

The war in Croatia left many dead. [*War* names a specific war.]

v **With plural count nouns**

*A* or *an* never precedes a plural noun. *The* does not precede a plural noun that names a general category. *The* does precede a plural noun that names specific representatives of a category.

Men and women are different. [*Men* and *women* name general categories.]

The women formed a team. [*Women* refers to specific people.]

v **With noncount nouns**

*A* or *an* never precedes a noncount noun. *The* does precede a noncount noun when it names specific representatives of a general category:

Vegetation suffers from drought. [*Vegetation* names a general category.]

The vegetation in the park withered or died. [*Vegetation* refers to specific plants.]

v **With proper nouns**

*A* or *an* never precedes a proper noun. *The* generally does not precede a proper noun:

Garcia lives in Boulder.

There are exceptions, however. For instance, we generally use *the* before plural proper nouns (*the Murphys, the Boston Celtics*) and the names of groups and organizations (*the Department of Justice, the Sierra Club*), ships (*the Lusitania*), oceans (*the Pacific*), mountain ranges (*the Alps*), regions (*the Middle East*), rivers (*the Mississippi*), and some countries (*the United States, the Sudan*).

**2 Use other determiners appropriately.**

The uses of English determiners besides articles also depend on context and kind of noun. The following determiners may be used as indicated with singular count nouns, plural count nouns, or noncount nouns.

v **With any kind of noun (singular count, plural count, noncount)**

*my, our, your, his, her, its, their*

possessive nouns (*boy's, boys'*)

*whose, which(ever), what(ever)*

*some, any, the other*

*no*

Their account is overdrawn. [Singular count.]

Their funds are low. [Plural count.]

Their money is running out. [Noncount.]

v **Only with singular nouns (count and noncount)**

*this, that*

This account has some money. [Count.]

That information may help. [Noncount.]

v **Only with noncount nouns and plural count nouns**

*most, enough, other, such, all, all of the, a lot of*

Most money is needed elsewhere. [Noncount.]

Most funds are committed. [Plural count.]

v **Only with singular count nouns**

*one, every, each, either, neither, another*

One car must be sold. [Singular count.]

v **Only with plural count nouns**

*these, those*

*both, many, few, a few, fewer, fewest, several*

*two, three*, and so forth

Two cars are unnecessary. [Plural count.]

**Note** *Few* means “not many” or “not enough.” *A few* means “some” or “a small but sufficient quantity.”

Few committee members came to the meeting.  
A few members can keep the committee going.

Do not use *much* with a plural count noun:

Many [not Much] members want to help.

v **Only with noncount nouns**

*much, more, little, a little, less, least, a large amount of*

Less luxury is in order. [Noncount.]

**Note** *Little* means “not many” or “not enough.” *A little* means “some” or “a small but sufficient quantity.”

Little time remains before the conference.  
The members need a little help from their colleagues.

Do not use *many* with a noncount noun:

Much [not Many] work remains.

**EXERCISE 16.5 Revising: Articles**

For each blank below, indicate whether *a, an, the*, or no article should be inserted. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

FROM NATIVE AMERICAN INDIANS WHO MIGRATED FROM ASIA 20,000 YEARS AGO TO NEW ARRIVALS WHO NOW COME BY PLANES, UNITED STATES IS NATION OF FOREIGNERS. IT IS COUNTRY OF IMMIGRANTS WHO ARE ALL LIVING UNDER SINGLE FLAG.

Back in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at least 75 percent of the population came from England. However, between 1820 and 1975 more than 38 million immigrants came to this country from elsewhere in Europe. Many children of immigrants were self-conscious and denied their heritage; many even refused to learn native language of their parents and grandparents. They tried to “Americanize” themselves. The so-called Melting Pot theory of social change stressed importance of blending everyone together into kind of stew. Each nationality would contribute its own flavor, but final stew would be something called “American.”

This Melting Pot theory was never completely successful. In the last half of the twentieth century, ethnic revival changed metaphor. Many people now see American society as mosaic. Americans are once again proud of their heritage, and ethnic differences make mosaic colorful and interesting.

**EXERCISE 16.6 Revising: Adjectives and adverbs**

Revise the following paragraph so that it conforms to formal usage of adjectives and adverbs. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

Americans often argue about which professional sport is better: basketball, football, or baseball. Basketball fans contend that their sport offers more action because the players are constant running and shooting. Because it is played indoors in relative small arenas, basketball allows fans to be more closer to the action than the other sports do. Fans point to how graceful the players fly through the air to the hoop. Football fanatics say they don’t hardly stop yelling once the game begins. They cheer when their team executes a real complicated play good. They roar more louder when the defense stops the opponents in a goal-line stand. They yell loudest when a fullback crashes in for a score. In contrast, the supporters of baseball believe that it might be the most perfect sport. It combines the one-on-one duel of pitcher and batter struggling valiant with the tight teamwork of double and triple plays. Because the game is played slow and careful, fans can analyze and discuss the manager’s strategy. Besides, they don’t never know

when they might catch a foul ball as a souvenir. However, no matter what the sport, all fans feel happily only when their team wins!

**EXERCISE ON CHAPTERS 13–16 Revising: Grammatical sentences**

The paragraphs below contain errors in pronoun case, verb forms, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, and the forms of adjectives and adverbs. Revise the paragraphs to correct the errors. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://www.ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

Occasionally, musicians become “crossover artists” whom can perform good in more than one field of music. For example, Wynton and Branford Marsalis was train in jazz by their father, the great pianist Ellis Marsalis. Both of the sons has became successful classical artists. Branford’s saxophone captures the richness of pieces by Ravel and Stravinsky. Wynton’s albums of classical trumpet music from the Baroque period has brung him many awards. Still, if he was to choose which kind of music he likes best, Wynton would probable choose jazz. In contrast to the Marsalises, Yo-Yo Ma and Jean-Pierre Rampal growed up studying classical music. Then in the 1980s they was invited by Claude Bolling, a French pianist, to record Bolling’s jazz compositions. In fact, Rampal’s flute blended with Bolling’s music so good that the two men have did three albums.

