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Countable and Uncountable Nouns

A noun is a word that refers to person, place, thing, event, substance or quality; can be either countable or uncountable.

Countable nouns have singular and plural forms while uncountable nouns can be used only in the singular form.

- In English grammar, words that refer to people, places or things are called nouns. There are several ways to classify nouns. One way is whether they are countable (also known as count) or uncountable (also known as non-count) nouns. Countable nouns, as the term suggests, are things that can be counted. They have singular and plural forms.

E.g. *table, tables; month, months; pen, pens.*

- A countable noun becomes plural by adding *s* at the end of the word. Of course, there are nouns that form plurals in other ways.

E.g. *man, men; child, children; goose, geese.*

- In contrast, uncountable nouns cannot be counted. They have a singular form and do not have a plural form.

- you can't add an *s* to it, e.g. dirt, rice, information and hair. Some uncountable nouns are abstract nouns such as advice and knowledge.

E.g. Her jewellery is designed by a well-known designer.
I needed some advice, so I went to see the counsellor.

Some nouns can be countable or uncountable depending on the context or situation.

E.g. We'll have two coffees (countable).
I don't like coffee (uncountable).

1. Articles

You cannot refer to a singular countable noun on its own. It is usually preceded by an article, either the indefinite article – *a, an* – or the definite article *the*.

—1.1. Indefinite Article

When the countable noun is mentioned for the first time, you use an indefinite article *a* for words beginning with a consonant sound or *an* if the noun begins with a vowel sound. However, when a countable noun is mentioned for the second time, it is usually preceded by the definite article *the*.

E.g. *I saw a (indefinite article) cat yesterday.*

The (definite article) *cat was grey with black stripes.*

Sometimes when uncountable nouns are treated as countable nouns, you can use the indefinite article.

E.g. *Please select a wine that you like*

1.2. Definite Article

You can use the with countable nouns when you want to refer to a specific person or thing.

E.g. *The baby stared at the moon in fascination.*

Please take me to the clinic near the coffee shop. I'm not feeling well.

The indefinite article is not used with uncountable nouns. However, the definite article *the* can be used with uncountable nouns when referring to specific items.

E.g. *I found the luggage that I had lost.*

I appreciated the honesty of the salesman.

2. Tricky Uncountable Nouns

The noun *fruit* is usually considered as an uncountable noun.

E.g. *Fruit is good for your health.*

When referring to a single piece of fruit, you would say,

She had only a piece of fruit for lunch!

However, when referring to different kinds of fruit, you may use *fruit* as a countable noun.

E.g. *I love to shop at that supermarke- they have a wide variety of tropical fruits.*

Similarly, you may use an indefinite article for uncountable nouns when you are referring to a single item.

E.g. *a piece of furniture, a bottle of water, a grain of rice.*

2.1. Quantifiers

Countable and uncountable nouns may also be used with quantifiers. These are words that express amount or quantity. Common examples are some, any, more, few, little, several.

However, there are some quantifiers that can be used with only countable nouns: many, few, a few, fewer, several.

E.g. The citizens came to the meeting with many suggestions on how to improve their neighbourhood.

Fewer tourists visited that area as it was known to be unsafe.

Some other quantifiers can be used with only uncountable nouns: much, little, a bit of.

E.g. Would you like a bit of pepper in your soup?

There's very little dessert left.

Some quantifiers may be used with both countable and uncountable nouns: all, some, any, lots of, plenty of, enough.

E.g. He has enough courage to face the bullies.

We have some plates for the party tonight. Tracy will bring more.

3. Subject-Verb Agreement

Countable nouns may take singular or plural verbs.

E.g. Our neighbour is singing at the competition tonight.

Our neighbours are singing at the competition tonight.

However, uncountable nouns are considered singular and may take only singular verbs.

Nouns such as luggage, furniture and jewellery are uncountable nouns and take singular verbs.

E.g. The furniture in this house needs to be replaced.

The apparatus for the next experiment has been set up.

My luggage has been checked in.

Uncountable nouns ending with s may pose a problem to users of English.

These nouns have the plural ending s, but they take a singular verb.

E.g. The news is not good.

Mathematics is a very important subject.

