



Forming sentences – ensuring agreement in number and tense

Introduction

A common error that occurs in writing is the creation of sentences that do not grammatically agree in number and tense. Although this type of error does not greatly reduce communication, it impedes the quality of your presentation and therefore your marks. This resource outlines how to ensure that agreement is consistent when forming your sentences – as would be expected in high quality academic writing.

What is agreement and how do I ensure my sentences contain it?

To achieve agreement in your writing, all parts of a sentence should agree in both number and tense:

Number (applies to pronouns, nouns and verbs)

- Singular (meaning one)
- Plural (meaning more than one)

Tense (applies only to verbs)

- Past (already happened)
- Present (happening now / generally happens)
- Future (will happen)

The following outlines how to demonstrate each type of agreement.

Showing agreement in number

To show agreement in number your sentences should consistently contain singular or plural pronouns, nouns and verbs.

Example

The following sentences both show agreement in number in their use of **pronouns**, **nouns** and **verbs**.

Sentence 1: **This** study **demonstrates** how global warming is contributing to a rise in sea levels.

Sentence 2: **These** findings **demonstrate** the rate at which sea levels are rising.

The following details how the correct word forms were used:

	Pronoun		Noun		Verb
Singular	This	agrees with	study	agrees with	demonstrates
Plural	These	agrees with	findings	agrees with	demonstrate

Therefore, to ensure that all parts of your sentence express agreement in number, **pronouns**, **nouns**, and **verbs** must all express the same numeric value (singular or plural).

Showing agreement in tense

Agreement in tense is achieved by providing consistency in your application of time / tense to the verbs you use in your writing.

Example

In the following agreement is achieved by using the same tense when referring to the same time period – as demonstrated by the highlighted words:

Tense	Meaning	Example
Past	Already happened	The research was carried out over the summer period. Six members of staff were interviewed.
Present	Happening now / generally happens	Market research is important in determining key competition within the area. It provides an understanding of how your product or service compares to competitors.
Future	Will happen	There will be an increase in the number of students who attend academic skills classes. This will happen because of higher recognition of skills transferability.

Summary

Errors of this type are often unintentional and may only cause minimal strain for the reader. However, it is important to ensure the standard of your writing is such that you present your ideas in a clear and concise manner. It is recommended that you always proofread your work for mistakes in agreement and other similar errors.

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:
lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub

