The *Essential Grammar* covers the areas of English grammar which most often cause problems for intermediate learners. It has been based on students’ needs and analysis of the Longman Learner’s Corpus, with natural real-life example sentences taken from the British National Corpus. It provides practical help for students who want to put their grammar to active use when writing or speaking in English.

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Statements and questions

Statements

A 'statement' is a sentence which gives information. If you make a statement, you usually give the sentence a subject, and this must go in front of the verb. The children are playing in the garden.

Negative statements

Negative statements are made in two main ways:

1. If the statement contains an auxiliary verb, such as is or have, you usually add not or its contracted form n't.

   She is not leaving. OR She isn't leaving.

   Am and may do not allow n't. Will, shall, and can have special contracted forms won't, shan't, can't.

   The same rules apply when you make a question negative.

   Are they in the garden? Aren't they in the garden?

   Will he get the job? Won't he get the job?

2. If the statement has no auxiliary verb, you need to make the negative using a form of do + not/n't. Make sure that the main verb is in its basic form.

   She likes swimming. She doesn't like swimming. NOT She doesn't likes swimming.

   I saw a ship. I didn't see a ship. NOT I didn't saw a ship.

Questions

Questions are sentences which ask for information. They fall into three main types, depending on the kind of reply they expect.

'Yes-no questions' expect a simple yes or no reply (or a word or phrase which can be used instead of yes or no). In these cases, you change the order of subject and verb.

   Will Jane resign? (Possible answers: yes, no, don't know, probably, maybe etc)

   Are they ready?

'Wh-questions' begin with a question word, such as what, why, where, or how. This kind of question can have a wide range of different replies. The answer may be a full sentence, or one which leaves out the words that you can guess from knowing the question. Here too, you need to change the order of subject and verb.

   Where are you going? (Possible answers: I'm going to work, downstairs, the library etc)

'Alternative questions' give the listener a choice of two possible replies, both of which are mentioned in the question. The two possibilities are connected by the word or. Thus again, you must change the order of subject and verb.

   Will you travel by train or by boat? (Possible answers: by train, by boat, don't know etc)

Tag questions

You can change a statement into a question by adding a 'tag question' at the end of it. When you use a tag question, you are asking the listener to agree with the statement you have just made. If you make the statement positive, you expect the answer yes. If you make it negative, you expect the answer no.

A tag question is a type of 'yes-no question', and shows the same change of word order. You use the same personal pronoun (she, they etc) and tense of the verb as in the statement to which the tag question is joined. In the most common kind of tag question, you change from positive to negative, or from negative to positive.

   She's outside, isn't she? (Expected answer: yes)

   They were ready, weren't they? (Expected answer: yes)

   You aren't going, are you? (Expected answer: no)

   It isn't difficult, is it? (Expected answer: no)

Questions which are not questions

You can also use a sentence which looks like a question, but it is one where you are not actually expecting any reply. Because these sentences are halfway between a question and an exclamation, you will find them sometimes written with a question-mark and sometimes with an exclamation-mark.

In some cases, you already know the answer or you are asking your listener to agree with you. These sentences are called 'exclamatory questions'.

   Hasn't she grown!

   Wasn't the book marvellous?

In other cases, no answer is possible. (Of course your listener may still give you an answer, whether you like it or not!) These sentences are used when you want to express a strong feeling about something. They are called 'rhetorical questions'.

   Doesn't everyone know that the whole thing is impossible?

Polite questions

You can make a question sound more polite by using please and by using phrases such as could I...? or may I...? For more information about this kind of question, go to REQUESTS in the ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION section.

Verbs: intransitive and transitive

Most verbs in English belong to either of two types: intransitive verbs or transitive verbs.

Intransitive verbs do not have an object. You can use it without having to add any more words to the sentence. Here are some examples of intransitive verbs:

- Something's happening.
- I'll wait.
- It doesn't matter.

You can add other words to these sentences in order to show meanings such as time, place, or manner, but these words do not have to be there for the sentence to make sense.

- Something's happening in the street.
- I'll wait for a few minutes.
- It doesn't matter at all.

Other intransitive verbs include appear, come, go, smile, lie, and rise.

Intransitive verbs cannot be used in the passive.

Don't say 'it was happened' or 'they were died'. Say it happened or they died.

In this dictionary, intransitive verbs are shown like this: [v I].

Transitive verbs

A transitive verb must have an object. Without the object, the sentence does not make sense. The object of the verb is usually a noun, a noun phrase, or a pronoun. Here are some examples of transitive verbs:

- She bought that dress in Tokyo. NOT She bought a dress in Tokyo.
- Did you find the key? NOT Did you find?
- I really like him. NOT I really like.

Sometimes the object is a clause which begins + (that). For example:

- I wish she would stop smoking. OR I wish that she would stop smoking.

- She bought that dress in Tokyo. NOT She bought in Tokyo.
- Did you find the key? NOT Did you find?
- I really like him. NOT I really like.
2: Verbs: intransitive and transitive

Sometimes the object is a whole sentence. For example:

“It’s time to go home,” he said.

Other transitive verbs include make, use, need, thank, enjoy, keep, and carry.

In this dictionary, transitive verbs are shown like this: [v T].

VERBS THAT CAN BE TRANSITIVE OR INTRANSITIVE

Several verbs can be used in a transitive or intransitive way. Here are some examples of verbs that can be transitive or intransitive:

There's no need to shout. [v I]
Someone shouted my name. [v T]
Where do you want to meet? [v I]
I'll meet you outside the school. [v T]
I'm sorry. I don't understand. [v I]
She didn't understand his explanation. [v T]

The intransitive uses are very similar to the transitive ones, except that the object has been left out.

In this dictionary, these verbs are shown like this: [v I/T].

OTHER VERBS

Some verbs can be followed by an adjective or adjective phrase. Here are some examples of these verbs:

You seem tired.
It all sounds very interesting.
Was he angry?

In this dictionary, these verbs are shown like this: [v].

3 Talking about the present

English has two main ways of talking about present time: the simple present and the present progressive.

THE SIMPLE PRESENT

You make the simple present by using the verb in its basic form. You add -s or -es to the verb in the third person singular.

The simple present is used in the following ways:

1. You use the simple present to talk about something which will continue to happen in the future. You often use this meaning to talk about things that are true about your life, for example where you live, your job, or the kinds of things you like.

   Martin lives in Canada.
   I work in a hospital.
   “What kind of books do you read?” “I mostly read science fiction.”

2. You use the simple present when you talk about something which happens again and again, or say that something happens regularly at a particular time. Use words such as always, often, sometimes, occasionally, and never, or phrases such as on Tuesdays, every day with the simple present in this meaning.

   They often go out to restaurants.
   I travel to London twice a month.
   He gets up at 6 o'clock.
   She goes to church every Sunday.

3. You use the simple present when you are describing what is happening at the exact moment when you are speaking. This meaning of the simple present is used for example in sports commentaries.

   Shearer gets the ball from Gascoyne. He shoots and scores!

For descriptions of actions that are happening now, you usually use the present progressive (see below), rather than the present simple. For example:

   What are you doing? "I'm making a poster." NOT "What do you do? "I make a poster."

THE PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

You make the present progressive by using a form of the verb be in the present tense, followed by the main verb with an -ing ending, for example I am waiting, she is coming.

The present progressive is used in the following ways:

1. You use the present progressive to talk about something which is happening now at the time you are speaking or writing. You often use this meaning with words and phrases that express present time, such as now, at the moment, and currently.

   “What's Bob doing?” “He's watching television.”
   It's raining again.
   I'm looking for my glasses.

2. You use the present progressive to say that something is happening now, but will only continue for a limited period of time. Compare these pairs of sentences:

   We live in France. (=France is our permanent home)
   We're living in France. (=we are living there for a limited period of time)
   He cooks his own meals. (=he always does it)
   He's cooking his own meals. (=he does not usually do it)

If you want to talk about the subjects you are studying at school or university, you usually use the present progressive.

   She's studying law at Harvard. NOT She studies law at Harvard.
   I'm studying English. NOT I study English.

Verbs that cannot be used in the progressive

Verbs which express a situation or process, rather than describing a definite action, are not usually used in the progressive. Do not use the progressive with the following verbs:

be have see
believe like agree
know love disagree
recognize hate mean
remember prefer need
understand want deserve
wish belong

I know the answer. NOT I am knowing the answer.
She understands me. NOT She is understanding me.
Talking about the past

There are several ways of talking about actions that happened in the past. These include the simple past, the past progressive, the present perfect, the past perfect, and the phrase used to.

**THE SIMPLE PAST**

You usually make the simple past by adding -ed to the end of the verb. For example:

- I walk → I walked
- we wait → we waited
- they jump → they jumped

Many common verbs have irregular simple past forms, and so you have to use a special ending, or change the verb in some other way. For example:

- I go → I went
- we buy → we bought
- they see → they saw

You use the simple past to talk about an action which happened and finished in the past. There is a space between the time when the action happened, and the time when you are speaking or writing about it.

- He kicked the ball into the net.
- I went home early because I had a headache.
- The police found a dead body in the river.

You often use words or phrases such as at midnight, on Tuesday, in 1992, yesterday, and last year with the simple past, to draw attention to the time when something happened. For example:

- Our visitors arrived yesterday.
- Where did you go last week?
- The war ended in 1945.

**THE PAST PROGRESSIVE**

You make the past progressive by using was or were, followed by the main verb with an -ing ending, for example I was looking, they were laughing.

The past progressive is used in the following ways:

1. You use the past progressive when you want to talk about something that happened in the past, and continued to happen for only a limited period of time.

   - We were living in France at that time.
   - I was trying to get the waiter's attention.
   - The man was looking at me in a very strange way.

2. You use the past progressive to talk about something which continued to happen for a period of time, during which another thing happened.

   - I was watching TV when the phone rang.
   - They met each other while they were staying in London.

**THE PRESENT PERFECT**

You make the present perfect by using has or have, followed by the past participle form of the main verb, for example I have walked, she has gone, they have seen.

The present perfect is used in the following ways:

1. You use the present perfect to talk about something that happened in the past and finished, but which still affects the situation now.

   - Someone has broken the window. (RESULT NOW: it is still broken, and needs to be mended)
   - The taxi has arrived. (RESULT NOW: someone needs to go and get into the taxi)
   - Jane's hurt her hand, so she can't write. (RESULT NOW: Jane can't write)

You often use just and recently with the present perfect in this meaning.

- Jane's just left, but you might catch her in the car park.

In American English, people often use the simple past instead of the present perfect in this sense.

**THE PRESENT PERFECT PROGRESSIVE**

You make the present perfect progressive by using have been/has been, followed by the main verb with an -ing ending, for example I have been living, she has been studying.

The present perfect progressive has very similar meanings to the present perfect, but draws attention to the period of time during which the action has taken place.

The present perfect progressive is used in the following ways:

1. You use the present perfect progressive to talk about something which has continued to happen for a period of time in the past, and which may still be happening now.

   - How long have you been learning English?
   - We've been expecting them to arrive since last Thursday.

2. You use the present perfect progressive to talk about something which has been taking place recently and which affects the situation now.

   - "You look tired." "I've been working really hard."
   - It's been raining all week, so the ground's very wet.
Talking about the future

There are several ways of talking about the future in English.

**THE FUTURE WITH 'WILL'**

You put the verb will in front of the main verb. This is the most common way of expressing future time. The short form of will is 'll and the short form of will not is won't. You usually use these in spoken English instead of will or will not. The main verb can be either in its 'simple' form or in its 'progressive' form. For example:

- I will talk to them.
- We'll have a break at six o'clock.
- I'll talk to them.

You use will in this meaning in sentences that begin I'm sure, I think, I expect, I suppose, I doubt etc, or with words such as probably, perhaps, certainly etc.

- "Do you think Carla will pass her test?" "Yes, I'm sure she will."
- I expect I'll see him again soon.
- They say it'll probably snow tomorrow.
- Perhaps things will be better next week.