All uncountable nouns associated with clothes, such as shorts, jeans and briefs, are plural uncountables. They cannot be used in the singular form or with numbers. We cannot say for example a shorts or two shorts. Instead we say:

E.g. Can you lend me a pair of shorts? I didn't bring mine.

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that replaces a noun or noun phrase that has already been mentioned in a text or conversation.

1. Pronouns

There are several types of pronouns. Among them are personal, possessive, demonstrative, indefinite, reflexive and relative pronouns.

Personal pronouns stand in for nouns and noun phrases, and usually refer back in a text or conversation to them.

E.g. Jane is going to watch the parade tomorrow. She plans to leave at 4 pm.

We are collecting old photographs for our project. They should still be in good condition.

Personal pronouns may be categorised as follows:

PERSON	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	Subject	Object	Subject	Object
First (person speaking)	I	me	we	us
Second (person spoken to)	you	you	you	you
Third (person spoken of)	He, she, it	Him, her, it	they	them

2. Positions of Pronouns in Sentences

A pronoun can be the subject of a verb:

E.g. I can't catch the mouse. It moves too quickly.

A pronoun can be the object of a verb:

E.g. The flowers look beautiful. Sally arranged them just now.

A pronoun can be the object of a preposition:

E.g. I'm going to buy some snacks. Make sure you keep a place for me.

3. Reflexive pronouns

These refer to the person or animal that is the subject of the verb. The following are reflexive pronouns.

PERSON	SINGULAR	PLURAL
First	myself	ourselves
Second	yourself	yourselves
Third	himself, herself, itself	themselves

3.1. Positions of Reflexive Pronouns in Sentences

Reflexive pronouns may be used:

As the object of a verb.

E.g. Meera blames herself for the mistake.

As the object of a preposition.

E.g. Stop looking at yourself in the mirror.

As the indirect object of a verb.

E.g. Tara gave herself a treat.

To emphasise a noun or personal pronoun.

E.g. Jane herself baked this delicious cake.

4. Possessive pronouns

Examples of possessive pronouns are mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs, its.

Unlike personal pronouns, these usually stand alone and do not have to precede a noun.

E.g. Karen told me that she had lost her phone. That must be hers.

They have found their seats. Have you spotted ours?

The cat is looking for its master.

Note: The possessive pronoun its is different from it's.

It's is a contracted form of it is.

5. Indefinite pronouns

The indefinite pronoun is used when referring to no particular person or thing.

Some indefinite pronouns refer to people,

E.g. someone, anyone, everybody, no one, everyone, nobody.

Some indefinite pronouns refer to things, e.g. something, anything, everything, nothing.

E.g. Someone is at the door.

Where is everyone?

Has anyone seen the television remote control?

6. Demonstrative pronouns

A demonstrative pronoun points to a specific thing or things to indicate whether they are close or far, in space and/or time. Like possessive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns stand alone and do not have to precede a noun.

	NEAR IN	FAR IN
	DISTANCE	DISTANCE
	OR TIME	OR TIME
Singular	this	that
Plural	these	those

E.g. Jane stopped eating rice for dinner. This has helped her lose weight quickly.

That was the last time I saw my colleague Matthew.

7. Relative pronouns

Who, whom, whose, which and **that** function as relative pronouns when they add further information to the things or people mentioned in the sentence.

RELATIVE PRONOUN	REFERS TO
who	a person or people
whom	a person or people
which	a thing or things
whose	a person, people, a thing or things
that	animal(s) or thing(s)

The difference between who and whom is that who may be the subject of a verb; it is also often used as an object although this is frowned upon.

E.g. Isn't that Shyla who objected to the proposal?

These are candidates whom we interviewed last week.

Whom is used only as the object of a verb. Both who and whom can be the object of a preposition but if the preposition comes before the pronoun, you must use whom. This is illustrated in the examples below.

E.g. Whom/who did you speak to about this matter?

To whom did you speak about this matter?

The relative pronoun that can often be used instead of who, whom and which.

E.g. The shirt that Matthew bought has some stains on it.

Note: American English favours the use of that over which while British English still uses both that and which.

Adjectives



An adjective is a word that describes people, objects, events, substances and ideas.

1. Adjectives

Do you want to add colour to your speech or writing? Try using appropriate, vivid adjectives to express your thoughts and feelings. Adjectives describe nouns by telling us more about them, e.g. their size, colour or shape.

