

Standard and Non-Standard English

Standard English is formal English. It's the type of writing you should use in your written work. And — you guessed it — non-Standard English is a more informal type of English.

The subject and the verb have to agree

In Standard English, the verb in a sentence has to agree with whoever's doing the action. See p.6 for more on verbs and subjects.

She swim every day. ❌



non-Standard English

She swims every day. ✅



Standard English



I has a cowardly cat. ❌



I have a cowardly cat. ✅

It go very fast. ❌

It goes very fast. ✅

They does lots of cleaning. ❌

They do lots of cleaning. ✅

'To be' has to agree with the subject

- 1) Some verbs don't follow the normal pattern. They're called irregular verbs.
- 2) The verb 'to be' is one of the most common ones, so it's worth learning how it goes.

Present Tense

I am
You are
He/She/It is

We are
They are



They is hungry. ❌

They are hungry. ✅

Past Tense

I was
You were
He/She/It was

We were
They were

We was planning a party. ❌

We were planning a party. ✅



Standard and Non-Standard English

Verbs might seem pretty straightforward, but unfortunately, there are always a couple of tricksters. There are a few traps you can fall into when it comes to verbs, especially 'have', so watch out...

Don't get the two types of past tense mixed up

You usually need 'have' or 'has' with 'been' or 'done'. For more on this, see p.8.

1 *I done the washing-up.* ❌

This isn't Standard English.

I did the washing-up. ✓

I have done the washing-up. ✓

Both of these are Standard English.

2 *I been to the lake.* ❌

non-Standard English

I went to the lake. ✓

I have been to the lake. ✓

Standard English

Use 'have' not 'of'

Don't use words like 'should' or 'could' with 'of' — it's non-Standard English.

1) It's easy to write 'of' when you mean 'have'.

John could of run faster. ❌

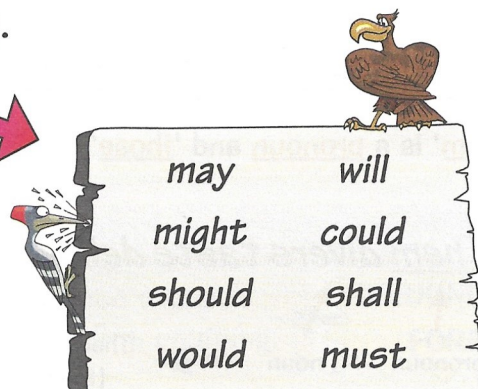
John could have run faster. ✓

2) When you use these verbs, use 'have' and never use 'of'.

I should have left.

We may have come last.

Sam must have given up.



Quick Questions...

Rewrite each sentence so it's in Standard English. Keep the sentences in the same tense.

1) I hates sprouts.

3) They was thirsty.

5) They been on holiday.

2) He do his homework.

4) I is late for school.

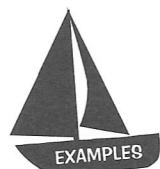
6) Jack might of wanted an ice lolly.

Standard and Non-Standard English

Here's a page I prepared earlier about pronouns. I love pronouns...

Make sure every pronoun fits the sentence

Pronouns change depending on whether they're the subject or the object. In active sentences, subject pronouns do the action. An object pronoun has the action done to it. See p.3.



We hid really well.



This pronoun is the subject of the sentence.

He couldn't find us.

This is the object.



Don't use 'me' when you mean 'I'

- 1) 'I' and 'me' can be tricky to get right if they're used with another name.
- 2) Split the sentence into two parts, like this:

Sarah and me waited for the bus.

Sarah waited for the bus. ✓

Me waited for the bus. ✗

This is how the sentence should be written.

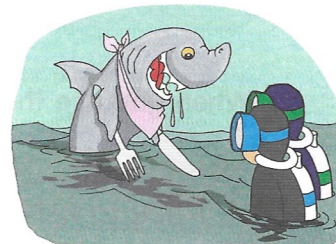
Sarah and I waited for the bus. ✓

'I' is always the subject.

'Me' is always the object.

Don't confuse 'them' and 'those'

'Them' is a pronoun and 'those' points something out. Don't mix them up.



Them divers taste delicious. ✗

Those divers taste delicious. ✓

pronoun + noun

'Them' replaces the noun, so you can't have the pronoun (them) and the noun (divers) in the same sentence.

Quick Questions...

In each of these sentences there's a mistake. Rewrite each sentence correctly.

- 1) I haven't met he.
- 2) I really want them cakes.
- 3) Gabriel and me went climbing.
- 4) He annoyed Jo and I.
- 5) Them books are funny.
- 6) Us aren't on the list.