

### Articles Usage with Countable & Uncountable Nouns

Whether an article is required or not depends on the noun that follows. For this purpose nouns can be classified into two types: countable & uncountable nouns. The difference is based on whether the noun can be counted or not. For example complaint is a countable noun as it can be counted. Therefore it is possible to say 1 complaint or 2 complaints. Advice on the other hand cannot be counted so it is not possible to say 1 advice or 2 advices , The correct expression is some/any advice or the expression a piece of advice.

#### Countable nouns

These nouns have a singular form and plural form.

#### Singular

In the singular form an article is usually used before the noun. Example: The doctor received a complaint from her patient.

NB. Exceptions: The article can be left out if it is replaced with another determiner such as his/her or this /that or any/each/every. E.g. The doctor listened to each complaint. Her complaint was recorded.

#### Plural

In the plural form the article is usually not used before the noun. Example: The doctor received complaints from her patients.

 **Remember:** Always use articles when referring a particular job such as: doctor/dentist/nurse/pharmacist/physiotherapist/teacher etc etc.

Countable nouns	Singular form	Plural form
	<i>Note the use of an article before each noun in singular form, either as a/an/the</i>	<i>Note the absence of the indefinite articles a/an before each noun in singular form, but the definite article</i>
abscess	The patient had an abscess on her gum.	The patient had 3 abscesses on her gum.
ache	The patient reported a dull ache in her abdomen.	The patient suffered from aches and pains.
accountant	Mr. Hagen is an accountant.	Mr. & Mrs. Hagen are both accountants.
appointment	A follow-up appointment was scheduled.	The patient did not attend her follow-up appointments.
cavity	The cavity was exposed.	The cavities were exposed.
check up	The patient attended for a check-up.	Regular check-ups will keep you healthy.
complaint	If you have a complaint, tell your doctor.	If you have any complaints, tell your doctor.
condition	You have a condition known as tuberculosis.	There are 3 conditions which can indicate the presence of cancer.
deposit	A carious deposit was evident on tooth 32.	Carious deposits were evident on teeth 32 & 33.
doctor	The patient has not seen a doctor for several years.	Three doctors were involved in the treatment of the patient.
episode	The patient had an episode of heart flutter.	The patient reported 3 episodes of heart flutter.
examination	An examination is necessary to rule out cancer.	Blood urine examinations revealed no abnormalities.
gum	The gum surrounding tooth 23 was inflamed.	The gums were infected.
increase	There was an increase in the size of the swelling.	The patient presented with numerous swellings.
interpreter	An interpreter is required.	Interpreters will be required.
investigation	An investigation is required to rule out bowel cancer.	Investigations are required to rule out bowel cancer.

limp	The patient walked with a limp.	All the patients had limps.
parasite	The threadworm is a parasite.	Threadworms are parasites.
lip	The patient had a swollen lip. (one lip)	The patient had swollen lips. (both lips)
smoker	She is a smoker.	They are smokers.
operation	An operation is necessary.	Two operations are necessary.
painkiller	The patient requested a painkiller.	Painkillers are not necessary with this procedure.
physiotherapist	An appointment needs to be arranged with a physiotherapist.	Two physiotherapists work at this rehabilitation centre.
result	The patient hoped for a positive result.	The results were positive.
review	A review was scheduled after 2 weeks.	The nurse received positive reviews from her patients.
sensation	The patient reported a tingling sensation in his fingers.	The patient experience tingling sensations in his fingers.
social worker	A social worker has been arranged to offer ongoing care.	Two social workers have been arranged to offer ongoing care.
teacher	Steve is a teacher.	Steve and Chris are teachers.
test	A blood test was ordered.	Blood and urine tests were ordered.
visit	Please organise a visit by a social worker.	Regular visits by a social worker are required.

#### Uncountable nouns

These nouns cannot take a plural form such as: cancer, anaesthesia and information. For these words no article is required. However, the definite article the as well as quantifiers such as some and any can be used before the noun.

Uncountable nouns	Indefinite articles cannot be used with uncountable nouns. However definite article "the" as well as quantifiers such as some and any can be used.
accommodation	The patient lives in rental accommodation.
advice	Advice on diet is requested.
assistance	The patient will require assistance upon discharge.
attention	The patient requires urgent attention.
behaviour	On examination, the patient's behaviour was abnormal.
cancer	The patient has cancer.
caries	Deep caries were present on several teeth.
concentration	The patient has poor concentration.
damage	The scan confirmed damage to the medial cartilage.

discomfort	If you experience discomfort, please consult your doctor.
information	Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.
pain	The patient experienced pain on palpation.
progress	The patient has made good progress.
tissue	She has healthy, soft tissue.
treatment	The condition did not respond to treatment.
research	Further research is required.
surgery	The patient chose not to have surgery.

#### Common mistakes

Incorrect	Correct
Wound on her left knee has been stitched.	A wound on her left hand has been stitched.
I am writing to refer Marvin, 7 year old boy who was admitted to hospital on 21/11/16.	I am writing to refer Marvin, a 7-year- old boy who was admitted to hospital on 21/11/16.
Mr Brown has been patient of mine for 7 years.	Mr Brown has been a patient of mine for 7 years.
Please note, the patient has had prosthetic heart valve for year.	Please note, the patient has had a prosthetic heart valve for a year.
Examination revealed abscess on her gum.	Examination revealed an abscess on her gum.
Apart from bruises to her body, X-rays reveal that she has fracture of the right ankle.	Apart from bruises to her body, X-rays reveal that she has a fracture of the right ankle.
Mr Jones had a heart surgery in 2015.	Mr Jones had heart surgery in 2015.
The patient has a cancer.	The patient has cancer.
She had a healthy soft tissue.	She had healthy soft tissue.
He had lacerated lip and swollen gum.	He had a lacerated lip and swollen gums.
The patient has pollen allergy.	The patient has a pollen allergy.
The patient has tender right elbow joint.	The patient has a tender right elbow joint.
The patient presented for regular check-up on 12/2/16.	The patient presented for a regular check-up on 12/2/16.

#### New Information Vs Previously Mentioned Information

##### Indefinite Article: A or An

When you mention something for the first time the indefinite article a/an is required. This signifies to the reader that it hasn't been mentioned before.

### Definite Article: The

When you mention something for the second and subsequent times that we mention it the definite article the is required because we are referring a something which has been mentioned before.

**Example:** Initially, she came to me on 03/07/06 for a blood test. The results of the blood test were negative.

Correct application of this rule creates cohesion in your letter as you are able to connect ideas, as in the example above, where the reader knows which blood test is being referred. Conversely, incorrect use can confuse the reader.

**Example:** Initially, she came to me on 03/07/06 for the blood test. The results of a blood test were negative.

In the example above the ideas are not connected and the reader will be confused.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient has <u>the</u> family history of diabetes.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: If it is the first time to give this information then the indefinite article is required for countable nouns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient has <u>a</u> family history of diabetes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, the pain in the right knee joint has appeared over the last 2 days.</li> <li>Thank you for seeing, Mr and Mrs Conway, who have presented to me for the fertility advice.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: If it is the first time to give this information and the word is an uncountable noun, such as pain or advice, then no article is required. Note, this error has a big effect on meaning: <u>the</u> in this case implies that this subject has been mentioned previously, which of course it hasn't. <i>For more details on countable &amp; uncountable nouns click <a href="#">here</a></i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, pain in the right knee joint has appeared over the last 2 days.</li> <li>Thank you for seeing, Mr and Mrs Conway, who have presented to me for fertility advice.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thank you for seeing this patient, an eight year old girl who presented today with the broken left arm following the accident at her school play ground.It has been forty minutes since a accident.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thank you for seeing this patient ,an eight year old girl who presented today with <u>a</u> broken left arm following <u>an</u> accident at her school play ground.It has been forty minutes since <u>the</u> accident.</li> </ul>

### Referring to Something Specific

The definite article is used when referring to something specific. It is very important to include this article to signify the information is specific.

*Note: These articles are usually omitted in the case notes. This is because the case notes are in short note form and standard grammar rules do not apply. However for referral letters it is necessary to apply and adhere to standard grammar rules.*

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She was on Microgynon 30 for previous 5 years.</li> <li>He has been a smoker for last 12 years.</li> <li>Mr. Roberts has been a resident at our nursing home for past 2 years.</li> <li>This medication needs to be taken twice a day for next 3 days.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: All the expressions above are referring to a specific period of time so a definite article is required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She was on Microgynon 30 for <u>the</u> previous 5 years</li> <li>He has been a smoker for <u>the</u> last 12 years.</li> <li>Mr. Roberts has been a resident at our nursing home for <u>the</u> past 2 years.</li> <li>This medication needs to be taken twice a day for<u>the</u> next 3 days.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MrsSangean is currently on following medication: karvea 150mg daily, oroxinen 0.1 daily.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation:In this case, the writer is referring to specific medication. i.e that which follows.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MrsSangean is currently on <u>the</u> following medication: karvea 150mg daily, oroxinen 0.1 daily</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient reported pain in left ankle.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Here the writer is referring to a specific side, i.e not the right side but the left side.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient reported pain in <u>the</u> left ankle.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patient complained of chest pain.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Patient requires an article to indicate which patient the writer is referring to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>The</u> patient complained of chest pain.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examination revealed a slightly swollen joint and a tender spot on medial aspect of it.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Here the writer is referring to a specific region, i.e not the anterior aspect but the medial aspect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examination revealed a slightly swollen joint and a tender spot on <u>the</u> medial aspect of it.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on above information, I believe the patient needs urgent admission to hospital.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Here the writer is referring to a specific information, i.e not the information on the medical chart but the information written above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on <u>the</u> above information, I believe the patient needs urgent admission to hospital.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thank you for seeing this patient who presented at my surgery regarding tooth 54 which has been temporary filled by school dental service.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Here the writer is referring to a specific dental service, i.e not the community dental service but the school dental service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thank you for seeing this patient who presented at my surgery regarding tooth 54 which has been temporary filled by <u>the</u> school dental service.</li> </ul>

## Special Usage of Articles

There are some situations where you should always use the definite article and there are some situations where the indefinite article is required. Understanding these rules can greatly reduce the number of "minor" errors in your writing so please study these rules carefully.

### 😊 *Handy Hint!*

Articles are usually omitted in the case notes. This is because the case notes are in short note form and standard grammar rules do not apply. However for referral letters it is necessary to apply and adhere to standard grammar rules including article usage.

## Body Parts

The definite article "the" should be used when referring to parts of the body.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pain in left groin.</li> <li>Pain in stomach.</li> <li>I suspect it to be adenoma of parotid gland.</li> <li>Mr. Smith had an operation on a left knee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pain in <u>the</u> left groin.</li> <li>Pain in <u>the</u> stomach.</li> <li>I suspect it to be adenoma of <u>the</u> parotid gland.</li> <li>Mr. Smith had an operation on <u>the</u> left knee.</li> </ul>

## Names of Diseases

Do not use an article for names of diseases or conditions.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient is suffering from the high blood pressure.</li> <li>Recently, the patient has complained of the headache.</li> <li>The patient was diagnosed with the arthritis.</li> <li>The patient has had the influenza for three days.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient is suffering from high blood pressure.</li> <li>Recently, the patient has complained of headache.</li> <li>The patient was diagnosed with arthritis.</li> <li>The patient has had influenza for three days.</li> </ul>

## Same

Always use the definite article with this word.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• She has a family history of same disease that had been controlled by Risperidone.</li><li>• The children were treated by same dentist.</li><li>• The medication is same as last time.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• She has a family history of <u>the</u> same disease that had been controlled by Risperidone.</li><li>• The children were treated by <u>the</u> same dentist.</li><li>• The medication is <u>the</u> same as last time.</li></ul>

## Articles with Gerunds

A gerund is the ...ing form of a verb which takes on the grammatical function of a noun. It can be the subject or object in a sentence. Usually no article is required with gerunds.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On review today, Mr Walker has reduced the smoking from 20 to 10 cigarettes per day.</li><li>• The patient was advised to stop the drinking.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On review today, Mr Walker has reduced smoking from 20 to 10 cigarettes per day.</li><li>• The patient was advised to stop drinking.</li></ul>

## Articles and Nominalisation

Nominalisation is a process where verbs can be turned into a "noun phrase". For example: The patient sucked his thumb until he was five becomes The patient had a habit of thumb sucking until the age of five.

Often in medical English, it is necessary to use nominalisation such as: The excessive drinking of alcohol will adversely affect your health. The reduction of weight has led to improved health. It is common in these cases to use an article before the nominalised expression.

The other benefit of using the style of writing is that it creates a formal tone and allows you to summarise details from the case notes.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The patient is complaining of discomfort during passing of urine.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The patient is complaining of discomfort during the passing of urine.</li></ul>

## Grammar & Vocabulary Clinic

### Capitalisation

Correct use of capitals is an important area to master when writing referral letters. Study the rules of usage below to ensure you meet the standard conventions.

#### Rules of Usage

##### 1. Medications and Diseases

- Capitals are required for proper nouns. Proper nouns include the brand name of a drug or registered trademark of the manufacturer.
  - Ritalin
  - Voltaren
  - Zocor
- The chemical constituent should be written in lower case.
  - penicillin
  - amoxicillin
- Names of diseases should always be lower case.
  - bowel cancer
  - high blood pressure
  - diabetes
  - epilepsy
- Eponyms: Some medical conditions are named after the person who discovered it. In this case the first word should be capitalised.
  - Parkinson's disease
  - Bell's palsy
- Names of medical procedures do not require capitals.
  - orthopantomogram
  - x-ray
  - caesarian section
- Body parts should always be lower case
  - heart
  - adrenal gland
  - knee

##### 2. Proper Nouns: Proper nouns name something specific as in the examples below. These words must always be capitalised.

- Job titles
  - The Lactation Consultant, Mater Hospital
  - The Veterinary Eye Specialist, University of Queensland
- Institutions
  - Mary Jones was admitted to Spirit Hospital.
  - Dr. Bloomfield works at Weller Point Medical Centre.
- Places including addresses
  - 168 Wickham Terrace, Spring Hill
  - 12 Logan Road, Mt Gravatt
  - 36 Barmore Street, Holland Park
- Titles when they precede the name of a person
  - The patient was seen by Doctor Smith.
  - Nurse Jones is in charge of the patient's care.

##### 3. Common Nouns: Common nouns do not name any specific institution, place, person or profession. These words do not need to be capitalised.

- The patient was admitted to hospital.
- The patient does not have a family doctor.
- Steve is a teacher.
- Yoshiro is a doctor.
- Reza is a dentist.

##### 4. Holidays, months, days of the week all need to be capitalised. However seasons do not.

- The baby was born on Christmas Day.
- The patient was admitted to hospital on January 12.
- Please come and see me on Wednesday.
- The vaccination will be available in spring.

##### 5. The pronoun "I" must always be capitalised.

- It was I who treated the patient.