Using adjectives to describe the things, people or ideas we are talking about helps our readers and listeners form a more vivid picture of them.

E.g. Please bring that beautiful leather bag to me. (expresses a positive opinion)

She was a timid, nondescript girl when she was at school. (expresses a negative opinion)

2. Formation of Adjectives

Many adjectives do not have prefixes or suffixes.

E.g. good, tall, fat, wide, simple, gaunt.

However, adjectives may be formed by adding prefixes (before a word) or suffixes (after a word).

E.g. illegal, insensitive, rusty, childish, merciless, enjoyable.

Usually adjectives are formed by adding suffixes to nouns.

E.g. baggy, hairy, hairless, burdensome, quarrelsome, beautiful.

Sometimes, adjectives may be formed by adding suffixes to verbs.

E.g. attractive, washable, expectant, complimentary, boring, disappointed.

When a negative prefix such as un, il, dis, in, im or ir is added to an adjective, it creates an opposite or negative meaning.

E.g. unnatural, illogical, dishonest, infamous, immoral, irreverent.

3. Positions of Adjectives in Sentences

Adjectives may be found in three positions in a sentence:

Before a noun:

E.g. exciting lesson, empty room.

As a complement, after a linking verb:

E.g. The shop is open.

John is sick.

After a noun or an indefinite pronoun:

E.g. I wrote to the person concerned.

Is there anyone important at the meeting?

How do you use Adjectives?

You can use adjectives in the ways suggested below.

Use two or more adjectives to describe a noun in greater detail.

E.g. small grey cat,
desperate, brazen thief

Show comparison and contrast using parallel phrases such as 'not only ... but also', 'as ... as'.

E.g. Beatrice is not only intelligent, but also hardworking.

Tom is as strong as his father.

Use adjectives to express opinions:

E.g. What a boring play! The director was unimaginative.

Adjectives describe many different things, such as size, shape, colour, quality, origin or nationality, material, and the speaker's or writer's opinion.

It is common to find two or more adjectives before a noun. However, they cannot be strung together randomly; rather, they follow a fairly strict order, from top to bottom:

4. Comparison of Adjectives

Adjectives are useful when you want to compare things. Adjectives have three degrees: positive, comparative, superlative.

The positive merely describes a noun, e.g. a tall child.

The comparative compares one person, animal or object with another.

E.g. She is taller than her mother.

The superlative compares a person, animal or object with more than one other.

E.g. She is the tallest in her class.

How do you use adjectives to show comparison?

Words containing one or two syllables take the suffix -er in the comparative form and -est in the superlative.

Many adjectives containing two syllables and all adjectives containing three or more syllables have the word more or most before the adjective to convey the comparative and superlative respectively.

E.g. more intelligent, most comfortable.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
fast	faster	fastest
small	smaller	smallest
careful	more careful	most careful
generous	more generous	most generous

Here are some examples where the comparative and superlative do not have the -er or -est suffix:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
bad	worse	worst
good	better	best
many	more	most
much	more	most

Tenses

Tenses show when something happens.

Present tense - I eat.

Past tense - I ate.

Future tense - I will eat.

Verbs are one of the most important classes of words. They tell us what is happening in terms of actions or the state of affairs in a particular situation.

E.g. The children talk (verb) very loudly.

My daughter is (verb) a talented artist.

All sentences require a verb. The tenses are parts of verbs that tell you the time when the action referred to in the sentence took place.

The base form is the basic verb form. It is so called as it has no inflections (i.e., no endings such as -s, -ing or -ed).

This is the form of the verb that is listed in dictionary entries. The base form of any verb can be changed into a singular or plural, present or past tense.

E.g. smile (base form)

smiles (third person singular, present tense)

smiled (past tense)

In the English Language there are two tenses: the present and past. As the terms imply, the present tense refers to actions and states in the present while the past tense talks about actions and states in the past. To refer to the future, we often use the present tense and modal verbs.

E.g. We leave for London tonight. (using the present tense)

We will attend the dinner on Friday. (using the modal verb will)

The present tense is the most basic tense in the English Language. Generally we use it to refer to present activities or to talk about routines or habits. We also use the present tense to refer to facts and beliefs. It is also used to make general statements about people and things.

