Grammar:

Verbs and Sentence Structure

This workshop will:

- Refresh your understanding of verbs and clauses
- Cover problematic verb forms, passive and active voices, and different clause types for speakers of English.
- Provide an opportunity to practice within the workshop and via follow-on activities for you to be able to continue to improve your grammar

Teaching points:

1. Using appropriate verb tenses for academic work
2. Use of passive and active voice
3. What a clause is
4. Different types of clauses and sentences

Adapted extensively from Cottrell (2008)
1. Using appropriate word tenses for academic work

When you are writing academically, you will regularly use reporting verbs, i.e. those used to inform the reader of previous research in the subject under discussion. When reading academic texts, you will find that these reporting verbs are very often in the present tense because of the need to bring past research into the present (Sharpling, 2014), although the past is also used. Check with your tutor to see if there is a preferred tense.

Present

To warn: Boynton (1982, p. 79) warns the reader that ordinary chocolate is “too frail to withstand heat, moisture and proximity to baked beans”.

To refute: Some people subscribe to the idea that chocolate is unhealthy, but Boynton’s (1982) book refutes this claim.

Past

To reason: Smith (2013) reasoned that communication skills are essential to building effective nurse-patient relationships.

To endorse: In her study on building effective nurse-student relationships, Brown (2013) endorsed the idea that communication skills are essential.

Examples above adapted from Velliaris and Miller (2009), and Eastern Institute of Technology (2014)

As a group, let’s decide which verb and form (past or present) to insert in the following sentences.

A. Hanks (2004, p. 257) defines/defined an idiom as an expression whose “meaning . . . is distinct from the sum of its parts”.

B. Smith (2005) disagrees/disagreed with Fry (2003) when she maintains/maintained that many students have trouble with reporting verbs.

C. This paper investigates/investigated the effects of alcohol on memory and stresses that further research be done as a matter of urgency.

Activity 1: Verb forms and tense

In pairs or small groups, choose a verb and tense to fill the gap. Also provide a reason.

A. Stein-Parbury (2000) defines/defined listening as the ability to hear, understand, and appreciate a patient’s experience.

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B. De Cieri et al. (2003) **clarify/clarified** the role of human resources in terms of a company's improved competitiveness in their Australian Business Excellence Model.

C. In their presentation, Sawyer and Smith (2001) **describe/described** their sampling methods and data analysis in great detail.

D. In their study on acculturation, Birman, Sharpe, and Angeles (2004) **propose/proposed** a variety of solutions to the current problem facing Australian cities such as Melbourne and Sydney, that of "ghettoisation" (p. 77).

E. Previous studies on the work-study balance of tertiary students (Campbell, 2004; Guthrie, Logan, & Tuomy, 2003; Smith, 1999) **conclude/concludes** that most students prioritise work over study.

F. Lygon (2001) **ignores/ignored** conflicting data in his review of the literature thereby compromising the credibility of his research in the field.

Adapted from Australian Catholic University (2010)

Frequents errors are made with the past tense for the verb *to be* with when to use *was* or *were*. The rule is to only use *was* for the 1st and 3rd person singular, i.e. I and he/she/it, and *were* for everything else.

Examples:

- I *was* happy to win tickets to the concert.
- You *were* happy to win tickets to the concert.
- He *was* happy to win tickets to the concert.
- We *were* happy to win tickets to the concert.
- The twins *were* happy to win tickets to the concert.

A similar problem occurs with *to have* in the present with *have* and *has*. The rule is even easier than above: only use *has* for the 3rd person singular, i.e. I he/she/it, and *have* for everything else.

Examples:

- I *have* the concert tickets.
- You *have* the concert tickets.
- She *has* the concert tickets.
- We *have* the concert tickets.
- The twins *have* the concert tickets.

**Treat acronyms like words**
2. Use of passive and active voice

There are two ‘voices’ which can be used in writing:

- active voice is used when the subject is placed before the verb
- passive voice is used when the subject is moved so the object is placed first

Quick summary of subject-verb-object sentence construction:

A sentence must have a subject and a verb connected to it; it may also have an object.