##### 6. Capitalise the first word of a salutation and the first word of a complimentary close.

- Dear Dr. Jameson:

- Yours sincerely,

### Common Errors

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His medical history shows that he is Epileptic.</li> <li>• Also, I have given Dycal base on 1.1 and dressed it with Glass Ionomer Cement.</li> <li>• The patient was diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes.</li> <li>• Mrs. Marsh has a history of Hyperthyroidism, Hypertension and Glaucoma.</li> <li>• The patient is allergic to Penicillin.</li> <li>• The patient suffered from severe Abdominal pain.</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 1 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His medical history shows that he is <u>epileptic</u>.</li> <li>• Also, I have given <u>dycal</u> base on 1.1 and dressed it with <u>glass ionomer cement</u>.</li> <li>• The patient was diagnosed with <u>type 2 diabetes</u>.</li> <li>• Mrs. Marsh has a history of <u>hyperthyroidism, hypertension and glaucoma</u>.</li> <li>• The patient is allergic to <u>penicillin</u>.</li> <li>• The patient suffered from severe <u>abdominal</u> pain.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. duane thomson presented at my clinic today with the complaint of a broken posterior tooth.</li> <li>• The director of nursing</li> <li>• emergency department</li> <li>• Mater hospital</li> <li>• 84 Monash road</li> <li>• The patient was seen by doctor Jones.</li> </ul> <p>The above words are all proper nouns. Refer to rule 2 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. <u>Duane Thomson</u> presented at my clinic today with the complaint of a broken posterior tooth.</li> <li>• <u>The Director of Nursing</u></li> <li>• <u>Emergency Department</u></li> <li>• Mater <u>Hospital</u></li> <li>• 84 Monash <u>Road</u></li> <li>• The patient was seen by <u>Doctor Jones</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As per the General Practitioner's order, we are doing daily home visits and wound dressing and also assisting him with his showers.</li> <li>• Please see your Pharmacist for advice.</li> <li>• Ms. Gatsby is a University student.</li> </ul> <p>The above words are all common nouns. Refer to rule 3 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As per the <u>general practitioner's</u> order, we are doing daily home visits and wound dressing and also assisting him with his showers.</li> <li>• Please see your <u>pharmacist</u> for advice.</li> <li>• Ms. Gatsby is a <u>university</u> student.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient first visited my surgery in march, 2008.</li> <li>• Mrs. Green will be discharged from hospital on wednesday.</li> <li>• Symptoms of hay fever are worse in Spring.</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 4 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient first visited my surgery in <u>March</u>, 2008.</li> <li>• Mrs. Green will be discharged from hospital on <u>Wednesday</u>.</li> <li>• Symptoms of hay fever are worse in <u>spring</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient requested that i prescribe antibiotics for the virus.</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 5 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient requested that <u>I</u> prescribe antibiotics for the virus.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dear Dr. Roberts:</li> <li>• yours sincerely,</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 6 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Dear</u> Dr. Roberts:</li> <li>• <u>Yours</u> sincerely,</li> </ul>

## Present Perfect

Present perfect tense is used to describe an event which starts in the past and continues until the present. Mastery of this pattern is an essential for writing successful referral letters. Three common ways to form present perfect when writing referral letters are as follows:

Present Perfect Simple	Present Perfect Progressive	Present Perfect Passive
<p>Form: <i>have/has+ past participle</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I <u>have treated</u> Mr. Smith at this hospital for 3 years.</li> <li>Dr X <u>has treated</u> Mr. Smith at this hospital for 3 years.</li> </ul>	<p>Form: <i>have/has+been+___ing (present participle)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I <u>have been treating</u> Mr. Smith at this hospital for 3 years.</li> <li>Dr X <u>has been treating</u> Mr. Smith at this hospital for 3 years.</li> </ul>	<p>Form: <i>have/has +been+ past participle</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Smith <u>has been treated</u> at this hospital for 3 years(..byDr X).</li> <li>They <u>have been treated</u> at this hospital for 3 years(..byDr X).</li> </ul>

Present perfect is often combined with *for/since/over*. Compare the usage below and note time markers used.

For	Since	Over
<p><i>For</i> is used to describe a period of time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have been treating the patient for 3 years.</li> <li>The patient has been on this medication for 6 months.</li> <li>I haven't seen the patient for 1 year.</li> <li>The patient has been in pain for 5 hours.</li> <li>The patient has been waiting for 15 minutes.</li> <li>He has been complaining of back pain for a week.</li> <li>He has not had bowel motions for 3 days.</li> <li>He has been a smoker for a period of 25 years.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Since</i> is used to refer to the start of period of time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have been treating the patient since 2012.</li> <li>The patient has been on this medication since January.</li> <li>I haven't seen this patient since December 2014.</li> <li>The patient has been in pain since 10am.</li> <li>The patient has been waiting since 11.45am.</li> <li>He has been complaining of back pain since last week.</li> <li>He has not had bowel motions since Saturday.</li> <li>He has been a smoker since 1990.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Over</i> uses similar time markers to for but is used to express a change in condition, or to describe a repeated event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient's condition has deteriorated over the past 3 months.(change in condition)</li> <li>The patient has presented several times over the last year. (repeated event)</li> <li>The patient's back pain has worsened over the last week.(change in condition)</li> <li>He has tried to quit smoking several times over the past 25 years.(repeated event)</li> <li>The patient has experienced seizures on 3 occasions over the past year.(repeated event)</li> </ul>

### 😊 Handy Tip

When using time markers such as ...for the past 20 years, ...for the last 3months, ...for the next 3 months or .... for the previous 3 months always use the definite article "*the*" as it its function is to specify a particular period of time.

## Common Errors

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient was diagnosed hypothyroidism since 2012</li> </ul> <p><i>Explanation: Past tense cannot be used with for or since</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient <u>has had</u> hypothyroidism <u>since</u> 2012. (present perfect)</li> <li>The patient <u>was diagnosed</u> with hypothyroidism <u>in</u> 2012. (simple past)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She has been problems with arthritis in her hands.</li> </ul> <p><i>Explanation: <u>Problems</u> in this sentence is a noun so</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She <u>has been having</u> problems with arthritis in her hands since 2012. (present perfect progressive)</li> <li>She <u>has had</u> problems with arthritis in her hands since</li> </ul>

<p>you can not use “been” with a noun.</p> <p>You must use have or has + noun or been+ ___ingverb. You can also use been + adjective</p>	<p>2012.(present perfect simple)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She <u>has been arthritic</u> since 2012. (present perfect simple +adjective)</li> <li>• She <u>has had arthritis</u> since 2012. (present perfect simple +noun)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is smoking 2 packs of cigarettes a day for the past 25 - 30 years.</li> <li>• Over the past week she remains free from severe pain and has been able to tolerate a fluid diet.</li> <li>• Also, there is an ulcer on the right lower lateral border of the tongue which is present for more than one year.</li> <li>• Mr. Diamond is a patient of mine since 2005</li> <li>• Mr. Eddy is a known smoker for 25-30 years.</li> </ul> <p><i>Explanation: The verbs in these sentences are in simple present tense. Present perfect needs to be used because you are</i></p> <p><i>referring to a time period which started in the past and has continued to the present.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He <u>has been smoking</u> two packs of cigarettes a day for the past 25-30 years. (present perfect progressive)</li> <li>• Over the <u>past week</u> she <u>has remained</u> free from severe pain and has been able to tolerate a fluid diet. (present perfect simple)</li> <li>• There is also an ulcer on the right lower lateral border of the tongue, which <u>has been</u> present for more than one year.(present perfect)</li> <li>• Mr Diamond <u>has been</u> a patient of mine since 2005.(present perfect simple)</li> <li>• Mr. Eddy <u>has been</u> a smoker for 25 years. (present perfect simple)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mrs. Brown has been presenting to me on several occasions over the past few months.</li> </ul> <p><i>Explanation: Progressive form not required.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mrs. Brown <u>has presented</u> to me on several occasions over the past few months.</li> </ul>

## Simple Past or Present Perfect

There is often confusion of whether to use simple past or present perfect tense. The basic rule to remember is if you are referring a particular time in the past then you must use simple past tense. If you are referring to a period of time that starts in the past and continues up to now use present perfect tense.

There are some common time markers used with simple past and present perfect. It is important to study, learn and use these tenses correctly when writing referral letters as you must refer to both past events and periods of time leading to the present.

Time Markers with Simple Past	Time markers with Present Perfect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He sucked his thumb <u>until he was 5.</u></li> <li>• Mrs. Kelly had diverticulitis <u>when she was a teenager.</u></li> <li>• He first came to see me <u>in 2012.</u>The patient didn't respond to treatment.</li> <li>• The patient was diagnosed with cancer <u>3 months ago.</u></li> <li>• The patient stopped taking medication <u>yesterday.</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He has been sucking his thumb for five years.</li> <li>• Mrs. Kelly has had diverticulitis <u>for the last 12 years.</u></li> <li>• He has been seeing me <u>since 2012.</u></li> <li>• The patient hasn't responded to treatment <u>yet.</u></li> <li>• The patient has shown no signs of improvement <u>up to now.</u></li> <li>• The patient has stopped taking medication <u>recently.</u></li> </ul>

### Common Errors

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She <u>has underwent</u> triple coronary bypass surgery on 10/08/15</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She <u>underwent</u> triple coronary bypass surgery on 10/08/15</li> </ul>

## Active and Passive Verb Formation

When writing a referral letter, it is necessary to use a variety of verb forms including both active and passive verbs. Using active verbs is good when you wish to create a personal tone or impart subjective information. However, passive verbs and sentence structures enable the writer to be more objective and focus attention on what is most important in a sentence such as the patient, procedures and treatment rather than on health professional.

### Compare

1. I advised the patient to stop smoking.
  2. The patient was advised to stop smoking (*focus on the patient*)
- 
1. I advised her to do bed exercises to prevent further complications such as deep vein thrombosis.
  2. Bed exercises were advised to prevent further complications such as deep vein thrombosis. (*focus on the treatment*)
- 
1. You need to take Flucloxacillin capsules twice a day for a duration of 2 weeks.
  2. Flucloxacillin capsules need to be taken twice a day for a duration of 2 weeks. (*focus on the medication*)

To form the passive, use the be verb (be, is/ are; was/were; has been/have been) + past participle as described in the table below.

Active	Passive
Present simple <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>takes</u> aspirin daily.</li> </ul>	Present simple <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspirin <u>is taken</u> daily.</li> </ul>
Present simple continuous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>is taking</u> aspirin daily.</li> </ul>	Present simple continuous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspirin <u>is being taken</u> daily.</li> </ul>
Past simple <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>took</u> aspirin daily.</li> <li>• The patient <u>took</u> 3 tablets daily.</li> </ul>	Past simple <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspirin <u>was taken</u> daily.</li> <li>• 3 tablets <u>were taken</u> daily.</li> </ul>
Past simple continuous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>was taking</u> aspirin daily.</li> </ul>	Past simple continuous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspirin <u>was being taken</u> daily.</li> </ul>
Present perfect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>has taken</u> aspirin daily for a period of one year.</li> <li>• The patient <u>has taken</u> aspirin, noten and normison for a period of one year.</li> </ul>	Present perfect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspirin <u>has been taken daily</u> for a period of one year.</li> <li>• Aspirin, noten and normison <u>have been taken</u> for a period of one year.</li> </ul>
Present perfect continuous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>has been taking</u> aspirin daily.</li> </ul>	Present perfect continuous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil: This form is rarely used in the passive.</li> </ul>
Past perfect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>had taken</u> aspirin daily for a period of one year.</li> </ul>	Past perfect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspirin <u>had been taken</u> daily for a period of one year.</li> <li>• Aspirin, noten and normison <u>had been taken</u> for</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient <u>had taken</u> aspirin, noten and normison for a period of one year.</li> </ul>	a period of one year.
<p>Past perfect continuous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient <u>had been taking</u> aspirin daily.</li> </ul>	<p>Past perfect continuous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nil: This form is rarely used in the passive.</li> </ul>
<p>Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient <u>will take</u> aspirin in the evening</li> </ul>	<p>Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aspirin <u>will be taken</u> in the evening.</li> </ul>
<p>Modal form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient <u>should have taken</u> aspirin in the evening.</li> </ul>	<p>Modal form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aspirin <u>should have been taken</u> in the evening.</li> </ul>

Please review the list of common mistakes below.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She was performed a colostomy accompanied with a partial bowel resection.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A colostomy <u>was performed</u> with a partial bowel resection.</li> <li>A colostomy <u>was performed</u> on the patient by the doctor with a partial bowel resection.</li> </ul> <p><i>The first example is better as it more concise and also it is obvious the roles of patient and doctor so it is unnecessary to state them.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As per the doctor's order, we were organized daily home visits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As per the doctor's order, daily home visits <u>were organised</u>. (passive)</li> <li>As per the doctor's order, we <u>organised</u> daily home visits. (active)</li> </ul> <p><i>Both sentences are grammatically correct but the first example is preferred because it focuses attention on the procedure rather than the health professional.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 9/7/15 he was presented to me for his regular check up.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 9/7/15 he <u>presented</u> to me for his regular check up. (active)</li> </ul> <p><i>Active voice is preferred here as the patient is the subject and most likely presented himself.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the subsequent visit the treatment options was discussed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the subsequent visit the treatment options <u>were discussed</u>.</li> </ul> <p><i>Because the noun is plural the plural verb "were" is required.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She had done colonoscopy 3 years ago. <i>This sentence indicates the patient did the procedure! 🤖</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A colonoscopy was done 3 years ago.</li> <li>She had a colonoscopy done 3 years ago.</li> </ul> <p><i>In these sentences it is unimportant who performed the colonoscopy so passive voice is used.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initially, she came to me on 14/01/2012 for a general check up and was found her blood pressure 160/90.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initially, she came to me on 14/01/2006 for a general check up and her blood pressure <u>was found</u> to be 160/90.</li> </ul> <p><i>After the conjunction "and" a subject is required.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, her baby will need to monitor his growth and general health condition. <i>This sentence indicates the baby will monitor their own growth! 🤖</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, the baby's growth and general health condition <u>will need to be monitored</u>.</li> </ul> <p><i>Future form of the passive.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Noten 50mg 1/2 tablet daily prescribed while Zocor and Calcium Caltrate continued.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Noten 50mg 1/2 tablet daily <u>was</u> prescribed while Zocor and Calcium Caltrate <u>were</u> continued.</li> </ul> <p><i>Add the "be verb"</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Today at my surgery attended Mr. Attard complaining of pain in his upper left molar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Today, Mr. Attard attended my clinic complaining of pain in his upper left molar.</li> </ul> <p><i>Use active form here as you need to focus on your patient, not your</i></p>

## Past Perfect

Past Perfect is an important tense in referral letters. The main functions of this tense are:

- When used with simple past it allows the writer to distinguish the order of events:
  - *She had not been able to conceive over the previous four months and as a result she was suffering from depression*. This means: first she could not conceive, then she became depressed.
- When used in reported speech. The case notes may describe the patient's condition at a time in the past, i.e. *patient found blood in toilet bowl 2 times*. This can be written in the referral letter as follows:
  - At today's consultation, Ms. Leon reported that there had been blood in the toilet bowl on 2 occasions.

So the main benefit of using past perfect is that it allows the writer to express the order in which certain health events occurred logically and clearly.

### 😊 Handy Hint 1

Do not use past perfect when describing one past event as it is not necessary.