**THE FUTURE WITH 'SHALL'**

In British English, you often use shall in questions when making suggestions about what to do, or when discussing what to do. This use is rare in American English.

- Shall we go now?
- What shall I tell Mike?
- In formal British English, you can sometimes hear I shall used to express future time.

- I shall try to persuade them.

This is very rare in American English.

**THE FUTURE WITH 'BE GOING TO'**

You use a form of be going to to say that something will happen soon.

- It's going to rain.
- Watch out - you're going to hit that tree!
- I think I'm going to be sick.

You also use a form of be going to to talk about someone's intentions, or what they have decided to do.

- I'm going to ask for my money back.
- Lucy is going to travel round the world when she leaves school.

**THE FUTURE WITH 'BE ABOUT TO'**

You use be about to to say that something will happen almost immediately.

- Take your seats, please. The show is about to begin.
- I was about to go out when the phone rang.

**THE FUTURE WITH THE PRESENT PROGRESSIVE**

You use the present progressive (he's leaving, they're starting etc) with a word or phrase expressing future time to talk about something that will happen because you have planned or arranged it.

- We're leaving on Saturday morning.
- I'm having a party next week - do you want to come?

**THE FUTURE WITH THE SIMPLE PRESENT**

You use the simple present (it starts, we arrive etc) with a word or phrase expressing future time, to say that something will definitely happen at a particular time, especially because it has been officially arranged.

- The next plane to Los Angeles leaves at 6:25.
- The meeting is on Thursday.
- What time does the show start?

You use the simple present in subordinate clauses to talk about the future, for example in clauses that begin with when, if, unless, before, after, and as soon as. Don't use will in this kind of clause.

- I'll call you when I get back. **NOT** I'll call you when I will get back.
- If the bus leaves now, it will get there by 6. **NOT** If the bus will leave now, it will get there by 6.
6 Phrasal verbs

WHAT IS A PHRASAL VERB?

A phrasal verb is a verb which consists of more than one word. Most phrasal verbs consist of two words: the first word is a verb, the second word is a preposition or an adverb. Examples of common phrasal verbs are get up, put off, turn on, object to, and apply for. There are also some three-word phrasal verbs, such as look forward to and turn away from.

WHERE DO YOU PUT THE OBJECT?

With transitive phrasal verbs, you have to decide where to put the object.

■ If the phrasal verb ends with a preposition, the preposition must come after the verb, and you cannot split up the phrasal verb. For example:

  - apply for sth (= ask to be considered for a job)
  - object to sth (= say that you do not agree with something)

In this dictionary, this kind of phrasal verb is shown with ‘sth’ or ‘sb’ at the end, to show you that you cannot split the phrasal verb and the object must come after the phrasal verb.

■ If the phrasal verb ends with an adverb, there are three possibilities.

  1. If you choose a noun phrase as the object, you can put it either before or after the adverb. For example:

     - call off (= decide that a meeting, party, strike etc should not happen)
     - turn on (= make a light, television, radio etc start working)
     - turn down (= make a television, radio etc less loud)

  2. If you choose a pronoun (him, her, it, them etc) as the object, you have to put it before the adverb. For example:

     - turn off (= switch a television, radio etc off)
     - turn off the light

  3. If the object is a long phrase, you usually put it at the end after the phrasal verb. For example:

     - They've called off the strike that was planned for next week.

This dictionary tells you how to move the object with this kind of phrasal verb. Here is an example of the kind of information it gives you:

try on [phrasal verb T] to put on a piece of clothing, to see if it fits you and looks nice on you

try on sth if you like the shoes, why don't you try them on?

try sth on I tried on a beautiful coat, but it was too big.

7 Modal verbs

The main ‘modal verbs’ (or ‘modals’) are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>can</th>
<th>may</th>
<th>might</th>
<th>will</th>
<th>would</th>
<th>shall</th>
<th>should</th>
<th>must</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Ought to, used to, dare and need are also used as modal verbs, but they have other uses as well.

WHEN TO USE MODAL VERBS

Modals have several meanings, so you need to think about the meaning of the sentence as a whole to be sure that your choice of modal expresses exactly what you want to say. The main ideas that modals are used to express are shown in the following sections.

Permission

(allowing someone to do something)

If you want to give or ask for permission, use can or may. May is more polite or formal than can.

You can leave when the bell rings.
Customers may purchase extra copies at half price.

Could is a polite way of asking for permission.

Could I leave early today?

Might is a very formal and old-fashioned way of asking for permission.

Might I borrow your umbrella?

= see also LET and PERMISSION

Obligation

(saying what someone must do)

If you want to demand that something happens, or that someone does something (= to express obligation), use must. You can also use this idea about yourself, in order to express a sense of duty.

The builders must finish the job today.

We mustn't leave the house before 6 o'clock.

I must remember to bring my notebook.

= see also MUST

Intention

(saying what you are going to do)

If you want to say that you intend to do something, use will or shall. You can emphasize the meaning of intention if you say the modal louder than the surrounding words.
Shall is only used with the first person (I or we), and is much less common than will. It is hardly ever used in American English.

This letter says they will definitely give us our money back.
I shan’t stay long.

To express an intention at a time in the past, use would.
I tried to explain, but nobody would listen.
Use would if there are conditions controlling whether something will take place.
I would leave tomorrow, if I had the money.

see also INTEND

Ability
(saying whether you are able to do something)

If you want to say whether someone is able to carry out an action, use can.
Guy can speak Russian.
Can you remember her name?
I can’t find my shoes!
When you put these sentences into the past tense, use could.
He was late for school because he couldn’t find his bag.
Use could if there are conditions controlling whether the event will take place.
I could leave tomorrow, if I had the money.

see also CAN

Possibility
(saying whether something is possible)

If you want to say that something is possible, use can or may. May is more polite or formal than can.
You can go by bus from London to Liverpool.
You may find the manager is still there, if you go to the office now.
If you want to suggest that the action is less likely to happen, use could or might. If you use might, you mean that the action is especially unlikely.
We could go by bus.
We might go by bus. (=it is possible, but only if there are no problems)

see also POSSIBLE

Probability
(saying whether something is likely)

If you want to suggest that an event is likely to happen, use should or ought to. It will probably take place, but you are not completely sure.
They should have had our reply by now.
If you take these tablets, you should be all right.
We ought to be there by 6 o’clock.

see also PROBABLY, SURE/NOT SURE

Desirability
(saying that something is the right thing to do)

If you want to say that you think it is a good thing for something to happen, use should or ought to. If you think that it is a bad thing for something to happen, put these verbs into the negative.
You should get the early flight, if you want to be in good time.
You ought to see the doctor as soon as possible.

