

Test Your Grammar Skills

Understanding Ellipsis – Information Page

Ellipsis occurs when we leave out unnecessary words from a sentence. The omitted words are unnecessary for working out the meaning, because they do not affect the meaning, e.g.

*This is the book I like. NOT This is the book **that** I like.*

In this way, ellipsis ‘tidies up’ the sentence by making it more streamlined or ‘word-efficient’. In English, it is not necessary to repeat words and phrases in the same sentence, for example: “*The twins bought ice creams for ~~the twins~~ themselves.*” This creates **redundancy**. We can also use ellipsis when we know the listener or reader is aware of the meaning from the context, e.g.

Two friends walk into their work canteen and one goes towards the kettle.
He says to his colleague: “Tea?” instead of “*Would you like a cup of tea?*”

Native speakers use ellipsis all the time, and are quite proficient with it. They know what is missing and why it does not matter to the meaning. However, learners of English may realise that part of the sentence is missing, but struggle to guess the missing part. They find they don’t get the meaning of the sentence, because “something is missing” – which is the definition of ellipsis. However, sometimes we don’t use ellipsis when we want to sound more formal, e.g. “*It is the book that I like.*” is more formal than “*It’s the book I like.*”

There are many kinds of ellipsis, some of which are listed below. We can use one or more of them in the same sentence:

Textual ellipsis – the surrounding text makes the meaning clear:

Type of ellipsis:	Example with ellipsis:	The full sentence without ellipsis:
1. contractions	We’ll go for a meal.	We will go for a meal.
2. relative pronoun (or clause) missing	The bike I bought yesterday...	The bike that I bought yesterday...
3. verb phrase missing before gerund	While driving, I thought of you.	While I was driving, I thought of you.
4. verb phrase missing after verb + to	We can leave, if you want to.	We can leave, if you want to leave .
5. pronoun replaces a noun phrase	That bike was the one I borrowed.	That bike was the bike that I borrowed.
6. imperative form replaces modal	Go with us tomorrow.	You could go with us tomorrow.

Situational ellipsis – knowledge of the context makes the meaning clear:

Type of ellipsis:	Example with ellipsis:	The full sentence without ellipsis:
7. a word or two replace a sentence	Football?	Do you want to go and play football?
8. auxiliary verb(s) (or be) missing	You watching the match later?	Are you watching the match later?
9. short answer instead of full	“Did you take the call?” “Yes, I did.”	“Yes, I did take the call. ”

Structural ellipsis – general/cultural knowledge makes the meaning clear:

Type of ellipsis:	Example with ellipsis:	The full sentence without ellipsis:
10. news headline, title of book/film, etc., slogan – assumes reader’s prior knowledge	Tories deliver killer blow at election.	The Conservative Party (nicknamed the Tories = slang) wins decisively (delivers killer blow = slang) at the General Election.

Telegraphic ellipsis – note form, which is clear to the original writer:

Type of ellipsis:	Example with ellipsis:	The full text without ellipsis:
11. note form, e.g. diary entry, shopping list, note to self, etc.	Got up, had breakfast, went out, met Philip, walked to South Bank, then Tate M.	I got up and had breakfast, then I went out and met Philip. We walked to the South Bank, then we went to Tate Modern.

Note: in **punctuation**, an **ellipsis** is the symbol with three dots: ...
This also means that something is missing: *We went to the library ... five minutes later we had to leave!*
or that something continues: *Nobody guessed who broke the washing machine, but...*

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Understanding Ellipsis 1

Ellipsis occurs when we leave out unnecessary words from a sentence. Write each sentence again without ellipsis, and add numbers to show which kind of ellipsis was in each sentence:

	<u>No.</u>
1. Take a book if you need to. _____	
2. I've never been to Peru. _____	
3. The last science-fiction film I saw was the one with blue people in it. _____	
4. Talk later? OK? _____	
5. The agreement we reached was unacceptable. _____	
6. After reading the report, Jody concluded it'd been a waste of time for her. _____	
7. I didn't want to, but Jack forced me to attend the meeting. _____	
8. Wash hair, get dressed, eat breakfast, leave by 8. _____	
9. Tea? _____	
10. The Amazing Sombrero _____	
11. Dan saw a fox when out running. _____	
12. Find the car keys? _____	
13. "Bus gone?" "Yes. Just." _____	
14. Talks Fail _____	
15. The book I needed wasn't available. _____	

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Understanding Ellipsis 1

Answers will vary. Sample answers:

