

Functional Skills English

Level 2



Learning Resource 2
Grammar and Syntax

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Information

Passive Verbs

A **passive** verb is used when the subject of the sentence “experiences” or “receives” the action of the verb rather than “doing” the action. A **passive** verb is formed by using part of the verb “to be” and a past participle.

Examples

Subject	Active verb	Object	Subject	Passive verb
They	are serving	dinner.	Dinner	is being served.
He	will prosecute	trespassers.	Trespassers	will be prosecuted.
We	cannot rectify	mistakes (later).	Mistakes	cannot be rectified (later).

Sometimes an **agent**, the person or thing that did the action, is used to complement the verb, often by means of a phrase introduced with the word “by”.

Examples

Subject	Passive Verb	Agent
Dinner	was served	by waiters in bow ties.
My car	was serviced	by a qualified mechanic.
A mouse	was brought in	by my cat.

Exercise 1

In the sentences below:

- **highlight** all the passive verbs
- **underline** all the agents (warning – some sentences may not have agents)
- **draw** a circle round the subjects of the passive verbs.
 - 1) She was stopped by a policeman.
 - 2) Will was being bullied constantly by the older boys.
 - 3) The baby was given an injection by the nurse.
 - 4) Lisa has been kicked on the leg by her horse.
 - 5) Because of the foul, a free kick was awarded.
 - 6) The letter had been steamed open.
 - 7) Before she returned home, the whole cake had been eaten.
 - 8) As the park warden discovered, all the rare orchids had been picked.

Information**Passive–Active Verbs**

Passive verbs are most often used when writing more formal text, such as in police or hospital reports and in some newspaper articles, academic writing, legal or formal letters. They are often written in the **third person** e.g. **They** will be prosecuted. **He** was given some new medication. **It** is reported that the leader is dead. Abstract nouns are also often used e.g. the **probability** of it raining, the **occupancy** of the property, and the **modernisation** of the company.

In less formal writing, **active** verbs are more generally used, often with first or second person verbs e.g. **we** are watching a film, **I** spent an hour on the 'phone to my friend, can **you** come with **us**?

Exercise 2

Read the following paragraph from a housing agent's letter to new tenants and underline all the passive verbs.

It is understood from the present owners that the property will not be available until September 1st 2009. However, the building alterations which are being undertaken will be completed by then and, therefore, occupancy of the property will commence from that date. The bathroom has already been modernised and the three bedrooms have all been redecorated. The front door still has to be blocked off and the outside of the house has not yet been repointed. With the probability of improving weather in the near future, it is hoped that building work will be completed to schedule by the end of the month so that the electrical fittings can be installed in the kitchen soon afterwards.

Exercise 3

Now try to rewrite the extract using active verbs as though you were writing this information about the house in a letter to a friend.

Remember that the **subjects** of each sentence may need to change – suitable subjects will probably be “the owners” or “they” - and you may wish to make the paragraph more personal by using “we”, “us” or “you”, as if you and your friend are to be the new tenants.



Information

Active–Passive Verbs

Active verbs are used in most informal writing, in letters to friends, some newspaper reports and writing for children. They are used when the **subject** of the verb is “doing” the action.

Exercise 4

Read the following paragraph from a letter to a friend. It is about her recent summer holiday. Look particularly at the verbs that are used in the extract.

We stayed in a fabulous apartment. My bedroom window looked out over the pool so I was able to ogle the talent without them seeing me. The apartment had two bedrooms with twin beds and there was a double bed-settee in the living area. We ate out in the evenings but often made a salad at lunchtime in our little kitchen. There were discos in the nearby hotel every evening where we danced the night away with Simon and his mates. Simon is so good looking, especially in his swimming shorts! We usually didn't get to bed until after 2.00 a.m. and often quite drunk – alcohol's so cheap out there!

Underline all the **verbs** in the extract. Are any of them in the **passive** mood? Can you explain why not?

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Exercise 5

Investigation

- With a partner, if possible, discuss the paragraph from the informal letter on page 5 and the extract from a housing agent’s letter on the previous page.
- Look at the *language* that is used in the two letters, the *length of the sentences* and the *verbs*. Are the *verbs* in the *active* or *passive* mood?
- Check the *subjects* of each verb. Write down all the *differences* that you can find between the two letters.

