

# Grammar Matters

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## Chapter 1

# Why is Proper Grammar so Important?

**1. Proper grammar is essential to being understood.** Writing is an essential form of daily communication. Between emails, text messages, reports, papers, and tweets, everyone writes. Proper grammar ensures that your message is not lost. You might have the greatest message in the world, but that message will lose its impact if you litter the message with grammatical errors. A misplaced comma or a typo might not seem like a big deal, but it can change the entire meaning of your sentence. For example, imagine a friend asked which company you used for your new carpet installation, and you responded with one of the following emails.

- **We used Lowes for our carpet installation.** Great! The message is clear.
- **We sued Lowes for our carpet installation.** The message is clear, but the meaning is very different. Two letters were reversed in the word *used*, and it changed the entire meaning. Typos can sometimes form correctly spelled words with very different meanings.

**2. Correct grammar reveals the writer's attention to detail, competency, and professionalism.** If it seems like the writer is too distracted or sloppy to learn the rules of grammar, it begs the question, where else are they distracted and sloppy. Your written words are representing you. You want the reader to focus on your message and not your mistakes.

Proper grammar is essential for formal writing in the academic world and in the business world. In school, many instructors will deduct points from an assignment for each grammatical error. Those points add up quickly and can lower your grade significantly. In business, resumes and cover letters are your tickets to an interview. If your cover letter is filled with grammar errors, it is not likely that you will even receive an interview. Kyle Wiens, CEO of iFixit, said:

*"If it takes someone more than 20 years to notice how to properly use "it's," then that's not a learning curve I'm comfortable with. So, even in this hyper-competitive market, I will pass on a great programmer who cannot write. Applicants who don't think writing is important are likely to think lots of other (important) things also aren't important. After all, sloppy is as sloppy does."*

**3. In business writing you are representing your company and yourself.** No company wants their employees to send out messages filled with grammar errors. It makes the company look sloppy and unprofessional. Studies have shown that a single spelling mistake on a website can cut online sales revenue in half. It might seem like a small error, but it reveals the company's attention to detail. In February 2014 Bing announced that websites containing grammar errors would show up lower on the search rankings than companies with proper grammar. Companies want to appear in the top ten rankings on search engines because it directs more business to their own website. Duane Forrester of Bing said, "Why would an engine show a page of content with errors higher in the rankings when other pages of error free content exist to serve the searcher?"

**4. The ability to write well puts the writer in charge.** By prioritizing your ideas, you can guide the reader through your writing, emphasizing points that you deem important. By doing this, you can emphasize your main point.

## **Common Errors in Business Writing**

**1. Effective writers should not depend on spell-check programs to catch all of the proofreading errors.** Spell-check will catch spelling errors, typos, and basic grammar errors; however, it cannot replace concentrated proofreading. Spell-check only catches words that are not in the English language. If your typo happens to create a word in the English language, spell-check will not catch it. The meaning might be completely different. Spell-check does not know the difference between a person *definitely attending* or *defiantly attending*, between being stranded on a *desert island* or a *dessert island*, or between *my dear* or *my deer*. Both options are spelled correctly, but they have dramatically different meanings.

Proofread your documents thoroughly. It is helpful to read your documents out loud. If you read it in your head, you often read what you meant to say instead of the information you wrote. Have someone else proofread your document too.

**2. Effective writing should be comprehensible and enjoyable to your target audience.** Have you ever become frustrated reading an instruction manual because the directions were confusing? Clearly, the writer did not accurately gauge the target audience. If the reader is throwing the manual down in frustration, then the writer has failed. How can you avoid this?

**Do not use technical terms or acronyms unless you are certain that the reader is familiar with these terms.** If you must use the term, be sure to define it in your document. You want your message to be clear and not frustrating to your reader.

**Do not use slang, text language, hashtags, emoticons, or jargon in formal writing.** Many people do not understand these terms, and find it frustrating to receive correspondence containing it. This type of communication is acceptable in informal communication, but is too casual and informal for business communication or academic writing. Imagine receiving the following email from your manager, “OMG! U will b xited 4 2morow! :)” Would you take your manager seriously? The message is too casual, and makes the writer look amateurish and unprofessional.

Article 1 - *Trackerpress*: “Why is it important to use correct grammar?”  
<http://www.trackerpress.com/reference/why-is-correct-grammar-important.php>

Article 2 - *USA Today*: “Wanna get hired? Work on your grammar”  
<http://www.usatodayeducate.com/staging/index.php/career/wanna-get-hired-work-on-your-grammar>

Article 3 - *Huffington Post*: “Kyle Wiens of iFixit Won’t Hire the Grammatically Challenged”  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/03/kyle-wiens-ifixit-grammar\\_n\\_1937902.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/03/kyle-wiens-ifixit-grammar_n_1937902.html)

## The Eight Parts of Speech

Before you can play a sport, you must learn the rules of the game. The same theory applies to writing with proper grammar. Before you can write effectively, you must learn the rules. Let’s meet the starting lineup.

### Nouns

A noun names a person, place, thing, feeling, or idea. Nouns can be as specific as Starbucks coffee or as abstract as freedom and happiness. Nouns are broken into two groups: proper nouns and common nouns. **Proper nouns are capitalized**, and they refer to specific things. **Common nouns are not capitalized**, and they refer to general things.

Nouns	Proper	Common
<b>People</b>	Fred Smith	student
	Dr. Sam Jones	doctor
	Mrs. Mary Johnson	instructor
<b>Places</b>	Seattle	city
	Sea-Tac Airport	airport

	United States	country
<b>Things</b>	iPhone	cell phone
	New York Times	newspaper
	Thanksgiving, Christmas	holidays

## **Pronouns**

Pronouns take the place of a noun in a sentence and provide efficiency to your writing. Without pronouns, writing becomes bogged down in nouns. For example:

**Without pronouns:** Mary sent Fred a text message to remind Fred to pick up dinner for Mary and Fred. (Difficult to read)

**With pronouns:** Mary sent Fred a text message to remind him to pick up dinner for them. (More efficient)

Pronouns can act as the subject of a sentence (I, he, she, they, it) or the object of a verb (me, them, us). Pronouns will be covered more in Chapter 4.

## **Verbs**

Verbs show the action or a state of being. **Every sentence must have a verb to be complete.** Without verbs, the subjects of sentences wouldn't be doing anything. Verbs are further broken down into three categories: action verbs, helping verbs, and linking verbs.

**Action verbs** describe the action of the subject. *Run, jump, climb, read, think, and cook* are all examples of action verbs.

**Linking verbs** describe a state of being of the subject. The action is more descriptive and connective. *Is, are, seems, look, become, and feel* are all linking verbs.

**Helping verbs** do not show action in a sentence. They do exactly what their name implies. They help other verbs. Helping verbs work with a main verb to form a verb phrase. Common helping verbs are the following: *am, are, were, has, was, will, have, and had.*

- Mary *has* passed everyone in the marathon.
- Mary *will* win the race.

Verbs will be covered in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. For now, it is important to be able to identify if a sentence has a verb. A sentence is not complete without a verb.

## **Adjectives**

Adjectives are words that describe nouns and pronouns. Without adjectives, our language would be flat and boring. Adjectives often add information that explains which one, how many, what color, and what kind.

- *Orange* cat (what color?)
- *One* cat (how many?)
- *Fluffy* cat (which one?)
- *Siamese* cat (what kind?)

These are all adjectives that are working to describe the cat. Adjectives usually appear in front of the nouns and pronouns that they describe, but they can also appear after a linking verb.

- The cat is *orange*.
- The cat is *fluffy*.

*A*, *an*, and *the* form a unique group of adjectives called **articles**. These will be discussed further in Chapter 7. For now, just know that articles are part of the adjective team.

## **Adverbs**

Adverbs are words that describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Adverbs describe how, when, where, or to what extent the action takes place.

- Mary ran *quickly* to win the race. (How did she run?)
- Mary's legs will be sore *tomorrow*. (When will her legs be sore?)
- Mary's family waited for her *there*. (Where did they wait?)
- She was *very* relieved to have a few days of rest. (To what extent?)

Adverbs often end in *-ly*, but some of the most common adverbs do not. *There*, *then*, *now*, *sometimes*, *very*, *today*, and *inside* are all common adverbs that do not end in *-ly*. Adverbs (not adjectives) describe and modify verbs. The word *verb* is even inside the word *adverb* in case you forget.

## **Prepositions**

Prepositions join nouns and pronouns to other words in the sentence. Prepositions show a relationship between words. Prepositions often show a relationship of space and time.

The name itself has the word *position* in it. A preposition is a short word that will reveal a position in time or space. If you lost your keys, think of all of the places (positions) your keys could be. They could be *on* the table, *under* the couch, *between* the books,

*with* your gym clothes, *at* the office, or *behind* the refrigerator. A preposition can also reveal a more abstract relationship.

- Mary is *against* the new law, but Fred is *for* it.

Prepositions are usually very short words. Some of the most common prepositions are *at, by, for, from, in, of to,* and *with*.

## **Conjunctions**

Conjunctions are the big joiners of the grammar world. They join words, phrases, and clauses. The most common conjunctions are *and, but,* and *or*.

- Mary *and* Fred enjoy drinking coffee.
- Mary drank coffee, *but* Fred drank tea.
- Either Fred *or* Mary needs to run to the store.

## **Interjections**

Interjections are the interrupters of the group. Interjections express strong feelings and emotions. When these expressions stand alone as a sentence, an exclamation point is used. When the emotion is not as strong, the interjection is set apart with a comma.

- *Wow!* Did you see the race? (Interjection standing alone as a sentence)
- *Oh well,* I had planned to order the soup, but they are sold out. (Interjection set apart with a comma)

Interjections show strong emotion and excitement. Avoid overusing interjections in formal writing. Too many interjections and exclamation points give the impression that the writer is shouting.

## **Team Grammar**

Let's review our grammar team.

**Nouns/Pronouns:** represent people, places, things, and ideas

**Verbs:** show the action

**Adjectives/Adverbs:** the describers

**Prepositions/Conjunctions:** the joiners

**Interjections:** the interrupters

## Chapter 2

# Sentences

To write effectively, it is important to understand how to write complete sentences.

**What is a sentence?** All sentences must begin with a capital letter and end with a punctuation mark. This is a grammar rule that does not have any exceptions. In addition to a capital letter and a punctuation mark, a complete sentence must contain a subject, a predicate, and it must make sense. The **simple subject** is a noun or pronoun that is performing the action in the sentence. A quick way to find the simple subject is to ask whom or what the sentence is about. The **simple predicate** is the verb or verb phrase that explains what the subject is doing. The predicate gives the sentence action or shows a state of being.

Simple Subject	Simple Predicate
Mary	ran.
Cars	drive.

These are very basic sentences, but they are still complete sentences. They fulfill all the requirements for being a complete sentence. Most people do not spend their time writing only two-word sentences. Our language would be very choppy and inefficient if we spoke this way all of the time. What happens when we add other words to the sentence?

Complete Subject	Complete Predicate
<u>Mary</u> and <u>Sarah</u>	<u>ran</u> the race.



<u>Cars</u> on the freeway	<u>drive</u> slowly during rush hour.
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The **complete subject** is the simple subject and all of its modifiers. The **complete predicate** is the simple predicate plus all of its modifiers. The simple subjects and simple predicates are underlined. The simple subject can be more than one noun. In the first sentence, both *Sarah* and *Mary* are the simple subjects of the sentence. In order to be a complete sentence, the sentence must make sense. The sentence must form a complete thought on its own. If the sentence does not make sense without adding some additional words, then you have written a fragment.

### Complete Sentence Checklist

A sentence must have all of the following to be complete:

1. A sentence must start with a capital letter and end with a punctuation mark.
2. A sentence must have a verb.
3. A sentence must have a subject.
4. A sentence must make sense.

### Sentence Types

All sentences must begin with a capital letter, but they can end with one of three different types of punctuation. The punctuation mark is based upon what type of sentence it is. There are four types of sentences: statements, questions, commands, and exclamations.

**Statements** A statement tells something and ends with a period. Sometimes these are called declarative sentences because the sentence declares something.

- It is raining outside.
- I left my umbrella in my car.

**Questions** A direct question asks something and needs to end with a question mark.

- Is it still raining?
- Is it going to rain tomorrow?

**Commands** A command gives an order and ends with a period. If the command is very strong, then it can end with an exclamation point. Most of the time, the subject in a command is not stated. Instead, it is understood that the subject is *you*.

- Check the weather for tomorrow. (You should check the weather for tomorrow.)
- Take your umbrella. (You should take your umbrella.)

**Exclamations** Exclamations show strong feelings or excitement. An exclamation can be a complete sentence, but it does not have to be a complete sentence. An exclamation does not have to have a subject and a predicate. In exclamations, often the subject and the predicate are implied.

- Wow! It is raining very hard!
- Oh no! He forgot his umbrella!

Do not overuse exclamations in formal writing. Exclamations show a lot of emotion and give the impression that the writer is shouting.

## **Phrases and Clauses**

### **Phrases**

A phrase is a group of words without a subject and a verb. Phrases are part of a sentence, but they cannot stand alone as complete sentences.

<b>Phrases</b>	
on the roof	prepositional phrase
from another planet	prepositional phrase
could have gone	verb phrase
to study the chapter	infinitive phrase
the coffee that she drank	noun phrase

It isn't necessary to memorize each type of phrase, but it is important to recognize that each of these phrases could not be a complete sentence on their own.

### **Clauses**

A clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb. They come in two forms: independent clauses and dependent clauses. **Independent clauses** can stand on their own as sentences. A simple sentence is one independent clause. An independent clause has a subject, a verb, and it makes sense.

A **dependent clause** also has a subject and a verb, but it does not make sense on its own. A dependent clause is a type of sentence fragment. Dependent clauses often begin with the words *because, although, after, when, if, and as*. These are called subordinating conjunctions, and they are covered further in Chapter 9.

**The following words and phrases are often used to introduce dependent clauses:**

after	even though	unless
although	if	until
as	no matter how	when
as if	now that	whenever
as though	once	where
because	than	wherever
before	that	whether
even if	though	while

If you begin a sentence with one of these words, it can turn an independent clause into a dependent clause. Once the clause is dependent, it is no longer a complete sentence. A dependent clause is a fragment, and great writers avoid fragments. Dependent clauses leave the reader waiting for the rest of the sentence. It is the equivalent of setting up a great joke and leaving off the punch line.

Independent Clause	Dependent Clause
The cat ran up the stairs.	Because the cat ran up the stairs.
The sun came out at noon.	Although the sun came out at noon.
The students arrived on time.	When the students arrived on time.

**How can you fix dependent clauses?** There are two ways to fix a dependent clause. You can remove the subordinating conjunction (*although, because, if, when*). Often just removing that word will reveal an independent clause.

Another option is to attach the dependent clause to an independent clause. A dependent clause needs an independent clause in order for the sentence to make sense. In the following examples, the dependent clause precedes the independent clause. Notice that the dependent clause does not make sense as its own sentence. When the dependent clause joins an independent clause, the entire sentence makes sense.

Dependent Clause	Independent Clause
When the students arrived,	the instructor handed out notes.
After she ordered,	she waited patiently for her coffee.
If Fred cooks dinner,	Mary washes the dishes.

**Punctuating Dependent Clauses** Did you notice the punctuation in the examples? If a dependent clause appears before the independent clause in the sentence, add a comma to separate the two clauses. If the dependent clause appears after the independent clause, no comma is needed.

Independent Clause	Dependent Clause
The instructor handed out notes	when the students arrived.
She waited patiently for her coffee	after she ordered.
Mary washes the dishes	if Fred cooks dinner.

## Sentence Varieties

Have you ever written a paragraph and realized that every sentence looked the same? That is a quick way to lull your reader to sleep. One way to fix the problem is to add some variety to your sentence structure. Sentences come in four different varieties:

simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences.

A **simple sentence** is exactly what its name implies; it is simple. A simple sentence contains one independent clause. Simple sentences can be long or short, but they still contain only one complete thought.

- Mary ran to the park. (one independent clause)
- Sarah went on vacation. (one independent clause)
- Dave's favorite places to visit are Paris, Las Vegas, New York, and Boston. (one independent clause)

Simple sentences contain only one independent clause. Children's books are written with simple sentences because they are easy to understand. Why do we need other sentence varieties? Imagine that you received the following email:

- I went for a run. Now I am tired. I ran five miles.

While this email is grammatically correct and easy to understand, it sounds choppy and stilted. Other sentence varieties help break up the choppiness of simple sentences. Occasionally the choppiness of a simple sentence is exactly what the paragraph needs. The choppiness can add emphasis to that sentence when added between other sentence varieties.

- I went for a run, and now I am tired. I ran five miles. (Simple sentence following compound sentence adds emphasis to simple sentence)

A **compound sentence** contains two independent clauses with related topics. Compound sentences can be punctuated in three different ways. Two independent clauses can be joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*). Two independent clauses can also be joined together with a semicolon. Another option for joining two independent clauses is to use a conjunctive adverb. A conjunctive adverb is an adverb that is acting like a conjunction by gluing together two independent clauses. Conjunctive adverbs are preceded by a semicolon and followed with a comma. We will look at them closer in Chapter 9.

- Sarah flew to Hawaii on Tuesday, but her suitcase arrived on Friday. (*Two independent clauses joined with a coordinating conjunction and a comma.*)
- Sarah flew to Hawaii on Tuesday; her suitcase arrived on Friday. (*Two independent clauses joined with a semicolon.*)
- Sarah flew to Hawaii on Tuesday; however, her suitcase arrived on Friday. (*Two independent clauses joined with a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb.*)

A trick to remember all of the coordinating conjunctions is the acronym **FANBOYS**. Each letter represents one of the coordinating conjunctions: **F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et, **S**o.

A **complex sentence** contains one independent clause and one dependent clause. The punctuation changes depending on the order of the clauses. If the dependent clause appears first, a comma is needed after the dependent clause. If the independent clause appears first in the sentence, then no comma is needed.

- Because Sarah’s suitcase was lost, she had to go shopping. (*Dependent clause appears first in the sentence, so a comma is needed between the clauses.*)
- Sarah had to go shopping because her suitcase was lost. (*Independent clause appears first in the sentence, so no comma is needed between the clauses.*)

A **compound-complex sentence** contains at least two independent clauses and one dependent clause. These sentences can be very long, so do not overuse them.

- Although Sarah’s luggage was lost, she enjoyed her vacation in Hawaii; she is already planning her next trip.

## Sentence Faults: Fragments, Comma Splices, and Run-Ons

### Fragments

Fragments are incomplete sentences. As the name implies, a fragment is just a piece of the sentence. In formal writing, sentence fragments are frowned upon. A fragment is often disguised as a complete sentence, but it is lacking one of the requirements for being a complete sentence.

<b>Fragment</b>	<i>After the restaurant closed.</i> They went to a movie.
<b>Fixed</b>	After the restaurant closed, they went to a movie.
	The fragment is fixed by joining it to the independent clause.
<b>Fragment</b>	Mary plays many sports. <i>Such as soccer, softball, and lacrosse.</i>
<b>Fixed</b>	Mary plays many sports such as soccer, softball, and lacrosse.
	The fragment is fixed by joining it to the independent clause.

<b>Fragment</b>	<i>Due on Saturday, May 17.</i>
<b>Fixed</b>	The assignment is due on Saturday, May 17.
	The fragment is fixed by adding a subject and a helping verb.

Fragments can sneak into your writing because they are often punctuated as if they were complete sentences. Some sentence fragments can be fixed by changing the punctuation and joining the fragment to a complete sentence. Other sentence fragments require adding a verb or a subject to make them complete. How can you tell if your sentence is a fragment? Run the sentence through the Complete Sentence Checklist located at the beginning of the chapter. If the sentence does not meet all of the requirements, then it is a sentence fragment.

**Fragments are often used in newspaper headlines and advertisements to grab the reader's attention. It is acceptable to use a sentence fragment in these cases.**

## Comma Splices

Commas are such a handy piece of punctuation that sometimes writers try to give them powers that they do not have. When two independent clauses are stuck together with a comma, it is called a **comma splice**. Commas do not have the power to fuse two independent clauses together. Luckily for writers, there are several ways to fix a comma splice.

