HESI A2: Grammar

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The HESI A2 examination stands for Health Education Systems Incorporated Admissions Assessment and acts as a way to test a student’s potential success in an intense nursing program. The Orvis School of Nursing uses the scores from the exam in their selection process; while your GPA earns you an interview spot, ultimately, the result of your interview and your HESI score determine whether or not you get into the nursing program.

This resource will explain some of the grammatical concerns that are important for you to know on this English portion of the HESI A2. While most people use these points of grammar every day, some people are not confident identifying or putting names to them. That’s why we’re here—through practice and seeing examples of grammar in action, you can become a pro at understanding and naming any type of grammatical function. With that in mind, you can use this resource to:

1. Identify both simple and complex grammatical structures by name
2. Understand how to use these structures in sentences

General Sentence Grammar

Subjects

On the HESI A2, you may be asked to identify which part of a sentence is the subject and which part of a sentence is the predicate. Notice that the subjects in each example are in bold, while the verbs (which are part of the predicate) are underlined.

Most people understand the subject of the sentence as the person/place/object that is undergoing or doing some action. Sometimes the HESI A2 will ask you to identify the subject noun (or noun phrase) in a sentence. When asked to find the subject, look for who or what is “doing” the action in the sentence. Seek out the verb, and then you can figure out which noun attaches to that verb.

Because verbs are technically part of the predicate, it may seem useful to find that first, but once you’ve figured out the subject and verb of the sentence, finding the predicate phrase becomes simple. With the subject in hand, you can reliably assume that the predicate will follow.

Here are some common types of sentences you may see with a variety of subject nouns and phrases.

1. Robert opened a checking account at his local credit union.
2. The group of teenage girls was excited to see the premiere of the new film.
3. Tomatoes don’t grow well in our tiny little garden.

Predicates

Now that we’ve found the subject, we can look for the predicate in these sentences.

The predicate tells us about the action of our subject. With the subject, we ask “who” is doing the action, but with the predicate we ask “what” and “how.”

Let’s take a look at our previous sentences to identify the predicate. The verb half of the predicate is bolded, while the actual predicate phrase is underlined.
1. Robert **opened** a checking account at his local credit union.
2. The group of teenage girls **was excited** to see the premiere of the new film.
3. Tomatoes **don’t grow** well in our tiny little garden.

In sentence 1, the subject “Robert” is completed by the predicate “opened a checking account...” because that last phrase gives us information about “what” action Robert is doing and “how” he is accomplishing the action.

While some sentences, like the first one, will be fairly straightforward, remember that groups of people or things can also be subjects (as in sentence 2), or even inanimate objects like foods, buildings, or locations (as in sentence 3). One tricky thing to note is in sentence 3: be careful with “there,” as many times it is not the subject but merely an indication that the subject will soon follow.

**Parts of Speech**

It is also important on the HESI A2 to understand the parts of speech and to understand the different variations within those parts of speech. This section will provide an overview of the different parts of speech.

Some of the following explanations are complex. While you might not be tested on each part of speech, you can assume that you will see some of them in the detailed way they are explained below. It’s useful to have these longer descriptions, then, because they will prepare you for most grammatical situations on the HESI A2.

a. **Nouns**
   - Proper nouns are nouns that refer to unique, specific things (e.g. Saturn, Africa, BMW) versus common nouns that refer to general things (e.g. car, city, glass).
   - Countable nouns can become pluralized (e.g. chair becomes chairs), whereas uncountable nouns cannot take a different plural form (e.g. “milk” does not become “milks”).
   - Abstract nouns refer to concepts (e.g. pride), while concrete nouns refer to real-world entities (e.g. fish, table).

b. **Pronouns**
   - Personal pronouns are typically distinguished by the gender, number, and the “person” (first, second, or third) (e.g. he, she, they).
   - Reflexive pronouns refer back to the subject (e.g. “They hurt themselves”).
   - Possessive pronouns indicate who owns what (e.g. “That is her pen”).
   - Indefinite pronouns refer to unspecified entities or objects (e.g. something, somewhere, anyone, nobody).
   - Interrogative pronouns are used when the noun is an unknown person or object, like “who” when the unknown person is the subject of the sentence and “whom” when the unknown person is the object of the sentence.