You shouldn’t say things like that.
You oughtn’t to have left the engine running.

see also SHOULD

Necessity
(saying that something is necessary)

If you want to say that it is necessary for something to happen, use must.
We really must go now.
I must get my hair cut this weekend.
If you want to express the opposite meaning (=it is unnecessary for something to happen) use needn’t/need not or not need to.
There’s plenty of time so you needn’t worry.

Don’t use mustn’t because this gives the meaning of obligation.
(see Obligation above)

see also NEED

Certainty
(saying that you are sure about something)

If you want to say that you are sure something is true, use must.
You must be tired, after all your hard work.
They must have left by now.
To express the opposite meaning (=you are sure something is not true) use can’t.
You can’t be that tired – you’ve only been working for an hour!
They can’t have left yet.

see also SURE/NOT SURE

Prediction
(saying what you think is going to happen)

If you want to say that something is certain to happen, use either will or shall. As with the other uses of these words, shall tends to be found only with the first person (I or we), and is much less common than will. Shall is very rare in American English.
The cars will be there on time, I promise.
There is no doubt that we shall win.

see also SURE/NOT SURE

HOW TO USE MODAL VERBS

Modal verbs are used with the basic form of the verb (=the infinitive form, without “to”).
You must pay now.
They can go home if they want.

You must to pay now.
They can to go home if they want.

Modal verbs do not have an -s ending in the present tense of the third person singular.
He can speak French.
He cans speak French.

 Modal verbs do not use do in questions or negatives.
Can you remember her name?  NOT  Do you can remember her name?
We must not be late.  NOT  We don’t must be late.
Should we lock the door?  NOT  Do we should lock the door?

Modal verbs do not have an infinitive, a past participle, or a present participle.
Conditionals

When you want to say that one situation (described in the main clause) depends on another situation, you use a conditional clause. Conditional clauses usually begin with if or (for negative clauses) unless.

Jane will pass the exam if she works hard.

Jane will not pass the exam unless she works hard.

They may follow or go in front of the main clause.

If Jane works hard, she will pass her exam.

Conditional clauses are used in two main ways:

1. If you see the situation as a real one, and likely to happen, you use the present simple tense in the conditional clause and will ('ll) or won't in the main clause. Don't use will in the conditional clause.

   If you take a taxi, you will be there in good time. NOT If you will take a taxi...
   If you wear a coat, you won't get cold. NOT If you will wear a coat...

2. If you see the situation as unreal, imaginary, or less likely to happen, you use the simple past tense in the conditional clause and would ('d), might, or could in the main clause. Don't use would in the conditional clause.

   If you saw a ghost, what would you do? NOT If you would see a ghost...
   If I bought a new coat, I might not feel so cold. (=I would possibly not feel so cold)
   If I found their address, I could write to them. (=I would be able to write to them)

In sentences of this kind, the past tense of the verb be appears as were after the if, will, and would in the conditional clause.

   If I were at home, I would be watching television. (informal: If I was at home...)
   If John were playing today, we'd have a chance of winning. (informal: If John was playing...)

If you want to talk about conditional situations in the past, use had ('d) in the conditional clause, and would have in the main clause.

   If I'd seen her, I would have asked her to call. (=I did not see her)
   The books wouldn't have been damaged if Mary had moved them. (=Mary didn't move them)

You can use when instead of if in sentences of the first type (present simple + will etc), but not with those of the second (simple past + would etc). When is not used in situations that are unlikely or impossible.

What will John do if he goes home? (=John is probably going home)
OR What will John do when he goes home? (=John is definitely going home)

What would John do if he went home? (=John is probably not going home)
NOT What would John do when he went home?

I would shout if I saw a ghost. NOT I would shout when I saw a ghost.

Active and passive

In the sentence The dog chased the cat, the verb (chased) is active. If you turn it around, and say The cat was chased by the dog, the verb (was chased) is passive. You form the passive by using the verb be and the past participle of the main verb. For example, the passive of attack is attacked, the passive of pay is paid, and the passive of see is seen. You can only use the passive with transitive verbs (see section 2).

**WHEN TO USE AN ACTIVE VERB**

You use an active verb when you want to say that the subject of a sentence does something. For example:

She opened the window.

**WHEN TO USE A PASSIVE VERB**

You use a passive verb when you want to say that something happens to the subject of the sentence. For example:

President Kennedy was killed in 1963.

You often use a passive verb when talking about the history of something. For example:

The bridge was built in the 19th century.
The company was established in 1826.

In these cases, it is much more natural to use the passive than to find a vague, active way of expressing the sentence (such as Someone built this bridge in the 19th century).

You often use a passive verb when you are writing about science, or when you are saying how things are made. For example:

Hydrogen and oxygen can be easily mixed in this way.
Paper is made from wood.

If you used an active verb here, you would have to say who does the action - information which is not known or not important.

If you want to say who does the action of the verb in a passive sentence, use by and then say who does it.

President Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald in 1963.
The bridge was designed by Brunel.

**HOW TO CHANGE AN ACTIVE SENTENCE INTO A PASSIVE ONE**

There are three things you need to do in order to change an active sentence into a passive one:

1. Move the subject of the active verb to the end of the sentence, and put by in front of it.
2. Move the object of the active verb to the front of the sentence, so that it becomes the passive subject.
10: Nouns: countable and uncountable

3. Change the verb from active to passive. You do this by adding a form of the auxiliary verb be and the past participle of the main verb (see section 3).