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Information

Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions are questions that are used only **for effect** and to which **no answer is expected**. They are used in everyday speech and writing but in particular in speeches by politicians and in newspaper articles where the writer is trying to persuade the reader of a particular point. Can you think of any other examples? Add them to the list as you find them.

Examples of rhetorical questions used in everyday speech –

- What's that got to do with you? = That's got nothing to do with you.
- Who am I to complain? = It is not for me to complain.
- Who asked you? = Nobody asked you.
- Who would have thought it? = Nobody would have thought it.

Exercise 6

Read the following extract from a politician's speech at a party political conference. Highlight all the rhetorical questions that you can identify in the passage. (Look for the sentences ending with question marks.)

My fellow members, don't you see how important it is that we get this right? If we don't provide sufficient funding for our schools and our hospitals, how are we going to face the people of this country in the next election? Did we not say that we would reduce hospital waiting lists? Did we not promise a review of teachers' salaries? Did we not assure our young people that we would put an end to the turmoil that has been rife in our schools since the introduction of the new examination system? How are we to do this if we do not provide our doctors and teachers with the funds they require? I ask you, friends, to think positively about this amendment and vote in favour of the recommendation that we increase funding to these two vital bodies in our society.



Exercise 7

Now try to rewrite the passage without any rhetorical questions. Each sentence will now become a **statement** but must contain the same information as you were given in the original speech.

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Information**Use of Repetition**

The use of repetition is a common device used in persuasive writing such as advertisements and political speeches.

Examples:

- In advertising brochures: “You will want to **return again and again.**”
- In political speeches where a common device is to repeat the beginning of the sentence three times: “You can be sure that **the orange party** will not keep their promises; **the orange party** will raise taxes; **the orange party** will increase unemployment.”

Exercise 8**Recognising Deliberate Repetition for Persuasive Purposes**

Underline or highlight the words and phrases that are unnecessary in this passage and are merely added for effect.

Protest Against Council Taxes

Time and again, we have revisited the very same vexing issues that annually annoy people every year. It seems to be the intent of this council to put up rates and increase taxes. Why should the local rates payers of this area continue to subsidise the overseas visits of their chosen representatives on this council: their councillors? It is about time this malpractice, this unprofessional conduct was stopped and put an end to.

Why not join the rest of the local dissenters in a protest meeting at the Village Hall tomorrow, Thursday at 6 pm in the evening?

Information**Definitions of Different Types of Sentence**

Effective writing consists of a mixture of different kinds of sentence, a mixture of **simple**, **compound** and **complex** sentences. While simple or compound sentences are preferable for some types of writing, e.g. instructions or directions, complex sentences afford your writing more variety of structure and can make your writing more interesting to read.

A **Simple Sentence** is a sentence with only one **clause**, e.g. *The train pulled out of the station.*

A **Compound Sentence** is sentence made up of simple sentences of equal weight joined by **conjunctions** or joining words, e.g. *The train pulled out of the station **and** it immediately came to a stop.*

A **Complex Sentence** is a sentence containing a **main clause** and a **subordinate clause** or clauses, e.g. *The train pulled out of the station quickly because it was half an hour late.*

Information**Subordinate Clauses**

A subordinate clause forms part of a sentence and is dependent on another clause, phrase or part of a sentence, but it must contain a verb of its own. There are three main types of subordinate clause:

- **Adverb** clause –
e.g. I was surprised **because it was so unexpected.**
- **Noun** clause –
e.g. It was odd **that she did not telephone.**
- **Adjective** clause –
e.g. The news (that) **you gave us** is very odd.

Subordinate clauses are used when joining two or more **simple sentences** into one longer **complex sentence**. The above examples are **subordinate clauses**. Simple sentences would have been written like this:

- I was surprised. It was so unexpected.
- It was odd. She did not telephone.
- You gave us news. It is very odd.

Exercise 9

Put brackets round the *subordinate clauses* in these *complex sentences* and underneath write the two *simple sentences* from which they were formed. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1) The woman lives in a house (which is very big).
The woman lives in a house. It is very big.

2) The footballer who plays in central midfield has scored several goals this season.

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3) The athlete hurt her leg when she was training for the marathon.

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4) I saw the accident happen as I was going to the shops.