- Mary ordered coffee, Fred ordered a scone. (**Comma splice**)
- Mary ordered coffee, and Fred ordered a scone. (**Fixed by adding a coordinating conjunction**)
- Mary ordered coffee. Fred ordered a scone. (**Fixed by changing the sentence to two independent sentences**)
- Mary ordered coffee; Fred ordered a scone. (**Fixed by changing the comma to a semicolon**)
- Mary ordered coffee; however, Fred ordered a scone. (**Fixed by adding a conjunctive adverb, a semicolon, and a comma**)

## Run-On Sentences

A run-on sentence does not mean that it is a long sentence. In fact, a run-on sentence can be very short. A run-on sentence occurs when two independent clauses appear in a sentence without proper internal punctuation. A run-on sentence just keeps going, when it should be slowed down with punctuation. Run-on sentences can be fixed with the same group of tricks that fixed the comma splice.

- Fred enjoys cooking he does not enjoy cleaning. (**run-on sentence**)
- Fred enjoys cooking. He does not enjoy cleaning. (**Fixed by changing the sentence to two independent sentences**)
- Fred enjoys cooking, but he does not enjoy cleaning. (**Fixed by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction**)
- Fred enjoys cooking; he does not enjoy cleaning. (**Fixed by adding a semicolon between the independent clauses**)
- Fred enjoys cooking; however, he does not enjoy cleaning. (**Fixed by adding a semicolon, a conjunctive adverb, and a comma**)

## Chapter 3

# Nouns

A **noun** represents a person, place, thing, or idea. Nouns can name a specific place, such as *Seattle*, or a general place, such as a *city*. Nouns can also name feelings and thoughts. *Excitement, fear, anger, freedom, and happiness* are all nouns. Nouns work as the subjects of sentences, as the objects of verbs, and as the objects of prepositions. Nouns are divided into two categories: common nouns and proper nouns.

**Common nouns** name general people, places, and things. *City, coffee, lake, kayak, tree, flower, and shoe* are all common nouns. Common nouns are not capitalized.

**Proper nouns** name specific people, places, and things. *Mary, Fred, Seattle, New York City, and Italy* are all proper nouns.

Proper nouns	Common nouns
The White House	house
Mt. Rainier	mountain
Pacific Ocean	ocean
Thanksgiving	holiday
Friday	day

If you get confused, just ask yourself if the noun is referring to something specific. Nouns that name specific people, places, and things are capitalized.



## Making Nouns Plural

A **singular noun** names one person, place, or thing. *Student* is an example of a singular noun. What happens if more than one student shows up in the sentence? The singular noun *student* becomes the plural noun *students*. A **plural noun** names more than one person, place, or thing. Do not use apostrophes to make nouns plural. This is one of the most common grammatical errors.

- Most regular nouns become plural by adding an **s**.

tree	trees
sock	socks
book	books

- Nouns that end in **s, x, z, ch, sh, or z**, add **es**.

dress	dresses
tax	taxes
lunch	lunches
wash	washes

- Nouns that end in **y** are formed two ways.

1. When letter before **y** is a vowel, add **s**.

valley	valleys
key	keys
boy	boys
day	days

2. Nouns ending with a consonant and y are formed by changing the **y** to an **i** and adding **es**.

city	cities
grocery	groceries
library	libraries
blueberry	blueberries

- Nouns that end in **o** are formed two ways.

1. When the letter before the **o** is a vowel, add s. Musical terms ending in **o** are formed by adding an **s**.

kilo	kilos
tempo	tempos
cello	cellos

2. When the letter before the **o** is a consonant, no standard rule applies. It is helpful to memorize the plural forms of words you use regularly. If you are unsure, you should always check a current dictionary.

potato	potatoes
logo	logos

- Nouns that end in **f** or **fe** do not follow any standard rules. It is helpful to memorize the plural forms of the words you use regularly and check a dictionary if you are unsure.

life	lives
calf	calves
leaf	leaves
belief	beliefs

- Irregular nouns become plural by changing their spelling. Check a dictionary if you are unsure of the plural form. It is helpful to memorize the plural form of the most common irregular nouns.

foot	feet
child	children
man	men
tooth	teeth

- Some nouns do not change when they become plural. These nouns have the same spelling when they are singular and plural.

sheep  
trout  
salmon  
moose

**When dictionaries show two different forms of the plural noun, the preferred form is shown first.**

## **Family names and other proper nouns**

When *the* appears before the last name, the last name is always plural. For example, *the Johnsons will vacation in California this year*. Holiday cards often show how many people do not understand this rule. The exception to this rule is if the family name is followed by the word *family*. The word *family* makes the proper noun plural. For example, *Johnson* is singular, but *the Johnson family* is plural.

**Proper nouns become plural by adding an s or es to the ending.** If the proper noun ends in s, x, z, ch, or sh, then the plural is formed by adding es.

Lopez	Lopezes	The Lopezes	The Lopez family
Woods	Woodses	The Woodses	The Woods family
Ontario	Ontarios	The Ontarios	The Ontario family

**All other proper nouns become plural by adding s.**

October	Octobers
Smith	Smiths
Pepsi	Pepsis
Disneyland	Disneylands

## **Compound nouns**

Compound nouns are two or more words that are combined to form a single noun. *Editor-in-chief* and *vice president* are both compound nouns. Sometimes compound nouns contain hyphens, but most do not.

*Sister-in-law* is a compound noun. I have more than one sister-in-law, so how do we make that plural? The key is to figure out which part of the compound noun is the main noun. The *law* part of the compound describes what kind of sister. The main noun is *sister*. The correct plural form is *sisters-in-law*.

brother-in-law	brothers-in-law
editor-in-chief	editors-in-chief
vice president	vice presidents

If the compound noun does not have a main noun, then the final part of the compound noun is made plural.

start-up	start-ups
eight-year-old	eight-year-olds

Some compound nouns have two acceptable plural forms. In the dictionary, the preferred spelling is shown first, but both are considered acceptable.

attorney general	attorneys general	or attorney generals
teaspoonful	teaspoonfuls	or teaspoonsful

## **Abbreviations, degrees, numerals, and alphabet letters**

Numerals, academic degrees, abbreviations, and capital alphabet letters (except A, I, M, and U) become plural by adding a lowercase s.

12s	1990s
MBA's	all B's and C's

All lowercase letters and the capital letters A, I, M, and U are made plural by adding an apostrophe and s. The apostrophe is added for clarity. This is the only time that a plural is formed by adding an apostrophe and s. If you did not add the apostrophe, the words might be confused as the words *us*, *as*, and *is*.

dot your i's	all A's and B's
M's	U's

Abbreviations for units of measurement often have identical singular and plural forms.

oz.	ounce or ounces
ft.	foot or feet
km	kilometer or kilometers

Some measurements have more than one plural form. In addition, the measurement abbreviations are acceptable with or without periods. The important thing is to remain consistent with your measurement throughout your document. Do not switch between two plural forms of the abbreviation. That causes confusion. Pick one and use it consistently in your document.

lb. or lbs. (without periods is also acceptable)	pounds
qt. or qts. (without periods is also acceptable)	quarts
yd. or yds. (without periods is also acceptable)	yards

## **Possessive Nouns**

Possessive nouns show ownership, origin, or time. To make a noun possessive, you add an apostrophe and s.

- Fred's motorcycle (ownership)
- Hawaii's weather (origin)
- five years' time (time)

Writers can also show possession by using a prepositional phrase instead of a possessive noun.

- The motorcycle belonging to Fred
- The weather of Hawaii
- The time of five years

Both options are grammatically correct. It is important to know how to form a possessive noun both ways. In most cases, it is more efficient to use the possessive noun. Some sentences require knowledge of both tricks for forming the possessive. **Back-to-back possessive nouns** can create awkward and confusing sentences. They are grammatically correct, but they sound awkward. To avoid confusing sentences, rewrite one of the possessives as a prepositional phrase.

- My sister’s boss’s recommendation (awkward and wordy)
- The recommendation of my sister’s boss (improved)

If it sounds awkward and confusing, rewrite the sentence.

## **Using the Apostrophe**

Apostrophes have two purposes: to show possession and to show missing letters in a contraction. Apostrophes never make nouns plural. How do you know where to use an apostrophe?

### **1. Look for possessive words**

Usually the nouns appear together in a sentence, and the first noun shows ownership.

- Mary’s shoes
- the instructor’s notes
- Hawaii’s beaches

### **2. Reverse the nouns**

If you are not sure if the nouns are possessive, try reversing the nouns. Use the second noun to make a prepositional phrase.

- The shoes belonging to Mary
- The notes of the instructor
- The beaches of Hawaii

### **3. Determine if the noun is singular or plural**

People often get confused about where to put the apostrophe. It depends on two things: whether the noun is singular or plural and if the noun ends in s.

	<b>Singular possessive noun</b>	<b>Plural possessive noun</b>
<b>Noun does not</b>	<b>Add an apostrophe and s</b>	<b>Add an apostrophe and s</b>

<b>end in s</b>	student's assignments	
	woman's shoes	women's shoes
	child's toy	children's toy
<b>Ends in s</b>	<b>Add an apostrophe and s</b>	<b>Add an apostrophe only</b>
		students' assignments
	actress's costume	actresses' costumes
	witness's testimony	witnesses' testimony

**TIP:** When making plural, possessive nouns, it is helpful to make the noun plural first. Once the noun is plural, then you can determine how to make it possessive.

**Do not confuse possessive nouns with contractions.** A contraction is a shortened form of one or two words. An apostrophe is used in place of the missing letters. *Cannot* becomes *can't*. *Do not* becomes *don't*. The most confusing one of all is *it's*. *It's* is a contraction of the words *it is* or *it has*. *It's* is not possessive, it is a contraction. *Its* is a possessive pronoun. *It's* is a contraction.

## Challenges with Possessive Nouns

**Descriptive nouns** describe the noun, but they do not show ownership. Do not use an apostrophe. The key is to look for ownership. If the noun is only describing, and not showing ownership, then no apostrophe is needed. For example, *Human Resources Department* is a descriptive noun. *Human Resources* does not own the department, but it is describing the type of department.

- United States Army (not United States' Army)
- Sales Department (not Sales' Department)

**Compound nouns** become possessive by adding an apostrophe or an apostrophe s to the end of the compound word.

- Mother-in-law's (singular and possessive)
- Sisters-in-law's (plural and possessive)
- Start-ups' (plural and possessive)

**Family names** become possessive by following the same rules as other nouns. Singular names form their possessive by adding an apostrophe and s. Plural names already end in s. Add an apostrophe to make the plural name possessive.

Singular Name	Singular Possessive	Plural Possessive
Mr. Jones	Mr. Jones's house	the Joneses' house
Mrs. Johnson	Mrs. Johnson's yacht	the Johnsons' vacation

This rule is broken a lot. Holiday cards are often signed, “*Happy Holidays from the Smith’s!*” It is incorrect. Apostrophes make nouns possessive, not plural.

**Abbreviations** become possessive by following the same rules as other nouns. If the abbreviation is singular, then you add an apostrophe and s. If the abbreviation is plural and ends in s, then you only add the apostrophe.

- NBC’s Olympic coverage (singular, does not end in s)
- Both CEOs’ signatures were required (plural and ends in s)
- CBS’s fall schedule (singular and ends in s)

**Company and organization names** that include possessives may not use correct grammar. It is important to use the company’s legal name, even if it uses incorrect grammar. Consult the company’s website for their preferred spelling.

- Starbucks Coffee
- McDonald’s
- Macy’s (uses a star in place of the apostrophe)

**Time and money** can show possession, and they need to be punctuated properly.

- one year’s experience (the experience of one year)
- five years’ experience (the experience of five years)
- one dollar’s worth (the worth of one dollar)
- twenty dollars’ worth (the worth of twenty dollars)
- today’s class (the class of today)

If the possessive construction seems awkward, then it is perfectly acceptable to use the prepositional phrase instead. Both options are grammatically correct.

**Incomplete possessives** happen when the second noun in the possessive construction is implied and not stated. If you choose to leave off the second noun, make sure that the reader knows what word you implied. When in doubt, don't leave the word off.

- The family will meet at Mary's for the party. (Mary's *house* is implied.)
- This year's price is better than last year's. (Last year's *price* is implied.)

**Compound possession** happens when two nouns own something together or separately. It can confuse the best of us. If two or more nouns share ownership, then you only need one apostrophe and s.

- Mary and Fred's dog is white. (combined ownership)
- Sarah and Theresa's house has a pool. (combined ownership)

If two or more nouns have separate ownership, then both nouns need to be possessive.

- Mary's and Fred's suitcases were lost. (Separate ownership. They both lost their suitcases.)
- Sarah's and Theresa's cats are striped. (Separate ownership. Sarah and Theresa each own a striped cat.)

**Academic degrees** should be written as possessives. These degrees are not capitalized unless they are used as an abbreviation.

- A bachelor's degree is required for the position.
- Mary earned a master's degree in biology.
- He has a bachelor's and a master's. (possessive form is required even if the word degree is implied)

### **Apostrophes make nouns possessive, not plural.**

Do not rely on computer software to catch errors with plural and possessive nouns. The placement of the apostrophe can change the meaning of the sentence. The following two sentences are both grammatically correct, but they have different meanings.

- The student's cupcake smelled delicious. (One student with one cupcake)
- The students' cupcake smelled delicious. (More than one student sharing one cupcake.)
  
- The teacher began class by calling the students names. (Very rude!)
- The teacher began class by calling the students' names. (Much better!)



## Chapter 4

# Pronouns

Pronouns take the place of a noun in a sentence. This makes writing and speaking much more efficient.

- **Fred asked Mary if Mary could pick Fred up at Fred's office.** (Without pronouns)
- **Fred asked Mary if she could pick him up at his office.** (Pronouns are underlined.)

The first sentence is grammatically correct, but it is very inefficient. It's also a bit confusing and boring. The noun that a pronoun is referring to is called the **antecedent**.

- **Fred bought *flowers* and he gave *them* to Mary.**

The pronoun *he* refers to the antecedent *Fred*. The pronoun *them* refers to the antecedent *flowers*. If you are using a pronoun, it is important that the antecedent is clear.

## Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns can be sorted into three different cases: subjective case, objective case, and possessive case. Most pronouns have a different form depending on who is speaking or being spoken to.

	<b>Subjective Case</b>		<b>Objective Case</b>		<b>Possessive Case</b>	
	Sing.	Plural	Sing.	Plural	Sing.	Plural
<b>First Person</b> (person speaking)	I	we	me	us	my mine	our ours
<b>Second Person</b> (person is speaking to you)	you	you	you	you	your yours	your yours
<b>Third Person</b> (person or thing spoken of)	he she it	they	him her it	them	his, her hers, its	theirs theirs

**Subjective case pronouns** perform the action of the verb. Verbs show the action of the sentence, and the subject shows who or what is performing that action. If the subject is a pronoun, then the pronoun must be in the subjective case. Only subjective case pronouns can work as the subjects of verbs. If a pronoun appears as the subject of a sentence, then it must be in the subjective case.

- I am going to Hawaii. (First person subjective case pronoun)
- You need to study for the test. (Second person subjective case)
- They work well together. (Third person subjective case)

Subjective case pronouns also follow all forms of the verb *be* (am, is, are, was, were, be, been). This can be confusing, and it might initially sound strange because objective case pronouns usually follow verbs.

- This is she. (not *her*)
- It was they. (not *them*)

It can sound a bit unnatural and stuffy, but it is grammatically correct. If it sounds too stuffy for your style, then rewrite your sentence. Often rewriting involves taking the pronoun out and using the antecedent instead.

- This is Sarah. (Instead of she)
- It was Mary, Fred, and Dan. (Instead of they)

**Objective case pronouns** work as the object of a verb. A direct object shows who or what receives the action of the verb. The direct object is not performing the action,

but is receiving the action. If the direct object is a pronoun, then it must be in the objective case.

- The boss gave me a day off. (The boss performed the action of the verb.)
- Mary likes you. (Mary performed the action of the verb.)
- Fred drove them to the park. (Fred performed the action of the verb.)
- Sarah carried it to the park. (Sarah performed the action of the verb.)

In all of the examples, the objective case pronoun is not performing the action of the verb. It is just hanging out and receiving the action of the verb.

**Objective case pronouns** also work as the **object of a preposition**. Prepositions describe a relationship in time or space and answer the questions where and when. *Between, at, from, under, over, and above* are all prepositions. Prepositions always act as part of a prepositional phrase. The object of the preposition is a noun or pronoun. If it is a pronoun, then the pronoun is always in the objective case. This can get tricky with prepositions such as *between, except, and like*. The trick is to isolate the prepositional phrase. If any pronouns are objects of the preposition, then they need to be in the objective case.

- Fred threw the ball to him. (Object of the preposition *to*)
- Keep the secret between you and me. (Object of the preposition *between*)
- Everyone except Mary and him saw the movie. (Object of the preposition *except*)

This rule gets mixed up a lot, and it might take a while to train your brain to use this rule correctly. The biggest mistake is saying “between you and I.” The correct way to say it is “between you and me.” *Me* might sound casual or non-academic, but it is just as formal and academic as saying *I*. It is also correct.

Popular music doesn’t help the case. Jessica Simpson, Every Avenue, and over twenty other artists on iTunes have songs titled “Between You and I.” One group is even called “Between You and I.” It is incorrect. The songs might be catchy, but do not rely on popular music to teach correct grammar.

If you have trouble deciding whether to use a subjective or objective pronoun, it is helpful to find the verb. If the pronoun is the one performing the action of the verb, then it needs to be in the subjective case. If the pronoun is receiving the action of the verb, then the pronoun needs to be in the objective case. If the pronoun follows a preposition, then it is the object of the preposition and needs to be in the objective form. Subjective pronouns insist on performing the action of a verb, and objective pronouns prefer to sit back and let the action come to them.

**Possessive case pronouns** show ownership. Possessive pronouns do not have apostrophes like possessive nouns.

- Is this mine? (First person possessive case)
- The shoes by the door must be yours. (Second person possessive case)
- The tickets are theirs. (Third person possessive case)

When possessive pronouns describe nouns, they are acting as adjectives. Her car, his motorcycle, their vacation, your assignment, are all examples of possessive pronouns acting as adjectives. This will be covered more in Chapter 7.

Don't confuse possessive pronouns with contractions. Contractions are words or phrases that have been shortened by removing letters. An apostrophe is added to the contraction in place of the missing letters. *Will not* becomes *won't*. *Cannot* becomes *can't*. *They are* becomes *they're*. The biggest mistake is with the word *its*. *Its* is a possessive pronoun. It shows ownership. *It's* is a contraction, and is short for the words "it is" or "it has." If you cannot decide whether you should use "its" or "it's" in a sentence, just replace the word with the words "it is" or "it has." If the sentence still makes sense, then use the contraction "it's." If the sentence no longer makes sense, then "its" is the correct choice.

## **Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement**

Pronouns take the place of a noun in a sentence, so it is important to make sure it is clear which noun the pronoun is replacing. When the pronoun does not match with the noun it is replacing, the sentence is very confusing. Using pronouns correctly means following these rules:

1. **The pronoun must have a clear antecedent.** If the reader can't figure out what the pronoun is referring to, then the sentence is too vague.

- It was on the table. (What is it?)
- Mary told Sarah that she was in trouble. (Who is in trouble?)

2. **Pronouns must have the same number (singular or plural) as the antecedent.** If a pronoun is replacing a plural noun, then the pronoun also needs to be plural. Singular pronouns replace singular nouns.

- Sarah forgot that she was scheduled to work on Saturday. (Singular antecedent, singular pronoun)
- The students set their books down. (Plural antecedent, plural pronoun)
- Mary, Sarah, and Fred drove to their favorite restaurant. (Plural antecedent, plural pronoun)

**3. Pronouns must have the same gender (masculine, feminine, or neutral) as the antecedent.** A masculine pronoun replaces a masculine noun. A feminine pronoun replaces a feminine noun. It is important that the pronoun agrees with the antecedent.

- Mary ordered her favorite meal. (Feminine antecedent, feminine pronoun)
- The soup had a fly in it. (Neutral antecedent, neutral pronoun)

The English language is lacking a singular, third-person, gender-neutral pronoun. This is fine when referring to something such as soup, but it creates a problem when referring to people that could be male or female.