THE PASSIVE WITH ‘GET’
You can also make a passive using get instead of be. This kind of passive is very common in conversation. Do not use it in formal writing. You often use this kind of passive to say that something happened suddenly to someone.

I got sacked by my firm. OR I was sacked by my firm.
He got hit by a car. OR He was hit by a car.
You can also use the passive with get when you want to suggest that an action is more forceful or more important to you.

I get paid on Thursday. OR I am paid on Thursday.
We often get asked this question. OR We are often asked this question.

10 Nouns: countable and uncountable

COUNTABLE NOUNS
A noun is ‘countable’ if you can think of it as one of several separate units, for example book, egg, or horse. As the name suggests, countable nouns can actually be counted. In this dictionary, countable nouns are shown like this: [n C].

UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS
A noun is ‘uncountable’ if you cannot think of it as one of several separate units, but only as a single idea or substance, for example butter, music, or advice. These nouns are sometimes called ‘mass’ nouns. They cannot be counted. In this dictionary, uncountable nouns are shown like this: [n U].

GRAMMATICAL DIFFERENCES
There are some important grammatical differences in the way you use countable and uncountable nouns.

1. You can use a countable noun in the singular or in the plural, for example book/books, egg/eggs, horse/horses, ticket/tickets, university/uni-versities. Don’t try to use uncountable nouns in the plural. Don’t say butters, musics, advices, informations, furnitures. It is a common mistake to use an uncountable noun in the plural.

You should listen to his advice. NOT You should listen to his advices.
2. You can use a countable noun with a or an: for example a book, an egg, a horse, a ticket, a university. Don’t use a or an with uncountable nouns. Don’t say a butter, a music, an advice, an information, a furniture. It is a common mistake to use a or an with an uncountable noun.

I like listening to music. NOT I like listening to a music.
3. You can use an uncountable noun with quantity words such as some and any: some butter, any music. If you want to use these words with countable nouns, you must put the nouns into the plural, and say some tickets, any eggs.

She bought some books. NOT She bought some book.
4. You can only use the quantity expressions much, how much, or a little with uncountable nouns. With countable nouns, you have to use many, how many, or a few.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have much money.</td>
<td>He doesn’t have many friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time do you have?</td>
<td>How many records do you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a little butter in the fridge.</td>
<td>There are a few rooms still available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. You can use an uncountable noun on its own without such words as the, some, or any.
She doesn’t eat meat.
If you need advice, don’t be afraid to ask.
You cannot use a countable noun in the singular in this way – only in the plural.

I like reading books. NOT I like reading book.
Computers are always causing problems. NOT Computers are always causing problem.

NOUNS WHICH CAN BE COUNTABLE OR UNCOUNTABLE
You can use some nouns in either a countable or an uncountable way, depending on their meaning. The following pairs of sentences show how the meaning can change. In each case there is a countable noun in the first sentence, and an uncountable noun in the second.

Would you like a cake? (=one of several cakes which someone can take to eat)
Do you like chocolate cake? (=a type of food)
The lambs were born early this year. (=the animals)
Their are several ways of cooking lamb. (=a type of meat)

Most abstract nouns, such as love, anger, knowledge, intelligence, or freedom, are always uncountable. But some abstract nouns can also be used in a countable way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>uncountable</th>
<th>countable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They did it with difficulty.</td>
<td>They’ve had a lot of difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her voice sounded full of doubt.</td>
<td>I have my doubts about whether he’s the right person for the job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this dictionary, nouns which can be countable or uncountable are shown like this: [n C/U].

11 Nouns: singular and plural

Most countable nouns (see section 10) have both a singular and a plural form, showing the difference between ‘one’ and ‘more than one’.

REGULAR PLURALS
The regular way of changing a noun from singular to plural is to add -s at the end.
dog – dogs, chair – chairs, difference – differences
For nouns ending in -y, you drop the -y and add -ies to form the plural.
dictionary – dictionaries, opportunity – opportunities
For nouns ending in -o, you add -es to form the plural.
tomato – tomatoes, potato – potatoes

IRRREGULAR PLURALS
There are also several irregular ways of forming a plural. In this dictionary, irregular plurals are shown at the end of the entry, after the definition and examples.

1. With seven nouns you change the vowel. They are:
man – men woman – women
foot – feet goose – geese
mouse – mice tooth – teeth
house – lice

2. With a few nouns you change the final -f to -v before adding the -s ending.
They include:
knife – knives leaf – leaves
wife – wives half – halves
Nouns: singular and plural

Some nouns in this group have a regular plural as well: scarfs and scarves, hoofs and hooves. Both possibilities are correct.

3. With three nouns you add -en. They are:
   ox – oxen, child – children,
   brother – brothers (only in the religious sense)

4. A few nouns which have been borrowed from foreign languages have an irregular plural. They include:
   stimulus – stimuli, crisis – crises, criterion – criteria, phenomenon – phenomena

Often, these nouns have two plurals: they have developed a regular plural but have also kept their original irregular one. In these cases, the regular form is more informal and popular; the irregular form tends to be used by specialists.

There are no certain formulas for success. (informal)
We have to learn all the relevant chemical formulae. (specialist)

5. A few nouns have no plural ending, but you can still use them in a singular or plural way: they include the names of some animals (such as sheep, deer, cod), certain nationalities (such as Japanese, Swiss), some nouns expressing quantity (such as ton, p (=pence)), and a few others (such as aircraft, crossroads, kennels, offspring).

The sheep was making a noise. The sheep were making a noise.