Compare

- The patient had been feeling unwell last week. (incorrect if 1 past event described)
- The patient was feeling unwell last week. (correct)
- The patient had been feeling unwell last week and was admitted to hospital for observation. (correct as 2 past events need to be distinguished)

### 😊 Handy Hint 2

Past perfect is often used with the word **previous** instead of **ago** to demonstrate that you are referring to a time before a particular date in the past, not the date you are writing the letter. See below for examples.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She presented to me on 03/07/2015 for a regular check up because she experienced several episode of heart flutter over the past few weeks.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Past perfect tense is necessary here (had experienced) to differentiate what happened prior to the check up, which is also in the past.</i></li> <li>• <i>As your meaning is prior to 03/07/105 and not the day of writing the letter, you should use the word <u>previous</u> instead of <u>past</u>.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She presented to me on 03/07/2015 for a regular check up because <u>she had experienced</u> several episodes of heart flutter over the <u>previous</u> few weeks.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On review two weeks later, the frequency of headache decreased.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Use past perfect to indicate that frequency of headache had decreased prior to the consultation.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On review two weeks later, the frequency of headache <u>had decreased</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review on 25/04/15 showed the patient's general health improved and her blood pressure dropped to 140/85 and she lost 4 kg.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Past perfect is used when describing a condition that was true at a certain time in the past.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review on 25/04/15 showed the patient's general health <u>had improved</u> and her blood pressure <u>had dropped</u> to 140/85 and she <u>had lost</u> 4kg.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She presented to me yesterday evening with abdominal pain, mostly on the left iliac fossa, and was since 24 hours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She presented to me yesterday evening with abdominal pain, mostly on the left iliac fossa, which <u>had been occurring</u> for the <u>previous</u> 24 hours.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note that in the correct version 3 different times need to be considered</li> <li>2. The present i. e today: time of writing</li> <li>3. Yesterday evenings consultation</li> <li>4. Symptoms which occurred before yesterday's consultation.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She was admitted to Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital on 24/07/15 because she collapsed at home.</li> <li>Use past perfect tense to create a time line, so past perfect indicates the collapse occurred before the admission.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She was admitted to Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital on 24/07/15 because she <u>had collapsed</u> at home.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initially she presented to me in July 2015 with a complaint of chest discomfort for three weeks.</li> <li>If you use this time expression: <u>for a few weeks</u> then you must either use a relative clause and past perfect verb tense, or the very concise and useful expression: of _____ duration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initially she presented to me in July 2015 with a complaint of chest discomfort which <u>had been present</u> for three weeks.</li> <li>Initially she presented to me in July 2006 with a complaint of chest discomfort <u>of 3 week duration</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mrs. Jones had taken Microgynon 30 for the previous 5 years but had stopped in May 2015.</li> <li>There is no need to use past perfect twice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mrs. Jones <u>had taken</u> Microgynon 30 for the previous 5 years but <u>stopped</u> in May 2015.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On rechecking at 10.45pm, her condition has further deteriorated and an ambulance was arranged for transfer to hospital.</li> <li>Use past perfect and simple past together to distinguish the order of events i.e her condition deteriorated then an ambulance was called.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On rechecking at 10.45pm, her condition <u>had further deteriorated</u> and an ambulance <u>was arranged</u> for transfer to hospital.</li> </ul>

## Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject verb agreement is an area where accuracy is important. Below are some important rules which you should remember.

Singular subject & verb	Plural subject & verb	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <u>suture</u> <u>has</u> been removed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <u>sutures</u> <u>have</u> been removed.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>One</u> of the medications <u>is</u> unavailable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>All</u> of the medications <u>are</u> unavailable.</li> </ul>	The verb agrees with the subject which is this case is either singular in <u>one</u> or plural in <u>all</u> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>One</u> of the medications <u>has</u> side effects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>All</u> of the medications <u>have</u> side effects</li> </ul>	The verb agrees with the subject which is this case is either singular in <u>one</u> or plural in <u>all</u> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Mrs. Pratt</u> <u>lives</u> in rental accommodation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Pratt</u> <u>live</u> in rental accommodation.</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>He needs</u> to be assisted with activities of daily living.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>They need</u> to be assisted with activities of daily living.</li> </ul>	
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### Common Errors

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alison's school medical record reveals that her attendance have been declining in recent past.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alison's school medical record reveals that <u>her attendance has</u>been declining in recent past.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All these findings has been confirmed with bite-wing radiographs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All these findings <u>have</u> been confirmed with bite-wing radiographs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am writing to refer this patient who I suspect is suffering from rheumatic fever and need urgent admission.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am writing to refer this patient who I suspect is suffering from rheumatic fever and <u>needs</u> urgent admission.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe that the teeth 65 and 54 needs to be extracted followed by space maintainer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe that the teeth 65 and 54 <u>need</u> to be extracted followed by space maintainer.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threadworms looks like fine pieces of cotton thread that can grow up to 1.5 cm long.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threadworms <u>look</u> like fine pieces of cotton thread that can grow up to 1.5 cm long.</li> <li>• A threadworm <u>looks</u> like fine pieces of cotton thread that can grow up to 1.5 cm long.</li> </ul>

For more details follow these links:

- [The Writing Centre](#)
- [The Owl](#)

## Formal & Casual Expressions

The written language of English is different to the spoken language in that it is quite formal whereas the spoken form is more casual.

If spoken language expressions are used in formal letters it affects the “tone and register” of the letter.

Therefore, it is important to

maintain a formal tone and use standard expressions. Below is a list of inappropriate casual expressions with more formal appropriate expressions.

### Example Words

Casual	Formal	Casual	Formal	Casual	Formal	Casual	Formal	Casual	Formal	Casual	Formal
asks for	requests	think	believe	get	become	so	very	but	however	kids	children
say	state	get	receive	got	became	about	regarding	really	greatly	sad	depressed
said	stated	got	received	So	Therefore	a bit	slightly	kid	child	till	until
like	include	like	such as	don't	do not	Thanks	Thank-you	kids	children	lots	a lot of

### Example Sentences

Inappropriate Casual or Spoken Expression	Appropriate Formal Expression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She refuses to eat solids and prefers fluids only like apple juice and lemonade.</li> <li>There are several measures which can be taken to reduce the risk of infection like taking a shower in morning, using separate towel for everyone, changing underwear and bed sheets regularly, vacuuming carpets, keeping the nails short and washing hand thoroughly.</li> <li>She was given general advise for softening her stool, like changing her dietary habit but she was non compliant.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>Like</i> is a casual expression, and the two commonly used formal expressions with the same meaning are <i>such as</i> &amp; <i>including</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She refuses to eat solids and prefers fluids <u>such as</u> apple juice and lemonade.</li> <li>There are several measures which can be taken to reduce the risk of infection <u>including</u> taking a shower in morning, using separate towel for everyone, changing underwear and bed sheets regularly, vacuuming carpets, keeping the nails short and washing hand thoroughly.</li> <li>She was given her general advise for softening her stool <u>such as</u> changing her dietary habit but she was non compliant.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thanks for seeing Mr. Brown.</li> <li>Thanks for arranging a home visit for this patient. If you have any further questions, please feel free to ask me.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>Thanks</i> is a casual expression and should be written in full.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Thank you</u> for seeing Mr. Brown.</li> <li><u>Thank you</u> for arranging a home visit for this patient. If you have any further questions, please be free to ask me.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In view of the above signs and symptoms I think she is suffering from schizophrenia.</li> <li>The patient's family is thinking about a reduction in her medication.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>think</i> is informal and preferable expression is either <i>believe</i> or <i>consider</i>, depending on the context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In view of the above signs and symptoms I <u>believes</u> she is suffering from schizophrenia</li> <li>The patient's family is <u>considering</u> a reduction in her medication.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would really appreciate your attention regarding further management of this patient.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>Really</i> is spoken language and should be avoided in formal writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would <u>very much</u> appreciate your attention regarding further management of this patient.</li> <li>I would <u>greatly</u> appreciate your attention regarding further management of this patient.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About his dietary habits, he eats a large amount of oily and sweet food.</li> <li>If you require any other information about her condition, please do not hesitate to contact me.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>About</i> is a casual expression, regarding is more suitable. <i>Lots of</i> is also casual. "A large amount of" is more formal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Regarding</u> his dietary habits, he eats a large amount of oily and sweet food.</li> <li>If you require any other information <u>regarding</u> her condition, please do not hesitate to contact me.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She had lots of pain.</li> <li>He eats lots of oily food.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>Lots</i> is a spoken expression</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She had <u>a lot of</u> pain.</li> <li>He eats <u>large amounts of</u> oily food.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was nothing significant in his social history.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>Nothing</i> is more commonly a spoken expression which is not suitable for writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There were <u>no significant findings</u> in his social history.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please do not hesitate to contact me if u need additional information.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Definitely no <i>text or SMS language</i> in formal letters. Replace with: you</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please do not hesitate to contact me if <u>you</u> need additional information.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She has got maternal postpartum haemorrhage of 800mls.</li> <li>Mr O' Riley got an appointment for a follow up visit with his general practitioner, Dr. Avril Jensen.</li> <li>The mother got sick for a few days.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>Got/Get</i> are casual expressions and should generally be avoided in formal letters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She <u>has had</u> maternal postpartum haemorrhage of 800ml.</li> <li>Mr O' Riley <u>has</u> an appointment for a follow up visit with his general practitioner, Dr. Avril Jensen.</li> <li>The mother <u>became</u> sick for a few days</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Should you have any concerns regarding them, please do not hesitate to contact me.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The pronoun <i>them</i> sounds casual here. It is much better to use the patient's name, especially in the final sentence of the letter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Should you have any concerns regarding <u>Mary and her child</u>, please do not hesitate to contact me.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the moment, she is weak and disorientated sometimes but severe pain has been alleviated.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Sometimes is a casual expression. More formal expressions include: <i>at times</i> or <i>on occasions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the moment, she is weak and disorientated <u>at times</u> but severe pain has been alleviated.</li> <li>At the moment, she is weak and disorientated <u>on occasions</u> but severe pain has been alleviated.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This pain was exaggerated to cold and hot things</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>Things</i> is a casual expression and should be avoided</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This pain was exaggerated to hot and cold <u>stimuli</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A repeat vaginal examination revealed a very tender right vaginal fornix. But her blood pressure pulse is within normal range.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A repeat vaginal examination revealed a very tender right vaginal fornix. <u>However</u>, her blood pressure pulse is within normal range.</li> </ul>

<p>Explanation: It is not good English to begin a sentence with the conjunction <i>but</i> In this case use However, as it is more formal</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her temperature and blood pressure were normal while pulse was elevated at 88. So I recommended that she return today for a blood test and reassessment.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: So is a casual word, you can use it within a sentence, but not to start a sentence in formal writing. Replace with: <u>Therefore</u>,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her temperature and blood pressure were normal while pulse was elevated at 88. <u>Therefore</u>, I recommended that she return today for a blood test and reassessment.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was evidence of poor oral hygiene, carious lesions and active periodontal disease too.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>too</i> is informal, a more more formal expression is <i>as well</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was evidence of poor oral hygiene, carious lesions and active periodontal disease <u>as well</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her husband was upset because, she was not showing interest towards the kids.</li> <li>• Mark's dad also suffers from this condition.</li> <li>• The teacher spoke to her mum regarding the regular absences from school.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>kids, dad, mum</i> are all spoken expressions which are inappropriate in formal letters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her husband was upset because, she was not showing interest towards the <u>children</u>.</li> <li>• Mark's <u>father</u> also suffers from this condition.</li> <li>• The teacher spoke to her <u>mother</u> regarding the regular absences from school.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She had had termination of pregnancy 10 yearsback.</li> <li>• He is a regular smoker and drinker with the only relevant past history of left inguinal hernia operation 2 years back.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Back is used as a spoken expression not a written expression.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She had had termination of pregnancy 10 years<u>ago</u>.</li> <li>• He is a regular smoker and drinker with the only relevant past history of left inguinal hernia operation 2 years <u>previously</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He had a habit of thumb sucking till the age of 5.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Till is casual, until is formal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He had a habit of thumb sucking <u>until</u> the age of 5.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was so anxious.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>So</i> is informal and subjective, whereas <i>very</i> is more formal and objective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was <u>very</u> anxious.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owen has big tonsils.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: big is informal and does not sound professional.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owen has <u>enlarged</u> tonsils</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am writing to request a follow-up for this patient.</li> <li>• Examination revealed that his vitals were stable and left knee was swollen without effusion.</li> <li>• Examination revealed normal vitals.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Vitals and follow up are incomplete expressions, commonly used in spoken English, but not suitable for formal writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am writing to request a <u>follow-up visit</u> for this patient.</li> <li>• Examination revealed that his <u>vital signs</u> were stable and left knee was swollen without effusion.</li> <li>• Examination revealed that his <u>vital signs</u> were normal.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mrs. Jones is a widow who complained of persistent chest pain at roughly 1.45pm.</li> <li>• Miss Roberts started smoking around 6 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mrs. Jones is a widow who complained of persistent chest pain at <u>approximately</u> 1.45pm.</li> <li>• Miss Roberts started smoking <u>approximately</u> 6</li> </ul>

<p><b>ago.</b> Roughly and around are casual or vague expressions.</p>	<p>months ago.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I recommend some investigations to rule out cancer.</li> <li>• I requested some blood tests.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Some is vague and does not sound professional.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I recommend <u>further</u> investigations to rule out cancer.</li> <li>• I requested <u>additional</u> blood tests.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her BMI was 28 and all the rest of the examinations were normal.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>all the rest of</i> sounds informal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her BMI was 28 and <u>the remainder of</u> the examinations were normal.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abdominal examination revealed a small right groin swelling that's consistent with inguinal hernia.</li> <li>• Thank you for your expert care and please don't hesitate to contact us if you require further information.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: It is best to avoid contractions in formal letters as these are used more in spoken English.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abdominal examination revealed a small right groin swelling <u>that is</u> consistent with inguinal hernia.</li> <li>• Thank you for your expert care and please <u>do not</u>hesitate to contact us if you require further information.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition, she is just able to tolerate fluids.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Just can sound informal at times.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition, she is <u>only</u> able to tolerate fluids.</li> </ul>

## Medical Terminology

The medical case notes for the OET exam often contain abbreviations, medical acronyms and technical language. The task for the writer is to expand these into full words and sentences. There are 3 reasons why this is important.

1. As the OET is a test of English, you need to demonstrate your ability to transfer technical language in the case notes into standard English.
2. For some letters you are may have to write to someone who is not a health professional such as a social worker or family member.
3. A referral letter is not a report so the standard conventions of letter writing require a formal style which includes using complete words and sentences.

🧐 Handy Hint: It is a test of English not Latin, so where possible avoid the use of Latin based acronyms and words.

Here is a list of common abbreviations used in Australia.