- A SUBJECT ‘does’ the ‘doing’ or action of a verb, e.g. The DOG bit the cat – DOG is the subject as it is doing the biting.
- A VERB is the ‘doing’ part of a sentence, e.g. The dog BIT the cat – BIT is the verb as it is the action
- An OBJECT is the one that is having the ‘doing’ or action ‘done’ to it, e.g. The dog bit the CAT – CAT is the object as it is the thing that is being bitten.

(Pet care tips: 2012)

All of the above use active voice – the object (thing that ‘does’ the ‘doing’) comes before the verb and the subject (thing that is ‘being’ done to).

Let’s switch the above round to passive voice:

The cat was bitten by the dog.
The dog is still the subject (thing that ‘does’ the ‘biting’) and the cat is still the object (thing that is having the ‘biting’ done to).

But can you see what effect that has on the reader? You don’t just actually read it differently, you perceive it differently. It is now the cat that is the most important part of the sentence because it has been put first. This construction or order is useful in academic writing as it tends to enable students to write in the third person more easily, and it looks and sounds more formal.

Both active and passive can be used in your academic writing, but the key is when to use each one and to be consistent.
Which of these is active and passive, and what effect does it have?

A) Keir Hardie was elected as the first Labour MP by the voters of Merthyr Tydfil in 1900.  
B) The voters of Merthyr Tydfil elected Keir Hardie as the first Labour Party MP in 1900.

**Activity 2: Active or passive**

Read the 10 sentences below and decide whether they are passive or active, and check with a neighbour to see if your answers tally. Then rewrite the sentences in the other voice. Check with a different neighbour to share your results.

A. The honey bees we are kept in a humidified chamber at room temperature overnight.

B. Green plants produce carbohydrates in the presence of light and chlorophyll.

C. The proposed structure had novel features which were of considerable biological interest.

D. The solution was heated to 90°C for approximately 30 minutes and then allowed to cool.

E. Up to 90% of the energy in light bulbs is wasted in the form of heat.

F. Oswald shot President Kennedy in 1963.

G. The first edition of Freud's earliest writings on dreams was published in 1899.

H. Physicists have examined the possibility of cold fusion for many years.

I. Specialists refer patients after six months.

J. *Drosophila melanogaster* has been one of the most extensively studied species in genetics research.

Adapted extensively from Every (2012), Gould (2011) and Ricci (2012).
3. **What a clause is**

Many people find the term ‘clause’ daunting, but a clause is just a building block of a sentence with each one adding to the overall detail of a sentence. Without clauses, writing can be boring and child-like.

- A clause is a group of words that may or may **not** have a complete meaning on their own.

- A sentence may contain **more** than one clause, but **must** have one main clause.

4. **Different types of clauses and sentences**

**Main clauses:**

- a sentence must have one
- a sentence may consist only of **one** clause (all the sentence examples above are one clause long)

**Co-ordinated clauses:**

A sentence may consist of two main clauses that make sense on their own, linked by a conjunction – this is a **compound sentence**.

Two separate sentences combine into one compound sentence:

Just **deliverer**

The results of the experiment were recorded. The data was put in a spreadsheet.

The results of the experiment were recorded and the data was put in a spreadsheet.

There are many words that can be used as conjunctions including ‘or’, ‘but’, and ‘so’.

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**Other clauses:** a sentence may consist of a main clause and one or more other non-main clauses which would not make sense on their own; they may follow one another or one may be within another – this is a **complex sentence**.

One sentence which is a main clause and one other non-main clause combine into a complex sentence:

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sentence and one main clause

The results of the experiment were recorded.

that more sugar can be dissolved in water the higher the temperature of the liquid

start of original sentence start of non-main clause
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The results of the experiment, that more sugar can be dissolved in water the higher the temperature of the liquid, were recorded.

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end of non-main clause end of original sentence
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Non-main clauses can go in the middle or the end of complex sentences.

**A bit more information**

- Clauses are normally separated by **commas** or **conjunctions**
- A main clause does not have to begin a sentence
- A clause that is not a main clause does not have to have a verb or subject
- Quick reminder - a sentence contains a subject and verb to make sense on its own
Let’s look at the following passage together

The jury system is a central plank of the British legal system. A number of critics of it who say that it is outdated. Many cases too complex for ordinary members of the public. The result they feel that juries should not be used any longer.

