

**The OETWorkshop's**  
***Essential Grammar for Health Professionals***



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**Getting B, B, B, B (or even higher) in the OET  
or Band 7 in IELTS Academic requires . . .**

- correct grammar
- correct spelling
- appropriate words
- more sophisticated vocabulary
- correct punctuation
- verbal and written fluency
- quick comprehension skills



**If you are a skilled health professional -  
or a high achiever needing Band 7 in IELTS to gain entry  
into a prestigious University course, then ...**

1. You will know how much hard work is involved in stepping “up” to a higher level
2. You read widely – not just literature to do with your chosen discipline – but general everyday matters
3. You use English when involved in everyday conversations as you go about your daily life
4. You know what this  - or  means -
5. If you do all of the above – and you recognise symbols instantly – and they mean something to you ... then you are well on your way to mastering English at a high level.
6. Think about this: English letters/characters – are also symbols, which need to be instantly recognisable, and the quicker you can do this – the better.

THIS LITTLE BOOKLET INTRODUCES YOU TO THE FINER POINTS OF USING  
LOTS OF USEFUL STUFF AT <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/exercises/2/>

1. *What makes an English sentence, a sentence ? ? ?*
2. *Adjectives and Adverbs*
3. *Articles (a, an, the - or nothing at all!)*
4. *Apostrophes*
5. *Joining words (however, yet, and, but, consequently, therefore)*
6. *Making up complex sentences – joining 2 sentences together*
7. *Prepositions*
8. *Punctuation (; : ... - , )*
9. *Tricky words (advise/advice loose/lose since/ago)*
10. *Verb tenses*
11. *Appositives*
12. *Tricky had / has had / had had*

## **1. What is a sentence?**

An English sentence consists of a **subject**, a **verb** and an **object**.

If you don't have a subject, a verb and an object in a sentence – then you have what is called a “fragment” and you will never get a high score by writing fragments.

See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/exercises/5/18> (Avoiding fragments)

⇒ **Dr Jones was held up in traffic so he called the Clinic to reorganise his day.**

Can you see a subject ? a verb word ? and an object ? (the reason for writing this sentence in the first place?)

What about ...

⇒ **Temperature was very high at 39°C.**

Can you see a subject: a verb word ? an object ? You can? Amazing – because I can't !!

**His/The** temperature was very high at 39°C.      Much better!

Sometimes we use “it” to refer back to a particular subject - be careful – make sure you are using “it” clearly - that there is no doubt what or whom you are referring to.

⇒ **The cat being chased by the dog jumped over a high fence. It was an amazing sight.**

What was amazing? The dog chasing the cat? The cat jumping up and over a very high fence? Perhaps it was the amazingly high fence? “It” is not clear.

## 2. Adjectives and adverbs

See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/exercises/2/2>

**Adverbs** describe the verb, the doing word : *how fast / how much / to what degree* of speed or skill did someone run, teach, grow old, spend money, recover from illness – and so on.

And **adverbs** nearly always have “ly” at the end.



The patient is recovering **slowly**.  
The doctor **carefully** explained the surgical procedure.

**Adjectives** describe a noun.                      A car - a *black* car.



The **elderly** patient is recovering slowly.  
The **Sri Lankan** doctor carefully explained the surgical procedure.

## 3. Articles “a” “an” “the” - or nothing at all

See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/exercises/2/1> (for exercises on Articles)

In English, most objects in a sentence require an article in front of them.  
But not always !!! Articles are NOT used before medical conditions / diseases\*

“a” and “an” are both *indefinite* articles .... The only difference being, “an” is used when the next letter is a, e, l, o, u. However - the word “x ray”, for example, starts with an “x” - yet we would say *The patient had an xray*. Why? Because xray *sounds like* ‘ex ray’ which begins with an “e” - so use “an”.

Another example: If you use a University-publication, make sure you put it back. Why not “an” before the “u” in University? Because it sounds like ‘You-ni-versity’ and “y” does not need ‘an’. Confused? Keep going!

**Note the use of articles in these examples:**

The patient had an appendectomy in 2001.

The operation was a success.

The patient was walking on Day 2 after the hip replacement.

Mrs Jones first had cancer in 2002. As a child she had measles and mumps.\*

## 4. Apostrophes

APOSTROPHES are little marks, like a comma but written above the line, which have three uses:

- Use No.1 To show a letter has been left out.  
I've done it. Instead of: I have done it!
- Use No.2 To show something belongs to someone (singular possessive). The apostrophe goes before the "s"  
The nurse's mask was a blue colour.
- Use No.3 To show things belonged to more than one (plural possessive). The apostrophe goes after the "s"  
The nurses' masks were blue.

DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE APOSTROPHE ? Yes! Because your patient's name [singular possessive] might be Mr Blackmore. You might want to write:  
*Mr Blackmore's vital signs had changed for the worse.*

Now ... what about a patient whose name is, say, Mrs Jones – her name ends in an "s". *Mrs Jones' vital signs had changed for the worse.*

Although Mrs Jones is only one person – the vital signs belong to her – and strictly speaking you could write *Mrs Jones's vital signs ...* however, for the past few decades this convention has changed and now singular possessive apostrophes for names ending in "s" – adopt the apostrophe after the 's'.

### EXERCISES ON USING APOSTROPHES

Do the following sentences require an apostrophe?

1. The patients behaviour was very strange.
2. Its OK to miss one tablet, but not two.
3. Mrs Stromess headaches were getting worse.
4. The doctors performing the surgery were all specialists.
5. The patients in the Waiting Room were becoming impatient and noisy

### ***5. Joining words (however, yet, and, but; consequently, therefore; furthermore, in addition, moreover; )***

The following is copied from

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/index.php?category\\_id=3&sub\\_category\\_id=4&article\\_id=76](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/index.php?category_id=3&sub_category_id=4&article_id=76)

The definitions of these words can overlap, so you want to be careful about how and when you use them.

#### ANSWERS TO APOSTROPHE EXERCISES ABOVE

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. patient's behaviour                           | 2. It's OK to miss ...                                    |
| 3. Mrs Stromess' headaches were ...<br>of doctor | 4. no need for an apostrophe – doctors is the plural form |
|  | 5. same as above – no need for an apostrophe              |

## **5. Joining words (however, yet, and, but; consequently, therefore; furthermore, in addition, moreover; ) ... continued**

**consequently, therefore:** Something happened or something is true because of something preceding it.

**Example:** Jonathan read the company website and articles about the company before his interview. He was able to ask very good questions during his interview.

**Revision:** Jonathan read the company website and articles about the company before his interview; therefore, he was able to ask very good questions during his interview.

**furthermore, in addition, moreover:** Similar to the word “and,” but with more of a relationship to the first part of the sentence.

**Example:** Soo-yeon checked the grammar in her college application essay twice. She asked her neighbor to check the grammar one more time.

**Revision:** Soo-yeon checked the grammar in her college application essay twice; in addition, she asked her neighbor to check the grammar one more time.

**however:** Just like the word “but,” only for longer sentences.

**Example:** Miguel’s car didn’t start this morning. He got a jump start from his neighbor and was able to make it to his appointment on time.

**Revision:** Miguel’s car didn’t start this morning; however, he got a jump start from his neighbor and was able to make it to his appointment on time.

**indeed, in fact:** Similar to the word “and,” but there is a closer relationship to the first part of the sentence, and it extends the information in the first part of the sentence.

**Example:** Priya seems to be a workaholic. She spent the holiday in her office finishing the report.

**Revision:** Priya seems to be a workaholic; in fact, she spent the holiday in her office finishing the report.

**nevertheless:** Very similar to the word “but,” *but the truth of what comes before “nevertheless” is emphasized.*

**Example:** All his friends have been praising the high quality of service in the new coffee shop for months. When he went there, the server was quite rude.

**Revision:** All his friends have been praising the high quality of service in the new coffee shop for months; nevertheless, when he went there, the server was quite rude.

**then:** Something happening in sequence, after a previous event.

**Example:** Wenyu carefully reviewed the credit cards offers she had received this month. She chose the one with the best terms and completed the application.

**Revision:** Wenyu carefully reviewed the credit cards offers she had received this month; then, she chose the one with the best terms and completed the application.

'And' is a simple joining word – be careful you use it only once in a sentence - *and* try to think up a different joining word the next time you join two connected ideas together!

Consider this sentence:

Tom never attended lectures **and** somehow passed his exams **and** then he went on to be a doctor in Guatemala **and** he has been living there for six years now **and** has married **and** has two children **and** I think he likes his life. [AND it is boring, repetitive, uninspiring, poor English].

How do you make the above long sentence better? By making it into two sentences!  
*Tom never attended lectures. Somehow he passed his exams and went on to be a doctor in Guatemala where he has lived for six years, married, with two children: I think he likes his life.*

'However' is a word that carries a connotation of something else, an alternative.