Acronym/Short Form	Full Expression	Acronym/Short Form	Full Expression
Abdo	Abdomen	mane	in the morning
AC	before meals	min	minute
ADL	activities of daily living	NAD	no abnormality detected
&	and	nocte	in the evening
BD/bid	2 times a day	OPG	orthopantomogram
BP	blood pressure	P/PR	Pulse/Pulse Rate

BW x-rays	bite wing x-rays	PMH	past medical history
C/O	complains of	PRN	as required
cap	capsule	QID	4 times a day
DOB	Date of Birth	R	right
ECG	electrocardiograph	tab	tablet
F/-	fluoride application	sid	once a day
FBC	full Blood Count	TDS/tid	3 times a day
FTA	failed to Attend	w/o	without
IV	intravenous	y/yrs	year
h	hour	? rheumatic fever	possibility of something
hx	history	6/h	6 hourly
L	left	+	positive
lab	laboratory	3/12	3 months

Exceptions to this rule include abbreviations of measurement. Therefore it is acceptable to use the following in short form:

Acronym/Short Form	Full Expression	Acronym/Short Form	Full Expression
cm	centimeter	ml	millilitre
g	gram	mg	milligram
kg	kilogram	mm hg	milligram of mercury

### Common Errors

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Her current medications include sid Metformin 500 mg. mane and nocte, Glycosamine 5mg.mane and Candesartan 10mg. nocte.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Her current medications include a <u>daily dose</u> of Metformin 500 mg. <u>in the morning</u> and <u>at night</u>, Glycosamine 5mg.in the morning and Candesartan 10mg. <u>at night</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After discharge from hospital, Mrs.Jones has been</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After discharge from hospital, Mrs.Jones has been</li> </ul>

told to take Aperients (PRN) and Aldomet (250 mg bid).	told to take Aperients <u>when required</u> and Aldomet <u>twice a day</u> .
• I treated Claudia with prednisolone 5mg 1t/sid for seven days.	• I treated Claudia with prednisolone 5mg <u>tablet once a day</u> for seven days.
• On examination, there was tenderness and rebound tenderness over the R. iliac fossa.	• On examination, there was tenderness and rebound tenderness over the <u>right</u> iliac fossa.
• I am writing to refer Mrs. Wilson, a 45yr old woman who is suffering from signs and symptoms suggestive of advanced English.	• I am writing to refer Mrs. Wilson, a <u>45-year-old</u> woman who is suffering from signs and symptoms suggestive of advanced English.
• She presented to me yesterday evening with abdominal pain mostly in the left iliac fossa which had been present for the last 24 hrs.	• She presented to me yesterday evening with abdominal pain mostly in the left iliac fossa which had been present for the last 24 <u>hours</u> .
• Her mother died of MI	• Her mother died of <u>myocardial infarction</u>
• On examination she was found to have PR 88/min	• On examination she was found to have <u>a pulse rate of 88 beats per minute</u> . • On examination she was found to have <u>a pulse of 88</u> .
• Mr Duane Eddy 57/m is an a urgent referral regarding an ulcer in R. lateral border of tongue.	• Mr Duane Eddy, a <u>57 year old male</u> is an a urgent referral regarding an ulcer in the <u>right</u> lateral border of tongue
• I would appreciate if you could inform me about her treatment & progress over the next few days.	• I would appreciate if you could inform me about her treatment <u>and</u> progress over the next few days.
• The patient was discharged on Dec. 30 2009.	• The patient was discharged on <u>December</u> 30 2009. • The patient was discharged on <u>30/12/09</u> .
• Lab work and review was planned for the next morning.	• <u>Laboratory</u> work and review was planned for the next morning.

## Referring to a Patient

There are certain conventions which need to be followed when referring to a patient in a formal letter. This worksheet will explain what you need to know so that you can conform to these conventions.

The basic rules regarding titles are as follows:

- Mr. is used for adult men, married or single
- Mrs. is used for married women including widows
- Ms. is used to refer to both married or unmarried women
- Miss is used for young girls or unmarried women
- Master is used for young boys, but is rare nowadays as it has become old fashioned. It is still commonly used on an envelope, but not in the body of the letter.

nb Both miss & master are not abbreviations so no punctuation is required.

🧐 **Handy Tip 1:** Definitely do not use titles with first names only, i.e Mr Thomas or Mrs. Carol as this is not acceptable. See below for correct usage.

These titles can be used in the following ways

- I am writing to refer Mr. Hacker (standard)
- I am writing to refer Mr. Thomas Hacker (very formal, usually used above the address or after Re: but not on the body of the letter.)
- I am writing to refer Thomas (informal and commonly used for children)
- I am writing to refer this patient (commonly used in the opening sentence if patient's name has been mentioned above as in Re: Mr. Thomas Hacker)

**Question: When and how often should I use the patient's name in the letter?**

Answer: The standard way is to write the patient's name in full below the opening salutation. Then, use the patient's name once per paragraph as illustrated below, after which you can use pronouns. It is also important to be consistent with how you refer to the patient. Do not mix up your use of first names and surnames in the letter as this will only confuse the reader.

👉 **Handy Tip 2:** There is no need to write the patient's name out in full in the introduction if you have stated it below the salutation i.e Re: Mrs. Carol Brady as it is very clear who you are writing about. In such cases use "this patient" or title and surname "Mrs. Brady". If you do this you will be following standard conventions.

**Example Letter**

31 July 2016

The Director  
Redeemer Palliative Care Hospital  
32 Nelson Drive  
St Lucia  
Queensland, 4050

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Mrs. Carol Brady  
DOB 4 February 1974

I am writing to request palliative respite admission for this patient, a 42-year-old woman who has recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Mrs. Brady was admitted to Spirit Hospital on 20/10/16 due to severe stomach pain. During hospitalisation, a laparoscopy was performed and she was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer on 22/10/16. Unfortunately, the cancer has metastasized to her liver and left lung with a limited life expectancy. She has also been experiencing increased pain for which she takes Oxycontin and Panadol as required. She is feeling depressed and has not been eating well. Chemotherapy was offered but she refused the treatment and wished to return home to her family.

Mrs. Brady lives with her husband and has two children aged 10 and 12. Mr. Brady has reduced his work hours in order to care for his wife and the children who can be difficult to manage. Mr. Brady is finding it difficult to cope emotionally and feels isolated with limited family support. Due to the difficulty of the current situation, he has agreed to palliative respite admission for his wife.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could accept Mrs. Brady into your care and provide a complete reassessment of her pain medication to ensure maximum effectiveness.

Yours sincerely,

Community Nurse

### Common Mistakes

<p><b>Mr. Langer is an only child.</b>          Explanation: Mr. is only used for adult men, so if the patient is a child you should use their first name.</p>	<p><u>Alfie</u> is an only child.</p>
<p><b>Thank you for seeing my patient, Master Alfie Langer, a 7 year old boy.</b>          Explanation: Master is somewhat old fashioned and does not sound "familiar" if used in the body of the letter.</p>	<p>Thank you for seeing my patient, <u>Alfie</u>, a 7-year-old boy.</p>
<p><b>Mr. Peter, a 23 year old young man, presented at my surgery today complaining of painful wisdom teeth.</b>          Explanation: You can not use titles with first names only.</p>	<p><u>Mr Holmes</u>, a 23-year-old young man, presented at my surgery today complaining of painful wisdom teeth.</p>
<p><b>I am writing to refer Miss. Green for surgical assessment.</b>          Explanation: Miss is not an abbreviation so no punctuation required.</p>	<p>I am writing to refer <u>Miss Green</u> for surgical assessment.</p>
<p><b>Dear Dr.,          I am writing this letter....</b>          Explanation: Do not use short forms without the surname of the person.</p>	<p>Dear Doctor,          I am writing this letter....</p>

## Letter Format

One of the criteria used to assess your writing in the OET exam is *Control of Presentation Features*. This criterion assesses the overall presentation of the letter and includes a lot of the features outside the body of the letter including

- Letter format
- Punctuation
- Capital letters
- Spelling

This worksheet will describe the characteristics of formal medical correspondence. To do this, the letter has been broken up into 6 parts.

**1. Date:** The date should be placed at either the top left or top right of the letter and can be either written in full or as numbers as follows:

- 21/07/16
- July 21, 2016
- 21st July, 2016

**2. Address:** The address gives the name and address of the person or facility to whom you are writing. There are some basic conventions which need to be followed including:

- Capital letters for job titles, names & street names
- Commas not required when the address is separated by lines

Dr. John Howard 1 Wickham Tce Spring Hill QLD, 4010	Dr Ian Hanson Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon Riverlea Public Hospital Graham Street Riverlea	Lactation Consultant Breast Feeding Support Centre 68 Main Street Romaville N.S.W, 2068
--	--	---

**3. Salutation:** If the name of the person is included in the case notes then it should be used. This can be followed by either a comma or full colon.

- Dear Dr. Wilson,
- Dear Dr. Wilson:

If the name of person is not mentioned and they are a non-medical person, then you can begin with Sir/Madam as used in business correspondence or if they are a medical professional you can use their job title Doctor/Nurse/Dentist etc

- Dear Sir/Madam,
- Dear Doctor
- Dear Nurse

**4. Subject:** The subject is a place where information such as the name & age of the patient can be included. This can save you words in the body of the letter, but be careful not include too much information here, and definitely no phrases or sentences. Both Re & RE are acceptable.

- Re: Dylan Charles D.O.B.04/12/2010
- RE: Dylan Charles D.O.B.04/12/2010

**5. Body:** The information in the body of the letter should be divided into paragraphs, with the standard format for a referral letter being as follows:

- Introduction which includes background information & purpose of writing or chief complaint in summary form.
- Past medical/social history
- Current condition in detail or discharge plan
- Conclusion, which if time permits, should be specific to the scenario in then case notes.

*Note: OET requires the letters to be between 180~200 words approximately. The word length is based on the body of the letter only.*

**6.Closer:** The closer is the final part of the letter and should be written one space below the last line of the body. Only the first word in the closer should be capitalised and a comma should follow the last word.

- Yours sincerely,(standard)
- Sincerely yours,
- Sincerely,
- Yours truly, (American style, but gaining popularity in Australia)
- With best regards,

*Note: Yours faithfully,* is often recommended as a closer when you don't know the name of the person to whom you are writing. However, in formal medical correspondence it is not advised as it puts you in a subservient position.

### Sample Letter Format from a Physiotherapist

05/02/2016

Mr. Alex Hinges  
Southside Physiotherapy Centre  
15 Kings Street  
New Hampshire  
N.S.W 2240

Dear Mr. Hinges,  
Re: Master Peter MacLean  
D.O.B. 17/10/1999

Thank you for taking over the care of Peter, a 16-year-old student who has a history of cystic fibrosis (CF).

Peter was diagnosed with CF when he was born and he needs frequent admissions due to recurrent lung infections. He lives with his parents and an elder brother. Peter currently takes Pancrease, omeprazole and oral hypoglycaemics. His self-management program includes active cycle breathing (ACB), positive expiratory pressure (PEP), flutter and posture drainage (PD). Peter's fitness is maintained by biking to school.

He was admitted with an exacerbation of his CF on 02/02/2016 with frequent small and non-productive coughs. Examination revealed a thin and moderate dehydrated young man with hyperinflated chest. His temperature was spiking. He had moderately decreased lung function with blood oxygen saturation (SaO<sub>2</sub>) of 95%. There were widespread crackles on auscultation. Peter was treated with antibiotics intravenously.

Initial physiotherapy consisted of PD, percussion and vibration. Effective cough techniques were demonstrated.

Peter's condition has improved and he started gym sessions today. I have arranged for an appointment with Peter to check the effect of car fumes when he is biking. I will consider a mask to keep his airway moisturised if the car fumes impact on his breathing.

Peter will be discharged in 3 days from the medical ward and will require on going care.

Yours sincerely,

Tania Robinson  
Physiotherapist

### Common Errors

Incorrect	Correct
<p>30 Dec. 15 Explanation: The date should be written in full.</p>	<p>30 December 2015 30/12/15</p>
<p>To Dr. Blair Howell, Admitting doctor 28, George street, Spring hill, Queensland 4000</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>To</u> not required.</li> <li>2. Commas not required when the address is written top at the letter because the information is separated lines.</li> <li>3. Capitals required for job titles</li> <li>4. Capitals required for street names &amp; suburbs.</li> </ol>	<p>Dr. Blair Howell Admitting Doctor 28 George Street Spring Hill Queensland 4000</p>
<p>Dear Dr Jones Explanation: Comma or full colon required</p>	<p>Dear Dr. Jones, Dear Dr. Jones:</p>
<p>Re: Julie Crosby, 25 yr receptionist, single Explanation: Too much information. Best practice is too include name and age of patient only. Other information such as gender, profession, marital status and so forth can be included in the opening sentence.</p>	<p>Re: Julie Crosby, 25 years of age Re: Julie Crosby, D.O.B 21/07/90</p>
<p>Your's sincerely, Explanation: The possessive form is used before nouns, not adverbs</p>	<p>Yours sincerely,</p>
<p>Regards, Mary Smith Charge Nurse Explanation: Informal, email style closer</p>	<p>With best regards, Mary Smith Charge Nurse</p>
<p>Thanks, Mary Smith Charge Nurse Explanation: Too casual</p>	<p>Thank you for your assistance regarding this patient.  Yours sincerely, Mary Smith Charge Nurse</p>
<p>Hello Dr. Jones, Hi Dr. Jones Explanation: Too casual</p>	<p>Dear Dr. Jones</p>

## The Comma

The comma is the most frequently used punctuation mark within sentences. Used correctly it allows the writer to separate a group of words or phrase from other parts of a sentence. This is necessary in order to add useful information in a sentence. The information can be added at the beginning, the middle or the end. However if commas are not used or overused, the meaning can be affected and the flow of information disrupted. By understanding the basic rules presented in this section you should be able to develop a good understanding of how and when to use commas in referral letters.

### Rules of Usage

**1. The Adverbial Phrase:** The adverbial phrase can be used in referral letters to provide information such as a time, place, context, emphasis or mood in the sentence which is to follow and it is commonly separated by a comma

- **Context:** On examination, there was slight tenderness in the right fornix.
- **Date:** On today's visit, the patient was pale and sweaty.
- **Emphasis:** Please note, the patient is allergic to penicillin.
- **Mood:** Unfortunately, the patient's condition has worsened. *Note, mood or comment adverbs, such as unfortunately or regrettably convey the health professionals concern toward the patient's condition and are therefore effective ways of displaying empathy.*
- **Contrast:** The patient's condition has improved. However, a follow up visit is required.

#### Sentence Structure

	Adverbial Phrase	Subject	Verb	Object/Compliment
	blank	I	suspect	the patient has developed ectopic pregnancy.
Comma preferred	Unfortunately,	I	suspect	the patient has developed ectopic pregnancy.
	blank	Abdominal examination	revealed	slight right iliac fossa tenderness.
Comma preferred	On examination,	slight right iliac fossa tenderness	was revealed.	blank
	blank	Clinical examination of hard tissues	revealed	a large mesioincisal fracture.
Comma preferred	On examination,	a large mesioincisal fracture	was revealed.	blank
Comma preferred	Regarding her medical history,	she	has been suffering from	asthma for which she uses a ventolin inhaler.
Comma preferred	On review today,	there	was	no improvement in her condition.
Comma preferred	In terms of his medical history,	he	is	a heavy smoker and a heavy to moderate drinker.

Comma preferred	Please note,	the patient	has	an appointment with his physiotherapist at 10 o'clock on Monday.
Comma preferred	In addition,	there	are	composite and amalgam restorations on several teeth.

**Handy Hint:** Do not put a comma between a subject and a verb or a verb and an object.

**2. Appositives:** This is a noun or a noun phrase that is placed after another noun to explain or identify it. It has a very important use in the introductory sentence of referral letters as follows.

- *Mr Smith, an 80 year old widow, was admitted to hospital with complaints of heart palpitations.*
- *Thank you for seeing Jordan, a 10 year old boy who presented at my clinic today with a main concern of pain in tooth 54.*
- *I am writing to refer Mrs. Bradley, a 42 year old married woman who is suffering from cancer.*

**3. Conditional Sentences:** These sentences are frequently used in the conclusion of a referral letter and the rules are as follows:

- Use a comma if the if clause is at the beginning of the sentence.
  - *If you could take over her antenatal care, it would be much appreciated.*
  - *If you have any further questions regarding this patient, please don't hesitate to call me.*
- Don't use a comma if the if clause is at the end of the sentence.
  - *It would be greatly appreciated if you could take over her antenatal care.*
  - *Please don't hesitate to call me if you have any further questions regarding this patient.*

**4. Complex sentences:**

- Use a comma if the dependent clause is at the beginning of the sentence.
  - *In case of irritation, redness or swelling, please consult your doctor.*
  - *When the results become available, I will forward them to you.*
  - *Because of her deteriorating condition, the patient was admitted to hospital.*
- Don't use a comma if the dependent clause is at the end of the sentence.
  - *Please consult your doctor in case of irritation, redness or swelling.*
  - *I will forward the results to you when they become available.*
  - *The patient was admitted to hospital because of her deteriorating condition.*

**5. Comma Splices:** A comma splice is two sentences joined together with a comma, but no conjunction. This is an error as the information must be either joined with a **coordinating conjunction** such as *and/but/or* or a new sentence must be started.