PLURALS FOR COMPOUND NOUNS

Compound nouns combine two or more words into a single unit. You usually make them plural by adding -s at the end of the word: can-openers, grown-ups. But in a few cases, the first part of the compound takes the -s ending, especially when the compound contains a preposition.

runner-up – runners-up
passer-by – passers-by
man-of-war – men-of-war

Sometimes, a regular plural form has developed, which is slowly replacing the irregular one.

spoonfuls (also spoonful)
mother-in-laws (also mothers-in-law)

Nouns which are only singular

Several nouns are used only in the singular. There are three main types:

1. Proper names – names of particular people, places, times, occasions, events, and so on.
   John, Robinson, Christmas, Tuesday

   You can use these in the plural only if you think of them in a ‘countable’ way. This is especially common with proper nouns expressing time.
   On Tuesdays I go swimming.
   Are the Robinsons coming to the party?
   We stayed with Mary three Christmases ago.

2. Most uncountable nouns, such as music and advice, are only singular (see section 10).

3. A group of nouns which you use in the singular even though they end in -s. These include the names of certain subjects, diseases, and games.
   physics, linguistics, mumps, measles, billiards

A common mistake is to think of these as plural, and use them with a plural verb or form a singular noun from them.

Linguistics is fascinating. Linguistics are fascinating. NOT
Billiards is a game. Billiards are a game. NOT
Poor Mike’s got measles. Poor Mike’s got a measles. NOT

Determiners and articles

Determiners are used before a noun to ‘determine’ the character of the noun – in particular, how ‘definite’ or ‘general’ a noun it is, and whether it is ‘one’ or ‘more than one’.

When you use a noun, you have the choice of using it in one of three possible states.

1. You can use the noun without any determiner at all.

    - in the singular, if it is a proper noun
    - in the singular, if it is an uncountable noun
    - in the plural, if it is a countable noun

Boston is on the east coast.
I can hear music.
Tigers have black stripes.

When you use a plural countable noun without the article, you are seeing the noun in a general way – ‘tigers in general’.

2. You can use the noun with either of the articles, a or the.

    - use a with singular countable nouns
    - use the with singular countable nouns
    - use the with uncountable nouns

I can see a car.
I can see the car.
I can see the water.

The articles are the most common determiners in English. Their main job is to say whether the noun is ‘definite’ or ‘indefinite’.

3. You can use the noun with one of the other determiners. This adds a further meaning to the noun. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>determiner</th>
<th>adds the meaning of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>my book</td>
<td>‘possession’ (also your, his, her etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this book</td>
<td>‘nearness to the speaker’ (also plural these)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that book</td>
<td>‘distance from the speaker’ (also plural those)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some books</td>
<td>‘quantity’ (also any)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enough books</td>
<td>‘sufficiency’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>each book</td>
<td>‘item by item’ (also every)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>either book</td>
<td>‘one of two’ (also neither)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no book</td>
<td>‘absence’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what book</td>
<td>‘unknown item’ (also which, whose etc)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12: Determiners and articles

You cannot use two determiners at the same time. Don't say things like 'the this car', 'my an apple', or 'some the cups'.

You can use other words or phrases expressing quantity in front of a determiner to make the meaning of the noun phrase more exact.

NOTE: (of) shows that you can leave out the word of.

- all (of) the people
- double the amount
- a few of the cars
- half (of) that cake
- one of these things in the situation that you are talking about.

You can also add certain quantity words after the determiner. They include the numerals, as well as a few general expressions of quantity.

- The three kittens were playing on the floor.
- I've just taken my fourth examination.
- He bought it on one of his many trips abroad.

If you want to add adjectives to the noun phrase (see section 13), they always follow any determiners or other quantity expressions.

- the three little kittens
- my fourth difficult examination
- his many interesting trips

WHEN TO USE ‘A’ AND ‘THE’

A and the are called 'the articles'. A is called 'the indefinite article', and the is called 'the definite article'. They are used in the following ways:

1. The main use of a and the is to say whether you are talking about a noun for the first time, or whether you have mentioned it before. For a first-time mention, use a; for later mentions, use the.

   Mary bought a car and a bike, but she used the bike more often.

2. If you use the with a noun that you have not mentioned before, you are actually saying to your listener 'you know which one I mean'. This is usually because there is only one example of the noun in the situation, or you have only one such example in your mind.

   That is why it is 'definite'.

   - Have you fed the cat? (=you have only one cat)
   - There's the hotel. (=that is the hotel we have been looking for)
   - I met him during the war. (=both you and your listener know which war you mean)
   - Pass the salt, please.

3. If you want to talk about something of a particular type in an indefinite way, use a.

   I'm training to be an engineer.
   I went out to buy a newspaper.

4. Use a when you are talking about one of several things or people and it is not important to say which one. Use the when it is clear that you are talking about one particular thing or person and there is only one.

   A man I work with told me about it. (=you work with several men)
   The man I work with told me about it. (=you work with only one man)

5. You must use the with singular nouns such as world, sky, or sun, because there is only one of these things in the situation that you are talking about.

   We're going to travel round the world.
   Don't look directly at the sun.

6. If you are talking about buildings, places, and organizations as things which you often see or visit, use the. For example the bank, the theatre, the cinema etc.

   I went to the theatre last week.
   She's at the gym.

7. If you are talking about buildings, places, and organizations as things which you often see or visit, use the. For example the bank, the theatre, the cinema etc.

   I went to the theatre last week.
   She's at the gym.

8. If you want to use a countable noun in the plural to talk in general about something, don't use the.

   Tigers are very fierce animals.
   Prices keep going up.

9. If you want to use an uncountable noun to talk in general about something, don't use the.

   There has been a big increase in crime.
   There has been a big increase in the crime.
   It takes patience and skill to be a teacher.
   It takes the patience and the skill to be a teacher.

10. Most names of places or people that begin with a capital letter do not have the before them. Don't use the with these names.

    They're visiting Belgium and Holland.
    NOT They're visiting the Belgium and the Holland.

11. However, there are some names that always have the in them, for example the United States, the Nile (=the big river in Egypt) etc. Don't forget to put the in these names.

    He's from the United States.
    NOT He's from United States.

12. There are also many common nouns and phrases which do not use a or the. This is especially true when talking about meals, illnesses, ways of travelling, times and periods of time.

