

UNIT 6: VERB COMPLEMENTATION

The idea behind ‘**complements**’ in grammar is that not all verbs can stand alone – many of them need to be ‘completed’ by other words or phrases, such as objects, other verbs, clauses, etc. This is a fairly complex area, and in this unit we have chosen to focus on some of the more common types of complements (besides objects, which we already covered in Unit 5).

At this point, it would be useful to distinguish between

- **complements**, which are needed to make the sentence ‘complete’ and
- **adjuncts**, which provide additional information but are not indispensable.

Consider the underlined words in the following examples:

1. He wanted a new car.
2. He wanted to drive the car.

Without the underlined parts, these sentences would be incomplete: *‘He wanted’.
So the underlined words are **complements** of the verb *wanted* – they ‘complete’ it.
Compare these complements with the following examples:

3. He laughed aloud.
4. He laughed at his classmate’s mistake.

The underlined parts in (3-4), of course, add more information to the sentence. But, unlike (1-2), they are not absolutely necessary to make the sentence grammatical. You can leave them out and the sentence would still be grammatical: ‘He laughed’. So, the underlined parts are not complements, but **adjuncts**, which are optional and can be omitted. The underlined parts in the following are also adjuncts:

5. He wanted a new car for his next birthday.
6. He wanted to drive the car because he loved driving.

In this course, we will not be saying much about adjuncts, because they are less likely to cause errors, and because they are too many and varied. But complements are grammatically much more important, and you should try your best to use them correctly.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

QUESTION 1:

There are of course many ways of completing these sentences. Here are just some examples. Notice how the second verb is used.

1. He decided to migrate to New Zealand.
2. He agreed to study harder.
3. He promised to quit smoking.
4. He wanted to become a film star.
5. He intended to beat his opponent.
6. He tried to get her attention.
7. He pretended to be a millionaire.
8. He attempted to extort money from his classmates.

QUESTION 2:

There are lots of possibilities. Check with your teacher if you're not sure whether your sentences are correct.

QUESTION 3:

All these errors involve the correct infinitive form of the verb to use after the main verb:

1. Blackburn wanted Tom to leave DigiCom.
2. Kevin wanted Angela to marry him.
3. Angela decided not to see her.
4. She told him not to look back.
5. The heat made the mud become rock.

QUESTION 4:

The only verbs in Question 1 that can also take an object in addition to the verb complement are *promise* and *want*, as in:

3. He **promised** her to quit smoking.
4. He **wanted** his son to become a film star.

Examples of other verbs that can take both an object and a complement are:

He persuaded his parents to raise his allowance.

She convinced her teacher to give her an 'A'.

The robber forced the victim to give up his wallet.

QUESTION 5:

Sentences 2, 3, 5 and 6 contain errors. The correct forms are:

2. I will let him go home early.
3. I saw him pull the trigger.
5. I heard him say that you are his hero.
6. His father will make him go to school.

QUESTION 6:

The sentences where the object of the first verb can be understood as being the same as the subject of the sentence, and hence can be left out, are:

7. He likes to be on time.
9. I prefer to have short hair.

As for the reason why the object can be left out in some verbs, let's take *want* as an example:

1. He wanted to become a doctor.
2. He wanted his son to become a doctor.

In (2), the object is 'his son'. But in (1), the understood object is he himself, and since it is the same as the subject 'he', it is omitted. We can think of (1) as being basically 'He wanted (himself) to become a doctor'. Likewise, in 'I want to play tennis every day', the understood object of *want* is I myself.

QUESTION 7:

All are correct except (4) and (8). The correct forms are:

4. He wanted to give me a birthday present.
8. She convinced him to marry her.

QUESTION 8:

1. I have seen him cry only once.
2. I saw him crying at the funeral. – not much different from (1): 'crying' does not refer to the complete incident as much as 'cry' does.
3. He tried to lock the door. – suggests that he was unsuccessful.

4. He tried locking the door. – does not suggest that he was unsuccessful – probably he succeeded in locking it.
5. He stopped to see her. – He stopped on his way in order to see her.
6. He stopped seeing her. – He used to see her but then stopped doing that (very different from (5)).
7. The audience started to applaud. – suggests that this was interrupted or cut short.
8. The audience started applauding. – does not suggest the above – probably they went on applauding.