- *He does not have any dental experience, he is worried about the pain. (incorrect)*
- *He does not have any dental experience and he is worried about the pain. (correct)*
- *He does not have any dental experience. Therefore, he is worried about the pain. (correct)*

**6. Noun Clauses beginning with *that* should not be separated by a comma.**

- *It is also important to know, that a re-check is organised for the 31.5.2009 at 10:30 in order to remove the suture. (incorrect)*
- *It is also important to know that a re-check is organised for the 31.5.2009 at 10:30 in order to remove the suture. (correct)*

**7. Use commas to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses written in a series.** The final word does not require a comma and it should be separated by a conjunction such as and or or

- *Mrs. Olsen has a history of hypertension, hypothyroidism, glaucoma for which she is on regular medication. (incorrect)*
- *Mrs. Olsen has a history of hypertension, hypothyroidism and glaucoma which is on regular medication. (correct)*

## Common Errors

Incorrect	Correct
<p>1. On review today Mr Walker has reduced smoking from 20 to 10 cigarettes per day.</p> <p>2. On examination today there was a soft fluctuant swelling palpable on the left cheek</p> <p>3. Regrettably she has problems with breast feeding and caring for the baby.</p> <p>4. Please note he has a prosthetic heart valve.</p> <p>Comma preferred for adverbial phrases. Refer to rule 1 above.</p>	<p>1. On review today, Mr Walker has reduced smoking from 20 to 10 cigarettes per day.</p> <p>2. On examination today, there was a soft fluctuant swelling palpable on the left cheek</p> <p>3. Regrettably, she has problems with breast feeding and caring for the baby.</p> <p>4. Please note, he has a prosthetic heart valve.</p>
<p>1. I am writing to refer Mr. Jones a 57 year old man who was admitted to hospital on the 18th of July, diagnosed with myasthenia gravis.</p> <p>2. Mr Jones, a 57 year old man was admitted to hospital on the 18th of July, diagnosed with myasthenia gravis.</p> <p>Comma required for appositives. Refer to rule 2 above.</p>	<p>1. I am writing to refer Mr. Jones, a 57 year old man who was admitted to hospital on the 18th of July, diagnosed with myasthenia gravis.</p> <p>2. Mr Jones, a 57 year old man, was admitted to hospital on the 18th of July, diagnosed with myasthenia gravis.</p>
<p>Apply the comma rule for conditional sentences. Refer to rule 3 above.</p>	
<p>Apply the comma rule for complex sentences. Refer to rule 4 above.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He has an allergy to nuts, once he was hospitalised for severe anaphylactic reaction.</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 6 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He has an allergy to nuts <u>and</u> was once hospitalised for severe anaphylactic reaction.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please note that, Daniel has an allergy to peanuts.</li> </ul> <p>Apply the comma rule for comma splices. Refer to rule 5 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please note that Daniel has an allergy to peanuts.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr.Farrah, presented at my surgery today complaining of pain radiating from his left ear to his front teeth.</li> </ul> <p>Do place a comma between the subject and verb of a sentence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr.Farrah presented at my surgery today complaining of pain radiating from his left ear to his front teeth.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial examination revealed, complete edentulous upper and lower jaws with healthy soft tissue.</li> <li>• I am writing to request, visits for this family.</li> </ul> <p>Do place a comma between the verb and object of a sentence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial examination revealed complete edentulous upper and lower jaws with healthy soft tissue.</li> <li>• I am writing to request visits for this family.</li> </ul>

## Capitalisation

Correct use of capitals is an important area to master when writing referral letters. Study the rules of usage below to ensure you meet the standard conventions.

### Rules of Usage

#### 1. Medications and Diseases

- Capitals are required for proper nouns. Proper nouns include the brand name of a drug or registered trademark of the manufacturer.
  - Ritalin
  - Voltaren
  - Zocor
- The chemical constituent should be written in lower case.
  - penicillin
  - amoxicillin
- Names of diseases should always be lower case.
  - bowel cancer
  - high blood pressure
  - diabetes
  - epilepsy
- Eponyms: Some medical conditions are named after the person who discovered it. In this case the first word should be capitalised.
  - Parkinson's disease
  - Bell's palsy
- Names of medical procedures do not require capitals.
  - orthopantomogram
  - x-ray
  - caesarian section
- Body parts should always be lower case
  - heart
  - adrenal gland
  - knee

#### 2. Proper Nouns: Proper nouns name something specific as in the examples below. These words must always be capitalised.

- Job titles
  - The Lactation Consultant, Mater Hospital
  - The Veterinary Eye Specialist, University of Queensland
- Institutions
  - Mary Jones was admitted to Spirit Hospital.
  - Dr. Bloomfield works at Weller Point Medical Centre.
- Places including addresses
  - 168 Wickham Terrace, Spring Hill
  - 12 Logan Road, Mt Gravatt
  - 36 Barmore Street, Holland Park
- Titles when they precede the name of a person
  - The patient was seen by Doctor Smith.
  - Nurse Jones is in charge of the patient's care.

#### 3. Common Nouns: Common nouns do not name any specific institution, place, person or profession. These words do not need to be capitalised.

- The patient was admitted to hospital.
- The patient does not have a family doctor.
- Steve is a teacher.
- Yoshiro is a doctor.
- Reza is a dentist.

#### 4. Holidays, months, days of the week all need to be capitalised. However seasons do not.

- The baby was born on Christmas Day.
- The patient was admitted to hospital on January 12.
- Please come and see me on Wednesday.
- The vaccination will be available in spring.

#### 5. The pronoun "I" must always be capitalised.

- It was I who treated the patient.

#### 6. Capitalise the first word of a salutation and the first word of a complimentary close.

- Dear Dr. Jameson:
- Yours sincerely,

### Common Errors

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His medical history shows that he is Epileptic.</li> <li>• Also, I have given Dycal base on 1.1 and dressed it with Glass Ionomer Cement.</li> <li>• The patient was diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes.</li> <li>• Mrs. Marsh has a history of Hyperthyroidism, Hypertension and Glaucoma.</li> <li>• The patient is allergic to Penicillin.</li> <li>• The patient suffered from severe Abdominal pain.</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 1 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His medical history shows that he is <u>epileptic</u>.</li> <li>• Also, I have given <u>dycal</u> base on 1.1 and dressed it with <u>glass ionomer cement</u>.</li> <li>• The patient was diagnosed with <u>type 2 diabetes</u>.</li> <li>• Mrs. Marsh has a history of <u>hyperthyroidism, hypertension and glaucoma</u>.</li> <li>• The patient is allergic to <u>penicillin</u>.</li> <li>• The patient suffered from severe <u>abdominal</u> pain.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. duanethomson presented at my clinic today with the complaint of a broken posterior tooth.</li> <li>• The director of nursing</li> <li>• emergency department</li> <li>• Mater hospital</li> <li>• 84 Monash road</li> <li>• The patient was seen by doctor Jones.</li> </ul> <p>The above words are all proper nouns. Refer to rule 2 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. <u>Duane Thomson</u> presented at my clinic today with the complaint of a broken posterior tooth.</li> <li>• <u>The Director of Nursing</u></li> <li>• <u>Emergency Department</u></li> <li>• Mater <u>Hospital</u></li> <li>• 84 Monash <u>Road</u></li> <li>• The patient was seen by <u>Doctor Jones</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As per the General Practitioner's order, we are doing daily home visits and wound dressing and also assisting him with his showers.</li> <li>• Please see your Pharmacist for advice.</li> <li>• Ms. Gatsby is a University student.</li> </ul> <p>The above words are all common nouns. Refer to rule 3 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As per the <u>general practitioner's</u> order, we are doing daily home visits and wound dressing and also assisting him with his showers.</li> <li>• Please see your <u>pharmacist</u> for advice.</li> <li>• Ms. Gatsby is a <u>university</u> student.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient first visited my surgery in march, 2008.</li> <li>• Mrs. Green will be discharged from hospital on wednesday.</li> <li>• Symptoms of hay fever are worse in Spring.</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 4 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient first visited my surgery in <u>March</u>, 2008.</li> <li>• Mrs. Green will be discharged from hospital on <u>Wednesday</u>.</li> <li>• Symptoms of hay fever are worse in <u>spring</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient requested that i prescribe antibiotics for the virus.</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 5 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient requested that <u>I</u> prescribe antibiotics for the virus.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dear Dr. Roberts:</li> <li>• yours sincerely,</li> </ul> <p>Refer to rule 6 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Dear</u> Dr. Roberts:</li> <li>• <u>Yours</u> sincerely,</li> </ul>

### Common Mistakes Regarding Physical Description

Incorrect	Correct
<p><b>Advice was given to reduce her weight.</b> After the verb reduce it is not necessary to follow with a pronoun. So <u>you</u> is not required. Simply say: I advised him to reduce weight, or, you need to reduce weight.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advice was given to reduce weight.</li> <li>2. The patient was advised to reduce weight.</li> <li>3. A reduction of weight was advised.</li> </ol>
<p><b>In addition, she had lost her weight.</b> After the verb <u>lose</u> it is not correct to follow with a pronoun.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In addition, she had lost weight.</li> <li>2. In addition, she has lost a further 11 kg of weight over the past 2 months.</li> <li>3. In addition, the patient's weight has significantly reduced from 61 kg to 50 kg over the past 2 months.</li> </ol>
<p><b>He is now obese with a 99kilos weight and a 170cm height.</b> The use of the correct verb &amp; noun form and associated grammar is difficult. Refer opposite for correct usage.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. He is now obese with a weight of 99 kg and a height of 170cm. (noun form)</li> <li>2. He weighs 99 kg and is 170cm tall. (verb form)</li> <li>3. He weighs 99kg and is 170cm in height. (verb form)</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Today's examination revealed multiple missing teeth, various carious lesions and a periodontal pocket of depth 4-9mm.</li> <li>2. There are several periodontal pockets with about 4-9 mm in depth.</li> </ol> <p>Correct word order is: Depth of 4-9mm Height of 173cm Length of 20 m Weight of 78kg</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. His height was 173cm. Weight can change but height can not so don't use past tense.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Today's examination revealed multiple missing teeth, various carious lesions and a periodontal pocket depth of 4-9mm.</li> <li>2. There are several periodontal pockets which are about 4'9 mm in depth <u>or</u></li> <li>3. There are several periodontal pockets with a depth of about 4-9 mm.</li> <li>4. His height is 173cm.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. He was overweight 85 Kg with respect to his height 173 cm. This sentence is a shortened version similar to the case notes. It is important to write in full sentences.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. He was overweight at 85 kg with respect to his height <u>of</u> 173 cm.</li> </ol>

#### Submission status

Submission status	This assignment does not require you to submit anything online
Grading status	Not graded
Last modified	-
Submission comments	<a href="#">Comments (0)</a>

#### Difficult Words

The English language is governed by rules. However, there are also many exceptions to these rules and words which do not follow the normal or expected pattern are those which often cause problems. Study this list carefully so that you can improve your grammatical accuracy and knowledge.

#### Complain Vs Complaint

##### Complain is a verb

- The patient complained of severe abdominal pain.

##### Complaint is a noun

- The patient presented with a complaint of severe abdominal pain.

*Note 1: Complaint is a countable noun. so it can be used in the plural form or singular with an article.*

*Note 2: The two main prepositions used with complain are: complain of & complain about.*

- Mr. Cochrane presented with complaints of nausea, headache and fever. (plural)
- Mr. Cochrane presented with a complaint of nausea. (singular with article)

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient complaints of chest pain and her blood pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>complains</u> of chest pain and her blood pressure</li> </ul>

<p>is high.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient presented with a complain of chest pain.</li> <li>The patient presented with complaint of chest pain.</li> <li>He presented to my office on 23/03/2008 complaining on severe pain associated with the lower left first molar.</li> </ul>	<p>is high.(verb)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient presented with a <u>complaint of</u> chest pain.(noun)</li> <li>The patient presented with <u>a</u> complaint of chest pain. (article required)</li> <li>He presented to my office on 23/03/2008 complaining <u>of</u> severe pain associated with the lower left first molar.</li> </ul>
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### Suggest & Recommend Vs Advise

Suggest, recommend and advise are all words commonly used in referral letters to report information were given to the patient. However their rules of use differ and result in errors. Here are some examples of their correct and incorrect usage.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have suggested him to see you next week.</li> <li>I suggested her to return in morning as she required further blood test and assessment.</li> <li>I recommended him to rest for 3 days.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The words suggest &amp; recommend cannot be followed by an object pronoun such as him/her whereas advise can.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I suggested (that) he see you next week.</li> <li>I advised him to see you next week</li> <li>I suggested (that) she return in morning as she required further blood test and assessment.</li> <li>I advised her to return in morning as she required further blood test and assessment.</li> <li>I recommended (that) he rest for 3 days.</li> </ul>

### Explain Vs Tell

Explain and tell also have different rules which cause confusion

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I explained them that unsuccessful conception was not unusual in their case.</li> <li>I have already explained the couple the basic advice regarding conception.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The word explain cannot be followed by a pronoun or noun without the preposition to whereas tell can.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I explained to them that unsuccessful conception was not unusual in their case.</li> <li>I told them that unsuccessful conception was not unusual in their case.</li> <li>I have already explained to the couple basic advice regarding conception.</li> <li>I have already told the couple basic advice regarding conception.</li> </ul>

### Advise Vs Advice

#### Advise is a verb

- We advise patients on how to take their medication.

#### Advice is a noun

- We give advice or provide advice to patients on how to take their medication.

Note 1: The noun advice is uncountable so it can not be used in plural form. i.e. advices is incorrect as is an advice.

- I gave some advice to the patient regarding her medication.

Note 2: The pronunciation is different: advise advice

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It would be greatly appreciated if you could make a visit to this family and advice his parents regarding the recommended vaccines for both children.</li> <li>I am writing to refer this patient to you for an advice regarding the management of his bilateral inguinal hernia.</li> <li>I gave an advice to the patient regarding her medication.</li> <li>I gave advices to the patient regarding her medication.</li> <li>Please advice the patient on how and when to take their medication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It would be greatly appreciated if you could make a visit to this family and <u>advise</u> his parents regarding the recommended vaccines for both children. (verb)</li> <li>I am writing to refer this patient to you for <u>advice</u> regarding the management of his bilateral inguinal hernia(noun)</li> <li>I gave <u>some advice</u> to the patient regarding her medication.(noun)</li> <li>I gave <u>advice</u> to the patient regarding her medication.(noun)</li> <li>Please <u>advise</u> the patient on how and when to take their medication. (verb)</li> </ul>

### Request

Request can be both a verb and noun.

#### Request as a verb

- The patient requested painkillers. (verb form)

#### Request as a noun

- The patient made a request for painkillers. (noun form: request+for)

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient requested for new dentures.</li> <li>Ms. Green requested about IVF treatment.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The common mistake is to use the verb form plus preposition which incorrect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient <u>requested</u> new dentures. (verb)</li> <li>The patient <u>made a request</u> for new dentures. (noun)</li> <li>Ms. Green <u>requested</u> IVF treatment.(verb)</li> <li>Ms.Green <u>made a request</u> for IVF treatment. (noun)</li> </ul>

### Affect Vs Effect

#### Affect is a verb

- The patient has not been affected by the treatment.