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5) I shall speak to him because I am not pleased with his behaviour.

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6) The boxer, who lost the fight, was badly cut over his left eye.

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7) We heard the news that the expectant mother had been taken to the hospital by helicopter.

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8) Because the old lady could not see very well, she tripped over the step.

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Exercise 10**Complex Sentences**

Make each pair of *simple sentences* into one *complex sentence* using subordinate clauses. *Do not* combine the sentences simply into a compound sentence by using a joining word (and, but etc.). The first one has been done for you as an example.

- 1) She fell over. She had a big bruise on her hip.

Because she had fallen over, she had a big bruise on her hip.

- 2) There was a loud peal of thunder. The children were frightened.

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- 3) The car would not start. It was a freezing cold morning.

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- 4) He had bad toothache. He had an abscess on his gum.

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- 5) The telephone call came too late. She had already left.

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- 6) The teacher praised the pupils. They had worked hard.

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- 7) The motorcyclist was badly injured. He was not wearing a crash helmet.

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- 8) Tom disliked cats. He was allergic to them.

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Exercise 11**Simple and Compound Sentences**

Read through this newspaper article. Notice how the journalist has used short sentences.

Discuss how you think this affects the appeal of the article and the atmosphere it portrays.

It was a very dark night. Mrs. Taylor was walking home alone. She had just got off the bus. She had been to the cinema in town. Her friend, Mrs. Watson, was still on the bus. She lives at the other end of the village. Mrs. Taylor reached the corner of the street on which she lives. She was confronted by a group of youths. They started to shout at her and harass her. One of them took a swipe at her shoulder bag. Mrs. Taylor was not letting go. She started to scream. She struggled with the youths. They all joined in the attempt to steal her bag. Soon Mrs. Taylor was on the ground. The youths kicked her and trampled on her face. They finally grabbed her bag. They left her on the pavement. A man who was walking his dog found her later. She was taken to hospital with a broken cheekbone. She also had multiple cuts and bruises.

Now try to rewrite the paragraph in only a few sentences (probably about five or six sentences will do). Remember to use *subordinate clauses* in your sentences. You do not have to reuse all the words in the passage but you must keep the sense of the journalist's article the same. It may help you to decide where each new sentence should end if you try to keep each new idea in a separate sentence.

Exercise 12

Investigation

Working with a partner, compare your own version with theirs.

- ❖ Discuss how the appeal and atmosphere of the article are different from the original.
- ❖ Check that your versions still contain the main points of the journalist's article.
- ❖ Look at the ways that you have both used to change it into longer sentences.
- ❖ How are they alike?
- ❖ What different techniques have you both used to achieve the same end result?



Exercise 13**Investigation**

By comparing the original newspaper article on the previous page with your own version of the same article, you should be able to see that the way sentences are constructed is an important factor in the readability of the article.

With a partner, or in a group, discuss the following issues and then complete the questions below.

- Which one do you find easier to read – your version with longer complex sentences, or the original version with short simple sentences? Or would you prefer a combination of both simple and complex sentences?

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- In what kind of writing would you think it more appropriate for the author to write mostly in simple sentences? Why?

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- In what kind of writing would you think it more appropriate for the author to write mostly in complex sentences? Why?

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Exercise 14

Now try to match each kind of writing with the style of sentence construction that you think is the more suitable.

Draw a line between the kind of writing and the appropriate sentence construction.

Letter to a friend

Letter from a solicitor

Children's story

Teenage magazine article

Instructions for making a cake

News item in The Sun

Daily Telegraph article by the political editor

Adult science fiction novel

Instructions for building a flat-pack bookcase

A Sunday Supplement article describing a tranquil holiday island

**mostly
simple sentences**

**mostly
complex sentences**

Compare your answers with those of your partner or group.

Information

Subject-Verb Agreement

In complex sentences, which may contain several clauses and phrases, it is most important to check that the **subject** of a sentence agrees with its **verb**. The **subject** can be either **singular** (I, he, she, it, John, Mrs Brown, the teacher, a cat, a film, etc.) or **plural** (we, they, the children, our friends, the books, etc.), but in each case the verb that refers to the subject must be made to agree with it.

Examples:

- After whisking two eggs lightly in a mixing bowl **you will see** that **they have become** frothy.