- Every student must submit (his, her, its, his or her) assignment by Tuesday.

Which pronoun is correct? There isn't a perfect answer here. *Its* sounds like the student is not human. In the past, writers were instructed to choose the masculine pronoun in these situations. This kind of writing sounds antiquated and sexist today. Writers can choose to use *his and her* in a sentence. This is an acceptable way around the pronoun problem, but it can sound awkward and wordy if it is used too often.

Another solution is to rewrite the sentence entirely. This option is used the most. Luckily, there is a plural, gender-neutral, third-person pronoun. *They, them, their,* and *theirs* form the team to fix this problem, but the writer must make the antecedent plural too.

- Students must submit their assignments by Tuesday. (Plural antecedent, plural pronoun)

In casual conversation, many people use *they* as a singular, gender neutral, third-person pronoun. *They* is a plural pronoun, not a singular pronoun, so it is not correct to use this in formal documents. English is always evolving, so eventually *they* might fill the void that is missing on Team Pronoun. For now, treat *they* as a plural pronoun only.

## **Pronoun Challenges**

### **Compound Subjects and Objects**

Pronouns cause problems when they appear in combination with other nouns.

- I like coffee. (Correct. *I* is a subjective pronoun.)
- My brother and I like coffee. (Even though another noun showed up in the sentence, the pronoun remains the same.)
- My brother and me like coffee. (Wrong. *Me* is an objective pronoun, and it has no business acting as part of the subject.)

The trick to choosing the correct pronoun for the sentence is to ignore the other noun and the conjunction (usually and). You can cover it with your hand if that is helpful.

- ~~Fred and~~ she went to the beach. (Ignore “Fred and” to select the correct subjective case pronoun.)
- Sarah asked ~~the boss and~~ him for advice. (Ignore “the boss and” to select the correct objective case pronoun.)
- Would you like ~~Mary or~~ her to drive tonight? (Ignore “Mary or” to select the correct objective case pronoun.)
- ~~My brother and~~ I like coffee. (Ignore “My brother and” to select the correct subjective case pronoun.)

## **Reflexive Pronouns**

Reflexive pronouns end in -self or -selves and *reflect* back to their antecedents in the same sentence. Think of them as vain pronouns that need a mirror to reflect their image. Reflexive pronouns are reflecting off of the antecedent in the same sentence. *Myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, and themselves* are all examples of reflexive pronouns. The big challenge with reflexive pronouns is to make sure that the antecedent is in the same sentence. A reflexive pronoun cannot show up in a sentence without an antecedent.

- The students wanted to see themselves in the picture. (*Themselves* reflects on *the students*.)
- Mary looked at herself in the mirror. (*Herself* reflects on *Mary*.)
- I am going to treat myself to a scone. (*Myself* reflects on *I*.)

Problems show up when people use a reflexive pronoun instead of a personal pronoun. Some people feel uncomfortable using *me* in a sentence, so they choose *myself* instead. One is not more formal or more intellectual than the other, but *me* and *myself* follow different rules so they are not interchangeable. Reflexive pronouns must have an antecedent in the sentence to reflect on. If it does not, then use a personal pronoun instead.

- Please email Fred or myself with any questions. (WRONG! The reflexive pronoun has nothing to reflect on in the sentence.)
- Please email Fred or me with questions. (Correct.)

## **Subject Complements**

Subjective case pronouns (*I, you, he, she, they, it*) follow linking verbs. Linking verbs are all forms of the verb *be*, including *am, is, are, was, were, be, been, and has been*. Normally, objective case pronouns follow verbs, so this rule can sound awkward and stiff at first.

- It is I.
- That was he.
- Was it she who called earlier?

If it sounds too stiff, you can rewrite the sentence to sound more natural. *It is I* becomes *I am here*. Another rewriting option is to not use a pronoun at all, and switch the pronoun back to a noun. *That was he* becomes *That was Fred*. *Was it she who called earlier* becomes *Was it Sarah who called earlier?*

## **Indefinite Pronouns**

Indefinite pronouns, such as *everybody*, *anyone*, and *everything*, are called indefinite because they are not referring to anyone specific. Indefinite pronouns are rather vague about whom they represent. Words such as *everybody* and *everything* sound like a large number, but these indefinite pronouns are treated as singular pronouns. Some indefinite pronouns are always singular and some are always plural.

### **Always Singular**

anybody  
 anyone  
 anything  
 each  
 either  
 everybody  
 everyone  
 everything

### **Always Plural**

both  
 few  
 many  
 others  
 several

Indefinite pronouns can work as antecedents for other pronouns in the sentence. Make sure that the pronoun agrees with the antecedent. If the indefinite pronoun antecedent is plural, then the pronoun must be plural too.

- Everyone on the women's basketball team did her best. (The antecedent *Everyone* is feminine and singular.)
- Many Starbucks locations give their used coffee grounds to gardeners. (The antecedent *Many* is plural.)
- Each email address has its own unique password. (The antecedent *Each* is singular and neutral.)

## **Collective Nouns**

Collective nouns such as *team*, *faculty*, *flock*, *union*, and *committee* refer to a group. When talking about the group as a unit, they are considered singular. If the collective noun is not working as a singular unit, then it is plural.

If you cannot figure out if the collective noun is plural or singular, ask yourself if it is acting as a unit. Collective nouns act like a bag of candy. A bag of candy is a singular

unit. It is contained and all of the candy is traveling as a unit. What if the bag rips open? The candies in the bag are no longer working as a singular unit; instead, they are moving in all different directions. The bag of candy is singular, but the candies are plural. Is the antecedent acting like the bag of candy, or is it acting like the spilled candies?

- The team accepted its trophy. (Team is working as one unit.)
- The jury handed down its verdict. (Jury is working as one unit.)
- The jury could not agree on their verdict. (Jury is not working as one unit.)

It can sound awkward to use a singular pronoun with a noun that sounds plural. In those cases, rewrite your sentence by adding a plural noun as the antecedent.

- The team members accepted their trophy. (Antecedent is members.)
- The jury members handed down their verdict. (Antecedent is members.)

### **Who vs Whom**

Who vs whom poses a challenge to many people today. *Who* is a subjective case pronoun and works as the subject of a verb.

- Who called? (*Who* is the subject of the verb)
- Who is going to the conference? (*Who* is the subject of the verb)

Who also follows linking verbs and acts as the subject complement.

- His manager is who? (*Who* follows the linking verb *is*)

*Whom* is an objective case pronoun, and acts as the object of the verb or the object of the preposition. *Whom* is not performing the action of the verb. *Whom* can either receive the action of the verb or be the object of the preposition.

- To whom it may concern: (*Whom* follows the preposition *to*)
- Fred works for whom? (*Whom* follows the preposition *for*)
- Mary drives whom to school? (*Whom* is the object of the verb *drives*)

*Who* is used as a subjective case pronoun, and *whom* is used as an objective case pronoun. Still not 100 percent clear? There are a few tricks to make this easier.

**1. If *who/whom* follows a preposition, then the choice is always *whom*. *To whom*, *at whom*, *for whom*, *from whom*.**

**2. Mentally replace the word *who/whom* in your sentence with *he* or *him*.** If your sentence makes sense switching the word to *he*, then *who* is the correct choice. Both *he* and *who* are subjective case pronouns, so they work the same way. If your sentence



makes sense switching the word to *him*, then *whom* is the correct choice. Both *him* and *whom* are objective case pronouns, and they follow the same rules. It is easy to remember that *him* and *whom* go together because they both end with the letter *m*.

- Who/whom brought the doughnuts?
- He brought the doughnuts. (Correct! This makes sense.)
- Him brought the doughnuts. (Incorrect. This does not make sense.)
- The correct choice is: Who brought the doughnuts?

This trick doesn't work for every sentence. If it doesn't work for your sentence, the next trick will work.

3. *Who/Whom* phrases are often questions. One trick to discovering whether to use *who* or *whom* is to just answer the question. If the answer could be *he*, then *who* is the correct choice for your sentence. If the answer could be *him*, then *whom* is the correct choice. If the sentence is not a question, you can isolate the *who/whom* phrase and read it as a question.

- Who/Whom should I thank for this free coffee? (Answer the question.)  
I should thank he. (Wrong.)  
I should thank him. (Correct!)  
Who = he  
Whom = him  
Whom should I thank for this free coffee? (Correct!)
- Who/whom is coming to the concert?  
He is coming to the concert. (Correct!)  
Him is coming to the concert. (Wrong.)  
Who = he  
Whom = him  
Who is coming to the concert? (Correct!)
- I do not care who/whom she took to the dance. (This is not a question, so isolate the *who/whom* phrase and read it as a question.)  
Who/whom did she take to the dance? (The *who/whom* phrase is isolated as a question.)  
She took him to the dance. (Correct!)  
She took he to the dance. (Wrong.)  
I do not care whom she took to the dance. (Correct!)

Academy of Learning Video on who/whom:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3aEGrmsZ5c>

## Whose

*Whose* is a possessive pronoun. It is the possessive form of the pronoun *who*. *Whose* can refer to people or things. Do not confuse *whose* with the contraction *who's*. *Who's* is a contraction of words *who is* or *who has*.

- Whose shoes are these? (possessive pronoun)
- We cannot decide whose assignment was the best. (possessive pronoun)
- Do you know who's coming to the conference? (contraction)
- Who's responded to the invitation? (contraction)

## Chapter 5

# Verbs

Verbs show the action or the state of being in a sentence. Imagine these sentences without verbs. They do not make sense without verbs.

- Fred cooks dinner every night. (Action)
- Dan is the new manager. (State of being)
- Sarah flew to Hawaii. (Action)

## Types of Verbs

Verbs can be sorted into three different categories: action verbs, linking verbs, and helping verbs.

**Action verbs** show the action in a sentence. *Cook, drive, run, spin, jump, fly, and twirl* are all action verbs. Action verbs can be sorted even more. Action verbs are either transitive or intransitive.

A **transitive verb** transfers its action onto a direct object. It helps that both transitive and transfer begin with trans-.

- Fred made soup. (*Made* is a transitive verb. It transfers the action *made* to the soup.)
- Fred made. (Incorrect. *Made* is a transitive verb and needs a direct object in order for the sentence to make sense. This sentence does not make any sense.)

An **intransitive verb** does not have a direct object. Intransitive verbs do not need direct objects in order for the sentence to make sense.

- Mary ran. (*Ran* is an intransitive verb. It does not need a direct object to complete the meaning of the sentence.)
- Sarah stood. (*Stood* is an intransitive verb. It does not need a direct object to complete the meaning of the sentence.)

Most verbs are both transitive and intransitive. It just depends on how the verb is being used in a sentence.

- Mary drove. (Intransitive)
- Mary drove the car. (Transitive. *Car* is the direct object and is receiving the action of the verb *drove*.)

There is a quick way to figure out if a verb is transitive or intransitive. Immediately after the verb, ask the question *whom?* or *what?* If you can answer the question with information in the sentence, then that is the direct object. Transitive verbs have direct objects.

- Dan flew the airplane. (Dan flew *what?* Dan flew the airplane. *Airplane* is the direct object. *Flew* is a transitive verb.)
- Fred drove the kids to school. (Fred drove *whom?* Fred drove the kids. *Kids* acts as the direct object for the transitive verb *drove*.)

For more help with transitive and intransitive verbs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FL05uW4Fg> (Video on Transitive and Intransitive Verbs)

<http://www.chompchomp.com/terms/intransitiveverb.htm> (Intransitive Verbs)

## **Linking Verbs**

Linking verbs describe a state of being. They link the subject to more information about the subject. All forms of the verb *be* are linking verbs (*is*, *am*, *are*, *was*, *were*, and *has been*). Linking verbs connect subjects to their complements. A complement completes the meaning of the subject.

- Mary is the boss. (The linking verb *is* links *Mary* to the complement, *boss*.)
- The bird is red. (The linking verb *is* links *bird* to the complement, *red*.)
- The car was dirty. (The linking verb *was* links *car* to the complement, *dirty*.)

Some sensing verbs act as both linking verbs and action verbs. *Feels*, *appears*, *tastes*, *seems*, *sounds*, *looks*, and *smells* are all verbs that describe the senses. Sometimes

these verbs play on the linking verb team, and other times they play on the action verb team. How can you tell which team they are playing on? There is a quick trick. If you can replace the sensing verb with a variation of the verb *be*, and the sentence still makes sense, then the verb is a linking verb.

- **The cat smells bad.** Is that an action verb or a linking verb? Replace the verb with a variation of the verb *be*. *The cat is bad.* That still makes sense. *Smells* is working as a linking verb. The meaning of the sentence: the cat stinks.
- **The cat smells badly.** Is that an action verb or a linking verb? Replace the verb with a variation of the verb *be*. *The cat is badly.* That doesn't make any sense. *Smells* is an action verb. The meaning of the sentence: the cat has trouble smelling things.
- **She felt happy.** Action verb or linking verb? *She is happy.* That makes sense. In this case, *felt* is a linking verb.
- **She felt the wind in her hair.** Action verb or linking verb? *She is the wind in her hair.* No, that doesn't make any sense. *Felt* is an action verb in this case.

## Helping Verbs

Helping verbs show up in sentences to help out other verbs. Helping verbs never show up on their own. Instead, they help other verbs (linking and action) form verb phrases. The main helping verbs are all variations of the verb *be*. If a variation of the verb *be* appears in the sentence on its own, then it is always a linking verb. If it shows up as part of a verb phrase, then it is a helping verb. There are 23 helping verbs: *am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being, has, have, had, do, does, did, may, must, might, can, could, shall, should, will, and would.*

- Fred is cooking dinner. (*Is* is the helping verb. *Cooking* is the main verb. *Is cooking* is a verb phrase.)
- Mary can show you the report. (*Can* is the helping verb. *Show* is the main verb. *Can show* is a verb phrase.)

## Active Voice and Passive Voice

Transitive verbs can be sorted even further into active voice and passive voice. In **active voice**, the subject is performing the action in the sentence. It is very direct. Active voice is very clear, strong, and effective.

- Fred cooked dinner. (Fred is performing the action of the verb.)
- Mary ran the race. (Mary is performing the action of the verb.)
- Dan sent an email to Sarah. (Dan is performing the action of the verb.)

In **passive voice** the direct object of the verb becomes the subject of the sentence. The subject of the sentence is not performing the action of the verb in passive sentences. Often these sentences omit who is performing the action of the sentence. These sentences are vague about who performed the action of the sentence. Politicians often

use passive voice to avoid assigning blame. Because these sentences are vague about who is performing the action in the sentence, the focus of the sentence becomes the direct object.

- The dinner was cooked. (Who cooked the dinner?)
- The race was run. (Who ran the race?)
- An email was sent to Sarah. (Who sent the email to Sarah?)

Active voice is usually shorter, clearer, and more direct than passive voice. In most cases, active voice is the preferred way to get your point across. Passive voice can sound wordy, awkward, and weaker than active voice. There are some instances when passive voice is preferred. News reporters often speak in passive voice when they do not know who performed the action. For example, "Cars were stolen." Who stole the cars? If you do not know, then passive voice is an appropriate choice.

## Verb Tenses

Verbs do more than just show the action. Verbs reveal four additional things: 1. the number of subjects performing the action (singular or plural); 2. the person speaking (first, second, third); 3. the voice (active or passive); and 4. when the action happened. Verbs have a lot of work to do in a sentence!

**Present tense** verbs show action that is currently happening or a habitual action.

- Fred and Mary walk five miles every evening. (habitual action)
- Mary drives the car to work. (habitual action)

**Past tense** verbs show action that happened in the past. Regular verbs form the past tense by adding -ed or -d.

- Sarah traveled to Hawaii. (Event happened in the past)
- Dan worked on the report. (Event happened in the past)

**Future tense** verbs show action that will happen in the future. The helping verb *will* is added to the principal verb to form the future tense. *Shall* is another helping verb that can be used to form the future tense, but it is not as common.

- Dave will travel to Las Vegas next week. (Event will happen in the future)
- You will receive an invitation in the mail. (Event will happen in the future)

**Present Tense**

**Past Tense**

**Future Tense**

	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>First Person</b>	I walk	we walk	I walked	we walked	I will walk	we will walk
<b>Second Person</b>	you walk	you walk	you walked	you walked	you will walk	you will walk
<b>Third Person</b>	he, she, it walks	they walk	he, she, it walked	they walked	he, she, it will walk	they will walk

Note that third-person singular verbs are different than all of the other present tense verbs. Third-person singular verbs require an -s ending. Add -es if the verb ends in s, sh, ch, x, or z.

- Fred cooks (not cook) dinner every night.
- Stephanie teaches (not teach) many subjects.
- Mary drives (not drive) the kids to school.

**Participles** What are participles? Participles are another form that a verb takes. Every verb has five forms: present, past, present participle, past participle, and infinitive. Participles come in two varieties, present and past, and they are used in three different ways.

**Present participles** are formed by adding -ing to the present tense of a verb. This is the case for all regular verbs and all irregular verbs. Present participles always end in -ing. This is always the case, and there are no exceptions.

<b>Present tense</b>	<b>Present participle</b>
run	running
swim	swimming
cook	cooking
dance	dancing

**Past participles** of regular verbs are formed by adding -d or -ed to the present tense of a verb. Unfortunately, irregular verbs do not follow any established rule. Be sure to look them up in a dictionary. A dictionary will list the past participle form of the verb.

Present tense	Past participle
walk	walked
blend	blended
drive	driven
feel	felt

Why are participles important? Participles are important to learn because they are used three different ways.

**1. Participles combine with helping verbs to form verb phrases.** Neither present participles nor past participles can act as a verb in a sentence without helping verbs. Helping verbs are required for a participle to work as a verb.

- Fred is **cooking** dinner tonight. (*Is* is the helping verb. *Cooking* is the present participle of the verb *cook*.)
- Dave was **planning** to attend the concert. (*Was* is the helping verb. *Planning* is the present participle of the verb *plan*.)
- Mary had **blended** the milkshake perfectly. (*Had* is the helping verb. *Blended* is the past participle of the verb *blend*.)
- Sarah had **studied** all night. (*Had* is the helping verb. *Studied* is the past participle of the verb *study*.)

**2. Present and past participles can also work as adjectives.** Adjectives describe nouns or pronouns.

- Sarah enjoyed her **swimming** lessons. (The present participle *swimming* is describing the lessons.)
- The **dripping** faucet kept them awake. (The present participle *dripping* is describing the faucet.)
- The **wrecked** car was towed to the repair shop. (The past participle *wrecked* is describing the car.)
- The **broken** window was repaired quickly. (The past participle *broken* is describing the window.)

3. Present participles can also work as nouns. When present participles are acting as a noun, they are called **gerunds**. A gerund might look like a verb, but it is acting like a noun. Gerunds always end in -ing.

- **Running** is great exercise. (*Running* is the present participle of the verb *run* and is acting as a gerund in this sentence.)
- **Skiing** is a winter sport. (*Skiing* is the present participle of the verb *ski* and is acting as a gerund.)
- Dave enjoys **traveling** to new places. (*Traveling* is the present participle of the verb *travel* and is acting as a gerund. *Traveling* is the direct object of the verb *enjoys*.)

**If a pronoun is modifying a gerund, then it must be in the possessive form.** There are a few exceptions, but it changes the meaning of the sentence. In most cases, the possessive form is needed.

- She was bothered by his **texting** during class. (Not him. *Texting* is a gerund and requires the possessive pronoun *his*.)
- We objected to your **buying** the expensive tickets for us. (Not you. We did not object to you, but to the action of your buying the tickets. *Buying* is a gerund and requires the possessive pronoun *your*.)

Remember that past and present participles cannot act as a verb without helping verbs. If a participle is hanging out in your sentence without helping verbs, it is either acting as an adjective or as a noun (gerund).

<http://www.chompchomp.com/terms/participle.htm>

## Infinitives

An infinitive is the word *to* plus the present form of a verb: *to swim*, *to run*, *to catch*, *to drive*, *to learn*. Infinitives can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

- Sarah refused **to eat** the brussel sprouts. (*To eat* is the infinitive and is acting as a noun. It is the direct object of the verb *refused*.)
- Fred raced home **to watch** the football game. (*To watch* is the infinitive and is acting as an adverb. It is modifying the verb *raced*.)