#### Effect is a noun

- The treatment has had no effect.

Note: The pronunciation is the same.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She has also been effected by glaucoma for the past 4 years.</li> <li>The side affects of this medication are unknown.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She has also been <u>affected</u> by glaucoma for the past 4 years. (verb)</li> <li>The side <u>effects</u> of this medication are unknown. (noun)</li> </ul>

### Widow or Widower

- Widow (noun) refers to a woman whose husband has died and who has not remarried.
- Widower (noun) refers to a man whose wife has died and who has not remarried.
- Widowed (adjective) refers either a man or woman whose spouse has died and has not remarried.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer Mrs. Saunders, a 58-year-old widowed who admitted with pain, dehydration and nausea.</li> <li>I am writing to refer Mr. Saunders, a 60-year-old widow who complained of pain in his upper right second molar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer Mrs. Saunders, a 58-year-old <u>widow</u> who admitted with pain, dehydration and nausea.(noun)</li> <li>I am writing to refer this patient a 58-year-old <u>widowed woman</u> who admitted with pain, dehydration and nausea.(adjective)</li> <li>I am writing to refer Mr. Saunders, a 60-year-old <u>widower</u> who complained of pain in his upper right second molar.(noun)</li> </ul>

### History

History is always present, never past because you can't erase it! Therefore you need to use simple present tense not past tense when using this expression.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mrs. McGowan had a history of heart palpitation of 3 day duration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mrs. McGowan has a history of heart palpitation of 3 day duration.</li> </ul>

### Allergy Vs Allergic

#### Allergy is a countable noun

- Michael has no known allergies.(plural)
- Michael has a peanut allergy. (singular)

#### Allergic is an adjective

- Michael is allergic to peanuts.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, he is known allergic to nuts for which he was admitted to hospital with anaphylaxis 2 years ago.</li> <li>Regarding his medical history he is allergy to sulphur containing drugs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, he has a known <u>allergy to</u> nuts for which he was admitted to hospital with anaphylaxis 2 years ago.(noun)</li> <li>In addition, he is known <u>to be allergic to</u> nuts for which he had been admitted in the hospital with anaphylaxis 2 years ago.(adjective)</li> <li>Regarding his medical history he <u>has an allergy to</u> sulphur containing drugs.(noun)</li> <li>Regarding his medical history he <u>is allergic to</u> sulphur containing drugs.(adjective)</li> </ul>

### Confident Vs Confidence

**Confident is an adjective**

- The patient is not confident in her ability as a mother.
- Confidence is a noun**

- The patient lacks confidence in her ability as a mother.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient has not confident social situations.</li> <li>• The patient is not confidence in social situations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient has no <u>confidence</u> in social situations. (noun form)</li> <li>• The patient is not <u>confident</u> in social situations. (adjective form)</li> </ul>

**a few/few & a little/little**

Few and a few is used with plural nouns, and little and a little is used with uncountable nouns. Little and few have **negative connotations** and are similar in many to not much/ not many. A little and a few have **positive connotations** and are similar in meaning to some. Mixing up these words therefore will completely change the meaning of the sentence.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient has reduced speech output and a little eye contact.</li> <li>• There are few ways to help identify the possibility of threadworms such as checking the anus of your children at night and frequent scratching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient has reduced speech output and <i>little</i> eye contact. (negative connotation required here)</li> <li>• There are <u>a few</u> ways to help identify the possibility of threadworms such as checking the anus of your children at night and frequent scratching. (positive connotation required)</li> </ul>

**during/while**

**During is followed by a noun**

- During hospitalisation the patient made a full recovery.
- The patient had many visitors during his stay in hospital.

**While is followed by a phrase or gerund: \_\_\_\_ing**

- While in hospital, the patient made a full recovery.
- The patient had many visitors while recovering in hospital.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He twisted his ankle during playing squash 3 months ago.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He twisted his ankle <u>during a game of squash</u> 3 months ago.</li> <li>• He twisted his ankle <u>while playing squash</u> 3 months ago.</li> </ul>

**following/followed by**

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was admitted to our hospital followed by a collapse at home with dehydration, nausea and severe pain.</li> </ul> <p>Incorrect as it means the patient was admitted to hospital first, then collapsed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was admitted to our hospital following a collapse at home with dehydration, nausea and severe pain.</li> </ul> <p>Correct as it means the collapse occurred before being admitted to hospital.</p>

## Years Vs Year

Incorrect	Correct
<p>I am writing to refer this patient,63 years old man who lives alone.</p> <p>In this sentence there are two mistakes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the expression is a phrase and therefore requires an article “a “ to precede the phrase a 63-year-old man. An article is required because the noun man is singular. Compare with: There are two 63-year-old men in the waiting room.</li> <li>Years is an adjective in this sentence (it describes the age of the man) and adjectives are uncountable.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer this patient, a 63- year- old man, who lives alone.</li> <li>There are two 63-year-old men in the waiting room.</li> </ol>
<p>This patient is 63 year old.</p> <p>In this sentence the word <u>years</u> is a noun preceding an adjective <u>old</u>. Nouns can be countable so in this case you must make it plural.</p>	<p>This patient is 63 years old.</p>
<p>Her father died at 50 year old of bowel cancer</p> <p>In this case <u>at</u> is a preposition and needs to be followed by a noun or noun phrase, rather than the adjective” old”. See column on the right for possible correct choices. Year is a noun in this case so it should be written in plural form.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Her father died at 50 years of age of bowel cancer</li> <li>Her father died at the age of 50 of bowel cancer</li> <li>Her father died when he was 50 years old of bowel cancer.</li> </ol>
Other examples	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, he had a habit of thumb sucking until age of five years.</li> <li>In addition he had a habit of thumb sucking until he was five years age.</li> <li>Regarding the medical history, Alfie has a history of thumb sucking until the age of 5 years,</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, he had a habit of thumb sucking until the age of five.</li> <li>In addition, he had a habit of thumb sucking until he was five years of age.</li> <li>In addition, he had a habit of thumb sucking until he was five years old.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition she has fillings, crowns, good dental hygiene and a 13 years old chrome /cobalt removable partial denture.</li> </ol> <p>Years is an adjective in this sentence (it describes the age of the denture) and adjectives are uncountable.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition she has fillings, crowns, good dental hygiene and a 13 year old chrome /cobalt removable partial denture.</li> </ol>

### A to Z of Phrasal Verbs and Useful Vocabulary

Letter	Expression	Example sentence
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• admitted to</li> <li>• associated with</li> <li>• advised to</li> <li>• advice on</li> <li>• allergies</li> <li>• allergic to</li> <li>• arrived at</li>   <li>• arrived in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient was <u>admitted to</u> our hospital in March 2008 for the first time.</li>   <li>• Mr. Booth first came to see me on 12/08/08 complaining of shortness of breath which was worse when he was lying down. It was <u>associated with</u> a tightness in the chest and coughing.</li> <li>• She was <u>advised to</u> return the next day for a blood test and follow up consultation. (verb)</li> <li>• For both children <u>advice on</u> recommended vaccines will be necessary. (noun)</li>   <li>• She is not on any medication and <u>has no known allergies</u>.</li>   <li>• Please note, the patient is <u>allergic to</u> penicillin.</li> <li>• The patient <u>arrived at</u> my surgery in a depressed state.</li> <li>• The family <u>arrived in</u> Australia in 2007</li> </ul>
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• believe</li> <li>• borderline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I <u>believe</u> the patient needs urgent assessment and hospital admission</li> <li>• She was noted to be overweight and has <u>borderline</u> hypertension.</li> </ul>
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistent with</li> <li>• commence</li> <li>• commence on</li>   <li>• confidence in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am writing to refer Mr. Walker a 40 year old married patient, presenting with signs and symptoms <u>consistent with</u> prostatic enlargement.</li> <li>• IV fluids <u>were commenced</u> in order to improve hydration.</li> <li>• Therefore I <u>commenced him on</u> omeprazol 20 mg daily and strongly advised him to stop smoking cigarettes and stop drinking alcohol. (active)</li> <li>• She <u>was commenced on</u> 15gram alepam 1 tablet nightly for her current anxiety and sleeplessness. (passive)</li>   <li>• She lacks <u>confidence in</u> caring her baby in terms of breast feeding and bathing.</li> </ul>
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discharge on</li> <li>• deteriorate</li> <li>• deny</li> <li>• difficulty in</li> <li>• diagnosed with</li> <li>• diagnosis of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He will be <u>discharged on</u> the 12<sup>th</sup> of August.</li> <li>• Since 28<sup>th</sup> of July her condition <u>has deteriorated</u> with occasional disorientation.</li> <li>• She <u>denied</u> vomiting and she was vague reporting about laxatives.</li> <li>• Mr. MacIntosh presented to me with the complaint of <u>difficulty in</u> passing urine.</li> <li>• I am writing to refer my patient, Fletcher, a nine year old Labrador cross dog who is <u>diagnosed with</u> high grade lymphoma. (verb)</li> <li>• Histological results confirmed the <u>diagnosis of</u> high grade lymphoma. (noun)</li> </ul>
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evidence of</li> <li>• enclosed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination findings revealed <u>evidence of</u> an enlarged prostate.</li> <li>• I have <u>enclosed</u> the radiograph for your convenience.</li> </ul>
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to follow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient was advised <u>to follow</u> a low fat diet.</li> </ul>
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• history</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient first attended me yesterday evening with <u>a one day history of</u> lower abdominal pain</li> <li>• Mr. Abraham has <u>a positive family history of</u> prostate cancer</li> </ul>
9.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• indicate</li> <li>• indicative of</li>   <li>• inconspicuous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The family has <u>indicated</u> that they need an interpreter who speaks Farsi or Arabic during follow-up visits with this family.</li> <li>• However, there was slight swelling in the right groin <u>indicative of</u> inguinal hernia</li> <li>• His family and social history is <u>inconspicuous</u>.</li> </ul>
11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• known</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She is a <u>known</u> asthmatic since childhood and is on Budesonide inhaler for the same.</li> </ul>
13.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to make an appointment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have <u>made an appointment</u> for her through your receptionist.</li> </ul>
14.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• on examination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>On examination</u>, her blood pressure was 180/90 mm Hg with a regular pulse of 70 beats per minute.</li> </ul>
15.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• occasions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today she presented very anxious and depressed as she had noted some blood in her motions <u>on two separate occasions</u>.</li> </ul>
16.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provisional</li> <li>• present at</li> <li>• present to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Provisional diagnosis</u> suggests prostate cancer.</li> <li>• Mr Gates <u>presented at my clinic</u> yesterday at 7pm with a complaint of lower back pain.</li> <li>• Today, he <u>presented to me</u> complaining of a regular dull ache in the groin.</li> </ul>
17.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• queries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you have <u>any further queries</u>, please do not hesitate to contact me.</li> </ul>
18.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reveal</li> <li>• risk factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination today <u>revealed</u> a significantly increased right groin swelling.</li> <li>• His <u>risk factors</u> include: smoking 20 cigarettes per day, lack of exercise and a</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a routine recovery</li> <li>• reluctant to</li> <li>• rule out</li> <li>• remarkable findings</li> </ul>	<p>strong family history of hypertension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He has made <u>a routine recovery</u> and his wounds appear to be healing well.</li> <li>• He is <u>reluctant to</u> seek treatment.</li> <li>• I believe she needs an urgent assessment to rule out bipolar disorder</li> <li>• There were no other remarkable findings.</li> </ul>
19.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• suggestive of</li> <li>• suspicious of</li> <li>• suffering from</li> <li>• signs and symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miss Jones is suffering from the signs and symptoms <u>suggestive of</u> ectopic pregnancy.</li> <li>• I am writing to refer this patient, a 60-year-old woman, with symptoms <u>suspicious of</u> bowel malignancy</li> <li>• Ms. Tylor has been <u>suffering from</u> diabetes and she is administering insulin injection by herself.</li> <li>• He is a 40-year-old man who is suffering from <u>signs and symptoms</u> suggestive of peritonitis with perforated gastric ulcer.</li> </ul>
20.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• treated with</li> <li>• tentative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He also has been suffering from hypertension which has been <u>treated with</u> Atenolol 50 mg daily.</li> <li>• My tentative diagnosis is dental fluorosis.</li> </ul>
21.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• underlying</li> <li>• under control</li> <li>• uneventful</li> <li>• urgent</li> <li>• unremarkable</li> <li>• to undergo treatment/surgery /an operation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would appreciate your assessment of this girl to find out whether he has any <u>underlying</u> psychological problems.</li> <li>• Currently, her pain is <u>under control</u> with medication and she is tolerating fluids.</li> <li>• Her second pregnancy and delivery were <u>uneventful</u>.</li> <li>• I would appreciate if you could give <u>urgent attention</u> to Mrs. Woods' problem.</li> <li>• Cardiovascular examination was <u>unremarkable</u> and her electrocardiogram was normal.</li> <li>• She <u>underwent</u> colonoscopy three years ago which was normal. (<i>simple past</i>)</li> <li>• During hospitalization, the patient <u>has undergone</u> an electromyogram and X-ray. (<i>present perfect</i>)</li> </ul>
22.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vital signs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her <u>vital signs</u> were normal, but she was overweight (85 kg). <u>Therefore</u> she was advised to reduce weight and do exercise.</li> </ul>
23.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with a complaint of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Gates presented at my clinic yesterday at 7pm <u>with a complaint of</u> lower back pain.</li> </ul>

## Prepositions

Prepositions are a difficult area of language to fully master as their usage is not governed by strict rules. The best way to learn prepositions is by regular reading so that you can slowly absorb and become comfortable with their correct use. However, it is possible to memorise the correct use of a selection of prepositions in order to use them accurately in writing the referral letter.