You will see - singular subject followed by singular verb
They have become - plural subject followed by plural verb

- **The cook folded** the flour carefully into the mixture **which dropped** easily off the spoon when **it was poured** into the cake tin.

The cook folded - singular subject followed by singular verb.
Which dropped - singular subject followed by singular verb, "which" being the mixture.
It was poured - singular subject followed by singular verb, "it" being the mixture.

- **The referee**, after consulting with both of his assistants, **is pointing** to the spot and **is awarding** a penalty in favour of the home team.

The referee Is pointing and is awarding - singular subject followed by two singular verbs.

As you can see from the last example, it is particularly important to check subject-verb agreement when the subject is separated from its verb(s) by other clauses or phrases.



Exercise 15

Highlight the *subject* and *verb* that belong to each other in these sentences. Highlight each pair in *different* colours so that you can more easily check that each verb agrees with its subject, correcting any verbs that don't agree.

- 1) Aunt Lucy looks at the clock and, in the quiet of the early summer morning, tiptoes downstairs where she put on the kettle, makes herself a pot of tea and let the cat outside.
- 2) The patio door in the lounge, which her husband had locked the night before, is standing open and the plant pot on the patio are on its side, soil spilled everywhere.
- 3) Aunt Lucy screams and cast her eyes quickly round the room for any evidence of burglars; there seems to be nothing out of place.
- 4) She run outside, nervously searching around her for signs of intruders but everything are in its rightful place except for the plant pot which is now cracked from where it had fallen over.
- 5) At the sound of her screaming, her husband haul himself out of bed and holding tightly to the banisters hobble down the stairs as quickly as his broken leg allows him.
- 6) Thoroughly searching the garden, while Jack telephones the police, Aunt Lucy find her nephew, Matt, under a tree. He am fast asleep.
- 7) During the previous evening, Matt had been to a 21st birthday party in the local town, had drunk rather a lot and had been brought to his aunt's house in the early hours of the morning by one of her neighbours who had found him on the pavement by the bus stop.
- 8) Aunt Lucy had given Matt, who normally live with three mates in a flat above the shops, a key to use in emergencies so he had been able to get into the house but for some reason, probably because he were drunk, he had decided to sleep in the open air and had used the patio door to get out into the garden.

Investigation

Subject-Verb Agreement

Beware collective nouns, words that are singular but refer to a group of people or animals e.g. audience, crowd, queue, group, herd, committee, team. These nouns are followed by a **singular verb** if the group is considered to be a **single unit** but by a **plural verb** if the group is considered to be a **group of individuals**.

Examples: -

- The **audience**, which **was** a large one, **was** in **its** place by 7.30 p.m.
- The **audience**, who **were** all dancing in the hall, **were** obviously enjoying **themselves**.

- A **queue was** forming outside the stadium early in the afternoon.
- The **queue**, who **were** all joining in the singing, **were** waiting to get **their** tickets.

Look for other examples as you are reading books, newspapers and magazine articles and list them below. Is there a pattern to the way in which they are formed?

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Information**Past Tenses**

Past Tenses are used when a writer is telling us about things which happened in the past. Most narrative, newspaper articles, reports etc. are written in the past tense. However, there are **four** main past tenses that occur in most texts: -

Simple Past Tense expresses an action or state that has happened before the time of writing.

e.g. We **played** badminton.
They **walked** to school.
It **happened** so quickly.

Perfect Tense expresses a similar time but is formed by using part of the verb “have” and the past participle of the main verb.

e.g. They **have won** their cup match.
He **has broken** his arm.
It **has blown** up.

Imperfect or Continuous Tense expresses an action or state that was ongoing when some other action or state took place. It is formed by using part of the verb “to be” and by adding “-ing” to the main verb.

e.g. We **were waiting** at the bus stop when they drove past.
Sarah **was playing** outside when she fell and broke her leg.
It **was growing** dark as the boat sailed slowly into the harbour.

Pluperfect or Past Perfect Tense expresses an action or state that happened at a time earlier than the time of the main verbs in the text. It is formed by using “had” and the past participle of the main verb.

e.g. I **had forgotten** until you reminded me.
They **had** already **finished** their meal when I arrived.
It **had grown** very dark when the thunder started.