A common error with infinitives happens when people change “to” to the conjunction “and.”

- Be sure **to call** when you arrive. (Not be sure and call when you arrive.)



- Try **to arrive** on time. (Not try and arrive on time.)

An infinitive is both words: *to* plus the present form of the verb. It was once considered a grammatical crime to add any other words between *to* and the verb. This is called a split infinitive. In Latin, infinitives are only one word, so they cannot be split. Two words form an infinitive in English, but the Latin rule transitioned over to English. The most famous split infinitive is from Star Trek: “To *boldly go* where no one has gone before.” Not only did they split the infinitive, but they split it with the word *boldly*. Fixing the split infinitive does not sound as catchy, “To go boldly where no one has gone before.” It loses its impact. Split infinitives are considered acceptable today if they are necessary for clarity or effect. Be aware that splitting infinitives can lead to awkward sentences.

- She decided **to**, on her way home from work, **call** her sister. (awkward)
- On her way home from work, she decided **to call** her sister. (better)

## Participle Phrases

Participles and gerunds are often used to form phrases; these are called participle phrases. When a participle phrase introduces a sentence, it modifies the subject of the sentence. These phrases are separated from the rest of the sentence with a comma. Sentences can be confusing, and sometimes comical, when the introductory participle phrase does not modify the intended subject.

- **(Illogical) Flying in the airplane, the mountains looked beautiful.** (The introductory phrase modifies the first noun it comes to: mountains. This sentence means that the mountains were flying in an airplane and looking beautiful.)
- **(Correct) Flying in the airplane, Dave looked at the beautiful mountains.** (The introductory phrase is modifying Dave. This sentence means that Dave is flying in an airplane and looking at the beautiful mountains.)
- **(Illogical) Standing in line at Starbucks, the cell phone rang.** (The introductory phrase is modifying the cell phone. The sentence means that the cell phone is standing in line at Starbucks.)
- **(Correct) Standing in line at Starbucks, Mary heard her cell phone ring.** (The introductory phrase is modifying Mary. This sentence means that Mary is standing in line, and she heard her phone ring.)

Errors with participle phrases are sometimes called dangling participles. An incorrect participle phrase is just dangling there and modifying the wrong noun. Careful writers make sure that the introductory participle phrase is modifying the intended noun.

Misplaced participle phrases can appear in other positions in a sentence too. These phrases need to be placed logically. Modifying phrases should appear directly before or directly after the noun or pronoun that it modifies. If the participle phrases appear

anywhere else in the sentence, you might end up with unintended humor in your sentence.

- **The bride was escorted down the aisle by her father, wearing a beautiful silk gown.** (The father-of-the-bride wore a silk gown? The modifier is in the wrong place.)
- **Wearing a beautiful silk gown, the bride was escorted down the aisle by her father.** (correct)
- **The lost shoes were found by Dan lying under the couch.** (Dan is lying under the couch? Or were the shoes under the couch? Illogical and confusing.)
- **Dan found the lost shoes lying under the couch.** (Correct)

If you want your sentences to be taken seriously, be sure that your phrases modify the correct nouns and pronouns.

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/dangling-participles>

## Irregular Verbs

Irregular verbs do not follow our handy rules for forming the past tense. The good news is that there are fewer than 200 irregular verbs in the English language. The bad news is that these are words we use a lot.

Present Tense	Past Tense	Present Participle	Past Participle
bring	brought	bringing	brought
catch	caught	catching	caught
drive	drove	driving	driven
fly	flew	flying	flown
forgive	forgave	forgiving	forgiven
ring	rang	ringing	rung
see	saw	seeing	seen
swim	swam	swimming	swum
think	thought	thinking	thought
throw	threw	throwing	thrown
write	wrote	writing	written

Most irregular verbs are words that we use regularly. If it is not a word that you are familiar with, be sure to check a dictionary for the correct way to form the past tense, present participle, and past participle.

<http://www.theirregularverbs.com/verbList.php?page=1> (Irregular verbs - present, past, past participle shown)

<http://chompchomp.com/irregular01/> (Irregular verb exercises)

## Lay vs Lie

These two verbs are chronically mixed up. They are used incorrectly so often that the correct version might sound wrong. *Lay* and *lie* do not mean the same thing. *Lay* means *to set or to place*. For example, *she lay the book on the table*. *Lie* means something else. For now, let's ignore the definition that refers to an untruth. *Lie* means *to recline or to rest*. For example, *go lie down for a nap*.

Remember transitive and intransitive verbs from the beginning of the chapter? This is a case where it is important to know the difference.

*Lie* is an intransitive verb. It does not need a direct object in order to make sense. People *lie* down. *Down* is not the direct object; it is just showing how people lie.

- I will lie down for a nap. (present tense. Down is not a direct object.)
- Fred told the dog to lie down. (Present tense)

*Lay* is a transitive verb. *Lay* requires a direct object in order to make sense.

- He lay the book on the table. (Book is the direct object.)
- Mary lay the baby in the crib. (Baby is the direct object.)

Things get confusing when we move out of present tense.

	<b>Present</b>	<b>Past</b>	<b>Present Participle</b>	<b>Past Participle</b>
<b>Lie</b> (Intransitive) No Direct Object	lie	lay	lying	lain

<b>Lay</b> (Transitive) Direct Object Required	lay	laid (not laying)	laying	laid
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The mix up with these two words happens because the past tense of *lie* is *lay*. This is where it becomes very important to know if the verb is transitive or intransitive.

Lie is an intransitive verb and does need a direct object in order to complete the meaning of the sentence. The subject is performing the action of the verb *lie*.

- I will lie down for a nap. (Present tense of the verb lie)
- Yesterday, he lay down for a nap at 2. (Past tense of the verb lie)
- Fred is lying on the couch. (Present participle of the verb lie)
- Those newspapers have lain on the counter for weeks. (Past participle of the verb lie)

Lay is a transitive verb and requires a direct object in order to complete the meaning of the sentence.

- He lay the **book** on the desk. (Present tense of the verb *lay*. *Book* is the direct object.)
- He laid the **report** there yesterday. (Past tense of the verb *lay*. *Report* is the direct object.)
- She is laying new **flooring** in the bathroom today. (Present participle of the verb *lay*. *Flooring* is the direct object.)
- She has laid tile **flooring** before. (Past participle of the verb *lay*. *Flooring* is the direct object.)

Popular music gets lay and lie wrong all time. Bob Dylan, Woodie Guthrie, Kris Kristofferson, Chasing Cars, Miley Cyrus, Eric Clapton, and many other musicians use lay/lie incorrectly in their music. Why do they use it incorrectly? Musicians might be trying to avoid the *untruth* definition of *lie*, and use *lay* to avoid confusion. It is also possible that they used *lay* because it rhymed with another lyric. The third option is that they don't know the difference. The bottom line is, don't rely on Miley Cyrus or other musicians to teach the rules of grammar. Sometimes they get it right, and sometimes they get it wrong.

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/lay-versus-lie>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3k1xGZH3GI> (video on lay vs lie)  
<http://masterofgrammar.blogspot.com/2007/06/lay-vs-lie.html>

## Chapter 6

# Subject/Verb Agreement

In a sentence, a verb needs to agree in number with the subject. Singular subjects need singular verbs. Plural subjects need plural verbs.

- I **am** tired. (singular subject/singular verb)
- We **are** tired. (plural subject/plural verb)
- The writing assignment **was** due. (singular subject/singular verb)
- Several writing assignments **were** due. (plural subject/plural verb)
- The student **listens**. (singular subject/singular verb) **3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbs require an “s.”**

## Finding the subject

The key to subject verb agreement is locating the subject of the sentence. This can be tricky when other words get in the way of the subject.

**Prepositional phrases** can appear in your sentence and disguise the true subject. The subject of a verb is never found in a prepositional phrase. Ignore the prepositional phrase when locating the subject. Common prepositions include *of, to, in, from, for, with, at, on, except, and between*.

- The names ~~on the invitation~~ **were** Fred and Mary.

- The information ~~from the president~~ **is** listed below.
- Everyone except Fred **is** attending the party.
- The bill ~~at the restaurant~~ **was** paid in full.

Subjects can be difficult to find when they appear near phrases that begin with the words *along with, as well as, in addition to, such as, including, together with, plus, and other*. These are called **parenthetical phrases**, and they are often set apart from the rest of the sentence with commas. Parenthetical phrases do not contain sentence subjects. The information in the parenthetical phrase is de-emphasized in the sentence. It is not as important to the sentence as the subject. It is fine to use these phrases, but ignore them when locating the subject of the sentence.

- Fred, ~~together with his entire family~~, **is** attending the conference.
- The manager, ~~along with all of her employees~~, **has** received a raise.
- The job application, ~~plus tips on how to ace an interview~~, **is** listed online.

If the sentence seems awkward, you can rewrite it to sound more natural. One option is to add the information in the parenthetical phrase to the subject. This creates a compound subject because it contains two subjects. Rewriting sentence with a compound subject means that you have to change the verb too.

- Fred and his entire family **are** attending the conference. (plural subject/plural verb)
- The manager and all of her employees **have** received a raise. (plural subject/plural verb)
- The job application and tips on how to ace an interview **are** listed online. (plural subject/plural verb)

It can be challenging to find the subject in **inverted sentences**. Look for the true subject **after** the verb. Sentences beginning with *here* and *there* are always inverted. Questions are also written in inverted order. Look for the subject after the verb. If it helps clarify the subject, you can restore the sentence to the more common subject-verb pattern.

- Here **are** your keys. (Restoring subject-verb pattern: Your keys are here.)
- There **are** four birds on the fence. (Restoring subject-verb pattern: Four birds are on the fence there.)
- Where **are** we? (Restoring subject-verb pattern: We are where?)
- How important **are** good grades? (Restoring subject-verb pattern: Good grades are how important?)

## **Basic Rules for Subject-Verb Agreement**

Once you have located the subject, decide whether the subject is singular or plural and select the verb that agrees in number. A singular subject requires a singular verb. A plural subject requires a plural verb. There are a few cases when this can be challenging.

### **Subjects joined by *and***

The conjunction *and* joins words together. When one subject is added to another subject using the conjunction *and*, the subject is usually plural. The conjunction *and* adds the subjects together and makes the subject plural. Plural subjects require plural verbs.

- Fred and Mary **order** coffee every morning. (Fred and Mary form a compound subject, joined by the word *and*. *Mary and Fred* is plural, so the verb *order* is plural.)
- Debbie and Dave **are** flying to Hawaii. (*Debbie and Dave* form a compound subject, joined by the word *and*. *Debbie and Dave* is plural, so the verb *are* is plural.)

### **Subjects joined by *and* are singular in only two cases.**

1. When the subjects are preceded by the words *each* or *every*, the verb is singular. Think of it as each *and every single thing*.

- Every student and instructor **is** eligible for a prize. (Think of the sentence as, “Every single student and every single instructor is eligible for a prize.”)
- Each report and check **needs** to be signed. (Think of the sentence as, “Each individual report and each individual check needs to be signed.”)

2. When the subject joined by *and* represents a single person or thing, it is considered singular. For example, macaroni and cheese is a singular noun. It refers to one dish.

- Macaroni and cheese **is** her favorite meal. (Macaroni and cheese represents a single dish, so the subject is singular.)

### **Subjects joined by *or* or *nor***

When two or more subjects are joined by *or* or *nor*, the conjunction *or* and *nor* means it is either one or the other. *Or* does not add the subjects together. *Or* implies a choice between one or the other. **The verb must agree with the closest subject in the sentence.** It often helps to ignore the other half of the sentence when choosing the correct verb.

- ~~Either you or Sam~~ Sam **was** responsible for bringing the coffee. (The closest subject is *Sam*. The verb agrees with *Sam*.)

- ~~Either Sam or you~~ **were** responsible for bringing the coffee. (The closest subject is *you*. The verb agrees with *you*.)
- ~~Neither the cats nor the dog~~ **is** eating. (The closest subject is *dog*. The verb agrees with *dog*.)
- ~~Neither the dog nor the cats~~ **are** eating. (The closest subject is *cats*. The verb agrees with *cats*.)

When dealing with subjects joined by *or* or *nor*, if one part is singular and the other part is plural, it often sounds more natural to put the plural part closer to the verb.

- Neither the packages nor the letter **was delivered** on time. (Grammatically correct, but might sound awkward.)
- Neither the letter nor the packages **were delivered** on time. (Grammatically correct and sounds natural.)

**TIP: *Either* always pairs up with *or*. *Neither* always pairs up with *nor*.**

## **Company and Organization Names**

Company names require singular verbs, even if they end in the letter *s*. Companies such as Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, and Macy's might look plural, but they are considered singular; therefore, they require singular verbs.

- Starbucks **is** hiring. (Starbucks is the name of a single company, so the verb needs to be singular as well.)
- Southwest Airlines **has** many flights to Las Vegas. (Southwest Airlines is the name of a single company.)
- Jones & Associates **is** located in Phoenix. (Jones & Associates is the name of a single company.)

## **Challenges with Subject/Verb Agreement**

### **Indefinite Pronouns**

Indefinite pronouns are vague, and figuring out whether an indefinite pronoun is singular or plural can be challenging. *Everybody* sounds like a lot of people, but it is considered singular. Some indefinite pronouns are always singular, and some are always plural. Be sure to check the chart if you are not sure. Singular pronouns require singular verbs. Plural pronouns require plural verbs.



Some indefinite pronouns are singular or plural depending on how they are being used in a sentence. *All, more, most, some, any,* and *none* can be singular or plural, depending on how they are being used in a sentence. Occasionally, a prepositional phrase will reveal whether the subject is plural or singular. Be cautious, a prepositional phrase will never contain the subject, but it might reveal whether the indefinite pronoun is singular or plural.

- Everyone in the family is here. (singular subject/singular verb)
- Both are good choices. (plural subject/plural verb)
- Most of the students are here today. (*Most* is plural in this sentence. The prepositional phrase reveals that *most* refers to the students. Plural subject/plural verb)
- Most of her coffee is gone. (*Most* is singular in this sentence. The prepositional phrase reveals that *most* refers to *her coffee*. Singular subject/singular verb)

<u>Always Singular</u>	<u>Always Plural</u>	<u>Singular or plural</u>
Anyone    anybody	both	all
Anything    each	few	any
Either    every	many	more
Everyone    everybody	several	most
Everything    neither		none
No one    nobody		some
Nothing    someone		
Somebody    something		

## Collective Nouns as Subjects

Collective nouns such as *committee, jury, team, group, family, crowd, class, flock,* and *audience* may be singular or plural depending on how they are being used in the sentence. If the collective noun is acting as a unit, then it is singular and requires a singular verb. In most cases, the collective noun is acting as a singular unit. If the collective noun is acting separately, then the noun is considered plural and requires a plural verb. This can sound awkward. It often helps to rewrite the sentence so the subject is plural.

- The team **has worked** well together all season. (*Team* is acting as a singular unit.)
- The class **is working** hard on the assignment. (*Class* is acting as a singular unit.)
- The jury **were divided** in their opinions. (The *jury* is not acting as a unit, so it is plural. It sounds awkward, but it is grammatically correct. It sounds better to say *The jury members were divided in their opinions.*)
- The team **were practicing** individually before the game. (The *team* is not acting as a unit, so it is considered plural. It sounds awkward. It sounds better to say *The team members were practicing individually before the game.*)

### **Distinction between *the number* and *a number***

When the word *number* is the subject of a sentence, the adjective article (*the* or *a*) reveals whether the noun is singular or plural.

**The** number = singular

**A** number = plural

- A number of students **are** sick today. (plural subject/plural verb)
- The number of students absent today **is** low. (singular subject/singular verb)
- A number of animals **are** featured at the zoo this month. (plural subject/plural verb)
- The number of text messages sent last month **is** too high. (singular subject/singular verb)

### **Quantities and Measures**

When quantities and measures refer to total amounts, the subject is singular.

- Two hundred dollars **is** a lot to spend on a pair of jeans. (Two hundred dollars is the total amount. Singular subject/singular verb)
- Ten miles **is** a long way to run in an afternoon. (Ten miles is the total amount. Singular subject/singular verb)

If the quantities are referring to individual amounts, then the subject is considered plural.

- Two hundred quarters **were** lost at the casino. (The quarters are not acting as a unit, but as 200 individual quarters. Plural subject/plural verb)
- Four days a month **are** set aside for meetings. (The four days are not acting as a unit, but as four individual days. Plural subject/plural verb)

## Fractions, portions, and percentages

Fractions, portions, and percentages can serve as the subject of a sentence. Fractions, portions, and percentages may be singular or plural depending on the nouns they refer to in the same sentence. The prepositional phrase often offers a clue to help determine whether the subject is singular or plural.

- One third of the assignment **was** incorrect. (*One third* is singular because it refers to a singular assignment.)
- Only one third of the students **are** here on time. (*One third* is plural because it refers to the plural noun *students*.)
- A percentage of the report **covers** new research. (*A percentage* is singular because it refers to a single report.)
- A percentage of the books **were** checked out by Mary. (*A percentage* is plural because it refers to many books.)

## Chapter 7

# Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are modifiers, and they add description and texture to sentences. Although adjectives and adverbs have similar jobs, they do not have the same job. Adjectives modify and describe nouns and pronouns. Adverbs modify and describe verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Without adjectives and adverbs, our language would sound bland.

- (Without adjectives or adverbs) She wore a hat.
- (With **adjectives** and *adverbs*) She *proudly* wore a **gigantic, blue cowboy** hat.

Both sentences are grammatically correct, but the second sentence provides more information.

## Adjectives

Adjectives modify and describe nouns and pronouns. *Three, purple, large, and tall* are all adjectives. Adjectives are added to nouns to answer the questions *what kind is it?*, *what color is it?*, *which one is it?*, or *how many are there?*

- I like **yellow** houses. (Adjectives answer the question *what color?*)
- Fred likes **gourmet** meals. (Adjectives answer the question *what kind?*)
- The **thick** book sat open on the table. (Adjectives answer the question *which one?*)
- **Three** birds sat on the fence. (Adjectives answer the question *how many?*)

Adjectives also follow linking verbs. Linking verbs are all forms of the verb *be*, and can also be sensing verbs such as *taste*, *smell*, *look*, or *feel*. If the sensing verb is describing an action, then it is working as an action verb. If the sensing verb is describing a state of being, then it is working as a linking verb.

- The basketball player is **tall**. (The adjective *tall* follows the linking verb *is*.)
- The flowers are **pink**. (The adjective *pink* follows the linking verb *are*.)
- I feel **bad** about breaking the dish. (Not badly. The adjective *bad* follows the linking verb *feel*. If *feel* was working as an action verb, it would change the meaning of the sentence. *I feel badly* means that something is wrong with your sense of touch.)
- Mary looks **good** in her new outfit. (Not well. The adjective *good* follows the linking verb *looks*.)

## Articles

Articles are a specific category of adjectives. *A*, *an*, and *the* are adjectives that appear immediately before nouns, making the noun specific or nonspecific.

**The** is a **definite article**. The article *the* describes a specific person, place, or thing.

- Please bring **the** book to class. (describes a specific book)
- She went to **the** store. (she went to a specific store)
- He wants **the** motorcycle. (He wants a specific motorcycle)

**A** and **an** are **indefinite articles** and are used to describe people, places, or things in general. When do you use *a* and when do you use *an*? It depends on the word that comes next. **A** is used before words with a consonant sound, such as *a shop*, *a coffee*, *a bike*, *a book*, *a one-week trip*, and *a unit*.

- Please bring **a** book to class. (it doesn't matter which book)
- She went to **a** store. (it doesn't matter which store)
- He wants **a** motorcycle. (He wants a motorcycle, and he doesn't care which one.)

**An** is used before words with a vowel sound, such as *an honor*, *an hour*, *an employee*, and *an umbrella*. The word does not have to begin with a vowel, but it has to make the vowel sound. Be careful with words that start with *h*, *u*, and *o*. These letters can make consonant sounds and vowel sounds.

- It is **a** historic event, and he is **an** honorable man.
- She took **an** umbrella on **a** Utopian vacation.
- Fred left **an** onion on the counter when he went on **a** one-week vacation.

