

English grammar rules

The rules behind common learner mistakes, with right and wrong examples

1 Which tense?

Time words	Tense	Example
yesterday, in 1995	past simple	We met in 1975.
today, this year, ever	present perfect	I've seen it twice.
for + a period	present perfect	empty for three years
since + a start	present perfect	empty since 2006

2 Right, not wrong

he / she / it	He hates s hospitals. Not: He hate.
plural subject	They don't know. Not: They doesn't.
a or an	By sound: a university, an hour.
a / an	Singular countable only: some advice, not an advice.
fewer / less	fewer cars, less work
much / many	much change, many campsites
adjective order	Opinion first: an amazing red coat.

3 Words that go together

- depend **on** the weather
- interested **in** what I said
- good **at** geography
- **it's** = it is · **its** = belonging to it
- **affect** = verb · **effect** = noun

4 2-minute check

- Tense matches the time word
- -s on every he / she / it verb
- A, an or the before singular countable nouns
- A or an by sound
- Prepositions: on, in, at
- Its or it's: read it as "it is"
- Fewer or less: can you count it?
- No comma between two full sentences

5 If sentences

likely	If you win the next match, will you be in the semi-final?
unlikely	If I won a million dollars, I would quit tomorrow.
not	If you will win... · If I would win...

6 Two full sentences

period	Nobody goes there anymore. It's boring.
not	Nobody goes there anymore, it's boring.

TIP

English has no future tense form. Use will, be going to or the present: **The train leaves at six.**