**Prepositions of Time**

<b>In: In is used for longer periods of time</b>	<b>On: On is used for days and dates and some time expressions</b>	<b>At: At is used for the time of day and for some expressions</b>	<b>Some words require no preposition</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In November</li> <li>• In Spring</li> <li>• In 2006</li> <li>• In the past</li> <li>• In the future</li> <li>• In the morning</li> <li>• In the afternoon</li> <li>• In her childhood</li> <li>• In his twenties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On Monday</li> <li>• On 20 November</li> <li>• On Christmas day</li> <li>• On his birthday</li> <li>• On review</li> <li>• On examination</li> <li>• On investigation</li> <li>• On presentation</li> <li>• On two occasions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At 6 o'clock</li> <li>• At night</li> <li>• At lunchtime</li> <li>• At that time</li> <li>• At the moment</li> <li>• At the age of 45</li> <li>• At birth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yesterday</li> <li>• Today</li> <li>• Tomorrow</li> <li>• Last week</li> <li>• This week</li> <li>• Next week</li> </ul>

**Prepositions of Place**

<b>In: In is used for inside of something</b>	<b>On: is used for the surface area of something</b>	<b>At: At is used for a place of activity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Australia</li> <li>• In hospital</li> <li>• In surgery</li> <li>• In the stomach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the skin</li> <li>• On the ground floor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At home</li> <li>• At work</li> <li>• At the wound site</li> <li>• At the clinic</li> </ul>

**Common Errors**

<b>Incorrect</b>	<b>Correct</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His father died of cancer during the age of 50.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His father died of cancer at the age of 50.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In examination today, the patient was anxious and distressed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On examination today, the patient was anxious and distressed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial examination on today revealed inflammed gums.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial examination today revealed inflammed gums.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On December 2006, the patient had his wisdom teeth removed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In December 2006, the patient had his wisdom teeth removed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient's family arrived at Australia in last year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient's family arrived in Australia last year.</li> </ul>

### Useful signal markers

Letter	Signal Marker	Example Sentence
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____as well as_____</li> <li>• as a result of</li> <li>• as a result</li> <li>• along with</li> <li>• apart from this</li> <li>• at that time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She suffers from oedema <u>as well as</u> bladder incontinence and only tolerates fluids.</li> <li>• This child was admitted with Acute Meningoencephalitis <u>as a result of</u> a complication following Mumps.</li> <li>• Let me inform you that that the patient has proven to be uncooperative during his dental treatments. <u>As a result</u>, I would recommend the treatments be carried out with a general anaesthetic.</li> <li>• On vaginal examination cervical excitation was noted <u>along with</u>tenderness in the right fornix.</li> <li>• She looked very anxious and was having trouble sleeping. <u>Apart from this</u>, no abnormalities were found on rectal, cardiovascular and respiratory examinations.</li> <li>• Initially, I saw the patient six months ago when she complained of constipation. <u>At that time</u>, her physical examination was normal.</li> </ul>
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• besides that</li> <li>• because of this</li> <li>• based on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient has smoked 40 cigarettes a day for 25-30 years. <u>Besides that</u> he has type 2 diabetes.</li> <li>• He smokes 20 cigarettes and drinks 2 beers every day. <u>Because of this</u>, he has been told to cease smoking and to reduce alcohol.</li> <li>• Furthermore, a fine needle aspiration was taken and was investigated. <u>Based on that</u>, I suggest the dog has developed lymphoma.</li> </ul>
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consequently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The depth of periodontal pocket was 3.4mm.<u>Consequently</u>, he has undergone extensive treatment for carious lesions and oral hygiene maintenance.</li> </ul>
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• during_____</li> <li>• duration</li> <li>• despite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>During hospitalization</u>, his vital signs have been monitored and he has been assisted with his showers.</li> <li>• On 15/2/08, she presented complaining of lower abdominal pain <u>of 1 day duration</u>.</li> <li>• <u>Despite</u> various dental treatments and regular dental cleaning, his general gum condition is only fair.</li> </ul>
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for this reason</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Fox's blood pressure was elevated and he was overweight. <u>For this reason</u> the patient was advised to do exercise and follow a healthy diet.</li> </ul>
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hence</li> <li>• however</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The carious lesions on 65 are reasonably deep and <u>hence</u> the tooth has to be extracted.</li> <li>• The patient regularly visits the dentist and her oral hygiene status is good. <u>However</u>, her gums are inflamed.</li> </ul>
9.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in terms of ____</li> <li>• in order to</li> <li>• in addition</li> <li>• in the meantime</li> <li>• in case of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>In terms of her medical history</u>, she has mild hypertension and a 12 year history of diverticulitis.</li> <li>• I have prescribed a gleam <u>in order to</u> reduced anxiety.</li> <li>• Regarding the medical history, Alfie had a history of thumb sucking until the age of 5. <u>In addition</u>, he is epileptic and uses dylantin to control the attacks.</li> <li>• I have planned to review him in two months to monitor his blood pressure and smoking reduction. <u>In the meantime</u>, I believe he needs urological assessment.</li> <li>• <u>In case of</u> any irritation, redness or swelling of the skin, discontinue the treatment and consult your doctor immediately</li> </ul>
13.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may I remind you that....</li> <li>• my main concern is that.....</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>May I remind you that</u> both the teeth will require root canal treatment and crown.</li> <li>• <u>My main concern is that</u> the patient is reluctant to breastfeed and confident in caring for her baby.</li> </ul>
14.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It should <u>be noted</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>It should be noted that</u> they may have a problem with communicating in English as they understand limited English.</li> </ul>
15.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• over.....</li> <li>• on review today,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Over the past week</u>, she has remained free from severe pain and has been tolerating a fluid diet.</li> <li>• She first presented to me on 3.7.06 with several episodes of heart flutter <u>over the previous few weeks</u>.</li> <li>• <u>On review today</u>, the patient has reduced smoking to 10 cigarettes a day, attended gym twice a week and lost 7kg so far.</li> </ul>
16.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• please note</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Please note</u>, he has an allergic reaction to nuts.</li> </ul>
18.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regarding</li> <li>• regrettably</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Regarding</u> his medical history, Jordan suffers from eczema and asthma for which he receives treatment twice a year.</li> <li>• <u>Regrettably</u>, she complains of mild constipation and weakness.</li> <li>• <u>Recently</u>, she has been prescribed Karvea 150mg and Oroxine 0.1mg per</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recently</li> </ul>	day, Timoptol Eye Drops 0.5% twice a day and Normison 10mg as required.
19.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>since then</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His urinalysis and examination were normal except obesity and borderline hypertension. <u>Since then</u>, he has been doing regular exercise and has managed to lose 8kg of weight</li> </ul>
20.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>therefore</li> <li>the reason for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Her vital signs were normal, but she was overweight (85 kg). <u>Therefore</u> she was advised to reduce weight and do exercise.</li> <li><u>The reason for the referral</u> is to consider a possible prostate biopsy regarding the patient's condition.</li> </ul>
21.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>up until now,</li> <li>unfortunately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Up until now</u>, Mr. Hutton has leaded a very unhealthy life.</li> <li><u>Unfortunately</u>, she is not expected to survive more than 3 months.</li> </ul>
23.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with regard to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing <u>with regard to</u> this patient, a 57 year-old married man who is under our care with the diagnosis of myasthenia gravis</li> </ul>

### Example Cohesive Paragraphs

#### Doctors

Initially, I saw Mr. Jones last month when he came for check-up. At this time his blood pressure showed a mild elevation (165/90). Also his weight was above the normal limit (85 kg while his height is 173 cm). However, the cardiovascular examination and the urinalysis were normal. Therefore I advised him to lose weight, to stop smoking cigarettes and to come for a review visit within one month. A prostate specific antigen test was requested to be done before the next visit.

#### Dentists

Initial examination on 20/ 02/ 2008 revealed that 54 has a temporary filling with a cavity extending through the furcation. Based on the bitewing radiological findings, I advised both 54 and 65 be extracted along with the construction of a space maintainer. Moreover I advised the filling of carious 55 and fissure sealant for all 6's. In my view, general anesthesia is the proper sedation as the patient is known to be uncooperative in a dentist chair.

#### Nurses

When admitted to this hospital, Mr. Jagger complained of haemetemesis, anorexia, dizziness associated with weight loss and anaemia. He also was suffering from severe epigastric pain after meals. Therefore, his stool was examined and an endoscopy has been performed.

## Compound Sentences and Coordinating Conjunctions

When writing referral letters it is necessary to take information from the case notes and write it in complete sentences. The most basic way to do this is as a simple sentence. Simple sentences commonly contain a subject, verb and object and are known as independent clauses.

Example: The patient is allergic to penicillin.

This method is suitable for information which is not connected to other information in the case notes. However, it is more common to group information which is related into compound sentences. In the sentence below, two ideas are joined by the conjunction **and**. Note that the subject for each clause is different and each clause can function as a complete sentence

Example: I prescribed Panadol for his hand pain and he was advised to reduce weight and do exercise.

Compound sentences are joined by conjunctions and they show the relationship between the ideas. The most common conjunctions are:

**and** = the second clause contains a similar idea as the first

Example: She does not smoke and (she) drinks alcohol rarely.

**but** = the second clause contains an contrasting idea

Example: She does not smoke but (she) is a heavy alcohol drinker.

**so**=the second clause expresses a result or outcome

Example: She does not smoke or drink alcohol so her health is good.

One important decision for the writer to make is whether to include a subject in the second clause. Basically, the rule is you need to add a subject after a conjunction if the subject of the second clause is different to that of the first clause. Or if the sentence is very long.

- I prescribed Panadol for his hand pain and he was advised to reduce weight and do exercise. (In this case you must add a subject after **and** as the subject is different in the second clause)
- I prescribed Panadol for his hand pain and advised for weight reduction and exercise. (in this case you can omit the subject I as it is the same as the subject for the first part of the sentence)
- I prescribed Panadol for his hand pain and I advised for weight reduction and exercise. (this is grammatically correct, but in terms of style not very good as it is clear the subject remains the same, so need to repeat it)

### Common Mistakes

Incorrect	Correct
<p><u>Nicole is a non-smoker and no drink alcohol or other drugs.</u></p> <p>Explanation: The sentence is not balanced and there is no verb after the conjunction <b>and</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Nicole is a non-smoker and (she) doesn't drink alcohol or take drugs.</u></li> </ul>
<p><u>The parents say that immunisations were given at birth to both their children, but no record to prove that.</u></p> <p>Explanation: No subject or verb after the conjunction <b>but</b></p> <p><u>The wound has healed and free of infection</u></p> <p>Explanation: Omission of subject and verb</p>	<p><u>The parents say that immunisations were given at birth to both their children, but <u>they have</u> no records to prove that.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The parents say that immunisations were given at birth to both their children, but <u>there are</u> no records to prove that.</u></li> </ul> <p><u>The wound has healed and (it) <u>is</u> free of infection</u></p>
<p><u>Mr. Smith's activities were restricted since last year by grinding pain in the left hip and had difficulty in climbing and descending stairs.</u></p> <p>Explanation: No subject after the conjunction <b>and</b>, and note the subject for each clause is different. In the first clause the</p>	<p><u>Mr. Smith's activities <u>have been</u> restricted since last year by grinding pain in the left hip and <u>he</u> had difficulty in climbing and descending stairs.</u></p> <p><u>Her blood pressure was 175/95 and <u>she</u> took Normison</u></p>

<p>subject is Mr Smith's activities and in the second clause the subject is Mr Smith (not his activities)</p> <p><b>Her blood pressure was 175/95 and took Normison 1 tablet and 2 panadol at 10 pm.</b></p> <p>Explanation: You must add a new subject here as it is different to the subject of the first clause Her BP Vs She</p>	<p>1 tablet and 2 panadol at 10 pm</p>
<p><b>She is a widow and a resident at Golden Pond Retirement Village, has a son in Warwick.</b></p> <p>Explanation: This error is called a comma splice. A comma splice is incorrect because two sentences cannot be joined with a comma alone. In this case you can join the sentences with <b>and</b>.</p>	<p>She is a widow and a resident at Golden Pond Retirement Village <u>and</u> (she) has a son in Warwick.</p>
<p><b>Mr. Jones has been a patient of mine since 1999 and attending my clinic on a regular basis for scaling and cleaning.</b></p> <p>Explanation: incomplete verb formation after <b>and</b></p>	<p>Mr. Jones has been a patient of mine since 1999 and (he) <u>has been</u> attending my clinic on a regular basis for scaling and cleaning.</p>

### Parallel Structures & Balanced Sentences

The information in the case notes is usually written in note form, and therefore does not follow conventional grammatical rules. However, when this information is organised into complete sentences in the referral letter it is necessary to follow standard conventions of grammar and sentence structure. This worksheet explains how to group information using parallel structures to ensure that the sentences you write are grammatically balanced. This can be achieved by making sure that verbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions, phrases and clauses are parallel. Parallel structures within a sentence are joined with coordinating conjunctions such as and/or as well as with commas. Here are some examples:

#### With active verbs

- He is now worried about his condition because he is overweight, lacks exercise and smokes regularly

#### With passive verbs

- During hospitalization, IV fluids were commenced and a transdermal patch was used for her pain.

#### With nouns & noun phrases

- He is now worried about his condition because of his increased weight, lack of exercise and his habit of smoking.
- He will require information about how and when to take his medication, how to stop smoking and the necessity of doing regular exercise.

#### With gerunds

- In order to handle the above mentioned effects be cautious when driving a car, operating machinery or performing any hazardous activities especially after taking your regular dose.

#### With prepositions

- Threadworms resemble pieces of 1.5 cm cotton thread which is normally detectable at the surface of the feces or around the anus at night.

#### With verbs in the conclusion

- I am worried about Miss Jones and would appreciate your urgent assessment and treatment as you think appropriate.

*The important point to remember is that the structures must be balanced.*

### Common Mistakes

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Sally initially presented alone to my clinic on 27/12/07 with a 3-month-history of constipation and associated using laxatives</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The sentence is not balanced as noun phrases</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Sally initially presented alone to my clinic on 27/12/07 with a <u>3-month-history of constipation</u> and <u>associated use of laxatives</u></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ He has a family history of stroke and diabetic.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: This sentence is not balanced as stroke is a noun and diabetic is a adjective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ He has a family history of <u>stroke</u> and <u>diabetes</u></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Good hygiene should be maintained by taking a morning shower, using individual towels, washing clothes daily and to vacuum regularly.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: the final verb is out of balance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Good hygiene should be maintained by <u>taking</u> a morning shower, <u>using</u> individual towels, <u>washing</u> clothes daily and <u>vacuuming</u> regularly.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ I am writing to refer this patient, a 26 year old computer programmer, who is displaying sign and symptoms consistent with subdural haematoma.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Both nouns should be in plural form</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ I am writing to refer this patient, a 26 year old computer programmer, who is displaying <u>signs</u> and <u>symptoms</u> consistent with subdural haematoma.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ His height is 170cm and weighing 99kg.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: unbalanced word form, height is a noun, weight is a gerund</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ His <u>height</u> is 170cm and <u>weight</u> is 99kg.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ On subsequent visits, impressions for full upper and lower dentures were made, bite registered and complete upper and lower dentures were delivered</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Passive form required for all verbs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ On subsequent visits, impressions for full upper and lower dentures <u>were made</u>, bite registration <u>was taken</u> and complete upper and lower dentures <u>were delivered</u></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ She diagnosed with hyperthyroidism in 1997, hypertension in 2003 and Glaucoma since 2004.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Time markers need to be balanced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ She was diagnosed with hyperthyroidism <u>in</u> 1997, hypertension <u>in</u> 2003 and Glaucoma <u>in</u> 2004.</li> <li>❑ She <u>has had</u> hyperthyroidism <u>since</u> 1997, hypertension <u>since</u> 2003 and Glaucoma <u>since</u> 2004.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ During hospitalization, IV fluids were commenced and used a transdermal patch for her pain.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Passive form required for all verbs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ During hospitalization, IV fluids <u>were commenced</u> and a transdermal patch <u>was used</u> for her pain.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Further examination revealed dry mouth, dentures were worn out on occlusal surfaces and a heavy calculus deposit was seen on the dentures.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: In example 1, by adding in addition, you can change the structure and keep the sentence balanced. In example 2 the sentence is balanced as the verbs have been replaced with noun phrases.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Further examination revealed dry mouth. <u>In addition</u>, her dentures <u>were worn out</u> on occlusal surfaces and a heavy calculus deposit <u>was seen</u> on the dentures.</li> <li>❑ Further examination revealed <u>dry mouth</u>, <u>worn out dentures</u> on occlusal surfaces and <u>heavy calculus deposits</u> on the dentures.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ She is feeling loneliness and isolated due to losing her social contacts</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Loneliness is a noun whereas isolated in an adjective so the word forms are not balanced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ She is suffering from <u>loneliness</u> and <u>isolation</u> due to losing her social contacts. (nouns)</li> <li>❑ She is feeling <u>lonely</u> and <u>isolated</u> due to losing her social contacts. (adjectives)</li> </ul>

## Relative Clauses

In the introduction of a referral letter it is common practice to introduce the patient and provide some relevant details relating to their situation or condition. The relative clause allows writers to do this in a clear and concise manner.