Exercise 16

Read the following newspaper paragraph identifying the verbs in the following way:-

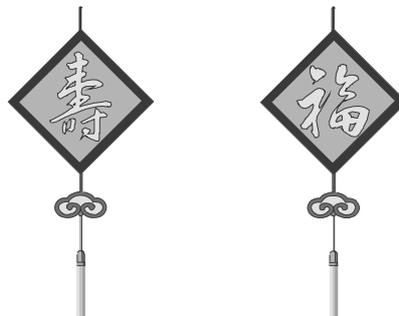
Verbs in the Simple Past or Perfect Tense highlight in yellow.

Verbs in the Imperfect Tense highlight in red.

Verbs in the Pluperfect Tense highlight in blue.

The examples in the Information above will help you.

Anna Yeung Ho had come from Hong Kong. She came to live in Britain five years ago. She knew very little English so, while her parents were running a Chinese Take-away, she went to college every day to learn English. Soon she had made many friends and they showed her the ways of her new country. They took her to see films, into pubs and clubs and to see the tourist sights in the locality. By the end of her first year in Britain, Anna was helping her parents to learn English too. She worked in the Take-away each evening, while she was still keeping up with her studies during the day. Last year she decided to go back to Hong Kong to teach English to schoolchildren so she has just completed a teaching certificate that will allow her to fulfil her dream. Her parents have admitted that they will miss her but now they have overcome their language problems and have made lots of friends of their own in the community. Anna will leave Britain at the end of this month.



Exercise 17

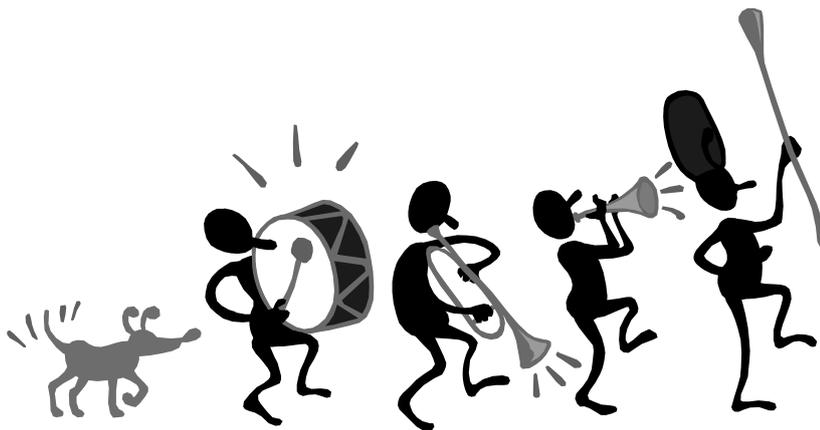
Look again at the paragraph above. Towards the end of it you should be able to pick out another tense that has been used. Look at the three verbs that are underlined – which tense has been used here? Why?

Exercise 18

Using Different Verb Tenses

Now read the next few sentences, which are the beginning of a report about a fundraising day written by a learner, and then continue the article remembering to use the *Perfect Tense* as your main tense but introducing as many other tenses as you sensibly can.

Last Friday was our annual fundraising day for local charities. As usual, learners thought up many crazy ideas to encourage people to sponsor them. The Music Society held a 24-hour concert in the Subterranean Bar (a very suitable place for them!) with some of the wind band enjoying the freedom to improvise when their conductor could no longer cope with the strain of waving his arms about. As expected, the jazz group took the long session through the wee small hours in their stride, though the trombonist was reported to have very sore lips the next day! While various bands were playing throughout the day, other activities took place outside in the Square. The Rugby Teams challenged the Hockey Club to a tug of war under strict supervision by their coaches. There seemed to be a never-ending supply of team members as both men and women took part in both teams. MedSoc organised a competition for the greatest number of baked beans transferred by sucking through a straw from one dish to another in a given time.



Try to complete the article in the same style, including as many other fundraising events as you want. At the end of the article, try to use other verb tenses by saying how much money has been raised so far, how much they are hoping to raise in total and which charities are going to benefit from the learners' fundraising. You may find it helpful to *underline* each relevant verb as you go so that you can check the tenses of the verbs that you use. When you have finished, exchange your work with a partner's and see if you both can trace the way that the verb tenses change as you read through each other's article.