	<u>No.</u>
1. Take a book if you need to. You can take a book if you need to take a book .	6, 4
2. I've never been to Peru. I have never been to Peru.	1
3. The last science-fiction film I saw was the one with blue people in it. The last science-fiction film that I saw was the science fiction film with the blue people in the science fiction film .	2, 5, 5
4. Talk later? OK? Can we talk later? Will that be OK?	6, 7
5. The agreement we reached was unacceptable. The agreement that we reached was unacceptable.	2
6. After reading the report, Jody concluded it'd been a waste of time for her. After Jody had spent time reading the report, Jody concluded that reading the report had been a waste of time for Jody .	3, 5, 1, 5
7. I didn't want to, but Jack forced me to attend the meeting. I did not want to attend the meeting , but Jack forced me to attend the meeting .	1, 4, 4
8. Wash hair, get dressed, eat breakfast, leave by 8. I must wash my hair, get dressed, then eat breakfast and leave by 8 o'clock .	11
9. Tea? Would you like a cup of tea, Natalie ?	7
10. The Amazing Sombrero The main character of the novel is called The Amazing Sombrero.	10
11. Dan saw a fox when out running. Dan saw a fox when Dan was out running.	5, 3
12. Find the car keys? Did you find the car keys?	8
13. "Bus gone?" "Yes. Just." "Has the bus gone?" "Yes, the bus has just gone ."	8, 7
14. Talks Fail Talks to find a new deal for the manager of City Football Club have failed.	10
15. The book I needed wasn't available. The book that I needed was not available.	2, 1

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Understanding Ellipsis 2

Ellipsis occurs when we leave out unnecessary words from a sentence. Write each sentence again without ellipsis, and add numbers to show which kind of ellipsis was in each sentence:

	<u>No.</u>
1. He's going to finish watering the plants later. _____	
2. Put the vase on the table where the kids can't break it. _____	
3. The map we've been using is the wrong one. _____	
4. Break? _____	
5. You coming with us? _____	
6. When shopping, I always look for bargains. _____	
7. Giraffe Fears Increase _____	
8. The hotel room is ready to use when you want to. _____	
9. Mike said he was busy, so I didn't invite him. _____	
10. Collins Signs for City _____	
11. Contact the other players and tell them about the match. _____	
12. "Dave." "Paul." "Nice to meet you." _____	
13. Was she late? No. _____	
14. Try the anchovies. Mmm! So divine! _____	
15. Leave work by 2, quick change, race to mum's, home before dark. _____	

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Understanding Ellipsis 2

Answers will vary. Sample answers:

	<u>No.</u>
1. He's going to finish watering the plants later. He is going to finish watering the plants later.	1
2. Put the vase on the table where the kids can't break it. Would you put the vase on the table where the kids cannot break the vase .	6, 1, 5
3. The map we've been using is the wrong one. The map which we have been using is the wrong map .	2, 1, 5
4. Break? Do you want a break?	7
5. You coming with us? Are you coming with us?	8
6. When shopping, I always look for bargains. When I am out shopping, I always look for bargains.	3
7. Giraffe Fears Increase Fears about the giraffe that has got lost in Chicago have increased.	10
8. The hotel room is ready to use when you want to. The hotel room is ready to use when you want to use the hotel room .	4
9. Mike said he was busy, so I didn't invite him. Mike said that he was busy, so I did not invite Mike .	2, 1, 5
10. Collins Signs for City A new striker called Mark Collins has signed a two-year contract with Bradley City Football Club .	10
11. Contact the other players and tell them about the match. You ought to contact the other players and tell the other players about the match.	6, 5
12. "Dave." "Paul." "Nice to meet you." "Hi, my name is Dave." "Hello, my name is Paul." "It is nice to meet you."	7, 7, 8
13. "Was she late?" "No." "Was she late?" "No, she was not late ."	9
14. Try the anchovies. Mmm! So divine! You ought to try the anchovies. Mmm! The anchovies are so divine.	6, 5, 8
15. Leave work by 2, quick change, race to mum's, home before dark. Tomorrow I will have to leave work by 2 o'clock, have a quick change, then race to my mum's house, and try to be home before it gets dark.	11

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Understanding Ellipsis 3

Ellipsis occurs when we leave out unnecessary words from a sentence. Write each sentence again without ellipsis, and add numbers to show which kind of ellipsis was in each sentence:

	<u>No.</u>
1. Got the time? _____	
2. Best pizza in town! _____	
3. Jenny'd had enough of her boss's bad moods. _____	
4. Wait for me after the lesson – but you don't have to. _____	
5. Want a biscuit? _____	
6. When I bought the software, I didn't know it would be so hard to use. _____	
7. Birdbath Stolen _____	
8. You going to the gig tonight? _____	
9. Get the document from Michael and copy it. _____	
10. Lovely weather. _____	
11. Arthur's friend from Scotland has arrived. _____	
12. Do you live in Bristol? Yes, I do. _____	
13. When relaxing at home, I love wearing some old jeans. _____	
14. Adventure In Space _____	
15. Worked here for years, haven't we, Barry? _____	