Tom never attended lectures, however passed his exams. He went on to be a doctor in Guatemala. He has, however, been living there for six years and has married and had two children.

[There is a subtle difference – can you spot it?]

## **6. Making up complex sentences – joining 2 sentences together**

See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/573/02/>

If you are writing something like:

The patient presented with a severe headache. One hour later the patient suffered an episode of vomiting and diarrhoea.

*The above 2 sentences are all about the same thing: the patient and his (or her) problems.*

The above 2 sentences are also **both** independent clauses - both of them are sentences in their own right. If you join them together – two independent clauses - into one long sentence – it will become better English, more concise. They will become a *compound* sentence.

*The patient **first** presented with a severe headache **which was followed one hour later** with vomiting and diarrhoea.*

Another example:

The globalization of commerce is underpinned by smart technology. One problem is, however, ever increasing cyber attacks by computer hackers who penetrate databases and password protected files.

These 2 sentences are both “stand alone” sentences in their own right – but the second one is *dependent* on the first one - there is no need for the second clause unless you wrote the first one. Joining these two together (an independent and a dependent clause) will make this a *complex* sentence.

*Better: Globalized commerce, underpinned by smart technology, has the rising problem of computer hacking – unauthorised access to our private data.*

### Handy words to use when joining two sentences together:

and so / consequently / however / therefore / but / and / as well as / which was followed by / which first arose / in addition to / but, unfortunately /

## 7. Prepositions

Prepositions *over, under, beside, behind*:

To make these prepositions highly relevant to your letter writing, consider the following examples and graphics.

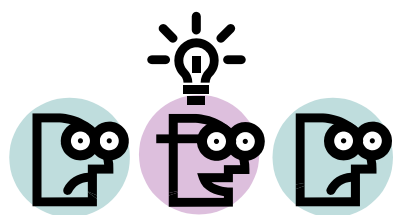
The scars will reduce **over** time.      2001   2002   2003   2004   2005

The nurse reached **over** the bed to get the patient’s chart.

His slippers were **under** the bed.

The consultant sat down on the chair **beside** the bed.

The name on the chart **behind** the bed was incorrectly spelt



The interns are **beside** one another.



Two nurses, one **behind** the other.

For more on prepositions, have a look at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/exercises/2/14>

## **8. Punctuation**

For an excellent overview of punctuation – see

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/566/01>

The ones discussed here are the colon : and the semi colon ; the elipsis . . . the dash - and the comma ,

### **The semi-colon ; and the colon :**

Colons indicate the start of a horizontal list.

Semi-colons separate the items in a list with each item itself having several bits of information **and all bits are equally important (the first mentioned is as important as the last mentioned)**

Test yourself: Should the following sentences have a colon, semi-colons, commas or a mixture of all three?

1. The patient has been attending this Clinic for the past two years complaining of dyspepsia GORD hypertension and insomnia.
2. The patient has been suffering for the past week with a number of complaints a runny nose bilateral headaches dizzy spells and nausea.
3. The patient has been suffering for the past week from a runny nose bilateral headaches dizzy spells and nausea.
4. Mr Jones has been coming to this Clinic for the past five years during which time he has had a number of problems addressed chronic rhinitis (2004), GORD (2005), hypertension (2007) insomnia (2008) and most recently (June 2009) irregular blood pressure.

ANSWERS:

1. The patient has been attending this Clinic for the past two years complaining of dyspepsia, GORD, hypertension and insomnia.
2. The patient has been suffering for the past week with a number of complaints: a runny nose, bilateral headaches, dizzy spells and nausea.
3. The patient has been suffering for the past week from a runny nose, bilateral headaches, dizzy spells and nausea.
4. Mr Jones has been coming to this Clinic for the past five years during which time he has had a number of problems addressed: chronic rhinitis, (2004); GORD (2005) ; hypertension, (2007); insomnia (2008) and, most recently (June 2009), irregular blood pressure.



### The ellipsis (3 little dots) . . .

The ellipsis is very useful for all those academics out there writing long dissertations. It is used when *you are quoting something – but are omitting some of the quotable text.*

Example: According to Jones (2004) “ ... without which it would not have been possible.”

The main thrust of what you are quoting is that Jones, back in 2004, did some kind of research and concluded that the result would not have been possible unless abc or xyz had been used / consulted. The “bit” left out could be several hundred words – a couple of sentences or just the first clause of the sentence. It is up to you. But if you are quoting, word for word, then put in a citation – and three little dots for the bits you are omitting.