**Definition:** A relative clause is the part of the sentence which provides information about the patient. They can be divided into two types, defining and non-defining. Defining clauses provide details about the noun being referred to. Commas are not required.

Non-defining clauses provide extra information about the noun being referred to but do not define it. Commas are required.

Defining	Non-defining
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer this patient who is due to be discharged today.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The relative clause defines the object of the main clause i.e Which patient? The patient who is being discharged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer this patient, who is due to be discharged today, for ongoing physiotherapy treatment.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The relative clause provides extra information (patient is due to be discharged) about the <u>object</u> of the main clause but does not define it. It could be removed from the sentence and the meaning would still be clear: I am writing to refer this patient for ongoing physiotherapy treatment.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer Mrs. Patterson, a 36-year-old married woman who is suffering from mild depression.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The relative clause defines the object of the main clause i.e Who? Mrs. Patterson, a 36-year-old woman. <i>n.b. In this sentence, the first comma allows extra information to be added about Mrs. Patterson.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mrs. Patterson, who is a 36-year-old married woman, is suffering from mild depression.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The relative clause provides extra information (Mrs. Patterson is a 36 year old woman) about the <u>subject</u> of the main clause but does not define it. It could be removed from the sentence and the meaning would still be clear: Mrs Patterson is suffering from mild depression.</p>

### 😊 Handy Tip

*No name=no comma*

In example 1 below, no comma is required as the relative clause is defining the person being referred to. In example 2, the relative clause does not define the person being referred to because it is already known. Therefore, If you include the patient's name, commas are required.

- The doctor who performed the operation is from Iraq.
- Doctor Yousif, who is from Iraq, performed the operation.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Holmes who lives with his wife in a government flat, is an aged care pensioner.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Commas required as it is a non-defining relative clause. You can also express this information in a compound sentence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Holmes, who lives with his wife in a government flat, is an aged care pensioner.</li> <li>Mr. Holmes lives with his wife in a government flat <u>and</u> is an aged care pensioner.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. O'Riley, who lives alone in his own home, and works as a fencing contractor and has only one brother.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: After the second comma a verb is required. i.e Mr O'Riley <u>works</u>..</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. O'Riley, who lives alone in his own home, <u>works</u> as a fencing contractor and has only one brother.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mrs. Peterson who recently moved to our</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mrs. Peterson recently moved to our</li> </ul>

<p>retirement village following her husband's death.</p> <p>Explanation: No relative pronoun needed here as it is a simple sentence.</p>	<p>retirement village following her husband's death.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mrs. Peterson, who recently moved to our retirement village following her husband's death, has a history of hypertension.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Brown presented at my clinic today with a complaint of fractured front teeth in a traumatic car accident.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: A relative clause is required to define how the teeth were fractured. Alternatively it can be written as two separate sentences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Brown presented at my clinic today with a complaint of fractured front teeth <u>which</u> occurred in a traumatic car accident.</li> <li>Mr. Brown presented at my clinic today with a complaint of fractured front teeth. This occurred in a traumatic car accident.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing regarding Mr. Jones, a 35-year-old male, who was recently diagnosed with with tuberculosis.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Second comma not required as it is a defining relative clause, i.e it defines Mr. Jones</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing regarding Mr. Jones, a 35-year-old male who was recently diagnosed with with tuberculosis.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer Mrs. Margaret Green, a 66-year-old widow with three children, with complaints of chest pain.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Relative clause required here as two prepositional phrases is confusing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer Mrs. Margaret Green, a 66-year-old widow with three children who is complaining of chest pain.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer, Ms. Abbot, a 58-year-old widow admitted with pain, dehydration and nausea.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Incorrect comma placement and relative clause required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer Ms. Abbot, a 58-year-old widow who was admitted with pain, dehydration and nausea.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Fisher was admitted to hospital with the diagnosis of obstructive artery disease and end with quadruple artery bi-pass grafts.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: A relative clause is required to define the treatment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Fisher was admitted to hospital with the diagnosis of obstructive artery disease which required quadruple artery bi-pass grafts.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer this 14-year-old boy to you who came to me complaining of a sprained ankle.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The relative pronoun must follow the noun it is referring to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer this 14-year-old boy who came to me complaining of a sprained ankle.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer this patient, a 39-year-old widowed woman, who is under our care after being injured in a car accident.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: No comma required as it is a defining relative clause.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to refer this patient, a 39-year-old widowed woman who is under our care after being injured in a car accident.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Roberts who is a 72-year-old retired gentleman was admitted to hospital for acute cerebral infarction on 08/03/10.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Commas required as it is a non-defining relative clause and provides extra information about Mr. Roberts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Roberts, who is a 72-year-old retired gentleman, was admitted to hospital for acute cerebral infarction on 08/03/10.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to explain Mr. Clarke's current situation, who has been a patient of mine for a long time.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: The relative pronoun must be added</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am writing to explain Mr. Clarke's current situation. He has been a patient of mine for a long time.</li> <li>I am writing to refer Mr. Clarke, who has</li> </ul>

directly after the person you are referring to.

been a patient of mine for a long time. Currently, he is suffering from.....

## Clauses of Contrast

Contrast can be expressed by joining two clauses with the following linking words: although/but/despite/despite the fact that/even though/however/in spite of/on the other hand/whereas/while. A comma is used to separate the two clauses as illustrated below.

- Although her condition has improved, she is still very weak.
- Her condition has improved, but she is still very weak.
- Despite an improvement in her condition, she is still very weak.
- Despite the fact that there has been an improvement in her condition, she is still very weak.
- Even though her condition has improved, she is still very weak.
- Her condition has improved. However, she is still very weak.
- In spite of an improvement in her condition, she is still very weak
- While her condition has improved, she is still very weak.

### Rules for linking words

- Although/Even Though + clause (underlined below)  
e.g. Although + her condition has improved, she is still very weak.
- Despite/In spite of + noun or gerund (underlined below)  
e.g. Despite an improvement in her condition, she is still very weak.  
Despite overcoming her illness, she is still very weak
- Despite the fact that/In spite of the fact that + clause (underlined below)  
e.g. Despite the fact that there has been an improvement in her condition, she is still very weak.  
Despite the fact that her condition has improved, she is still very weak.
- However : A comma is required after however  
e.g. Her condition has improved. However, she is still very weak

### Common Mistakes

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>In spite of providing with exercises and compensatory techniques she was unable to cope with training due to an increase in pain.</u></li> </ul> <p>Explanation: providing is incorrect, as it was the patient who was provided exercise, in such cases you have 2 choices</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use a noun phrase In spite of our provision of exercises</li> <li>2. Use passive voice In spite of <u>being provided</u> with exercise</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>In spite of our provision of exercises and compensatory techniques</u>, she was unable to cope with training due to an increase in pain.</li> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>In spite of being provided with exercises and compensatory techniques</u>, she was unable to cope with training due to an increase in pain.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Although she has improved, but she is still very weak</u></li> </ul> <p>Explanation: This sentence has two linking words so one must be omitted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Although</u> she has improved, she is still very weak.</li> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> She has improved, <u>but</u> she is still very weak.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Despite of regular follow up, plaque and tartar were detected over cervical and bucal surfaces of the denture teeth.</u></li> </ul> <p>Explanation: There is no linking expression “despite of”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Despite</u> regular follow up, plaque and tartar were detected over cervical and bucal surfaces of the denture teeth.</li> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>In spite of</u> regular follow up, plaque and tartar were detected over cervical and bucal surfaces of the denture teeth.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Despite of this advice, he regularly drinks 2-4 glasses of wine every night as well as 1-2 glasses of scotch at weekends.</u></li> </ul> <p>Explanation: As above</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Despite</u> this advice, he regularly drinks 2-4 glasses of wine every night as well as 1-2 glasses of scotch at weekends.</li> <li>• <input type="checkbox"/> <u>In spite of</u> this advice, he regularly drinks 2-4 glasses of wine every night as well as 1-2 glasses of scotch at weekends.</li> </ul>

## Clauses of Purpose

Purpose clauses allow the writer to express why a certain action was taken in the past or why a certain action needs to be taken in the future. It can be expressed by joining two clauses with the following linking words: in order to; so that. A comma is required when the subordinate clause comes before the independent clause.

- *In order to* reduce weight, a low fat diet has been recommended. (quite formal and suitable for referral letters)
- A low fat diet has been recommended *in order to* lose weight.
- A low fat diet has been recommended *so that* the patient can lose weight. (casual expression and used more in informal writing or spoken English)

### Rules

- in order to + infinitive: Further investigation is required in order to rule out bowel cancer.
- so that + past reference: A general anaesthetic **was given** so that the patient **would** not feel pain.
- so that+ future reference: A general anaesthetic **needs** to be given so that the patient **will** not feel any pain.

**Handy Tip:** in order to rule out + disease name is a useful phrase for introductions or conclusions.

- In order to rule out ectopic pregnancy, I would appreciate your urgent assessment.
- The patient wants to have a scan for nuchal translucency in order to rule out Down's Syndrome.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>In order for alleviation of pain, the patient was prescribed paracetamol.</b></li> </ul> <p>Explanation: In order must be followed by <u>to + infinitive verb</u>, not <u>for + noun</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>In order to alleviate of pain, the patient was prescribed paracetamol.</b></li> </ul>

## Clauses of Reason

In referral letters it is often necessary to state why a certain action was taken and clauses of reason allow the writer to do this in a clear manner. It can be expressed by joining two clauses with the following linking words: due to/due to the fact that; for this reason; because/ because of.

### Examples

- *Due to* failure to progress and fetal stress, an emergency caesarean section was performed.
- *Due to the fact that* there was failure to progress and fetal stress, an emergency caesarean section was performed. (formal)
- There was evidence of poor progress and fetal stress. *For this reason*, an emergency caesarean section was performed.
- *Because* there was evidence of poor progress and fetal stress, an emergency caesarean section was performed.
- *Because of* failure to progress and fetal stress, an emergency caesarean section was performed.

### Rules

- due to/because of + noun (underlined below)

Example: Due to a low fat diet, the patient's health improved.

The patient's health improved due to a low fat diet.

Because of a low fat diet, the patient's health improved.

The patient's health improved because of a low fat diet.

- due to + gerund (-----ing form)

Example: Due to losing weight, the patient's health improved.

- for this reason+ clause (underlined below)

Example: The patient was placed on a low fat diet. For this reason, her health improved.

- because + clause

Example: Mrs Healy's health improved because she was on a low fat diet.

Because she was on a low fat diet, Mrs Healy's health improved .

- due to the fact that + clause

Example: The patient's health improved due to the fact that she was on a low fat diet.  
 Due to the fact that Mrs Healy was on a low fat diet, her health improved.

**Handy Tip:** due to + ing form allows the writer to express meaning clearly and concisely so it is useful in referral letters.

### Comma placement

A comma is required when the subordinate clause comes before the independent clause. However, if the independent clause comes first, no comma is required.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient is feeling lonely and isolated due to lose her usual social contacts.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Incorrect word form and sentence structure after due to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The patient is feeling lonely and isolated due to <u>losing</u> her social contacts. (clear and concise)</li> <li>The patient is feeling lonely and isolated due to the fact that <u>she lost her social contacts</u>. (formal and a bit wordy)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His mother had difficulty in caring for both her son's illness and looking after two other small children due to sick.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Incorrect word form and sentence structure after due to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His mother had difficulty in caring for both her son's illness and looking after two other small children due to <u>her sickness</u>.</li> <li>His mother had difficulty in caring for both her son's illness and looking after two other small children due to <u>being</u> sick.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recently, the Mr Hutton stopped playing sport because muscle soreness.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: Incorrect word form and sentence structure after because of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recently, Mr Hutton stopped playing sport because of <u>muscle soreness</u>.</li> <li>Recently, Mr Hutton stopped playing sport because <u>he had muscle soreness</u>.</li> </ul>

### Clauses of Time

A very important part of referral letters is summarising the patient history and order of events in the case notes. The use of time conjunctions help the writer express these relationships clearly. Commonly used conjunctions include: ago, during, when, while, since, first, on the next visit, at that time, after, later, in ..... time etc. etc.

### Example sentences

- The patient first saw me three months ago complaining of painful wisdom teeth.
- During* hospitalisation, the patient had surgery to remove a suspicious lesion on his lip.
- When* Mr. Matthews is discharged, he will need assistance with showering and general household chores.
- While* you are on this medication, please do not drive or consume alcohol.
- Since* being admitted 3 weeks ago, the patient has steadily improved and is due to be discharged today.
- The patient first attended me yesterday evening
- On the next visit*, Peter's condition had worsened and he was very anxious.
- Mr. Hauritz initially presented at my clinic on 20/11/09. *At that time*, examination revealed carious lesions on several teeth along with poor dental hygiene.
- On review *after* three months, she had made good progress with her weight reduction.
- The patient was advised to reduce alcohol consumption, avoid heavy lifting and review *in three months time*.
- A review consultation was scheduled *for one month later*.

### Example paragraph

Six months ago, Mr. Roberts twisted his right ankle while playing golf. During the following months, the patient experience intermittent attacks of pain which hindered his ability to work effectively. On review after three months, the right ankle joint was x-rayed and the result appeared to be satisfactory. However, when the swelling, pain and impaired improvement persisted, an MRI was ordered which revealed a detached cartilage. Currently, Mr. Roberts does not have full mobility, and is no longer capable of full-time employment on which, financially, his family depends.

### Rules

- During + noun (underlined below)

Example: During his stay in hospital, Mr Mason's condition has improved.

- When + time clause (underlined below)

Example: When Ms. Song returned today, she was pale and distressed.

- While + clause (underlined below)

Example: While waiting in reception, the patient fainted.

- Ago + past tense (underlined below)  
The patient had a liver transplant 12 months ago.

### Comma Placement

A comma is required when the time clause comes before the independent clause.

### Handy Tip

Correct verb tense is an important point to consider when writing time clauses. The important points to remember are as follows:

- When the verb of the time clause is in present form, the verb in the main clause must also be present or future form.

Example: While you display symptoms of fever and rash, you are still infectious.

- When the verb of the time clause is in past form, the verb in the main clause must also be in past form.

Example: When the patient received his results, he fainted.

- When the verb in the main clause is in present perfect form, the verb of the time clause must be in present perfect form.

Example: While the patient has been in hospital, his condition has steadily improved.

Incorrect	Correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today, the couple presented at my clinic. Mrs. Conway informed me that her home ovulation prediction test showed positive.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: To demonstrate a higher level of English proficiency this information should be expressed in a complex sentence rather than two simple sentences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>When</u> the couple presented at my clinic today, Mrs. Conway informed me that her home ovulation prediction test showed positive.</li> <li>• Today, <u>when</u> the couple presented at my clinic, Mrs. Conway informed me that her home ovulation prediction test showed positive.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient has had placement of a prosthetic heart valve 12 months ago.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: <i>has had</i> is present perfect, but simple past is required with the time marker <i>ago</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The patient <u>had</u> placement of a prosthetic heart valve 12 months ago.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I first saw Mrs. Smythe at my clinic last week , she urgently needed a new partial denture.</li> </ul> <p>Explanation: An adverb of time such as when required to connect these two independent clauses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>When</u> I first saw Mrs. Smythe at my clinic last week , she urgently needed a new partial denture. (best choice)</li> <li>• I first saw Mrs. Smythe at my clinic last week <u>and</u> she urgently needed a new partial denture.</li> </ul>