    Will you have lunch with me?
    NOT Will you have the lunch with me?
    Her mother has cancer.
    NOT Her mother has the cancer.
    I travel to work by bus.
    NOT I travel to work by the bus.
    In winter we get a lot of snow.
    NOT In winter we get the a lot of snow.
    It's time to go to bed.
    NOT It's time to go to the bed.
    We got up at dawn.
    NOT We got up at the dawn.

13: Word order

This section deals with two areas which can cause problems for students: word order with adjectives before a noun, and word order with adverbs after a noun.

WORD ORDER BEFORE THE NOUN

The main way of describing a noun is to use adjectives or words that are like adjectives. You add these words after a, the, my, her etc. before the noun. You can add as many as you want, but you sometimes need to be careful about the order in which you use them.

You have a choice of three kinds of word. The largest group consists of adjectives.

- a lovely day
- a small round table
- the best students

You may also use a 'participle' before the noun - the -ing or -ed form of a verb, but here used to describe the noun.

- a crumbling wall
- her smiling face
- a cracked window
- the stolen car

You may also add one noun before another - the first noun is used to describe the second noun, which is the main noun in the phrase.

- the school buildings
- a tourist paradise
- a London bus

WHICH ORDER?

As soon as you use two or more describing words, you have to decide which order to put them in.

In many cases, there is no rule: you simply say first what comes into your mind first. But there are many adjectives, and the other kinds of describing word, are typically used in a particular place before the noun. You should think of these patterns only as a guide to help you, because there are a number of cases which do not follow the rule. But the following patterns are common:
13: Word order

1. Nouns go next to the main noun in the phrase, after any other adjectives.
   - a big London bus NOT a London big bus
   - the long country road NOT the country long road

2. Words which are closely related to nouns, such as the material something is made of or where something is from, also go next to the main noun.
   - big leather boots NOT leather big boots
   - a serious social problem NOT a social serious problem

3. Participles usually go in front of groups (1) and (2), but after any adjectives.
   - a broken garden chair NOT a garden broken chair
   - a smiling American tourist NOT an American smiling tourist

4. Adjectives with an 'intensifying' meaning, for example entire, whole, same go near the beginning, close to a, the, my, her etc.
   - the entire local committee NOT the local entire committee
   - the same old battered car NOT the old battered same car

5. Other adjectives follow (4) and go before (3). Those with a more general meaning usually come first, and those which describe properties of the noun which can be clearly seen, such as size and shape, usually come last. There are typical patterns here, too, as the table shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>your opinion about sth</th>
<th>size</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>shape</th>
<th>colour</th>
<th>where sth is from</th>
<th>material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lovely</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>old</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>wool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beautiful</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>young</td>
<td>square</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>plastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horrible</td>
<td>narrow</td>
<td>etc</td>
<td>etc</td>
<td>etc</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WORD ORDER AFTER THE NOUN

Some adverbs of time and frequency usually come immediately after the main verb. These include:

- always
- nearly
- just
- already
- still
- almost
- rarely
- ever
- very

She is always complaining. NOT Always she is complaining.

They are still working. NOT Still they are working.

Always and never are sometimes used at the beginning of a sentence in instructions and warnings, when the verb does not have a subject.

Always keep medicines away from children.

Never look directly at the sun through a telescope.

Adverbs and adverb phrases should not come between the verb and the object.

I like Japanese food very much. NOT I like very much Japanese food.

Adverbs and adverb phrases should not come between a main verb and an -ing participle, or between a main verb and an infinitive.

Tomorrow we'll go sightseeing. NOT We'll go tomorrow sightseeing.

In the evenings she likes to watch television. NOT She likes in the evenings to watch television.

14: Comparison

COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE ADJECTIVES

If you want to compare two things, you use the comparative form of an adjective. For example the comparative form of big is bigger, and the comparative form of interesting is more interesting.

Your car is bigger than mine.

His new book is more interesting than his last one.

If you want to say that one thing is bigger, faster, more interesting etc than all the others of a group of things, you use the superlative form of an adjective. For example, the superlative form of big is biggest, and the superlative form of interesting is the most interesting.

It's the fastest motorcycle in the world.

What's the most delicious food you've ever eaten?

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FORM OF THE ADJECTIVE

If the adjective is one syllable long, you add -er or -est to it, sometimes making a change in the spelling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>comparative</th>
<th>superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tall</td>
<td>taller</td>
<td>tallest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>bigger</td>
<td>biggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nice</td>
<td>nicer</td>
<td>nicest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the adjective is three or more syllables long, you add the words more or most before it.

That's a more interesting question.

Kim's question was the most interesting one.

Most adjectives with two syllables use more and most to form the comparative and superlative, but some two-syllable adjectives have -er/-est endings, and some two-syllable adjectives use both methods.

The -er/-est endings are possible with adjectives ending in -y, -ow, -le, -er, -ure. Don't forget that with adjectives that end in -y, the -y changes to -i.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>comparative</th>
<th>superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>happier</td>
<td>happiest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gentle</td>
<td>gentler</td>
<td>gentlest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrow</td>
<td>narrower</td>
<td>narrowest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clever</td>
<td>cleverer</td>
<td>cleverest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You keep this pattern even in the cases where you can add un- to a two-syllable adjective.

- happier/happiest
- proper and eager do not follow this rule: you can use only more/most with them.

You use more/most with all other two-syllable adjectives.

- more/most active
- more/most useful
- more/most recent

In this dictionary, comparatives and superlatives are shown at the end of the entry if there is anything irregular or unpredictable about them.

**ADJECTIVES THAT DO NOT FOLLOW THE NORMAL RULES**

Not all adjectives follow the normal rules. Some adjectives have completely irregular forms. The most common ones are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>comparative</th>
<th>superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td>worse</td>
<td>worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little</td>
<td>less</td>
<td>least</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this dictionary, we show these irregular forms at the end of the entry.

Words which are formed from a verb, and which end in -ing, -ed, or other past forms, always use more/most, no matter how many syllables they have.

- His latest film is even more boring than his previous ones.
- She was more shocked than I was.