Such crossovers are often more harder for vocalists. Each type of music has their own style and feel that is hard to learn. For example, Luciano Pavarotti and Kiri te Kanawa, two great opera performers, have sang popular music and folk songs in concerts and on albums. On each occasion, their technique was the most perfect, yet each sounded as if he was simply trying to sing proper. It is even more difficulter for pop or country vocalists to sing opera, as Linda Ronstadt and Gary Morris founded when they appear in *La Bohème*. Each of them have a clear, pure voice, but a few critics said that him and her lacked the vocal power necessary for opera. However, Bobby McFerrin been successful singing both pop and classical pieces. He won a Grammy award for his song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” But he is equal able to sing classical pieces *a cappella* (without musical accompaniment). His voice’s remarkable range and clarity allows him to imitate many musical instruments.

No matter how successful, all of these musicians has shown great courage by performing in a new field. They are willing to test and stretch their talents, and each of we music fans benefit.

<http://www.ablongman.com/littlebrown>

Visit the companion Web site for more help and additional exercises on subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement.

### Person and number in subject-verb agreement

Person	Number	
	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>First</i>	I eat.	We eat.
<i>Second</i>	You eat.	You eat.
<i>Third</i>	He/she/it eats. The bird eats.	They eat. Birds eat.

#### Summary of subject-verb agreement

- √ **Basic subject-verb agreement** (p. 305):

Singular	Plural
The kite flies.	The kites fly.

- √ **Words between subject and verb** (p. 307):

The kite with two tails flies badly. The tails of the kite compete.

- √ **Subjects joined by *and*** (p. 307):

The kite and the bird are almost indistinguishable.

- √ **Subjects joined by *or* or *nor*** (below):

The kite or the bird dives. Kites or birds fill the sky.

- √ **Indefinite pronouns as subjects** (opposite):

No one knows. All the spectators wonder.

- √ **Collective nouns as subjects** (p. 310):

A flock appears. The flock disperse.

- √ **Inverted word order** (p. 310):

Is the kite or the bird blue? Are the kite and the bird both blue?

- √ **Linking verbs** (p. 311):

The kite is a flier and a dipper.

- √ ***Who, which, that* as subjects** (p. 311):

The kite that flies longest wins. Kites that fall lose.

- √ **Subjects with plural form and singular meaning** (p. 312):

Aeronautics plays a role in kite flying.

- √ **Titles and words named as words** (p. 312):

*Kite Dynamics* is one title. *Vectors* is a key word.

### Common indefinite pronouns

Singular			Singular or plural	Plural
anybody	everyone	no one	all	both
anyone	everything	nothing	any	few
anything	much	one	more	many
each	neither	somebody	most	several
either	nobody	someone	some	
everybody	none	something		

### Person, number, and gender in pronoun-antecedent agreement

	Number	
Person	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>First</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>we</i>
<i>Second</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>you</i>
<i>Third</i>	<i>he, she, it,</i> indefinite pronouns, singular nouns	<i>they,</i> plural nouns
Gender		
<i>Masculine</i>	<i>he</i> , nouns naming males	
<i>Feminine</i>	<i>she</i> , nouns naming females	
<i>Neuter</i>	<i>it</i> , all other nouns	

### Summary of pronoun-antecedent agreement

#### ✓ Basic pronoun-antecedent agreement:

Old Faithful spews its columns of water, each of them over 115 feet high.

#### ✓ Antecedents joined by *and* (below):

Old Faithful and Giant are geysers known for their height.

#### ✓ Antecedents joined by *or* or *nor* (opposite):

Either Giant or Giantess ejects its column the highest.

#### ✓ Indefinite words as antecedents (opposite):

Each of the geysers has its own personality. Each person who visits has his or her memories.

#### ✓ Collective nouns as antecedents (p. 316):

A crowd amuses itself watching Old Faithful. The crowd go their separate ways.

### Ways to correct agreement with indefinite words

#### ✓ Change the indefinite word to a plural, and use a plural pronoun to match:

Faulty Every athlete deserves their privacy.

Revised Athletes deserve their privacy.

#### ✓ Rewrite the sentence to omit the pronoun:

Faulty Everyone is entitled to their own locker.

Revised Everyone is entitled to a locker.

#### ✓ Use *he* or *she* (*him* or *her*, *his* or *her*) to refer to the indefinite word:

Faulty Now everyone has their private space.

Revised Now everyone has his or her private space.

However, used more than once in several sentences, *he* or *she* quickly becomes awkward. (Many readers do not accept the alternative *he/she*.) In most cases, using the plural or omitting the pronoun will not only correct agreement problems but also create more readable sentences.

### Functions of adjectives and adverbs

**Adjectives** modify nouns: serious student

pronouns: ordinary one

**Adverbs** modify verbs: warmly greet

adjectives: only three people

adverbs: quite seriously

phrases: nearly to the edge of the cliff

clauses: just when we arrived

sentences: Fortunately, she is employed.

Visit the companion Web site for more help and additional exercises on adjectives and adverbs.

### **Degrees of irregular adjectives and adverbs**

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
<i>Adjectives</i>		
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst
little	littler, less	littlest, least
many		
some	more	most
much		
<i>Adverbs</i>		
well	better	best
badly	worse	worst