## Demonstrative Adjectives

*This, that, these, and those* are all demonstrative adjectives. Demonstrative adjectives must agree in number with the nouns they modify. Demonstrative adjectives also reveal whether the noun is nearby or at a distance.

**This** - singular adjective and shows that the noun it modifies is nearby

**These** - plural adjective and shows that the noun it modifies is nearby

**That** - singular and at a distance

**Those** - plural and at a distance

- **These shoes** are great! (The adjective and the noun are plural. The shoes are nearby.)
- **Those shoes** were too expensive. (The adjective and noun are plural. The shoes are at a distance.)
- **That class** is interesting. (The adjective and the noun are singular. The class is at a distance.)
- **This class** is my favorite. (The adjective and the noun are singular. The class is nearby.)

## Possessive Adjectives

Possessive adjectives appear before the nouns they describe. *My car, our garden, your vacation, his hat, her coffee, its schedule, and their retreat.*

- **His** car was in the shop, but he got a ride in **her** car.
- I lost **my** book at **your** house.

## Compound Adjectives

Compound adjectives are formed when two or more words are joined together to form a single adjective. Compound adjectives are hyphenated if they appear immediately before the noun they modify. If the compound adjective appears after the noun, they are usually not hyphenated. Some compound adjectives are always hyphenated no matter where they appear in a sentence. *First-class, well-known, short-term, old-fashioned, up-to-date, and full-time* are always hyphenated. If a dictionary lists the compound adjective with hyphens, then it is considered permanently hyphenated.

- The **five-year-old** child is **five years old**. (hyphenated before the noun, but not after)
- A **15-year** loan takes **15 years** to pay off. (hyphenated before the noun, but not after)

- Dave and Sarah had **first-class** seats to a **well-known** resort. (permanently hyphenated compound adjectives)

**Hyphens are used even if part of the compound adjective is implied.**

- Several **two-** and **three-bedroom** apartments are for rent.
- They are hiring many **part-** and **full-time** employees.

Compound adjectives can use hyphens, but adverbs are not hyphenated when they appear before a noun. *Newly opened clinic, freshly painted room, individually wrapped candy,* and *highly respected musician* would not be hyphenated because they contain an adverb. Adverbs often end in -ly and are never hyphenated.

## Coordinating Adjectives and Cumulative Adjectives

Sometimes it takes more than one adjective to describe a noun. If the adjectives are working independently to modify and describe the noun, they are called coordinating adjectives. Coordinating adjectives need to be separated with commas. To test whether the adjectives need a comma separating them, run the sentence through the following test.

1. Mentally add the word *and* between the adjectives. If the sentence still makes sense, then move on to the second rule.
2. Mentally reverse the order of the adjectives. Does the sentence still make sense?

If the sentence still makes sense, then the adjectives are working independently and a comma is needed between them.

- The **fluffy, yellow** cat sat in the sun. (Coordinating adjectives separated with a comma. Does it pass the test? The yellow and fluffy cat sat in the window. It still makes sense. A comma is needed between the adjectives.)
- Sarah is an **intelligent, motivated** student. (Coordinating adjectives separated with a comma. Does it pass the test? Sarah is a motivated and intelligent student. It still makes sense. A comma is needed between the adjectives.)

If the sentence does not pass the test, then do not add the comma between the adjectives. These adjectives are called **cumulative adjectives** because they build on one another and need to stay in a specific order. No commas are needed between cumulative adjectives.

- The **efficient administrative** assistant got the work done in record time. (No comma separating the adjectives. Does it pass the comma test? The administrative and efficient assistant got the work done in record time. It does not pass the test, so no commas are needed between the adjectives.)
- The **red sports** car was speeding. (No comma separating the adjectives. Does it pass the comma test? The sports and red car was speeding. It does not pass the test, so no commas are needed between the adjectives.)

## Adverbs

Adverbs describe and modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Adverbs can also modify phrases or entire sentences. The word *verb* is inside the word *adverb*, so it is easy to remember that adverbs describe verbs. Many adverbs end in -ly, but some of the most common adverbs do not, including *always, indeed, here, there, tomorrow, today, later, never, now, sometimes, soon, when, where, not, and too*. Adverbs explain *where, when, how, and to what extent*.

- **Yesterday** Fred arrived at work **early**. (Adverbs explain *when*)
- Please put your dirty dishes **there**. (Adverb explains *where*)
- Mary ran **so quickly** that she finished **early**. (Adverb explains *to what extent, how, and when*.)

Adverbs also follow action verbs.

- The students listened **carefully** to the instructions. (Not careful. Adverbs follow action verbs)
- The dinner party went **smoothly**. (Not smooth. Adverbs follow action verbs)
- It rained **unusually hard** on Sunday. (Both unusually and hard are adverbs.)

Some adverbs have two acceptable forms: slow, slowly; quick, quickly; deep, deeply; direct, directly; and close, closely.

- Sarah drove **slowly**. (*Or less formal: Sarah drove slow to the game.*)
- Fred called the president **directly**. (*Or less formal: Fred called the president direct.*)

## Double Negatives

Double negatives occur when a negative adverb (*no, not, nothing, none, hardly, barely*) is used with a negative verb (*didn't, don't, won't*). Double negatives are considered unprofessional and grammatically incorrect.

- He **doesn't never** drink coffee. (Double negative)
- He **doesn't** drink coffee. (correct)
- He **never** drinks coffee. (correct)
  
- Mary **can't barely** see without her glasses. (Double negative)
- Mary can **barely** see without her glasses. (correct)
- Mary **can't** see without her glasses. (correct, but changes the meaning slightly)

## Comparative and Superlative Forms

Do you need to compare something in your sentence? Adjectives work to compare nouns and pronouns. Adverbs are used to compare verbs. Adjectives and adverbs have three degrees: positive, comparative, and superlative. The **positive degree** of an adjective or adverb is used when it modifies only one word. The **comparative degree** is used when comparing two items. The **superlative degree** is used to compare three or more items.

### Comparative/Superlative Adjectives

The comparative degree of one- and two-syllable adjectives is formed by adding *-r* or *-er* to the ending (*newer, older, taller, shorter*). The superlative degree of one- and two-syllable adjectives is formed by adding *-st* or *-est* to the ending (*newest, oldest, tallest, shortest*). If the adjective ends in *y*, change the *y* to *i* before adding *-er* (for comparative) or *-est* (for superlative).

Long adjectives (three or more syllables) and adjectives that are difficult to pronounce form the comparative and superlative degrees by adding the words *more* and *most* (*more beneficial, most beneficial*) and *less* and *least* (*less popular, least popular*).

### Regular Adjectives

	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Comparative</b>	<b>Superlative</b>
	Used to describe the word	Used to compare two persons or things (usually add <i>r</i> or <i>er</i> )	Used to compare three or more persons or things (usually add <i>st</i> or <i>est</i> )



<b>One syllable</b>	old	older	oldest
<b>Two syllables</b>	quiet	quieter	quietest
<b>Ending in y</b>	happy	happier	happiest
<b>Two syllables (awkward)</b>	useful	more/less useful	most/least useful
<b>Three or more syllables</b>	advantageous	more/less advantageous	most/least advantageous

- Mary's shoes are **new**. (Positive degree)
- Sarah's shoes are **newer** than Mary's shoes. (Comparative degree)
- Fred's shoes are the **newest** in the family. (Superlative degree)
  
- The new copy machine is **efficient**. (Positive degree)
- The new copy machine is **more efficient** than the last copy machine. (Comparative degree)
- The new copy machine is the **most efficient** one on campus. (Superlative degree)

Some adjectives do not follow the rules when forming their comparative and superlative degrees. These are called irregular adjectives. They play by their own rules.

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Comparative</b>	<b>Superlative</b>
<b>bad</b>	worse	worst
<b>good</b>	better	best
<b>little</b>	less	least
<b>many</b>	more	most

### **Comparative/Superlative Adverbs**

Adverbs are used to modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. One-syllable adverbs form their comparative degree by adding *-r* or *-er* to the ending. One-syllable adverbs form their superlative degree by adding *-st* or *-est* to the ending. Most adverbs are longer than one syllable. Adverbs with two or more syllables form their comparative by adding *more* or *most* (*more cautiously*) or *less* or *least* (*less cautiously*).

## Regular Adverbs

	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Comparative</b> Add <i>r</i> or <i>er</i> for one-syllable adverbs. Most use <i>more/less</i> .	<b>Superlative</b> Add <i>st</i> or <i>est</i> to one-syllable adverbs. Most use <i>most/least</i> .
<b>One syllable</b>	fast	faster	fastest
<b>Two or more syllables</b>	neatly	more/less neatly	most/least neatly
<b>Two or more syllables</b>	carefully	more/less carefully	most/least carefully
<b>Two or more syllables</b>	beautifully	more/less beautifully	most/least beautifully

Some adverbs form their comparative and superlative degrees irregularly. These are called irregular adverbs, and they play by their own rules. It is a good idea to check a current dictionary if you are uncertain.

## Irregular Adverbs

<b>Adverb</b>	<b>Comparative</b>	<b>Superlative</b>
<b>well</b>	better	best
<b>much</b>	more	most
<b>badly</b>	worse	worst

## Commonly Confused Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs do similar jobs, so it is easy to get them mixed up. Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns. Adverbs describe verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

**Almost** (adj. - nearly): Almost everyone is here today.

**Most** (adj. - greatest in amount): Most students are happy that midterms are over.

**Farther** (adverb - distance): How much farther are we driving?

**Further** (adverb - additionally): We should talk about this further.

**TIP:** the word *far* is hidden in the word *farther*. Farther refers to distance.

**Sure** (adj. - certain): She is sure that she wants to go on vacation.

**Surely** (adverb - certainly): He will surely win the gold medal.

**Later** (adverb - after a certain time): He will sign the contract later.

**Latter** (adj. - the second of two things): Between the tea and the coffee, I choose the latter.

**Fewer** (adj. - refers to countable items): Ten items or fewer are allowed in this checkout lane.

**Less** (adj. - refers to amounts or quantities): There is less water in Lake Washington than in the Pacific Ocean.

**TIP:** use **fewer** with nouns you can count individually, and **less** with nouns you cannot count individually.

**Real** (adj. - actual, genuine) A real diamond is worth more than a fake diamond.

**Really** (adverb - actually, truly) He is really excited to go on vacation.

**Good** (adj. desirable) A number of students received a good score on the test.

**Well** (adv. satisfactorily): He did well on the exam.

(adv. healthy): He feels well enough to go to school.

## **Adverb and Adjective Placement**

Adverb and adjectives should be placed close to the words they describe, especially with the words *only*, *merely*, *first*, *almost*, and *last*. The position of the adjective or adverb can change the meaning of the sentence.

- **Only** Mary can get the project done. (Mary is the only person that can get the project done.)
- Mary can **only** get the project done. (Mary cannot do anything else. She can only get the project done.)

Be sure to proofread your sentences carefully. Even when the adverb or adjective is close to the word it is modifying, the placement can affect the entire meaning of the sentence.

- The boss noticed that **only** Fred took notes at the meeting. (Fred was the only person at the meeting taking notes.)
- The boss noticed that Fred **only** took notes at the meeting. (Fred didn't participate in any other way at the meeting. He only took notes.)
- He hit **almost** every car in the parking lot. (He hit a majority of the cars in the parking lot.)

- He **almost** hit every car in the parking lot. (He came close to hitting a majority of the cars in the parking lot, but he missed them all.)

<http://www.grammarbook.com/grammar/adjAdv.asp> (Adjectives and Adverbs)

<http://www.chompchomp.com/terms/adjective.htm> (Adjectives)

## Chapter 8

# Prepositions

Prepositions show the relationship of a noun or pronoun in time or space. Where are your keys? They are **on** *the counter*, **in** *your purse*, **under** *the book*, or **between** *the groceries*. Prepositions can also show ownership, for example: *the wines of France*, *the beaches of Hawaii*, or *the motorcycle belonging to Fred*. Prepositions can show possession, location, direction, time, and figurative location.

**Direction** - *toward, to, into, across, down, up*

**Location** - *at, above, behind, across, beside, under, between, among, by, near, toward, in* (Think of it as anywhere your keys could be hiding)

**Time** - *before, during, after, until, since*

**Figurative location** - *for, against, with*

**Possession** - *of, to*

Prepositions are team players; they cannot act alone. A preposition acts as part of a prepositional phrase, which includes the preposition, the object of the preposition, and any modifiers. The object of the preposition is always a noun or pronoun.

- Please put your phone **on** the table. (*On* is the preposition. The object of the preposition is *table*. *The* is a modifier.)
- Dan found the book **under** the couch. (*Under* is the preposition. The object of the preposition is *couch*. *The* is a modifier)
- Christie went **to** class. (*To* is the preposition. The object of the preposition is *class*.)

## Prepositions and Pronouns

If the object of a preposition is a pronoun, then it must be in the objective case (him, her, you, them, me, us).

- Let's keep the information **between** you and me. (Not I) Between is the preposition. The objects of the preposition are *you* and *me*.
- Students **like** Nancy and him are rare. (Not he) Like is the preposition. The objects of the preposition are *Nancy* and *him*.
- Dave sat **beside** me at the concert. (Not I) Beside is the preposition. The object of the preposition is *me*.

## Common Preposition Errors

### Would've, could've, should've

Would've, could've, and should've are contractions of the verb phrases would have, could have, and should have. When people use the contractions, it might sound like they are saying *would of*, *could of*, and *should of*. It might sound similar when spoken, but it looks different when it is written. The verb phrases are *would have* (or *would've*), *could have* (or *could've*) and *should have* (or *should've*). *Would of* is never correct.

- Nancy **should have** brought her book to class. (Not *should of*)
- Steve **could have** won the race. (Not *could of*)
- He **would have** brought the doughnuts, but the shop was closed. (Not *would of*)

### From, off, off of

*From* and *off* are both prepositions, but they do not mean the same thing. They are not interchangeable. *Off* is the opposite of *on*; be sure that meaning works in your sentence. Some people say "*off of*" instead of "*off*." This is considered informal. The extra preposition is not necessary for clarity, but it slips into casual conversation. For formal documents, do not add "of" unless it is necessary for clarity.

- Fred borrowed the book **from** Sarah. (Not *off*) In order to borrow a book "off" Sarah, then the book would need to first be "on" Sarah. Is she wearing the book? Probably not. Does she own the book? Yes. Fred borrowed the book from Sarah.
- Mary jumped **off** the diving board. (Not *off of*) The meaning is clear and concise without the additional preposition.

### To and too

*To* and *too* are have different meanings and they are not interchangeable. The preposition *to* means “moving toward.” The adverb *too* means “additionally, excessively, or also.”

- They wanted to go **to** the movie.
- The movie was **too** long.

## **Commonly Confused Prepositions**

Many prepositions do similar jobs, so it is common to get confused about which one to use.

### **Among/between**

**Among** is usually used to speak of three or more people or things.

**Between** is usually used to speak of only two people or things.

- The border **between** California and Oregon is very mountainous.
- Please divide the pie evenly **among** the six children.

### **Beside/besides**

**Beside** means *next to*.

**Besides** means *in addition to*.

- The woman standing **beside** me in line ordered the last scone.
- **Besides** the scone, she ordered two lattes and a muffin.

### **Except/accept**

*Except* and *accept* are different parts of speech. They might sound similar when spoken, but they are different.

**Except** is a preposition meaning “excluding” or “but.”

**Accept** is a verb meaning “consent to receive.”

- Everyone **except** Andrew was at school.
- Ava will **accept** the award on his behalf.

## In, into, in to

**In** shows a location or position

**Into** has three meanings and all of them show action:

1. Entering something
2. Changing form
3. Making contact

**In to** can happen when using the preposition *in*, followed by the word *to*. These words can show up next to each other in a sentence.

- The chocolate chip cookies were **in** the kitchen. (location)
- She walked **into** the kitchen to get a cookie. (entering something)
- She drove **in to see** Fred. (preposition *in* followed by the infinitive *to see*)
- He bumped **into** Steve last week. (making contact)
- The caterpillar turned **into** a butterfly. (changing form)

## Like, as, as if, as though

*Like* can be used as a preposition to introduce a noun or a pronoun. Do not use it to introduce a clause. If everything after the word *like* could form a complete sentence, then *like* is not being used correctly. Use **as**, **as if**, or **as though** to introduce clauses.

- Mary looks like a movie star. (*Like* introduces the noun *star*.)
- He looks as though he needs a vacation. (*He needs a vacation* is an independent clause.)
- She looks as if she had a haircut. (*She had a haircut* is an independent clause.)
- As I said in my text message, I am going to Starbucks now. (*Not like. I said in my text message* is an independent clause.)

## Necessary and Unnecessary Prepositions

### Necessary prepositions

Prepositions are useful words. They show a relationship between a noun and other words in the sentence. Don't eliminate prepositions that are required for clarity in your sentence. Be careful when two prepositions modify a single object in your sentence.

- What did you step **on** earlier? (*On* is necessary for clarity in this sentence.)
- Fred graduated **from** college. (*From* is necessary for clarity.)
- My interest **in** and commitment **to** your program remain high. (*In* and *to* are both prepositions with the same object: program.)

### Unnecessary prepositions

Too many prepositions can clutter sentences up with unnecessary wordiness. Business writing should be clear and concise. Eliminating unnecessary prepositions tightens up your writing. If the preposition is not needed for clarity, then remove it from your sentence.

- Where are you? (Not *where are you **at**?*)
- Both students performed well on the test. (Not *both **of** the students*)
- Mary jumped off the diving board. (Not *off **of** the diving board*)

Many writers overuse the preposition “of.” Grammar Girl writes, “Of is a preposition, and although it’s not an inherently evil word, overusing it can make your writing sound passive and fussy.” <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/do-you-overuse-of>

Other helpful links:

<http://www.dailywritings.com/5-ways-to-reduce-use-of-prepositions/>

<http://www.grammarly.com/handbook/grammar/prepositions/11/unnecessary-preposition/>

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/where-are-you-at>

## **Ending Sentences with a Preposition**

Many people were taught that ending a sentence with a preposition is a major grammatical crime. The truth is, there is not a rule saying it is wrong. Because so many people were taught that it was wrong, it is better to err on the safe side. In formal writing, such as cover letters and resumes, avoid ending sentences with a preposition. Ending a sentence with a preposition is acceptable in informal writing.

- When you called earlier, whom did you speak **to**? (informal)
- When you called earlier, **to** whom did you speak? (formal)
- What are these cookies made **of**? (informal)
- What ingredients are **in** these cookies? (formal)

According to Grammarmonster.com

*Try to avoid ending a sentence with a preposition. This is not really a rule, but lots of people think it is. So, to ensure you don't annoy your readers, just avoid the situation. If rewording your sentence makes it sound too contrived, just go for it and end your sentence with a preposition. (Sometimes, the cure is worse than the "problem.")*

[http://www.grammar-](http://www.grammar-monster.com/lessons/prepositions_ending_a_sentence.htm#crAM5OyjTDmtHzJ)

[monster.com/lessons/prepositions\\_ending\\_a\\_sentence.htm#crAM5OyjTDmtHzJ](http://www.grammar-monster.com/lessons/prepositions_ending_a_sentence.htm#crAM5OyjTDmtHzJ)  
[8.99](http://www.grammar-monster.com/lessons/prepositions_ending_a_sentence.htm#crAM5OyjTDmtHzJ)



## Idioms

Idioms are words and phrases that have a figurative meaning that is different from its literal meaning. Many idioms contain prepositions, but the literal meaning of the preposition is different from the implied meaning. For example, “under the weather” does not make sense if you take the phrase literally. It has nothing to do with the weather. Native speakers know that “under the weather” means that someone is feeling sick. *Dave is under the weather today* means that he is not feeling well. Every language has its own idioms. If you are not sure of the meaning, be sure to look it up.

**agree on** (mutual ideas) The members **agree on** the uniform changes.

**agree to** (a proposal or to undertake an action) Did you **agree to** the current proposal?

She **agreed to** the change in schedule.

