

Grammar points to consider when writing an essay or answering an exam question:

1. Is it "I" or "me"?: "I" is the **subject** of the verb (e.g. "*Bill and I went skating*"); and "me" is the **object** of the verb (e.g. "*Anna treated Bill and me to lunch*");. You can see that this way both these sentences would work just as well without Bill – and that is how you know which is correct. You would never dream of saying "Me went skating" or "Anna treated I to lunch" (would you?).
2. How to use "both": "Both" is only necessary when the similarity is seen separately. "We both had clashing personalities" is incorrect because the "clashing personalities" only clash because they are together – you don't have a clashing personality by yourself. "My husband and I are both married" is a pointless thing to say for the same reason!
You could say e.g. "*Fred and I were both wearing red trainers*" because you were wearing them separately and you want to emphasise that this is note-worthy.
3. Gender (when you are not sure): Do not assume that everyone is a man! A large "minority" of people (51%!) are female. Therefore, it is usually appropriate when discussing a person that you know nothing of to say "him/her", "her/himself", "her/him", "her/his" etc (order of genders is not important).
You can also use the pronoun "they" to refer to an individual whose gender you do not know (also "their", "them" etc).
4. "Who's" or "whose"?
"Who's" = "who is" or "who has" E.g. "*Who's at the door?*" (Who is at the door?)
"*Who's left their bag on my chair?*" (Who has left their bag on my chair?)
"Whose" = Literally "To whom", it's a bit like "whom does it belong to?" E.g. "*Whose book is this?*" (To whom does this book belong?)
5. "Which" or "who"?
"Which" for things, animals, concepts etc (not human beings)
"Who" for human beings
E.g. "*I have met fellow students who have seen something in me that I did not*", "*I read an excellent book which changed my way of thinking about this subject.*"
6. "Who" or "whom"?
Back to Point 1 really: "Who" for the subject of the verb (who is doing it) and "whom" for the object (to whom it happens)
E.g. "*My brother, who spends every weekend watching football, never has time for gardening.*"

“My neighbour, Lucy, whom you met at my house last Christmas, has just had a baby.” (You could also use “that” in this sentence: *“My neighbour, Lucy, that you met at my house last Christmas, has just had a baby.”*)

7. “Between” or “among”?

Between two; among more than two.

8. “Practise” is the verb (eg *“I am practising my Spanish before my holiday in Barcelona.”*)

“Practice” is the noun (eg *“Practice makes perfect.”*)

(Also see Note 10 below.)

9. “Few” or “a few”? (there is quite a big difference between these two).

“A few” = some, a small number (e.g. *I went to the coffee bar with a few friends.*)

“Few” = not many (e.g. *“There are few pandas left in the wild.”*)

e.g. old song with both: *“Regrets, I’ve had a few, but then again too few to mention. Blah blah I did it my way.”* (or: I’ve had some regrets but not enough to mention.)

From a “nonsense” poem by Edward Lear, *“Far and few, far and few are the lands where the Jumblies live”* (i.e. the places where the Jumblies live are a long way away and there’s not many of them – that’s not surprising, as “their heads are green and their hands are blue”!)

“Fewer” – not as many as before (e.g. *“Fewer people can afford luxuries in the global financial crisis.”*)

10. “Advise” is the verb (e.g. *“I advise you to be careful.”*)

“Advice” is the noun (e.g. *“I asked Alex for some advice about the application”*)

Note this is formed like “practise” and “practice” except that in “advise” you can hear a “z” sound and in “advice” you can hear a “ss” sound.

11. *“Without Alex’s help I would have been lost.”* Be careful with this as when we say it, it sounds like “would’ve”, which leads to spelling it as “would of” – this is an error which gives a poor impression of your English style.

12. *“The reason for this is ...”*. Please do not write, “Reason being is because ...” as although this sounds perfectly fine when you say it, it is an error in written English which gives a poor impression of your English style.

(E.g. *“I never vacuum the floors at home. The reason for this is that I am prone to back ache.”*)

13. “Lead” in the present tense but “led” in the past tense.

This is different from “read” which is “read” (pronounced as “reed”) in the present tense and also “read” (but pronounced as “red”) in the past tense.

14. “Criteria” is the plural, the singular is “criterion”.

(E.g. “My main criterion for a good holiday location is hot weather.”

“The marking criteria for the reflective assignment are self-focus, deep reflection, analysis applying relevant theory and appropriate presentation.”)

15. “It” is for animals and things, “he” “she” and “they” are for people.

(“E.g. “Every dog has its day.”

“If speech is not permitted, a person finds their ability to communicate much restricted.”)

16. “Uninterested” or “disinterested”?

“Uninterested” means “I don’t care” – “I’m uninterested in seeing the new Star Wars film because I am bored by space aliens”.

“Disinterested” means “not having an interest – such as financial, or an ulterior motive” – “Football referees should be disinterested in the result of the match so that they are unbiased.”

A D A M S T U T O R S