

74 Ellipsis

1 Omitting a noun/pronoun

We often omit nouns or pronouns in the second of two clauses joined by *and*, *but* or *or* (► Unit 58.1):

Lucy went up to the counter and (she) asked for a coffee.

We needed information about the interviewees' professions and (information) about their educational background.



We do not leave out pronouns in subordinate clauses, e.g. those starting with a conjunction such as *that*, *if*, *when* or *although*:

✗ *That night she was so tired that fell asleep as soon as got into bed.*

✓ *That night she was so tired that **she** fell asleep as soon as **she** got into bed.*

But we can leave out subject pronouns at the beginning of short sentences in informal speech (► Unit 83.2).

2 Omitting a verb

We can often omit a verb to avoid repeating it:

She writes for a magazine and he (writes) for a daily newspaper.

We do not generally leave out the auxiliary or modal.

FORM	CHANGE	EXAMPLE
present/ past simple verb	omit main verb in <i>and</i> clauses	<i>She clearly liked the students, and they (liked) her.</i>
auxiliary + main verb	omit main verb	<i>Over 40 percent of those on benefits are looking for a job, or claim that they are (looking for one).</i>
modal + main verb	omit main verb	<i>Students working on doctorates may apply for funding from our organisation. Other researchers may (apply for funding) as well; we will consider all applications.</i>
compound verb forms	omit second/third auxiliary or only the main verb	<i>The problem was one that had been observed in other vessels and the crew should have been told about it, or at least the captain should (have been told)/should have (been told)/should have been (told).</i>

In coordinated clauses, where the second clause is very similar in pattern to the first, we can leave out the auxiliary as well as the main verb:

Since the divorce I've lived in London and my wife (has lived) in Cambridge.

We can introduce a new modal to add interpretation, but still not repeat the main verb:

*It wasn't clear at first whether the house owners had been away for long but the letters on the doormat indicated that they **must have** (been away).*

It is possible to omit both auxiliary and modal verbs in comparison clauses:

*House prices **have dropped** much less than share prices (have done)/than share prices **have** (done).*

*Sally **could play** the piano much better than her sister (could).*

3 Omitting infinitives or *wh*- clauses

We can omit an infinitive phrase when the meaning is clear, but we keep the *to*:

*He didn't win the competition even though he had expected **to** (win it).*

After most verbs which are followed by an infinitive with *to*, such as *ask*, *forget*, *promise*, *want* and *would like* in *if* or *wh*- clauses, we can also omit *to*:

*The new 'freedom pass' allows anyone over sixty to use the buses and trains free of charge **whenever they want** (to).*

In questions and embedded questions, we often use the question word only and omit the clause: *Dr Angelo said he was going on a call but he didn't say **where** (he was going).*