**agree with** (a person) I **agree with** you. We **agree with** her idea.

**angry about** (a situation) Sarah was **angry about** being late for work.

**angry at** (a thing) Dan was **angry at** the coffee machine for breaking this morning.

**angry with** (a person) Are you angry with me? Theresa was **angry with** Johnny for forgetting her birthday.

**behind the scenes** (unseen) All of the preparation for the beautiful dinner happened **behind the scenes**.

**by heart** (from memory) She knows all of the words to the song **by heart**.

**correspond to** (a thing) A skier’s success **corresponds to** the proper snow conditions.

**correspond with** (a person) Steve and Fred **correspond with** each other on Facebook.

**differ from** (things) Running shoes **differ from** hiking boots.

**differ with** (people) I **differ with** you on many points.

**different from (not than)** This coffee is **different from** the one I had yesterday.

**expert in (not on)** Dan is an **expert in** electrical engineering.

**out of the blue** (unexpectedly) His marriage proposal came **out of the blue** and took Sarah by surprise.

**plan to (not on)** We **plan to** vacation in Hawaii.

**retroactive to (not from)** Your raise is **retroactive to** August 15, 2013.

**speak to** (tell something) I must **speak to** the manager immediately.

**speak with** (discuss with) They enjoyed **speaking with** you last week.

**up in the air** (uncertain) Our plans are **up in the air** until we hear from Kim.

Other helpful links on prepositions and idioms:

[http://www.roanestate.edu/owl/prep\\_idioms.html](http://www.roanestate.edu/owl/prep_idioms.html)

<http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/parts-of-speech/prepositions/idioms-that-begin-with-prepositions.html>

## Chapter 9

# Conjunctions

A conjunction connects words, phrases, and clauses. On Team Grammar, conjunctions work as the joiners.

### Coordinating conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions connect words, phrases, and clauses of equal value in a sentence. The coordinating conjunctions are easy to remember with the acronym FANBOYS, which represents **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so**.

- Mary **and** Sarah went skiing on the mountain. (*And* joins equal nouns.)
- Mary drove the car on the way to the resort, **but** Sarah drove the car on the way home. (*But* joins equal clauses.)
- Neither Mary **nor** Fred remembered to call home. (*Nor* joins equal nouns.)

*Yet* and *for* are not as common as the other coordinating conjunctions.

- The ski resort was very busy, **for** it was a holiday weekend. (*For* joins equal clauses.)
- They visited the new ski resort, **yet** they stayed at their favorite hotel in town. (*Yet* joins equal clauses.)

The word *so* should only be used as a coordinating conjunction in informal writing. In formal writing, the conjunctive adverbs **therefore** and **consequently** can be substituted for the coordinating conjunction *so*. Conjunctive adverbs require a semicolon and a comma to set them apart from the rest of the sentence.

Another option to avoid using *so* is to remove the conjunction and begin the sentence with **because** or **although**. This changes one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause. No conjunction is needed to join these two clauses together.

- Mary's car broke down on her way to work, **so** she had to take the bus. (Informal)
- **Because** Mary's car broke down on her way to work, she had to take the bus. (Formal) Dependent clause precedes an independent clause; therefore, a comma is needed after the dependent clause.
- Mary had to take the bus **because** her car broke down on her way to work. (Formal) The independent clause is first in this sentence; therefore, no comma is needed between the clauses.
- Mary's car broke down on her way to work; **therefore**, she had to take the bus. (Formal) Conjunctive adverb used
- Mary's car broke down on her way to work; **consequently**, she had to take the bus. (Formal) Conjunctive adverb used

## **Punctuating compound sentences**

A compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses. Independent clauses can stand alone as a sentence. To punctuate a compound sentence, place a comma before the coordinating conjunction. **To determine if a sentence is a compound sentence, remember that the words before and after the conjunction must be able to form complete sentences.**

- I swam many laps in the heated pool, **and** Dave ran five miles on the treadmill. (comma + conjunction)
- Fred received a text message while he was driving, **but** he did not look at his phone. (comma + conjunction)
- Mary cooked dinner on Monday, **but** Fred cooked dinner the rest of the week. (comma + conjunction)

**Do not use commas when coordinating conjunctions join compound verbs, objects, or phrases. If the words after the conjunction do not form a complete sentence, do not use a comma after the conjunction.**

- The school provided transportation to the event **and** scholarships to the students. (No comma is needed because and joins the compound objects *transportation* and *scholarships*. To determine if a sentence is a compound sentence, the words after the conjunction must form a complete sentence. *Scholarships to the students* is not a complete sentence.)
- Fred rode to the concert **and** parked his motorcycle in an underground parking garage. (No comma is needed because *and* joins the compound verbs *rode* and

*parked. Parked his motorcycle in an underground parking garage is not a complete sentence.)*

**Independent clause + comma + FANBOYS + independent clause = compound sentence**

## **Conjunctive Adverbs**

Conjunctive adverbs are another way to join independent clauses. Conjunctions have one job: to join words, phrases, and clauses. Sometimes an adverb wants to play on the conjunction team. When that happens, it is called a conjunctive adverb. A conjunctive adverb is a connecting word that joins two independent clauses. Conjunctive adverbs transition from one thought to another thought and are sometimes referred to as transitional conjunctions. A conjunctive adverb requires **a semicolon before it and a comma after it. One syllable conjunctive adverbs such as *thus, then, and hence* do not require a comma after it.**

**Common conjunctive adverbs include the following:**

accordingly	however	nevertheless
also	in fact	otherwise
consequently	in the meantime	for example
therefore	indeed	then
hence	furthermore	moreover
thus	for instance	likewise

- Mary usually drinks coffee every morning; **however**, today she drank tea.
- The weather is hot today; **thus** we should go to the beach. (No comma needed after the conjunctive adverb because *thus* is only one syllable.)
- Fred forgot his wallet at home; **consequently**, he was unable to pay for the meal.

## **Parenthetical Adverbs**

Many conjunctive adverbs also work as parenthetical adverbs, so be sure to pay attention to how it is being used in the sentence. *However, therefore, indeed, in the meantime, and likewise* also work as parenthetical adverbs. Parenthetical adverbs interrupt the flow of your sentence by appearing in the middle of a clause. Use commas to set parenthetical adverbs apart in your sentence.

- We were, **however**, happy to pay for the meal. (The parenthetical adverb interrupts the flow of the sentence and does not join two independent clauses. It is set apart with commas.)
- I, **therefore**, appreciate your not texting during class. (The parenthetical adverb interrupts the flow of the sentence. It is set apart with commas.)
- Mary and Fred, **likewise**, appreciate your not texting during the meal. (The parenthetical adverb interrupts the flow of the sentence. It does not join two independent clauses. It is set apart with commas.)

### **How can you tell parenthetical adverbs and conjunctive adverbs apart?**

Conjunctive adverbs join two independent clauses together. An independent clause must appear on both sides of the conjunctive adverb. Parenthetical adverbs appear within the same clause and interrupt the flow of the sentence. Parenthetical adverbs are not linking anything together; they are just interrupting the flow of the sentence.

## **Subordinating Conjunctions**

Subordinating conjunctions join dependent and independent clauses. Dependent and independent clauses are not grammatically equal, so they cannot use coordinating conjunctions to join together. Subordinating conjunctions work to join these unequal clauses. Dependent clauses begin with a subordinating conjunction such as *after*, *because*, *although*, *since*, *unless*, *while*, and *until*. A subordinating conjunction limits the clause it introduces and makes it dependent on an independent clause.

**If the sentence begins with a dependent clause, then a comma is required between the dependent clause and the independent clause.**

**If your sentence ends with a dependent clause (terminal dependent clause) then no comma is required.** If the terminal dependent clause provides nonessential information or breaks the flow of the sentence, a comma should be used for clarity.

- **Although** the coffeehouse was crowded, we received our drinks quickly. (The subordinating conjunction introduces the dependent clause at the beginning of the sentence, and it is set apart from the independent clause with a comma.)
- **Because** it was too crowded to sit inside the coffeehouse, we took our coffees to the park. (The subordinating conjunction introduces the dependent clause at the beginning of the sentence, and it is set apart from the independent clause with a comma.)
- We took our coffees to the park **because** it was too crowded to sit inside the coffeehouse. (The subordinating conjunction is terminal. The dependent clause ends the sentence; therefore, no comma is needed.)

- I am certain that I paid my cell phone bill, **although I cannot find my receipt**. (The terminal dependent clause adds unnecessary information and is set apart with a comma for clarity.)

## **Parenthetical Clauses**

Parenthetical clauses interrupt the flow of the sentence with additional and nonessential information. These clauses are set apart from the rest of the sentence with commas.

- The grammar class, **until I hear otherwise**, is the most beneficial class on campus. (Nonessential information is set apart with commas)
- Her shoes, **that she bought on sale last week**, were ruined in the rain. (Nonessential information is set apart with commas)

## **Relative Clauses**

Relative clauses are clauses introduced by the relative pronouns *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, and *that*. When relative pronouns introduce a dependent clause, they are functioning as a conjunction.

<b>Relative pronoun</b>	<b>Refers to</b>	<b>Used to introduce</b>
who, whom, whose	people	essential and nonessential clauses
that	animals and things	essential clauses
which	animals and things	nonessential clauses

**\*Deciding whether a clause is essential or nonessential can be tricky. An essential clause is needed to identify the noun to which it refers, and no commas should separate this clause from the antecedent.**

- A student **who** wants to earn a good grade must attend class regularly. (The relative pronoun refers to a person, and it introduces an essential clause. It is needed to identify which students must attend class regularly.)
- A dog **that** is adopted from the shelter is happy to have a home. (The relative pronoun refers to a dog, and it introduces an essential clause.)

A nonessential clause contains information that might be interesting, but it is not necessary. The main clause is understandable without this additional information. If the clause is nonessential, it is set apart from the sentence with commas on both sides of the clause.

- The coffeehouse, **which** is right next to the school, serves very delicious coffee and scones. (The relative pronoun refers to the coffeehouse, but it introduces nonessential information.)
- Fred, **who** lives in South Carolina, is an excellent cook. (The relative pronoun refers to Fred, but it introduces nonessential information.)

## **Correlative Conjunctions**

Correlative conjunctions join grammatically equal sentence elements and are always used in pairs. **Both . . . and, not only . . . but, either . . . or, and neither . . . nor.** When using correlative conjunctions, be sure that the words, phrases, and clauses are parallel in their construction. Correlative conjunctions show greater emphasis than coordinating conjunctions.

- I **not only** have the energy for the marathon, **but** time. (Not parallel)
- I **not only** have the energy for the marathon, **but** I have the time too. (Parallel)
- **Either** Dave was flying to London **or** to Tucson. (Not parallel)
- Dave was flying **either** to London **or** to Tucson. (Parallel)

## **Punctuation Review**

**Independent Clause, + FANBOYS + Independent Clause** (A comma is used when a coordinating conjunction joins independent clauses.)

**Independent Clause; + Conjunctive Adverb, + Independent Clause** (A semicolon used when a conjunctive adverb joins independent clauses. A comma is added after all conjunctive adverbs with two or more syllables.)

**Subordinating Conjunction + Dependent Clause, + Independent Clause** (A comma is used after a dependent clause that is introduced by a subordinating conjunction.)

**Independent Clause + Subordinating Conjunction + Dependent Clause** (No comma is required with terminal dependent clauses.)



## Chapter 10

# Commas

A comma is a very useful piece of punctuation. Unfortunately, many people were taught to use commas whenever they would naturally pause. This myth causes people to overuse commas and give them punctuation powers that they do not have. Commas have rules too.

### Series Comma

A series is a list of three or more items. Commas separate three or more equally ranked elements (words, phrases, or short clauses) in a list. A comma is needed before the final conjunction in the list. This comma is called the serial comma. Do not use the comma if only two items are listed.

- She enjoys running, swimming, and rock climbing. (Series of words. Notice that a comma precedes *and*; this comma is called the serial comma.)
- She enjoys running on the track, swimming in the pool, and rock climbing at the gym. (Series of phrases.)
- Mary is the owner, Fred is the manager, and Dan is the marketing assistant. (Series of clauses.)

- She enjoys swimming and rock climbing. (Only two items listed. No comma required.)

The items in the series must have the same grammatical structure. This is called **parallel construction**. If two of the three items in a series have articles, then the third item needs to be rewritten with an article too.

- The new student is intelligent, can be depended on, and punctual. (**Not parallel construction**. Two of the items on the list are adjectives, but one item on the list is a phrase.)
- The new student is intelligent, dependable, and punctual. (**Parallel construction**. All items on the list are adjectives.)
- He asked for a hat, a Lego set, and for a gift card. (**Not parallel construction**. Two of the items in the series begin with a preposition. This needs to be rewritten. It can be rewritten so all of the items have the preposition, or only the first item is preceded by a preposition.)
- He asked for a hat, a Lego set, and a gift card. (**Parallel construction**.)
- He asked for a hat, for a Lego set, and for a gift card. (**Parallel construction**, but a bit wordy.)

NOTE: Newspapers follow AP Style. AP Style omits the final comma in a series unless it is needed for clarity. This final comma is known as the serial comma or the Oxford comma. This final comma is controversial. Some people insist that you can leave it off unless it is necessary for clarity. For the sake of consistency, most writers either always use it or never use it. Unless you are writing an article for a newspaper, do not omit the final comma.

## **Direct Address**

A comma is needed when a person is being spoken to directly. The name of the person being addressed is set apart with a comma, regardless of where it appears in the sentence. Names, teams, and groups are set apart from the rest of the sentence with commas.

- **Sarah**, do you have the realtor's phone number? (At the beginning of the sentence)
- Are you, **the future leaders of America**, ready to take the next step? (In the middle of the sentence)
- Let's eat, **grandma**! (At the end of the sentence)

This comma is important. If you forget to place this comma, it changes the meaning of the sentence.



## Adjectives

When two or more adjectives are independently describing the same noun, separate the adjectives with a comma. How can you tell if the adjectives are working independently? To test whether the adjectives need a comma separating them, run the sentence through the following test.

- 1. Mentally add the word *and* between the adjectives. If the sentence still makes sense, then move on to the second rule.
- 2. Mentally reverse the order of the adjectives. Does the sentence still make sense?

If the sentence still makes sense, then the adjectives are working independently and a comma is needed between them.

- Jennifer Lawrence is a **talented, beautiful** actress. (Jennifer Lawrence is a beautiful and talented actress.)
- The **fluffy, yellow** cat sat in the sun. (The yellow and fluffy cat sat in the sun.)

## Independent Clauses

When two independent clauses are joined together with a coordinating conjunction, a comma is needed before the conjunction.

- Fred and Mary walked their dog to the park, **but** they left when it started to rain.
- The rain finally stopped, **and** the children went to the park to play.

## Introductory Dependent Clauses

Dependent clauses that begin sentences are set apart from the independent clause with a comma. Dependent clauses usually begin with a subordinating conjunction (Chapter 9). *Although, while, if, because, and when* are all subordinating conjunctions.

- Because it is raining today, I will need to wear my raincoat. (Introductory dependent clause separated with a comma.)
- Although the forecast shows sunshine, it is currently raining. (Introductory dependent clause separated with a comma.)
- If you go out in the rain, be sure to wear a coat. (Introductory dependent clause separated with a comma.)

## Terminal Dependent Clauses

When a dependent clause appears at the end of the sentence, a comma is usually not necessary. If the dependent clause answers the question *when?*, *why?*, or *how?*, then the clause is essential and does not require a comma. If the dependent clause adds unnecessary information, then a comma is needed. This isn't common, but it is necessary to separate these afterthoughts with a comma.

- Please email me **if** you have any questions. (The dependent clause at the end of the sentence provides essential information, so no comma is needed.)
- Mary went to the store **because** she needed to buy milk. (The dependent clause at the end of the sentence provides essential information, so no comma is needed.)
- I intend to grade the writing assignments on Saturday, **although** I can grade them earlier if you choose. (The dependent clause provides nonessential information, so a comma is required.)

## Parenthetical Expressions

Parenthetical words, phrases, and clauses interrupt the flow of the sentence and offer unessential information to the sentence. Parenthetical expressions can be removed from the sentence, and the sentence still makes sense. Commas are required to separate parenthetical elements from the rest of the sentence.

- **No**, I will not be attending the conference. (At the beginning of the sentence)

- We know, **for example**, that the book is overpriced. (In the middle of the sentence)
- You have checked your writing assignment for accuracy, **no doubt**. (At the end of the sentence)
- Marathon training, **you must admit**, requires a lot of time and stamina. (Commas are needed because the information is unnecessary.)
- The sweatshirt, **which happened to be bright yellow**, sat on the sale rack for weeks. (Commas are needed because the information is unnecessary.)

**DO NOT use commas to set off clauses that contain essential information.** If the clause contains information that is needed to complete the meaning of the sentence, then no commas are needed. This information is also covered in Chapter 9.

- A student **who wants to succeed in this class** should turn in their assignments on time. (No commas are necessary because the clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence.)
- A coffeehouse **that offers delicious beverages** will succeed in my neighborhood. (No commas are necessary because the clause is essential to the meaning.)

## **Commas and Appositives**

Appositives rename nouns or pronouns. Usually an appositive appears right next to the noun or pronoun it is renaming. An appositive that provides nonessential information should be set off by commas.

- Sam Jones, **the union representative**, is here. (The appositive adds nonessential information; commas set it off.)
- You may pick up your order at the location closest to your home, **our Lynnwood branch**. (The appositive adds nonessential information.)

When an appositive is needed to identify the noun or pronoun referred to earlier in the sentence, do not set it off with commas.

- The book ***Fast Food Nation*** explains how fast food affects our nation. (The appositive is needed to identify the specific book; therefore, no commas are used.)

Closely related one-word appositives do not require commas.

- My brother **Dan** sometimes uses my computer.

## **Commas and the Adverb *too***

The adverb *too* requires different punctuation depending on its meaning in the sentence. If the sentence uses the word *too* to mean “also,” it is set apart with commas. If the adverb appears at the end of a clause, you do not need to separate it with a comma. If the adverb appears in the middle of a clause, set it apart with commas on both sides.

*Too* has an additional meaning. If *too* is used to mean “excessively,” do not set it apart with commas.

- Many students will be at the event **too**. (End of the sentence.)
- You, **too**, can make an entrance at the event. (In the middle of the sentence, set apart with commas.)
- That joke was **too** funny. (Too means excessively in this sentence. No commas are needed.)

## Commas and Introductory Phrases

### Introductory Verbal Phrases

Verb phrases that appear before an independent clause should be followed with commas. Introductory verbal phrases modify the subject of the main clause. Be sure that your introductory phrase is modifying the intended subject.

- **Running the marathon**, Mary listened to music with a strong beat. (Introductory verb phrase separated with a comma)
- **Working long hours**, we finished the project early. (Introductory verb phrase separated with a comma)

### Introductory Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases can also introduce sentences. Introductory prepositional phrases with four words or more should be followed by a comma.

- **In March** we expect the sun to shine. (No comma is needed. Introductory prepositional phrase is only 2 words)
- **By the middle of March**, the sun will shine more often in Seattle. (Introductory prepositional phrase separated with a comma)

# **Dates, Time Zones, Addresses, and Geographic Locations**

## **Dates**

Dates can be comprised of a number of different parts, such as weekday, calendar day, and year. When writing dates with more than two parts, commas are used to separate the different elements in the sentence to provide clarity. The month and date are never separated with commas.

- On March 4 we will celebrate a special holiday. (Only two parts. No comma needed.)
- On March 4, 2014, we will celebrate a special holiday. (Two commas set off the third part.)
- On Tuesday, March 4, 2014, we will finish the chapter. (Month and date are never separated with commas. Commas separate other parts in this list.)
- In March 2012 investors saw the stock price increase substantially. (Only two parts. No comma needed.)

## **Time Zones**

When writing a sentence that contains a time zone, commas separate the time zone from the rest of the sentence. Note that commas are used on both sides of the time zone.

- Our flight leaves Seattle at 8:55 a.m., PST, and arrives in New York at 5:05 p.m., EST.
- Dan ordered the flowers at 11:58 p.m., PST, and the coupon expired at midnight.

## **Addresses**

When addresses are written in a sentence, separate each part of the address with commas. Do not place a comma between the state and the zip code.

- Please send a copy of your passport to Epic Adventures, 14567 NE Aardvark Place, Seattle, WA 98101, before your trip. (Commas are used between all elements except the state and zip code, which are considered a single unit.)
- Edmonds Community College is located at 20000 68th Avenue West, Lynnwood, WA 98036. (Commas are used between all elements except state and zip code, which are considered a single unit.)