### Dashes -

If used with care, a dash can be a very useful bit of punctuation. They are particularly useful in an *appositive* phrase - setting off the main pieces of information. For example:

I am referring the above patient - forty three, divorced, has suffered a cardiac arrest thirty minutes ago - for admission and urgent attention.

This could have been written:

I am referring the above patient, **a** forty three **year old**, divorced, **who** has suffered a cardiac arrest thirty minutes ago, for admission and urgent attention.

Note the differences.

### The comma ,

Commas divide up sentences into different (but related) parts. If you regard the comma as a way of indicating to the reader that this is the place where you would pause briefly – and take a breath – that is probably spot on. Strictly speaking, a comma joins two independent (stand alone) clauses followed by and, but, or, for, nor, so.

Say the following (no pauses) : Good morning my name is Dr Singh and I am on the Ward today I have just called by to see how you are going Did you have a good sleep last night? I would just like to check your temperature and look at the surgical wound Would that be OK? [Then you pause, to take a breath]. Goodness!!

No .. you would probably say: Good morning, my name is Dr Singh and I am on the Ward today. I have just called by to see how you are going. Did you have a good

sleep last night? I would just like to check your temperature, and look at the surgical wound. Would that be OK? [Ah! Much better!]

For more information on using dashes, semi colons, colons, commas and other kinds of punctuation, go to <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/566/01/>

## 9. Tricky words (advise/advice loose/lose since/ago )

Advise is the verb form – the doing word.

Advice is the noun form – the thing you are giving – you are not giving a card – you are giving advice.

Loose is the opposite to tight

Lose is when you have lost something

Since a particular time and event – something has happened

Ago refers to things that happened some time ago.

Examples:

I **advise** you to brush more regularly.

If you want my **advice**, your problem is really bad oral hygiene.

The splint is too **loose**.

If you **lose** the splint, it will cost another \$350 to replace – so look after it.

**Since** attending this Clinic, the patient has had a lot of respiratory problems.

The patient has had a lot of respiratory problems **since** 2001.

Nine years **ago**, when the patient first started attending this Clinic, he has had breathing problems.

## 10. Verb tenses

The basic rule is to stick to the same tense *if the action took place during the same time* (the same morning, same day, everything happened before the operation, everything happened after the operation, everything is planned to take place after the patient is discharged).

Example: Yesterday \* the patient was suffering from diarrhoea and was advised to maintain his fluid intake to avoid dehydration. Today \*\* he is much better and is recovering.

\* = straight away, you are using past tense

\*\* = now you are using present tense

Both these sentences are in the same paragraph – as they should be, as they are both referring to the patient's physical condition.

For a comprehensive overview of verb tenses, go to <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/601/08/>

## 11. Appositives

'Appositives' are modifying phrases or nouns, between two commas, adding more information or detail. Here is an example of an appositive (the **noun is in teal**, the **appositive is in red**).

The chief **surgeon, an expert in organ-transplant procedures**, took her nephew on a hospital tour.

Note: If you *eliminated [took out] the appositive – you would end up with the nuts-and-bolts of the sentence:*

The chief surgeon took her nephew on a hospital tour. [The appositive just gives us more information about the surgeon].

You can put appositives to good use – in the opening paragraph of your Letter of Referral.

I am referring the above **patient, a 45 year old divorced male, who is suffering from suspected colon cancer**, for further investigation and ongoing management.

Eliminate the appositive – and what have you got?

*I am referring the above patient for further investigation and ongoing management.*

AND THAT IS WHY **YOU MUST PUT A COMMA** before and after the appositive – to set it out clearly – because if you don't put a comma before and after the appositive, it will not be a grammatically correct sentence!

## 12. Had / Has had / Had had

'Had' is used for *recent* past tense: I had a coffee with my breakfast this morning.

'Had had' is used for *long time ago* past events - which will not recur: The patient had had an appendectomy in 1995.

'Has had' is used for *long time ago* past events – which MAY recur: The patient has had asthma in 2001 and 2004.

When you use **has had** in a sentence – it infers the patient has had asthma in the past *and may get it again in the future: the problem is still occurring – or might occur – in the future.*

But! When you use **had had** in a sentence - it infers the patient **had** asthma in the past *and has made lifestyle changes - bringing about a "cure" – and the patient is not expected to ever get asthma again. He/She is now completely cured of asthma.*

Any queries, please email [info@oetworkshop.com](mailto:info@oetworkshop.com)