E.g. She leaves for work at 7.30 every morning. (routine)

The sun rises in the east. (fact)

Harry usually drinks a glass of wine with his meal. (generalisation)

Regular verbs are made past tense by adding -ed.

E.g. The audience laughed (past tense) loudly at his joke. [laugh (base form) + ed]

Irregular verbs differ from the base form as they have a different spelling to indicate the past tense.

E.g. swim (base form) - swam (past tense).

Unlike the present tense, the form of a verb in the past tense is the same whether the subject is singular or plural.

E.g. The girl (singular subject) drank the water. The girls (plural subject) drank the water.

Other parts of the verb are the present participle and past participle. The present participle and the auxiliary verb be form the continuous tenses.

The present continuous indicates ongoing or future activity.

E.g. The workers are repairing the burst pipe.

I am taking my dog for a walk in an hour's time.

The past continuous is used for an activity that was ongoing at a certain point in the past.

E.g. She was working very hard last month.

It is also used to indicate an ongoing situation that was interrupted by a single past action.

E.g. The audience was enjoying the concert when the police arrived.

The present perfect tense is used when an action or situation in the present is linked to a moment in the past. It is often used to show actions that have happened up to the present but aren't completed yet.

The present perfect tense is formed by have/has + past participle; the past perfect is formed by had + past participle.

Examples of the use of the present perfect tense.

We can go out now – my car has been repaired.

I have worked in the city for the past five years.

Often, speakers of English make mistakes with the use of the present perfect and simple past.

E.g. I have watched that movie on Friday.

The use of the simple past tense would be correct in this instance:

E.g. I watched that movie on Friday.

Usually the present perfect should not be linked to a specific time (in this case, Friday) but to a duration of time such as recently, before, and since last year.

Most people have a problem with the past perfect tense. A rule to remember is: when a sentence refers to two past actions, you use the past perfect to indicate the action that took place first.

E.g. By the time I arrived (simple past), the train had left (past perfect).

To my horror, I realised (simple past) at the airport that I had forgotten (past perfect) to bring my passport!

Subject-Verb Agreement

Singular subjects go with singular verbs while plural subjects go with plural verbs.

Match your subject with the correct verb form.

Have you ever wondered why we say She looks very pretty and not She look very pretty? The answer lies in grammar rules on concord, or subject-verb agreement. The basic rule is that singular verbs must agree with singular nouns, while plural verbs must agree with plural nouns. What is a noun? It is a word to name people, places, events, things or ideas.

E.g. teacher, Orchard Road, party, basket, beauty.
How do you recognise a singular or plural verb?

A singular verb is one that has an s added to it in the present tense, such as writes, plays, runs, and uses forms such as is, was, has, does. A plural verb does not have an s added to it, such as write, play, run, and uses forms such as are, were, have and do.

E.g. Jack (singular noun) enjoys (singular verb) playing golf every Sunday.
The men (plural noun) enjoy (plural verb) playing golf every Sunday.

In the case of pronouns, he, she and it take a singular verb while you, we and they take a plural verb.

We (plural pronoun) think (plural verb) that she (singular pronoun) is (singular verb) innocent.

However, there are exceptions to the rules mentioned earlier.

If the two nouns are conjoined and represent a single idea, then the verb is singular.

E.g. Bread and butter is available on request.
Fish and chips is my favourite meal.
Law and order is the new government's priority.

Problems also arise when the speaker or writer is faced with more than one noun or pronoun in the sentence.

E.g. The quality of our students' essays has fallen drastically.

In this case, the verb has fallen agrees with the subject (first noun mentioned) or head noun of the noun phrase, quality.

E.g. The spokes of that wheel are broken.

In this case, the subject of the sentence is spokes (plural head noun), hence the plural verb are.

When a singular and a plural noun or pronoun (subjects) are joined by or or nor, the verb should agree with the subject nearer the verb.

E.g. The girls or their father collects the newspapers every morning.

In this example, the singular verb, collects, agrees with the noun closer to it, the singular noun, father.

People often get confused when deciding whether a singular or plural verb should agree with some collective nouns.

E.g. Should we say

The football team is (singular verb) ready to be photographed.

Or

The football team are (plural verb) ready to be photographed.

Well, it all depends on whether we are thinking of the team as a single collective unit or as individuals. If it is the former, then the verb should be singular. However, if we are considering the team as comprising individual members who are not acting as a single unit, then we use the plural verb.