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Understanding Ellipsis 3

Answers will vary. Sample answers:

	<u>No.</u>
1. Got the time? Have you got the time?	8
2. Best pizza in town! This restaurant serves the best pizza in town!	10
3. Jenny'd had enough of her boss's bad moods. Jenny had had enough of her boss's bad moods.	1
4. Wait for me after the lesson – but you don't have to. You could wait for me after the lesson – but you do not have to wait for me after the lesson.	6, 1, 4
5. Want a biscuit? Do you want a biscuit?	8
6. When I bought the software, I didn't know it would be so hard to use. When I bought the software, I did not know that the software would be so hard to use.	1, 2, 5
7. Birdbath Stolen A birdbath has been stolen.	10
8. You going to the gig tonight? Are you going to the gig tonight?	8
9. Get the document from Michael and copy it. You should get the document from Michael and copy the document.	6, 5
10. Lovely weather. There has been some lovely weather today, hasn't there?	7
11. Arthur's friend from Scotland has arrived. Arthur's friend, who is from Scotland, has arrived.	2
12. Do you live in Bristol? Yes, I do. Do you live in Bristol? Yes, I live in Bristol.	9
13. When relaxing at home, I love wearing some old jeans. When I am relaxing at home, I love wearing some old jeans.	3
14. Adventure In Space We were watching a film called Adventure in Space.	10
15. Worked here for years, haven't we, Barry? We have worked here for years, haven't we, Barry?	8

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Understanding Ellipsis 4

Ellipsis occurs when we leave out unnecessary words from a sentence. Write each sentence again without ellipsis, and add numbers to show which kind of ellipsis was in each sentence:

	<u>No.</u>
1. We told Jeff his car was cool. _____	
2. While leaving the exam hall, Janet realised she had lost her pen. _____	
3. I can study with you after school if you want. _____	
4. Put the bags down anywhere. _____	
5. If you use the wrong detergent, it's bad for your dishwasher. _____	
6. We just can't agree with your proposal, Mr.French – terrible! _____	
7. Gas Price Record High _____	
8. Unbelievable! _____	
9. Seen Bill anywhere? _____	
10. Mind your head when leaving the aeroplane. _____	
11. "What's your name?" "Alan." _____	
12. Carrots, tomatoes, half a loaf, milk (x2 semi), cheese (Jack's lunches). _____	
13. Jeremy said he couldn't stand listening to opera. _____	
14. "Where's Tony?" "Outside." _____	
15. "Look at these photos." "The ones from Brazil?" "Yes." _____	

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Understanding Ellipsis 4

Answers will vary. Sample answers:

	<u>No.</u>
1. We told Jeff his car was cool. We told Jeff that Jeff's car was cool.	2, 5
2. While leaving the exam hall, Janet realised she had lost her pen. While she was leaving the exam hall, Janet realised that she had lost her pen.	3, 2
3. I can study with you after school if you want. I can study with you after school if you want to study [with me] after school.	4
4. Put the bags down anywhere. You can put the bags down anywhere.	6
5. If you use the wrong detergent, it's bad for your dishwasher. If you use the wrong detergent, it is bad for your dishwasher.	1
6. We just can't agree with your proposal, Mr.French – terrible! We just cannot agree with your proposal, Mr.French – it is terrible!	1, 7
7. Gas Price Record High The gas price in this town has reached a record high.	10
8. Unbelievable! That goal was unbelievable!	7
9. Seen Bill anywhere? Have you seen Bill anywhere?	8
10. Mind your head when leaving the aeroplane. You need to mind your head when you are leaving the aeroplane.	6, 3
11. "What's your name?" "Alan." "What is your name?" " My name is Alan."	1, 9
12. Carrots, tomatoes, half a loaf, milk (x2 semi), cheese (Jack's lunches). I need to buy carrots, tomatoes, half a loaf of bread, two bottles of semi-skimmed milk, and cheese for Jack's lunches.	11
13. Jeremy said he couldn't stand listening to opera. Jeremy said that he could not stand listening to opera.	2, 1
14. "Where's Tony?" "Outside." "Where is Tony?" " He is outside."	1, 9
15. "Look at these photos." "The ones from Brazil?" "Yes." " You should look at these photos." "The photos from Brazil?" "Yes, the photos from Brazil. "	6, 5, 9

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