## **Geographic Locations**

When referring to a location with both the city and the state, separate the city from the state with commas. Commas are used on both sides of the state name unless the state appears at the end of the sentence. Commas are also used to set off the name of a country when it follows the name of a city.

Think about how you write these locations as an address on an envelope. You would separate the city, state, and country with commas.

- The Jones family moved from Portland, Oregon, to Billings, Montana. (Two commas set off the state unless it appears at the end of the sentence.)
- The 12-hour flight from London, England, to Seattle, Washington, was filled with business travelers. (Two commas set off the country unless it appears at the end of the sentence.)

## **Contrasting Statements**

Commas are used to set apart two related, but contrasting, statements. Contrasting statements are often introduced by the words **not**, **never**, **but**, and **yet**. Not all contrasting statements are preceded by these words. If the sentence contains contrasting statements, separate the contrasting statements with commas.

- We chose to travel to London, not Paris, at the beginning of our honeymoon. (The contrasting element appears in the middle of the sentence.)
- The more she complains, the more we ignore her. (One comma sets off a contrasting statement at the end of the sentence.)

## **Clarity**

Commas can help eliminate confusion in a sentence. Commas are used to separate words that are repeated for emphasis. In addition, commas can be used between words if it helps avoid confusion in the sentence.

- No matter what, they know they have our support. (Comma needed for clarity.)
- Most of the time, travelers bring a book or magazine to read. (Comma needed for clarity.)
- They waited a very, very long time for a table at the restaurant. (Comma added between the repeated words.)

## **Short Quotations**



A comma is used before the quotation mark to set off a short quotation from the rest of the sentence. If the quotation is divided into two parts, commas are used with each part of the quotation.

- The instructor said, “The writing assignment is due on Friday.”
- “Discipline,” said Abraham Lincoln, “is choosing between what you want now and what you want most.”

## **Degrees, Abbreviations, and Numbers**

### **Degrees and Abbreviations**

Degrees, personal titles, and professional titles are set off by commas. The abbreviations Jr., Sr., and Roman numerals added to a person’s name are not separated with commas.

- David Johnson, PhD, will speak about the importance of grammar.
- Mary Elizabeth, MD, is currently accepting new patients.
- Fred Jones Sr. is the father of Fred Jones Jr.

### **Company Abbreviations**

Some companies have the abbreviations Inc. and Ltd. in their company name. Inc. and Ltd. are not set off with commas unless the company’s legal name includes the commas. (This is not common.)

- Pixar Inc. creates animated movies and short films. (no comma needed)
- Apple Inc. invented the iPhone. (no comma needed)

### **Numbers**

To avoid potential confusion, use a comma when unrelated numbers appear side by side in a sentence. Numbers of more than three digits require commas. Calendar years, addresses, page numbers, decimal points, and zip codes do not require internal commas.

- By 2015, 950 levels of Candy Crush will be available. (Two figures appearing side by side are separated with a comma.)
- There were 1,780 people at the mall today. (Comma separates a number larger than three digits.)
- Their zip code is 98052. (No internal comma needed in a zip code)

## **Quick List of Comma Rules**

**1. Use a comma to separate three or more items in a series.**

- She likes apples, pears, bananas, and peaches.

**2. Use a comma with a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS) to separate independent clauses.**

- Fred likes to go out for dinner, but he also enjoys cooking dinner at home.

**3. Use a comma to separate an introductory dependent clause from the independent clause.**

- Although it began to rain, we went for a walk around the neighborhood.

**5. Use commas to separate two or more adjectives that describe the same noun.**

Try inserting the word “and” between the adjectives and reverse the adjectives. If the sentence still makes sense, then a comma is needed between the adjectives.

- She is an intelligent, capable student. (She is a capable and intelligent student.)

**4. Use commas to set apart nonessential parenthetical elements in a sentence.** It is considered nonessential if it can be removed and the sentence still makes sense.

- Fred is, without a doubt, the best cook in the family.

**5. Use commas to set apart elements in dates, geographical locations, addresses, and titles in names.**

- Nancy Johnson, MD, moved to Paris, France, on July 15, 2013, to complete her residency.

**6. Use commas to separate a short quotation from the rest of the sentence.**

- Mary asked, “Who wants to go to Hawaii in December?” “I do,” said Sarah.

**7. Use commas when necessary to prevent confusion.**

- To Nancy, Kennedy was the most charismatic president.

**8. Use commas when directly addressing someone.**

- Let’s eat, Grandma!

**9. Use a comma when separating introductory words, such as yes, well, no, and now.**

- Yes, I will be at the conference in Las Vegas.

**10. Use a comma to show contrasting statements.**

- These are my shoes, not yours.

**11. Use a comma when unrelated numbers appear side by side in a sentence.**

- By September 2014, 13 new cafes will be opening on campus.

## Chapter 11

# Semicolons, Colons, and Other Punctuation

### Semicolons

Many people were not taught how to properly use the semicolons, so they approach semicolons with fear. Once you learn the tricks to using semicolons, you might wonder how you wrote without them. Semicolons are a stronger piece of punctuation than the comma. Use them in the following instances.

**Semicolons are used to connect two independent clauses.** Using a semicolon signals that the two clauses are closely related. If the two independent clauses are not closely related, then a semicolon is not the right choice.

- Winter quarter is almost finished; finals take place in two weeks. (Correct! These two independent clauses are closely related.)

- Summer quarter begins in July; I like coffee. (Incorrect! These two independent clauses are not closely related.)

Independent clauses can work as their own sentence. If the clause cannot function as an independent sentence, then the semicolon is not the right choice. In addition, **never** use coordinating conjunctions with semicolons. Semicolons and coordinating conjunctions do not go together. You can think of them as oil and water; they do not mix.

- The coffee shop closes at 9 p.m.; we need to hurry to get there in time. (Correct! These two independent clauses are closely related.)
- The coffee shop closes at 9 p.m.; for lattes and scones. (Incorrect! The second half of the sentence is a prepositional phrase and not an independent clause.)
- The coffee is better at the downtown location; but we can go to the Bellevue location. (Incorrect! Semicolons and coordinating conjunctions are never used together.)

**Semicolons are used to connect two independent clauses with the addition of a conjunctive adverb.** Conjunctive adverbs provide a transition between one clause and the next clause. A semicolon appears before the conjunctive adverb, and a comma appears after longer conjunctive adverbs. Common conjunctive adverbs include the following: *accordingly, consequently, for example, furthermore, however, likewise, moreover, nevertheless, otherwise, and therefore*. Shorter conjunctive adverbs like *then, thus, and hence* do not require the additional comma.

- Fred worked on his writing assignment for two days; consequently, he received a high score from his instructor.
- She did not attend class for two weeks; consequently, she missed a lot of information that was on the exam.
- Mary updated her Facebook status before the movie started; hence she had many notifications when she turned her phone back on. (No comma needed after *hence*.)

**Semicolons are used to separate items in a series when those items already have commas.** Usually you only use commas to separate items in a series, but when the items already contain commas, semicolons are added for clarity.

- We traveled to Paris, France; Berlin, Germany; and Madrid, Spain. (Semicolons separate the locations, which are already written as city, country.)
- Mary has lived in Billings, Montana; Portland, Oregon; Orlando, Florida; and New York, New York. (Semicolons separate the locations, which are written with internal commas separating the city and the state.)

**Semicolons are used to separate three or more independent clauses that appear in a series.** These sentences can be long and wordy. If the sentence becomes too cumbersome, it is time to rewrite it.

- The first coffeehouse offered delicious coffee and scones; the second coffeehouse offered only coffee; and the third coffeehouse offered coffee, muffins, and music.

## **Colons**

**The colon is used to introduce lists, quotations, and explanations.** Colons alert the reader that a list or an explanation follows. The information after the colon will list, explain, or clarify the information that appeared before the colon. Colons are only used after statements that are complete sentences. Never use a colon after a phrase or a fragment.

**Use a colon after an independent clause that introduces a list of one or more items.** All of the words to the left of a colon must form an independent clause. If it does not form an independent clause, then do not use a colon. A list can be introduced by such words as *the following*, *as follows*, *these*, or *thus*. A list can be written vertically or horizontally. Do not let the formatting confuse you. The rules still apply to colons even when the sentence is written as a vertical list.

When writing lists in sentence form, do not capitalize the first letter after the colon unless it is a proper noun. When using a colon in a vertical list, capitalize the first letter of each item on the list.

- Fred's favorite cities to visit are the following: New York, San Diego, and New Orleans. (Do not place the colon after "are" because it is a verb. You can usually add "the following" to make the phrase an independent clause.)
- She had only one request that morning: coffee. (Colon introduces the one item on her list.)
- During November and December, Starbucks offers the following coffee beverages:
  - Pumpkin Spice Lattes
  - Peppermint Lattes
  - Peppermint Mochas
- Mary's favorite cities are
  - Paris
  - London
  - Prague

(No colon is used for this list because the sentence would not form an independent clause before the colon.)

**Use a colon to introduce long one-sentence quotations and quotations longer than one sentence.** The entire quotation needs to be inside the quotation marks, including the sentence punctuation.

- Maria Robinson said: “Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.” (Long one-sentence quotation introduced with a colon.)

Long quotations that fill more than three lines should be moved to a separate paragraph without quotation marks. The paragraph should be indented on the right and the left, and the quotation should be separated from the rest of the text with a blank line before and after the paragraph. Indentation and blank lines separate the quotation from the rest of the text.

Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it.

--Steve Jobs

**Use a colon to connect two independent clauses if the second clause explains or supplements the first clause.** If the information after the colon does not explain or illustrate the first clause, then a semicolon is a better punctuation choice.

- The team faced a huge problem: their uniforms did not arrive in time for the game. (What was their huge problem? The second clause explains what the “huge problem” is.)

**Colons are used after the salutation of a business letter.**

- Dear Mr. Smith:
- Dear Dr. Mary Jones:
- To Whom it May Concern:

**Colons are used to separate hours and minutes.**

- 10:59 p.m.
- 6:30 a.m.

**Colons are used to separate the title and the subtitle of books, articles, and other publications.**

- Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking (book title)
- Woe is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English (book title)

## **Periods**

Periods are most commonly used to end a sentence, but periods have other uses too. **Do not double space after periods unless you are typing on a typewriter.** Modern word processing adds the appropriate space after a period. If you double space your document, you will end up with a lot of white space in your text.

**Use a period at the end of a sentence that is a statement, a command, or an indirect question.** This is the most familiar way to use a period. Indirect questions can be challenging because the sentence might sound like a question. The sentence may even contain the word *question*. If the statement contains the word *wonder* or *question*, look closely at the sentence to determine if the sentence is an indirect question or a direct question.

- The campus cafe was closed yesterday. (statement)
- Turn in your writing assignment by midnight on Friday. (command)
- The instructor asked if there were any questions. (indirect question)
- The students wondered when the sun would come out again. (indirect question)

**Use a period to punctuate a polite request or suggestion.** Polite requests look a lot like questions, but they are really commands. Polite requests add the words *can*, *may*, *will*, *could*, and *would* to soften a command. The result is a command that sounds a lot like a suggestion. Polite requests are a way to command action in a less pushy way. Because these sentences are commands, they cannot be answered with a simple *yes* or *no* reply. A polite request is asking for action.

- May I suggest that you prepare your writing assignment early in the week. (polite suggestion)
- Will you please let me know if you have any questions. (polite request)
- Could you please arrive ten minutes early for your appointment. (polite request)

Punctuating polite requests can be confusing. As the writer, you have control over how the sentence is written. Rewrite the sentence as a statement if a period seems awkward.

- I suggest that you prepare your writing assignment early in the week. (polite request rewritten as a statement)
- Let me know if you have any questions. (polite request rewritten as a statement)
- Please arrive ten minutes early for your appointment. (polite request rewritten as a statement)

### **Use periods to punctuate lower case abbreviations.**

- a.m. (ante meridiem)
- p.m. (post meridiem)
- ft. (foot or feet)
- Ave. (avenue)
- St. (street)
- EXCEPTIONS: mph (miles per hour), wpm (words per minute)

### **Use periods to punctuate abbreviations containing capital and lowercase letters.**

- Dr. (Doctor)
- Mr. (Mister)
- Mrs. (Misses)
- Est. (Established)

### **No periods are used to punctuate abbreviations containing all capital letters.**

Businesses, organizations, academic degrees, geographic areas, television stations, federal agencies, and professional certificates do not use periods.

- NBC (National Broadcasting Company)
- NYSE (New York Stock Exchange)
- IPO (Initial Public Offering)
- AA (Associate of Arts degree)
- FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)
- USA (United States of America)
- **EXCEPTION:** use periods and spaces when single initials are used to abbreviate a person's name, such as J. K. Rowling.
- **EXCEPTION:** use periods when United States is abbreviated and used as an adjective (U.S. government)

### **Punctuating after an abbreviation**

If the abbreviation appears at the end of a sentence, you do not add an additional period to the end of the sentence. If your sentence ends with a different punctuation mark, then the period and the additional punctuation mark are used together. This is grammatically correct, but it looks awkward. In these cases, it is often better to rewrite your sentence.

- Dave's flight was scheduled to depart at 9:35 a.m. (no extra period needed)
- Did you mark the course in ft. or yds.? (period used for abbreviation and question mark used to end the question)



- Did you mark the course in feet or yards? (rewritten using the words feet and yards instead of their abbreviations)

## **Question Marks**

**Use a question mark to punctuate a direct question.**

- Have you seen my keys?
- What do you want for dinner?

**Use a question mark to punctuate tag questions added to statements.** These questions are added to the end of a statement and turn the entire sentence into a question.

- The cafe serves the best coffee, don't they?
- That was the best movie, don't you think?
- You didn't forget your wallet again, did you?

**Use a question mark to punctuate statements that are meant to be read as question or to show surprise.** Adding a question mark changes the meaning of the sentence. If you want the sentence to be read as a question, then add a question mark.

- We are going out at midnight. (statement)
- We are going out at midnight? (The question mark changes the meaning of the sentence. Why are we going out at midnight?)
- The shoes cost \$300. (statement)
- The shoes cost \$300? (The question mark changes the meaning of the sentence.)

**Use a question mark within parentheses to show doubt or uncertainty.**

- She graduated from college (1996?) after years of studying.
- He started his job a few years ago (2010?).

## **Exclamation Points**

The exclamation point expresses strong emotions, excitement, horror, urgency, and panic. Use it sparingly to avoid the impression that you are shouting.

- Wow! I won the lottery!
- That is amazing!

## **Hyphens**

Hyphens reveal a connection between words. It alerts the reader that these words go together. The connection can change the meaning of the sentence.

- The doctors worked twenty-four-hour shifts. (The doctors worked around the clock.)
- The doctors worked twenty four-hour shifts. (The doctors worked twenty separate four-hour shifts.)
- The doctors worked twenty-four hour shifts. (The doctors worked twenty-four separate hour-long shifts.)

**Use a hyphen to create compound nouns, verbs, and adjectives.**

- up-to-date
- first-class
- brother-in-law
- double-space
- full-time

**Use a hyphen to create words with the following prefixes: ex, self, or quasi.**

- He is our quasi-official leader.
- She has a lot of self-esteem.
- The ex-president of the company was invited to the meeting.

**Use a hyphen to write family titles that contain *ex*, *great*, or *in-law*. The prefixes *step*, *half*, or *grand* are not hyphenated.**

- great-grandmother
- mother-in-law
- half brother
- stepsister
- stepbrother

**Use a hyphen to divide a word over two lines.** This rule only applies if you are working on a typewriter. Most word processing software will adjust the spacing, and move the word to the next line.

## **Dashes**

Be careful not to confuse dashes and hyphens. They might look very similar, but they are different. You can think of them as twins, but even human twins get annoyed when you cannot tell them apart.

Where is the dash located on the keyboard? The dash is not on a standard keyboard. You form a dash by typing two hyphens with no space between them, no spaces before them, and no spaces after them. Most software will convert the two hyphens to a dash. This dash is also called the em dash. (The dash is the length of the letter m.) If your software does not convert to the dash, two hyphens working as a dash is acceptable.

The dash is used instead of a comma, semicolon, colon, or parentheses in order to show greater emphasis. The dash is more dramatic than the comma or parentheses. Because the dash is used to show emphasis and drama, do not overuse it.

To remember that a dash shows greater emphasis and drama, think of the meaning of the word “dash.” If someone is dashing to class, they are in a big hurry. It is more dramatic than just walking to class. The dash alerts the reader that the following information is dramatic.

**Use a dash to set off parenthetical elements and appositives.** Usually parenthetical elements and appositives are set apart from the sentence with commas. Commas are the standard way to set apart parenthetical elements in a sentence. Use dashes or parentheses to set apart parenthetical elements that contain internal commas. Be aware that using dashes will emphasize the parenthetical element. Parentheses de-emphasize the parenthetical element.

- Three students--Sam Jones, Fred Johnson, and Dave Smith--received awards at the conference. (Parenthetical element contains internal commas. Dashes used for clarity.)
- Three desserts--cheesecake, macarons, and ice cream--were available at the meeting. (Parenthetical element contains internal commas. Dashes used for clarity.)

If you place parenthetical elements between dashes instead of commas, it emphasizes the parenthetical element.

- All students--including Sam Jones--must take the test again. (Parenthetical element is emphasized.)

- All of the desserts--especially the cheesecake--were devoured by the students. (Parenthetical element is emphasized.)

**Use a dash to show an interruption of thought, an abrupt change of thought, or an afterthought.** This is an abrupt form of punctuation for an afterthought. It is often better to rewrite the sentence.

- I will call you tomorrow--if that is okay with you--to discuss our plans. (Interruption of a thought)
- Let's meet for coffee on Thursday--no, let's meet Friday instead. (Abrupt change of thought. Rewriting would improve this sentence.)

**Use a dash to connect an introductory list with a summarizing statement.** If this seems awkward, you can rewrite the sentence without the dash.

- Angry Birds, Words With Friends, Candy Crush--these are some of the most popular iPhone games. (with the dash)
- Angry Birds, Words With Friends, and Candy Crush are some of the most popular iPhone games. (No dash. Coordinating conjunction added to connect the list to the summary.)

**Use a dash to attribute a quotation.** The dash immediately precedes the source of the quotation. The dash and source should appear on a separate line and aligned to the right.

- Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing.

--Abraham Lincoln

## **Parentheses**

Parentheses are always used in pairs to enclose a complete sentence, a word, a number, or an expression.

**Use parentheses to set apart parenthetical or nonessential sentence elements.**

There are three ways to punctuate parenthetical elements. Dashes emphasize the nonessential information the most. Parentheses emphasize the nonessential information the least. Commas neither emphasize nor de-emphasize the information.

- The advertisement, which appears on page 5, has a major spelling error. (Normal punctuation of nonessential information. The parenthetical element is not emphasized or de-emphasized.)
- The advertisement--which appears on page 5--has a major spelling error. (Strong emphasis placed on the parenthetical information.)
- The advertisement (which appears on page 5) has a major spelling error. (Least emphasis placed on the parenthetical information.)

**Use parentheses to enclose numbers in formal documents.** In legal, business, and formal documents, numbers usually appear in both word and numeral form. Using the written form of the number and the numeral form should be reserved for formal documents.

- Payment is due in thirty (30) days.
- The boat cost twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000).

**Use parentheses to enclose numbers or letters that list items in a sentence.** Use numbers to list items that require a specific order. Letters are used for lists that do not require a specific order.

- To register for the marathon, (1) log on to our website, (2) select the marathon you want to race, (3) select the form of payment you want to use, (4) enter payment, and (5) click the submit button to complete your purchase.
- The website offered several tips for marathon training, including (a) wear appropriate running shoes, (b) break in new shoes before the race, (c) incorporate a rest day every week, and (d) stretching is required.

## **Parentheses and Sentence Punctuation**

If the entire sentence is inside parentheses, then the period is also inside the parentheses.

- (Check Canvas for all upcoming due dates.)
- (See page 5 for more information.)

If only part of the sentence is enclosed with parentheses, and that section appears at the end of the sentence; then the punctuation stays outside of the parentheses. Semicolons, colons, and commas that appear in the sentence stay outside of the parentheses.