A point to note is that American English almost always treats collective nouns as singular, hence a singular verb is used with it.

Nouns which have two parts such as spectacles, scissors or pants require plural verbs.

E.g. My spectacles are missing.

These scissors need sharpening.

However, when regarded as a pair, a singular verb is used.

E.g. My pair of spectacles is missing.

This pair of scissors needs sharpening.

There are some occasions when we should use singular verbs.

Expressions such as each of, one of, anybody, each, every and nobody must be followed by a singular verb.

E.g. Each of the ladies has a designer handbag.

Anybody is allowed to enter this hall.

Nobody is disappointed with the results.

A singular subject with attached phrases introduced by with or like or as well as is followed by a singular verb.

E.g. The boy, with several others, was late for school.

Meiling, like Johan, is tall for her age.

Tom, as well as Fred, is on the first shift.

Two singular nouns or pronouns separated by either ... or or neither ... nor take a singular verb.

E.g. Either he or she has eaten the cake.

Neither Meera nor Gopal knows anything about the accident.

Amounts, even if plural, have a singular verb.

E.g. Sixty dollars is too much to pay for that dress.

Ten kilometres is too long a distance for me to walk.

Five kilogrammes of flour is all that I need for my baking.

There are some occasions when we should use plural verbs. When two or more plural subjects are connected by and, the verb is plural.

E.g. The officers and their men were patrolling the area.

Domestic cats and dogs need adequate care and attention.

Plural subjects separated by either ... or or neither ... nor, both ... and, and all but take a plural verb.

E.g. Either the boys or the girls are to blame.

Neither the contestants nor the audience were aware of the fire.

All but Sam are going to the cinema.

Both the twins and their parents are attending their graduation ceremony.

Another problem that users of English face is this: does the verb in a sentence agree with the noun (subject) before it or the noun or adjective after it (subject complement)?

The answer is that it should agree with the subject – the noun before it.

E.g. The thing (subject) we need at this moment is (verb) more eggs.

The greatest benefit (subject) is (verb) the opportunities presented to our staff.

Prepositions

A preposition is a word that shows the relationship between an object – a noun or pronoun – and other words in a sentence.

Memorise how prepositions are to be used. There is no easy way out. Our notes here may help too!

The preposition is placed before a noun or pronoun. It shows the relationship between nouns and pronouns in the same sentence. It may be used to indicate position, place, direction or time.

1. Prepositions of Position

With regard to place, *in* tends to be used with larger or enclosed areas such as cities, countries and tunnels, whereas *at* tends to be used for smaller places, points on a journey, or for activities typically associated with a place.

- E.g. The couple will spend their money *in* London. (large area)
 Their train stops *at* London Paddington. (point on a journey)
 The boys are running around *in* the library. (enclosed area)
 They boys are *at* the library, reading. (reading is associated with libraries)

When talking about heights or levels, you use *below*, *over* or *under*.

- E.g. The dog is sleeping *under* the bed.
 The plane flew *over* the hills.

2. Prepositions of Direction

These prepositions indicate a movement towards a goal.

- E.g. Let's go *to* the market.
 The swimmers walked *into* the sea.
 The students eagerly ran *towards* the campsite.

3. Prepositions of Time

On is used for days and dates.

- E.g. The wedding will be *on* Saturday. *At* is used to indicate a specific time.
E.g. I'll see you *at* six o'clock.
 From ... *to* and *during* are used to indicate a period of time.
E.g. The tulip festival is *from* March *to* May.
 During the school holidays, students engage in community projects.

Other prepositions indicating time are *before*, *until*, *after*, *since* and *by*.

- E.g. My wife exercises *before* breakfast.
 You can visit her *after* office hours.
 You must submit the forms *by* 1st July.
 Until now, I've always thought that she was a meticulous officer.
 She has been making a lot of progress *since* she started her exercise programme.

4. Troublesome Prepositions

There are times when we are unsure which preposition we should use. These are some troublesome prepositions.

Beside and Besides

Beside means “next to”.

E.g. She sits beside me in the office. Besides means “other than” or “apart from”.

E.g. Besides enjoying cooking, I like reading a book when I’m free.

Between and Among

Between is used when referring to two people, places or things.

