

ELLIPSIS

We often leave out words when the meaning can be understood without them; that's what ellipsis is about: avoiding repetition. It is a distinctive feature of speech (= spoken language). Here is a guidance about when to use ellipsis in informal speech.

- We often drop *unstressed beginnings* of sentence. This happens mainly with articles, possessives, personal pronouns, auxiliary verbs and 'be', demonstratives and introductory 'there is'.
 - *A knive and [a] fork.*
 - *[The] Car's giving trouble again.*
 - *'What's the matter?' [My] Stomach's sore.'*
 - *[She] Doesn't know what she's talking about.*
 - *[Have you] Seen any good film lately?*
 - *[Does] Anybody want more?*
 - *[I'm] Getting in your way, am I?*
 - *[You're] Dutch, aren't you?*
 - *[There is] Nobody at home.*
- We only drop pronouns before **stressed** words:
 - ***Like** your dress.*
 - ***May** see you tomorrow.*
 - ***Must** dash.*
 - ***Won't** work, you know.*
 - ***Haven't** seen her*
 - ***Can't** swim.*

BUT NOT:

- *Have seen him *[I have seen him = I've seen him]*
- *Can swim *[I can swim]*
- *Am coming tomorrow *[I am / I'm coming tomorrow]*

[!] Affirmative auxiliaries are *unstressed*.

- We can drop auxiliary verbs before personal pronouns, except 'I' and 'it':
 - *[Are...] You tired?*
 - *[Is...] She married?*
 - *[Will...] You be here tomorrow?*
 - *[Does...] She want something?*
 - *[Are...] You coming?*

BUT NOT:

- * I late? *['Am I late?' = 'Late, am I?']*
- * It raining? *['Is it raining?' = 'Raining, is it?']*

- We often use an auxiliary verb instead of repeating a longer expression:
 - *'Get up!' - 'I am.'*
 - *He said he'd write but he **hasn't**.*
 - *I can't see you today, but I **can** tomorrow.*

If there is no auxiliary to repeat, we use 'do':

- 'I hope you enjoyed yourself.' 'I certainly **did**, thanks.'
- She said she would phone and she **did**.
- They like jazz, and I **do** as well.

- We often use 'to' for the infinitive of a repeated verb, if the meaning is clear:

- 'Are you moving?' - 'We hope **to**.'
- 'Come and dance.' - 'I don't want **to**.'
- I don't play tennis, but I used **to**.
- I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings; I didn't mean **to**.

After '**want**' and '**would like**', 'to' cannot normally be omitted:

- 'Come and have a drink.' - 'I'd like **to**.'
- My parents encouraged me to be a doctor, but I didn't want **to**.

However, 'to' is often dropped when 'want' or 'like' are introduced by such subordinators as '**if... / when .../ as ...**'

- 'Can I help?' '**If you like**.'
- You can phone **whenever you want**.
- Come and stay **as long as you like**.
- I've decided to do **what I like**.

- Ellipsis of the *subject* in complex clauses.

Ellipsis of subject can be used in coordinate clauses [those introduced by 'and' and 'or'] when both clauses share the same subject:

- I went there **and** [I] got it.
- I may see you tomorrow **or** [I] may phone later in the day.

This feature also applies, though somewhat less frequently, to 'but':

- They may complain **but** [they] haven't said anything yet

It also seems acceptable for the conjunct 'yet' [=however]:

- They didn't like it, **yet** [they] said nothing.

Subordinators and other conjunctions do not allow ellipsis of the subject of the clause they introduce even if the subject is co-referential with that of the preceding clause.

- The conjunction '*that*' is often left out in an informal style. This happens mostly after very common verbs [*believe, expect, hear, know, say, suggest, tell, think...*] and adjectives [*glad, funny, sorry, surprised...*]

We can also leave out 'that', in an informal style, after 'so', 'such', 'now', 'provided', 'the way...'

- Come in quietly **so** she doesn't hear you.
- We went out **the same way** we'd got in.
- You can borrow my bike **provided** you bring it back.
- They were having **such** a nice time they didn't want to leave.