QUESTION 9:

These are just some examples of how to complete these sentences:

1. The Chief Executive declared that some public examinations would be abolished.
2. He assured his parents that he would graduate with first-class honours.
3. He doubted whether anyone would be willing to marry him.
4. He wondered when the recession would end.
5. The officer informed him that his passport had been revoked.

ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

Here are the original texts. The blanks may be filled by other verbs too, but the form of the verbs should (by and large) remain the same.

Text 1:

Before the invention of radio and television, people spent much of their leisure time **doing** activities that required **doing** or **making** something. They practiced **playing** a musical instrument or studied **singing**.

Most people learned **to keep busy** by **trying to improve** their abilities in some way or by **practising** a skill. People who couldn't afford **to spend** much money on hobbies often started **collecting** simple objects, such as matchbook covers or stamps, or even things like buttons or bottle caps. Of course, most people spent a lot of time **reading**, and **writing** letters to friends.

Children played games in which they pretended **to be** pirates or cowboys or people they remembered **reading about** in books. Many women were extremely clever at **making** and **decorating** articles of clothing. Men often kept busy by **making** toys for children or **carving** small sculptures out of wood.

Text 2:

Eliza Doolittle was a common flower girl who wanted **to be** somebody. But she had a horrible accent, which prevented her **from being** accepted by society. So she went to see Professor Higgins, a famous phonetician. She wanted him **to teach** her to speak proper English, like a lady. He tried **to get** rid of her at first, but when he saw how great a challenge it would be, he decided **to take** her on as a pupil. He hoped **to turn** her from a flower girl into a duchess, to win a bet with his friend Pickering. He promised **to give** her free lessons. But he gave her a hard time. He forced her **to say** the alphabet hundreds of times. He made her **speak** with pebbles in her mouth. He did not let her **eat** or **sleep** until she got it right. After a while she decided **to quit**, but he told her not **to give up** so easily. In the end she helped him **win** his bet.

Text 3:

The education secretary yesterday denied **interfering** with the autonomy of two leading universities by **voicing** support for them to merge.

Secretary for Education and Manpower Arthur Li Kwok-cheung refused to **apologise** for **saying** on Friday that he would act as a "matchmaker" to speed the merger of the Chinese University and the University of Science and Technology (HKUST).

"What have I done wrong?" he asked. "What I had done was discuss **raising** the standards of higher education with their vice-chancellors. It is up to universities now **to consult** the views of their staff and students on the merger. I will not be interfering with the autonomy of the institutions."

Chinese University vice-chancellor Ambrose King Yeo-chi, who supported the idea, said yesterday the two universities had yet **to reach** an agreement on the merger, adding no timetable for the move had been suggested.

Professor Li said he had discussed the merger with Professor King and HKUST president Paul Chu Ching-wu after joining the government in August. "We share the same view - that a merger between the two institutions could help **develop** a world-class university."

He said he had expected his earlier remarks **to prompt** criticism. "Some people at the institutions may have conflict of interests and self-interests at heart," he said.

Professor King supported amalgamation yesterday in a letter to staff and students at the Chinese University.

"A merger with the HKUST is likely **to speed** up the process for our university to develop as a world-class university," Professor King said.

But he insisted that the two institutions had not reached any agreement. "It should be decided after **consulting** staff and students," he said.

Text 4:

The United States yesterday accused five Asian nations - China, Vietnam, North Korea, Laos and Myanmar - of severely **repressing** religious freedom as part of calculated bids to prop up totalitarian regimes.

The State Department named four other states in Asia - Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Sudan and Uzbekistan - as **being** hostile to minority or non-approved religions.

The report's gallery of worst offenders targeted regimes which it said branded some or all religious groups as "enemies of the state" because of the threat they posed to dominant ideology.

China was accused of **scrutinising** spiritual groups and in some cases of "harsh repression".

Vietnam was criticised for **restricting** religious groups it deems in contravention of state policies. Some ethnic Hmong Protestants had been forced **to recant** their faith, the report said.

In North Korea the government continued **to suppress** groups not recognised by the state, the report said.

Myanmar was accused **of deploying** its "pervasive internal security apparatus" to infiltrate meetings of religious groups and the report cited credible reports that the armed forces had forcibly converted hundreds of Christian tribal Nagas to Buddhism.

The only non-Asian state in the same category was Cuba, where authorities were accused **of mounting** surveillance operations against worshippers and of harassing unregistered religious groups.