Among is used for three or more people, places or things.

E.g. Divide the cake among the five of you.

The twins shared the sweets between themselves.

‘Differ with’ and ‘Differ from’

When you differ with someone, you disagree with that person’s opinion or idea.

When you differ from someone, it means that you are unlike that person.

E.g. The form teacher differed with the English teacher on the boy’s abilities.

Mr Chan differed from his predecessor in terms of management style.

Sometimes you may find it hard to decide which preposition you should use with a word.

Adverbs

An adverb is a word that modifies verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions.

While adjectives tell you more about a noun or pronoun, adverbs do the same for verbs. Adverbs tell you, among other things, how (manner), when (time) or where (place) an action took place.

E.g. She sang beautifully. (manner)

She came early for the interview. (time)

I stayed here when I visited Hanoi. (place)

Some adverbs also moderate or intensify adjectives or adverbs.

E.g. That was an extremely entertaining performance.

I wouldn't recommend it. It was a very bad show.

I went to the market rather early on Saturday.

She danced remarkably well.

1. Possible Positions of Adverbs in a Sentence

At the beginning of a sentence (usually to emphasise a point).

- Finally, we found our way back to the camp.

In the middle of a sentence.

- The philanthropist rarely reveals his identity when he makes his donations.

At the end of a sentence, after a verb.

- She screamed loudly.

Adverbs may be categorised into the following classes:

Manner: gracefully, sadly, slowly, well

Time : before, now, since, eventually

Place : here, there, everywhere, nowhere

Degree: almost, quite, very, rather

Number: once, twice

Interrogative : where, when, how

2. Adverbs of Manner

Adverbs of manner tell you the way an action is performed. They answer the question how? Usually, the adverb follows the verb.

E.g. The students cheered enthusiastically when they were told that they were getting a holiday.

Sometimes, the adverb is placed before the verb to emphasise the manner of the action.

E.g. He deliberately tripped the rude boy.

She suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

Although many adverbs of manner end in -ly, not all do.

E.g. She's trying hard to impress the judges.

3. Adverbs of Time

Adverbs of time answer the questions when? how long? and how often?

E.g. Lunch will be ready soon.

Jenny visited us twice last year but we haven't seen her since.

Harold rarely visits his grandparents.

Possible Positions of Adverbs of Time in a Sentence

At the beginning of the sentence, usually for emphasis.

E.g. Frankly, the job is not worth doing for the money alone.

After the verb or at the end of a sentence.

E.g. The school looked very different then.

Before the verb.

E.g. The neighbours now realise what had happened.

4. Adverbs of Degree

Adverbs of degree answer the question how much? or to what extent? They increase or reduce the force of the word they describe.

They are usually used with adjectives and are placed before the adjective that they describe.

E.g. The students put up a totally entertaining performance.

They are used with other adverbs and are placed before the adverb they describe.

E.g. The young man walked incredibly slowly.

When used with verbs, they come before the verb.

E.g. The audience absolutely hated the show.

Adverbs are used to indicate comparison in the same way as adjectives. They generally form the comparative or superlative by adding more and most to the positive adverb.

Adverbs are used to indicate comparison in the same way as adjectives. They generally form the comparative or superlative by adding *more* and *most* to the positive adverb.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
early	earlier	earliest
long	longer	longest

bravely	more bravely	most bravely
carefully	more carefully	most carefully
greedily	more greedily	most greedily

Exceptions:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
badly	worse	worst
well	better	best

5. Confusion between Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns. Using adjectives to modify verbs, adverbs or other adjectives is not Standard English.

E.g. He behaves strange. (not Standard English)

He behaves strangely. (Standard English)

After a few lessons Tom sang real well. (not Standard English)

After a few lessons Tom sang really well. (Standard English)

Conjunctions

A conjunction is a word that connects similar words or group of words such as phrases, clauses and sentences.

1. Conjunctions

Conjunctions are connectors that link words, phrases, clauses or sentences. There are two main types of conjunctions: coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.

Coordinating conjunctions join equivalent word classes, phrases or clauses. Joined words and phrases should be of the same class or type, and joined clauses should be main clauses.

Coordination can take place between two or more main clauses.

E.g. Emily went to see a doctor and was given two days' medical leave but went to work anyway.