Information

Passive Verbs Again

Passive verbs are more often used in formal writing such as legal letters and impersonal reports. They help to keep the focus of the writing on the action rather than on the subject of the sentence, the person or thing that performs the action.

Examples

1)	active form of the verb passive form of the verb my	I noticed it has been brought to my attention	emphasis on "I" emphasis on "been brought to attention"
2)	active form of the verb passive form of the verb decided"	we decided it has been decided	emphasis on "we" emphasis on "has been

Exercise 19

This abstract from a legal report has been written by a solicitor's junior clerk. Unfortunately, he has used active verbs in his writing so the emphasis is not as his boss wants it. She asks him to rewrite it using **Passive** verbs so that she can send the report to her client.

Read the original report in the active mood and then complete the rewritten version below. Remember to change the emphasis of the passage from "we" and "you" to "it".

Unfortunately we are not able to offer you much hope of ever regaining the full value of your property. If you had notified the insurance company immediately that you had lost this valuable item, I think that you would have been more successful in your claim. Clause 2.11 of your agreement with them states that you are under an obligation to report missing property as soon as you become aware of it. As you cannot be certain that your instruments disappeared from your car and because you think it may be some weeks ago since this incident happened, we have little hope of bringing this claim to a satisfactory conclusion. Therefore, because you are so unsure of the exact details of the time and place of the loss, we cannot pursue this matter any further with your insurance company.

Information**Pronouns**

A pronoun is a word that stands in for a noun or a noun phrase. There are several different kinds of pronouns:

- personal pronouns e.g. I/me, you, she/her, he/him, we/us, they/them, it;
- possessive pronouns e.g. mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs, its;
- reflexive pronouns e.g. myself, yourself, themselves etc;
- indefinite pronouns e.g. someone, anything, nobody, everything;
- interrogative pronouns e.g. who/whom, whose, which, what;
- relative pronouns e.g. who/whom, which, that.

It must be clear from the context to what or whom a pronoun refers. Make sure that this is checked during proof reading.

The pronoun must agree with the noun in all the following:

- the person used, first, second or third person;
- singular or plural;
- subject-verb agreement.

Examples:

Have you met **Kate**?

Have you met **her**?

Is that **your coat**?

Is that **yours**?

Tom and Sanjit congratulated **Tom and Sanjit** on their successful exam results.

Tom and Sanjit congratulated **themselves** on their successful exam results.

George was **not** there to answer the call.

Nobody was there to answer the call.

What was the name of the person you were speaking to?

To **whom** were you speaking?

He chose a book. **The book** was by James Berry.

He chose a book **which** was by James Berry.

Exercise 20

Replace the **emboldened pronouns with ones which make sense and are correct in terms of person, gender, singular or plural and subject-verb agreement.**

The girl strolled into the dining room. At once all eyes were upon **them**. **He** seemed unaware of the interest **it** had aroused. The head waiter approached her and caught **their** attention. "Perhaps Madam was not aware that dress is formal in the dining room," **they** said smiling. "But my dress is formal," **it** said. "**They** was made by the finest couturier in Paris. **He** is the height of fashion in New York." "I don't doubt it, Madam, but I am afraid that what is acceptable there is not acceptable here. Trousers are not formal dress," **she** said bluntly. "I must ask **him** to leave." The girl blushed, turned on **their** heels and left. The general hubbub of conversation resumed. "The very idea!" someone said. "Women wearing trousers and in the Savoy dining room! What is the world coming to?"

Exercise 21**Pronouns**

Replace the **emboldened noun or noun phrase by an appropriate pronoun.**

- 1) **What is the name of the person who** spilt the milk? **John** spilt the milk.
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- 2) I saw **Imran** break the window.
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- 3) By twelve o'clock **the bedroom carpets** had been vacuumed by the cleaner.
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- 4) **The patient in bed 8** was getting very bored by his enforced bed rest by the end of the week.
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- 5) I can't remember **the object** I was supposed to pick up from the station.
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- 6) Margaret looked at **Margaret** in the mirror and sighed a long deep sigh.
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7) Although we took our sandwiches with us, others hadn't and ended up eating **our sandwiches**.

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8) Do you remember to **which person** you sent the email?

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9) **None of the people** we expected to go was there.

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10) We could all hear **a noise** coming from the cellar.

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