





Syntax

The arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences

6 Common Syntax Slip-ups & How you can fix them

Common Errors:

Subject Verb Agreement

1. The most common error is noun and verb tense not matching.
Example: He play the piano. He is a singular pronoun and the word play is a plural verb

Having a Clearly Defined Subject

2. It needs to be clear to reader who in the sentence is doing the action.
Example of an error: The piano was played by Jack.

Prepositional Phrases

3. A lot of the time people confuse which prepositions should be used. An error would be: Emily was late to school.

How to fix them:

1. The sentence should be: He plays the piano. "He" should be paired with the singular verb "plays".
Quick Tip! If the word has an "s" on the end, its partner word should not.

2. The way the sentence is formed makes it sound like the piano was the one performing the action instead of Jack. The correct format would be: Jack played the piano. It needs to be clear that the Jack was the one doing the playing.

3. The correct sentence would be: Emily was late for school. "To" would be used to indicate the time or a period of time, while "for" is used to indicate time or duration. A correct usage of "to" would be: He works eight to five.

4.

Genitive Case

Genitive case refers to words and phrases that use apostrophes, like “today’s news” and possessive phrases. An incorrect usage would be: The kids’s behavior was terrible.

5.

Nouns with Fixed Numbers

Some words only have a singular or plural form. For these, the subject verb agreement is tricky. Words like this are scissors, harm, news, cattle, physics, nonsense, and clothes. Incorrect sentences using these words would be: The news are fresh. The cattle is sick.

4.

The correct sentence would be: The kids’ behavior was terrible. When the word ends in an “s”, another “s” is not needed. You only need to put an apostrophe in.

5.

In contrast to the rules, cattle is “plural” and “news” is singular. The sentences should be: The news is fresh. The cattle are sick. Sometimes these can be tricky but it’s the same as subject verb agreement.