c. **Adjectives**
   - Attributive adjectives are part of a noun phrase where they modify that noun (e.g. “gloomy” in the noun phrase “gloomy clouds”).
   - Predicative adjectives are linked by nouns, pronouns, or verbs to describe nouns (e.g. “This group is really peppy”).
• Nominal adjectives are adjectives that act like nouns, as the noun is assumed or left out (e.g. “Between the happy and sad movies, I preferred the happier”).

d. Verbs
• Intransitive verbs don’t have a direct object that they are modifying, and they are always actions (e.g. “She sneezed”).
• Transitive verbs, on the other hand, have a noun phrase that is modified or “acted upon” by that verb (e.g. “She gathered all of the leaves”).
• Ditransitive verbs have both a direct object that is being acted upon (underlined) and an indirect object (underlined, italicized) that gives us important identifying information (e.g. “She gave her mother several keepsakes”).

e. Adverbs
• Many adverbs are formed by adding the ending “-ly” to an adjective so that it will modify the way an action is done (e.g. “She performed beautifully”).
• Independent adverbs are standalone words, but they can modify verbs in much the same way (e.g. “We played our music very well” or “It is quite hot”).

f. Prepositions
• Prepositions (e.g. “on,” “in,” or “between”) indicate a prepositional phrase that describes the location of things.
• Prepositions can be adjuncts to nouns, meaning that the preposition “belongs” to the noun and attaches to it (e.g. “The food in France”).
• Prepositions can be predicative expressions, meaning that they link with a helping verb (e.g. “Our dog is in the garage”)
• Prepositions can also be used alongside verbs, modifying the way that verb is completed or giving us additional information (e.g. “The bear slept throughout winter”).

g. Conjunctions
• Coordinating conjunctions (and, but, so, yet, or, nor, for) help us link large things like independent clauses together.
• Coordinating conjunctions are different than correlative conjunctions, which we can only use for groups of words or noun phrases (e.g. “You can have either chocolate or liver”).
• Lastly, subordinating conjunctions help link together an independent clause (a standalone sentence) and a dependent clause (a sentence that cannot stand alone) (e.g. “We went to the dog park, but we forgot our dog”).

h. Interjections
• Interjections are somewhat unique, so remember interjections are (a) usually only one word and (b) convey a certain emotion or emotional state (e.g. “Woah!” for surprise versus “Dang!” for frustration).
Commonly Made Mistakes

As a last category to watch out for on the HESI A2, there may be questions asking you to choose between words that are commonly mistaken for other words. We’ve included some of the common mistakes that you might see on the grammar section.

- **Their vs. There vs. They’re**
  
  The important thing is to remember the function of these words. “Their” is a possessive pronoun, meaning that it indicates who owns something—an easy mnemonic is to look for the “I,” because if an object belongs to me (or “I”), then it would be referred to as “their object.” “They’re,” on the other hand, is a contraction for “they are,” which can be simple if you remember that the “are” is just tacked on the end of the word (they’re). Lastly, “there” refers to a vague location, but it is easy to remember if you can distinguish the other two first.

- **Its vs. It’s**
  
  “It’s” is a contraction, short for “it is.” “Its” is a possessive pronoun. With just an apostrophe standing between these two forms, try to remember it like this: just like other possessive words (“mine” or “my”), “its” is a singular word with no conjunction or apostrophe. However, because the word “it’s” has an apostrophe to break it up, we can understand that it is two words connected together by that apostrophe.

- **Affect vs. Effect**
  
  This is a common mistake at all levels of education, but you can use this neat mnemonic to remember the distinction: “affect,” the word that begins with A, is the action, or the verb form. If you can remember that, then you can also remember that “effect” must be the noun version.

- **Lie vs. Lay**
  
  This one can be tricky, but it comes down to where the direct object (the thing being acted upon) is. If no object is being set down, then “lie” is the word you want (e.g. “He lies down on the sofa”). If there is an object that is being placed on something, then “lay” is the correct choice (e.g. “He lays the poster on the table.”).