**COMPARISON OF TWO THINGS WHICH ARE THE SAME**

If you want to say that two things are the same size, the same height etc, you can say that one thing is as big as the other, as tall as the other etc.

- She's as tall as her sister.
- Do you think this summer will be as hot as last summer?

**COMPARISON OF TWO THINGS WHICH ARE NOT THE SAME**

If you want to say that two things are not the same size, the same height etc, you can say that one thing is not as big as the other, not as tall as the other etc.

- The meal wasn't as good as the last meal I had there.
- I'm not as fat as him. OR I'm not as fat as he is.

- London is not as expensive as some other European cities.

You can use less ... than to mean the same thing as not as ... as, but you usually use it with adjectives that have two or more syllables, for example less expensive, less important. Value for money is less important than quality and reliability.

**Don't use less with short adjectives such as good, old etc.**

You can leave out the second as and the noun after it, if you have already mentioned or suggested the second thing that you are comparing.

- The material looks like silk, but it's not as expensive. (=not as expensive as silk)
- Similarly, you can also leave out the than part of the comparison when you are using less, if you have already mentioned or suggested the second thing that you are comparing.

- I prefer the old Hollywood movies. They're much less violent. (=than modern films)

If you want to say that one type of thing is less expensive, less important etc than all other things of the same type, you can say that it is the least expensive, the least important etc. People usually choose the least expensive brand.

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---

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td>worse</td>
<td>worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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- She was more shocked than I was.

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- Do you think this summer will be as hot as last summer?

**Comparing two things which are not the same**

If you want to say that two things are not the same size, the same height etc, you can say that one thing is not as big as the other, not as tall as the other etc.

- The meal wasn't as good as the last meal I had there.
- I'm not as fat as him. OR I'm not as fat as he is.

- London is not as expensive as some other European cities.

You can use less ... than to mean the same thing as not as ... as, but you usually use it with adjectives that have two or more syllables, for example less expensive, less important.

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- The material looks like silk, but it's not as expensive. (=not as expensive as silk)

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**Don't use least with short adjectives such as good, old etc.**

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**REPORTED SPEECH**

**Reporting statements**

**Direct speech**

If you want to write what someone has said, the simplest way is to repeat the exact words that they had used in quotation marks ("..."). This is called 'direct speech'.

- "I really enjoyed the meal," he said.
- "Time to get up!"

If you mention the speaker at the end of the sentence, and do not say he or she, you usually reverse the order of the subject and the verb. For example:

- "It's much too cold to swim," said Frank.
- "Go back to your room," said her mother.

**Indirect speech**

You can also report what someone has said without using quotation marks. This is called 'indirect speech'. The usual way of doing this is to use a clause which begins with + (that). For example:

- "I'm tired!"
- He said he was tired. OR He said that he was tired.

That is more common in written English and in formal spoken English.

**Changing from direct to indirect speech**

When changing from direct to indirect speech, you need to change the grammar in certain ways.

Verb tense forms usually need to change. In most cases, you change the present tense into the past tense.

- She said, "I am staying at the Chelsea Hotel."
- She said that she was staying at the Chelsea Hotel.

If the direct speech is already in the past tense, you need to put the verb even further back in time, using had. This applies to both past tense and present perfect forms of the verb (see section 2).

- She said, "I came by bus."
- He said that he had come by bus.

If the direct speech contains will, shall, or may (see section 2), these also need to change.

- She said, "I want to get married."
- She said she wants to get married.

- "Blue's my favourite colour."
- She said that blue's her favourite colour.

If the direct speech contains will, shall, or may (see section 2), these also need to change.

- She said, "I will see you soon."
- She said that she would see us soon.

Would, should, could, might, and must do not change.

- She said, "I could visit him on Thursday."
- She said she could visit him on Thursday.
You also need to change certain personal pronouns. I and you have to be changed to he and she, unless the original people are still taking part in the conversation. Similarly, my and your need to be changed to his and her.

Mary said to John, “I saw your cat.”
Mary said that she had seen your cat. (if the person who says this is talking to John)
Mary said that she had seen his cat. (if the person who says this is not talking to John)

You also need to change times and places which depend on the speaker’s point of view.

He said, “I saw the car here yesterday.”
He said that he’d seen the car there the day before.

In this case here becomes there because you are in a different place, and yesterday becomes the day before because you are now speaking at a later time.

Similarly, now becomes then, last week becomes the week before, two months ago becomes two months before, tomorrow becomes the next day, and so on. Of course, if the time phrase does not depend on the speaker’s point of view, it can be used without change.

He said, “I bought the car in November 1996.”
He said he had bought the car in November 1996.

**REPORTING QUESTIONS**

When you are changing a question from direct speech into indirect speech, you follow the same kinds of rules as for statements. The only differences are that you need to use a different word to introduce the reported speech, and the word order of the question becomes like that of a statement. You end the sentence with a full stop, not a question mark.

You use if or whether to introduce a ‘yes–no question’.

I asked, “Does he eat meat?”
I asked whether he ate meat. OR I asked if he ate meat.

You introduce questions where there is a choice in the same way – more usually by using whether than by using if.

I asked, “Is it Karen’s book or Michael’s?”
I asked whether it was Karen’s book or Michael’s.

You introduce questions that begin with who, why, what, how etc by using the word which begins the question in direct speech.

Someone asked, “Why doesn’t she resign?”
Someone asked why she didn’t resign.

She asked, “When will you go back to Japan?”
She asked when he would go back to Japan.

You often mention the person who is being asked the question, by using a pronoun (him, her, them etc) or by mentioning their name.

I asked him if he ate meat.
She asked Michael when he would go back to Japan.

**REPORTING WHAT SOMEONE HAS TOLD OR ASKED ANOTHER PERSON TO DO**

When saying what someone has told or asked another person to do, you usually use an infinitive.

“Go home!”
She told him to go home.

“Can you shut the window?”
She asked him to shut the window.

⚠ Don’t confuse say and tell. Don’t say ‘He said me to go home.’ or ‘He told, Go home!’ Say *He told me to go home.* or *He said, “Go home!”*