The main coordinating conjunctions are and, but and or.

Conjunctions are useful as they help avoid unnecessary repetition of words or phrases.

E.g. It is a small kitchen. It is a practical kitchen → It is a small but practical kitchen.

John will inform you of the results. John's assistant will inform you of the results. → John or his assistant will inform you of the results.

They gave their opinions. I gave my opinions. → They gave their opinions and I gave mine.

Coordinating conjunctions may be used in several ways.

1.1. Addition

The conjunction and connects words and phrases that are linked in some way.

E.g. Sam and I will not be attending the meeting.

The conjunctions both ... and are used as a pair for emphasis.

E.g. Both the girls and I were eager to participate in the competition.

1.2. Contrast

The conjunctions but, though and so link words, phrases or clauses that have contrasting meanings. In the case of clauses containing a contrasting idea, whereas and while are used.

E.g. Slowly but surely the ancient temple was painstakingly rebuilt.

Jane, though looking better, is still feeling weak after the operation.

Alex ate too much at the buffet lunch, so he skipped dinner.

Mrs Gopal is firm with her students whereas Mrs Chan tends to be more lenient.

While Stanley tended the garden, his wife baked a cake.

1.3. A Choice or Alternative

You use the conjunction or to link words, phrases or clauses that present a choice or alternative.

E.g. Would you like to have dinner now or later?

I'll contact you by phone or email.

The pairs either ... or and neither ... nor are used to lend greater emphasis to the alternatives.

E.g. Neither the boys nor Sally believes her story.

Either Meiling or Sharon is going to the airport today.

1.4. Cause and Effect

The coordinating conjunctions so and therefore link a cause to its effect.

E.g. He had worked hard, so his success was not unexpected.

They heard the announcement on the radio and therefore took another route to avoid the traffic jam.

Unlike coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions join an independent clause to a dependent clause.

The dependent clause cannot stand on its own and often does not make sense without the main clause.

Most subordinating conjunctions are single words,
e.g. although, as, because, since, when.

Although the journey to the disaster site was difficult, the volunteers want to continue to support the project.

Since they refused to obey the school rules, the boys were suspended from school for a week.

Sarah was waiting for the bus to arrive when she fell.

However, some subordinating conjunctions consist more than one word, e.g. except that, as long as, even if.

E.g. Even if he gives me a lift, I am not going to the funfair.

Except for Jane, all are expected at the lunch.

She will be allowed to keep her pet as long as she looks after it well.

Even if he gives me a lift, I am not going to the funfair.

These are some subordinating conjunctions that convey the following ideas:

Cause: since, because, so that

Concession and Comparison : although, as though, even though

Condition : even if, unless

Place : where, wherever

Time : after, as soon as, whenever

1.5. Correlative Conjunctions

Some conjunctions combine with other words to form correlative conjunctions. They appear together, joining various sentence elements that should be treated as grammatically equal.

Some examples are both...and; not only, but also; either ... or/neither ... nor; whether ... or.

Whether you win or lose this competition is not the issue; it's how hard you've tried.

Using "like" as a Conjunction.

Although like is often used as a conjunction, this is regarded as rather informal and should be avoided in formal writing.

E.g. He doesn't go out like he used to. (informal)
He doesn't go out the way he used to. (formal)

Instead of "Like I told you yesterday, we aren't going to the zoo today", say "As I told you yesterday, we aren't going to the zoo today".

Instead of "It looks like it's going to rain", say "It looks as if it's going to rain".
Misuse of "either ... or"

This construction presents a choice between two alternatives. However, the two alternatives should belong to the same word class.

E.g. We can go to either Bangkok or Bali for our vacation this year. (Both are nouns.)
They can eat either now or after the show. (Both are adverbs.)

Sometimes either is placed in an incorrect position.

E.g. She can take either the exam or ask to be interviewed. (One is a noun – exam
– and the other is a verb – ask.)

The correct phrasing should be: She can either take the exam or ask to be interviewed. (Both are verbs.)

Misuse of "due to"

Due to is often used in place of because of or as a result of. However, the correct way to use it is when it follows a noun or pronoun, i.e., in a sentence structure such as "something is due to...".

Therefore, the sentence below is incorrect:

Our departure was delayed due to bad weather.

It should be recast as:

The delay in our departure was due to bad weather.