Activity 3: Sentences and clauses

Read these paragraphs and highlight where there are errors. With your neighbour, rewrite the paragraphs so that they contain only complete sentences. To do this you may need to add linking words to join some sentences together, create clauses and/or re-word some parts.

a) A number of reasons why the ruling party might lose the next election. The state of the economy is probably the top one. Many people are losing jobs and businesses are unable to attract investment. A growing loss of faith in the government.

b) TV watchers could not believe how many people the protest attracted. Despite one of the wettest days of the year. On every street in the city centre, hundreds of protestors. Carrying slogans and denounced the government's policies.

If you would like help with punctuation we run workshops on these subjects.

You can also visit The Language Centre at Bradford University who will be able to provided additional support to ALL students:

http://www.brad.ac.uk/study/languages/international-study-centre/
References

Clip art: microphone/questions


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Verb and form

A. Hanks (2004, p. 257) defines an idiom as an expression whose “meaning . . . is distinct from the sum of its parts”. present

B. Smith (2005) disagreed with Fry (2003) when she maintained that many students have trouble with reporting verbs. past

C. This paper investigates the effects of alcohol on memory and stresses that further research be done as a matter of urgency. present

Activity 1: Verb forms and tense

D. Stein-Parbury (2000) defines listening as the ability to hear, understand, and appreciate a patient's experience. present

E. De Cieri et al. (2003) clarify the role of human resources in terms of a company's improved competitiveness in their Australian Business Excellence Model. present *Not 'clarifies' as this would be verb form for one person or item.

F. In their presentation, Sawyer and Smith (2001) describe their sampling methods and data analysis in great detail. present

G. In their study on acculturation, Birman, Sharpe, and Angeles (2004) propose a variety of solutions to the current problem facing Australian cities such as Melbourne and Sydney, that of "ghettoisation" (p. 77). present

H. Previous studies on the work-study balance of tertiary students (Campbell, 2004; Guthrie, Logan, & Tuomy, 2003; Smith, 1999) conclude that most students prioritise work over study. Present as a number of former studies and their findings are being discussed in terms of their relevance today.

I. Lygon (2001) ignores conflicting data in his review of the literature thereby compromising the credibility of his research in the field. present

Adapted from Australian Catholic University (2010)
A) is the passive as ‘Keir Hardie’ is the object (thing that has been ‘elected) and the subject is the ‘voters’ (thing that did the ‘electing’). Hardie is put first and so is the focus of the sentence.

**Activity 2:** Active or passive

A. The honey bees were kept in a humidified chamber at room temperature overnight. **Passive**
B. Green plants produce carbohydrates in the presence of light and chlorophyll. **Active**
C. The proposed structure had novel features which were of considerable biological interest. **Active**
D. The solution was heated to 90°C for approximately 30 minutes and then allowed to cool. **Passive**
E. Up to 90% of the energy in light bulbs is wasted in the form of heat. **Passive**
F. Oswald shot President Kennedy in 1963. **Active**
G. The first edition of Freud’s earliest writings on dreams was published in 1899. **Passive**
H. Physicists have examined the possibility of cold fusion for many years. **Active**
I. Specialists refer patients after six months. **Active**
J. *Drosophila melanogaster* has been one of the most extensively studied species in genetics research. **Passive**

Adapted extensively from Every (2012), Gould (2011) and Ricci (2012).

**TALKING POINT**

**Clauses**

The jury system is a central plank of the British legal system, **although** a number of critics of it say that it is outdated with many cases being too complex for ordinary members of the public. **Therefore,** they feel juries should not be used any longer.

**Activity 3:** Sentences and clauses

a) There are a number of reasons why the ruling party might lose the next election, **with** the state of the economy probably being the top one. Many people are losing jobs and businesses are unable to attract investment **generating** a growing loss of faith in the government.

b) TV watchers could not believe how many people the protest attracted, **despite it being held on** one of the wettest days of the year. On every street in the city centre, hundreds of protestors **carried** slogans and denounced the government’s policies.

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