- Sarah will travel to Hawaii next week (June 4). (The period is outside the parentheses.)

- When we start Spring quarter (April 7), the weather will be warmer. (Comma is outside the parentheses)

If a complete sentence appears in parentheses, and the parenthetical sentence is embedded inside another sentence, do not capitalize the first letter of the parenthetical sentence. If the sentence in parentheses requires a question mark or an exclamation point, then the punctuation needs to be inside the parentheses. Periods are never added to sentences that are inside parentheses embedded within other sentences.

- We tried the new restaurant (have you tried it?) last night. (A question is embedded within another sentence. Use a question mark inside the parentheses. Do not capitalize the first letter of the sentence inside parentheses.)
- Dave ordered the sock soup (yuck!), and I ordered pizza. (An exclamation is embedded within the sentence. Use an exclamation point inside the parentheses. Do not capitalize the first letter of the sentence inside the parentheses.)
- After dinner, we went to the beach (we wanted to digest our food before going home) to watch the sunset. (A complete sentence is embedded within the sentence. Do not add a period to this sentence! Do not capitalize the first letter of the sentence inside the parentheses.)

## **Quotation Marks**

Quotation marks always appear in pairs. One quotation mark appears at the beginning and one appears at the end. Quotation marks never appear alone.

**Use quotation marks to enclose words that are direct quotations.** Quotation marks imply that these are the exact words spoken. Unless the words are a direct quotation, do not use quotation marks.

- “When you’re curious, you find lots of interesting things to do,” said Walt Disney. (direct quote enclosed in quotation marks)
- Walt Disney said that curiosity and imagination are important. (indirect quotation requires no quotation marks)

**Use quotation marks to enclose the titles of magazine articles, songs, short stories, television episodes, or a chapter of a larger book.**

- The kids love the song “In Summer” from the movie *Frozen*.
- Dave’s favorite episode of *Lost* was “The Constant.”

## **Quotation Marks and Punctuation**

**Periods and commas are always placed inside the quotation marks.**

- The kids keep singing “Let It Go.” (period inside the quotation mark)
- Mary said, “We need to go to the store.” (period inside the quotation mark)
- Fred said, “Order me a latte,” but Mary accidentally ordered him a mocha. (comma is inside the quotation marks)

**Colons and semicolons are always placed outside the quotation marks.**

- Fred said, “Order me a latte”; Mary accidentally ordered him a mocha. (semicolon appears outside the quotation marks)
- The following characters appeared in the episode “The Constant”: Kate, Jack, Desmond, and Locke.

Question marks and exclamation point can be placed inside or outside the quotation mark, but it is determined by the sentence. Question marks and exclamation points are placed inside the quotation mark if they are part of the quotation. If the quotation is a question, then the question mark is placed inside the quotation mark. If the sentence asks a question, but not the quotation, then the question mark is outside the quotation mark.

- Dave asked, “What do you want for dinner?” (The question mark is part of the quotation. An additional punctuation mark is not needed.)
- What do you think she meant when she said, “The fish tank is on fire”? (The entire sentence is a question. The quotation is not a question. The question mark is placed outside the quotation mark.)

## **Italics**

**Use italics for the titles of books, magazines, movies, shows, plays, newspapers, and music albums.**

- *Newsweek* published the article about education. (Magazine title is in italics)
- *Friends* was a popular television show in the 1990s. (Television show title is in italics)

**Use italics for words or phrases used as examples in your sentence.** Using italics, you can write about a specific word, without including the meaning of the word in your sentence.

- People should know that *irregardless* is not a real word. (Use italics to refer to words in a sentence without using their meaning in a sentence)
- Many people confuse the words *lay* and *lie*. (Use italics to refer to words in a sentence without using their meaning in the sentence)

**Use italics for slang words.** Some people prefer to use quotation marks. It is a personal preference.

- Andy thought the dessert was *epic!* (Slang)
- Ava’s soccer goal was *wicked.* (Slang)

## **Brackets**

**Use brackets to set apart editorial comments within a quotation.** The comments inside the brackets can include additional information or corrections. The most common use for brackets is to enclose the word *sic* inside brackets following an error in a quotation. *Sic* is a Latin word meaning *thus* or *so*. By putting the word *sic* in brackets, it acknowledges that there is an error in the quotation, but the quotation is exactly how the speaker said it.

- He said, “I want to go too [sic] the store!”
- The coach wrote the article “We can’t loose [sic] the game” for the local newspaper.
- “Your vacation package price [\$3,960] also includes all meals and beverages.”

## **Apostrophes**

**Use an apostrophe to form possessive nouns.** Apostrophes show ownership or origin. Apostrophes never make a noun plural.

- Fred’s motorcycle (motorcycle belongs to Fred)
- Ava’s toys (the toys belonging to Ava)
- The Joneses’ house (the house belonging to the Jones family)

**Use an apostrophe to form contractions.** Contractions are shortened words that formed by joining two words. An apostrophe takes the place of the missing letters.

- Can’t (contraction of *cannot*)
- Won’t (contraction of *will not*)
- Could’ve (contraction of *could have*)
- It’s (contraction of *it is* or *it has*)

**Use an apostrophe in place of omitted letters or numbers.**



- '70s (1970s)
- Class of '14 (class of 2014)

**Use an apostrophe as the symbol for feet in measurement.** The quotation mark is used as the symbol for inches.

- The room is 15' x 25'. (15 feet by 25 feet)
- She is 5' 4" tall. (5 feet four inches)

## Chapter 12

# Capitalization

Capitalization makes a big difference in the meaning of your sentence. It is the difference between living in the white house and living in the White House. There are a lot of capitalization rules. The trick is to be aware that there are a lot of rules and know when reference a dictionary or style guide.

Do not capitalize words to emphasize them. It is not grammatically correct, and there are better ways to emphasize your point. In addition, do not type documents in all capital letters. Writing in all capitals gives the impression that the writer is shouting. It is considered rude.

When capitalizing nouns, only capitalize the first letter of the word. It is correct to write *Washington* and incorrect to write *WASHINGTON*. Only the first letter should be capitalized. Abbreviations are exceptions to this rule.

**Capitalize the first letter of the first word in a sentence.** If your sentence begins with a company name that is not capitalized, it is better to rewrite your sentence.

- The Apple iPhone is a very popular smartphone.
- iPhones are very popular smartphones. (Technically correct, but it looks so awkward that it is better to rewrite it.)

**Capitalize the pronoun *I*.** It is never correct to use the pronoun *I* as a lowercase letter.

- If I were you, I would turn in the writing assignment on time.
- Dave and I enjoy drinking coffee.

**Capitalize proper nouns.** Proper nouns name specific people, places, or things. People's names are always capitalized. Company names, product names, and nicknames are all capitalized. Historical events are always capitalized. Specific academic courses are capitalized, but the general subject is only capitalized if it contains a proper noun. If the noun names something very specific, then it must be capitalized.

- **Specific names:** Edmonds Community College, Eastern Washington University, and Cascadia Community College are all capitalized because they name specific colleges.
- **Specific companies:** Starbucks, Microsoft, Boeing, and Alaska Airlines
- **Historical events:** World War I, World War II, and the Great Depression
- **Specific products:** PowerPoint, Excel, and Word
- **Specific academic courses:** Accounting 101, English 102, and History 205. The general subjects of accounting, English, and history are not capitalized unless the subject contains a proper noun like English.

**Capitalize geographic locations.** The names of specific cities, counties, states, countries, continents, lakes, rivers, oceans, and mountains are capitalized. The word *city* is only capitalized if it is included in the official name of the city. Salt Lake City includes the word *city* in its official name, so it is capitalized.

- **Specific geographic locations:** Lake Washington, Lake Erie, and Lake Tahoe
- **Specific countries:** France, Canada, Spain, and Italy
- **Specific continents:** North America, South America, Africa, and Asia

**Capitalize the name of specific celestial bodies.** Do not capitalize sun or moon. Many planets have suns and moons, so these are common nouns. Earth is sometimes capitalized and sometimes lowercased. When it shows up in a list of other planets, Earth is capitalized. If it refers to space, Earth is capitalized. If the meaning refers to something other than space travel or our specific planet, then it is lowercase.

- Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Earth are all planets in the solar system.
- Why on earth did you do that?
- The beauty queen wished for peace on earth.

**Capitalize days, months, and holidays.** Seasons are lowercase unless they are included in a proper noun. Seasons that are combined with a year are considered proper nouns because it refers to a specific season.

- Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are all capitalized because they name specific days.
- Mary loves summer days. (*Summer* is not capitalized because it is a common noun.)
- The Fall 2014 course catalog will be available soon. (*Fall* is capitalized because it is combined with the year to form a proper noun.)

**Capitalize the first word and all main words naming specific newspapers, journals, books, and articles.** Do not capitalize the conjunctions (*and, but*), prepositions (*to, of, for*), and articles (*a, an, the*) unless they are the first word in the title.

- *Grammar Girl Presents the Ultimate Writing Guide for Students* is a great grammar book.
- *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* is currently on top of the *New York Times* best seller list, but it is not a book about capital letters.

**Capitalize formal titles (political, professional, military, nobility) that appear before someone's name.** Formal titles that appear after someone's name are not capitalized. The titles Mr., Mrs., Miss, and Dr. are capitalized when they appear before someone's name. If the title appears before the person's name, then it is part of their official title. If the title appears after their name, it is only describing their role, and should not be capitalized. It is correct to say that Queen Elizabeth is a queen. Her title is capitalized because it appears before her name and is part of her official title. The second *queen* is lower case because it is only describing her role. The distinction is whether the title is part of their official name or if it is a common reference to their generalized role.

- In October President Obama invited several former presidents to the White House.
- The conference had many impressive speakers, including Dr. Smith and Professor Jones.
- Prince William and Prince Harry are princes.

**Capitalize family titles only if they precede the person's name or are substituting for a person's name.** Aunt Sarah and Uncle Al are both capitalized because the title precedes their names. A broad reference to aunts, uncles, and cousins is not capitalized because it does not refer to a specific person. If the family title is preceded by a modifier, such as a possessive pronoun (my, his, her, our), then the family title is not capitalized.

- She is a mother now. (*Mother* is not capitalized because it refers to a generalized role.)
- Say hello to Dad for me. (*Dad* is capitalized because this is his name in this sentence.)
- Aunt Sarah and Uncle Al were invited to the party. (The titles precede their names)
- Her aunt and uncle were invited to the party. (The family titles are preceded by possessive pronouns.)
- Andy has eight cousins. (*Cousins* is not capitalized because it is a general reference and not part of someone's name.)

**Capitalize specific religions and nationalities.**

- **Religions:** Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Judaism.
- **Nationalities:** American, French, British, Korean, Japanese, and Russian.

**Capitalize direction names if they are referring to a specific location.** Do not capitalize compass directions if they are used to describe a direction.

- **Specific regions that include direction names:** the Middle East, the East Coast, the Northern Hemisphere, Western Washington, and the South.
- **General compass directions are lower case:** travel south, drive east, turn north, and walk west.

**Capitalize the main words naming specific departments, bureaus, divisions, agencies, and committees.** If the noun refers to a general committee or agency, then it is not capitalized.

- Mary is involved in many committees. (General reference to many committees.)
- Fred called the Customer Service Department. (Refers to a specific department)
- The Bureau of Engraving and Printing is a division of the United States Department of the Treasury. (Refers to a specific bureau and department)
- The Accounting Department handles payroll. (Refers to a specific department)
- Microsoft's Xbox Division is very profitable. (Refers to a specific division)

### **Capitalize the first word in a quotation.**

- The instructor said, “Turn in your writing assignments.”
- Dave said, “Do not forget to buy coffee at the store.”

### **Capitalize the first word of each item in a vertical list.**

The instructor covered the following topics in class today:

- Action verbs
- Transitive verbs
- Intransitive verbs
- Linking verbs

### **Capitalize the names of specific amendments, bills, laws, and treaties.**

- The Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919 and ended WWI.
- The Bill of Rights is the collective name of the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
- The Seventh Amendment guarantees jury trials in cases involving more than twenty dollars.
- The Affordable Care Act received a lot of coverage in the media.
- They need to work out a peace treaty. (Not capitalized because this is a general reference to a treaty and does not name a specific treaty)

## **Quick List of Capitalization Rules**

**1. Capitalize the first letter of the first word in a sentence.**

**2. Capitalize the pronoun *I*.**

**3. Capitalize all proper nouns.**

**4. Capitalize geographic locations.**

**5. Capitalize celestial bodies. (Jupiter, Mars, Earth)**

**6. Capitalize days, months, and holidays.**

**7. Capitalize the names of specific newspapers, journals, books, and articles.**

**8. Capitalize formal titles (political, professional, military, nobility) that appear before someone's name.** If the title appears after the name, it is not capitalized.

**9. Capitalize family titles only if they precede a person's name or when they are substituting for a person's name.**

**10. Capitalize specific religions and nationalities.**

**11. Capitalize direction names if they are referring to a specific location.**

**12. Capitalize the main words naming specific departments, divisions, agencies and committees.**

**13. Capitalize the first word in a quotation.**

**14. Capitalize the first word of each item in a vertical list.**

**15. Capitalize the names of specific amendments, bills, laws, and treaties.**

## Chapter 13

# **Numbers**

Why are there numbers in a grammar book? Writing numbers correctly in a sentence is a grammar issue and not a math issue.

**When writing numbers as figures, use a comma to separate groups of three digits.** This adds clarity to the numbers. This rule does not apply to phone numbers, addresses, zip codes, serial numbers, account numbers, and page numbers.

- The balance on the account is \$14,300.
- Her zip code is 98052.

**The numbers one through ten are written out as words. Numbers above ten are written as numerals.** This is referred to as the Rule of Ten.

- The fruit bowl contains two bananas and three apples.
- The class has 23 students.

If numbers under ten and over ten are used in the same sentence, use numerals for all numbers. The highest number in the sentence sets the rule for all of the numbers in the sentence.

- The fruit bowl contains 2 bananas, 3 apples, and 14 apricots. (The highest number sets the rule for the sentence.)
- The class has 2 instructors and 23 students. (The highest number sets the rule for the sentence.)

**Numbers that begin sentences are written out as words.** If the written out number consists of more than two words, spare the reader and rewrite your sentence.

- Three students submitted the assignment early.
- Three thousand four hundred and fifteen people attended the conference. (Rewrite! This sentence is too cumbersome.)
- The conference was attended by 3,415 people. (Better!)

It is acceptable to begin a sentence with a number if that number refers to a calendar year.

- 2011 was a busy year for the family.

## **Money**

**Use numbers to express amounts of money.** A decimal point is unnecessary in whole dollar amounts. For clarity, always include a comma in dollar amounts of \$1,000 or more. Use a dollar sign and a decimal point for monetary figures less than \$1 if they are listed in a sentence with items that are more than \$1. If all monetary figures are less than \$1, it is acceptable to write the amounts as cents. Do not use the cents symbol.

- The invoice showed charges of \$25.99, \$20, \$.75, and \$1,212.25.
- The bake sale sold items for \$.25, \$.75, and \$3.
- The bananas cost 75 cents each.

## **Dates**

**Use numbers (1, 2, 3) if the date follows the month.** Do not use *th*, *nd*, *rd*, or *st* after the figure if the date follows the calendar month. Some word processing programs,

including Microsoft Word, automatically change the dates to the ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd). Be aware that some programs will do this and delete the ordinal numbers when necessary.

- May 17, 2008, was an exceptionally warm day in Seattle.
- They are scheduled to arrive on July 2, 2014.

**Use ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd) if the date precedes the month or if the date is used without the month.**

- Seattle was exceptionally warm on the 17th of May.
- They are scheduled to arrive on the 2nd.

## **Addresses**

**Use numerals for address numbers except for the number One.** Use numbers for zip codes, address numbers, suite numbers, apartment numbers, or route numbers.

- Her address is One Elm Street, Apt. 2, Redmond, WA 98052.
- His address is 7319 Maple Drive, Suite 310, Edmonds, WA 98020.

**Street names numbered ten and below are written out as words (First, Second, Third).** Street names numbered greater than ten are written as ordinal numbers (11th, 12th, 13th).

- 301 First Ave South
- 18061 85th Ave North
- 2025 Second Street

## **Adjacent Numbers**

**When two numbers appear side-by-side in a sentence, write the first number in words and second number as a numeral.** If the first number cannot be written in two words or fewer, it is acceptable to write out the number that can be written in fewer words. If both numbers are long, rewrite the sentence.

- The opera was divided into four 30-minute acts.
- The light fixture required ten 120-watt bulbs.
- The campus dorms consist of twelve 200-unit apartments.

## **Time**

**Use numbers to express time with a.m. and p.m.**



- The meeting starts at 11 a.m.
- The meeting starts at eleven a.m. (Incorrect)

**Numbers or words can precede *o'clock, in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the evening.***

- The meeting starts at 11 o'clock in the morning. (Acceptable)
- The meeting starts at eleven o'clock in the morning. (Acceptable)

Use one way to express time in a document and remain consistent. Do not use more than one way to express a single unit of time.

- The meeting starts at 11 a.m. in the morning. (Incorrect. This is redundant because a.m. already explains that this time is in the morning.)

## **Measurements**

**Use numbers to express weights, measurements, and temperatures.**

- Fred's flight to Seattle took 7 hours and 35 minutes.
- Seattle reached 75 degrees Fahrenheit today.
- The recipe requires 12 ounces of cheese.

## **Large numbers**

**Use a combination of numbers and words to express large numbers. It is easier to read as a combination.**

- Cleveland, Ohio's Balloon Fest released 1.4 million balloons into the air in 1986.
- In 2013 the state of Washington had 6.97 million residents.

## **Percentages**

**Use numbers to express percentages and spell out the word *percent*.** The percent sign (%) is only used in technical documents and tables.

- Our profits increased 10 percent last quarter.
- The flight arrives early 85 percent of the time.
- Mary received a 25 percent discount.

## **Fractions**

**Simple fractions are written as words when they can be expressed in two words and when it is the only fraction in a sentence.**

- One fourth of the class turned in the assignment early.
- We ate one half of the cookies before the party.

**Use numbers to express long fractions, mixed fractions (whole numbers and fractions together), and multiple fractions within the same sentence.** An extra space is added between the whole number and the fraction.

- The room measured 12  $\frac{1}{2}$  feet by 18  $\frac{1}{2}$  feet.
- The smartphone was only  $\frac{5}{8}$  of an inch thick.

## **Decimals**

**Use numbers to express figures with decimals.** If the figure is less than zero, a zero is placed before the decimal point.

- Phoenix had 0.05 inches of rain last month. (Zero is placed before decimal point because the amount is less than zero.)
- Seattle had 3.2 inches of rain last week.

## **Grades, scores, voting results**

**Use numbers to express grades, scores, and voting results.** When writing scores, place a hyphen between the winning and losing scores.

- The Seahawks defeated the Broncos 43-8.
- Mary earned a 99 on her writing assignment.
- The vote was 5-to-3 favoring the expansion.

## **Company Names, Organization Names, and Product Names**

Some companies, organizations, and products have numbers in their legal business names. Write the name exactly how the organization writes it, even if it defies all of the rules regarding numbers.

- 7 For All Mankind
- 7-Eleven
- 24 Hour Fitness
- Super 8
- A1 Steak Sauce
- Pac-12
- Big Ten

## **Quick Rules for Numbers**

- 1. When writing numbers as figures, use a comma to separate groups of three digits.**
- 2. The numbers one through ten are written as words. All numbers over ten are written as numerals.**  
**EXCEPTION:** If numbers under ten and over ten are used together in the same sentence, use numerals for all numbers.
- 3. Numbers that begin sentences are written out as words.**  
**EXCEPTION:** If the written out number consists of more than two words, rewrite the entire sentence.  
**EXCEPTION:** It is acceptable to begin a sentence with a calendar year.
- 4. Use numbers to express amounts of money.**
- 5. Use numbers (1, 2, 3) if the date follows the month.**
- 6. Use ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd) if the date precedes the month.**
- 7. Use numerals for address numbers except for the number One.**
- 8. Street names numbered ten and below are written out as words (first, second, third).**
- 9. When two numbers appear side by side in a sentence, write the first number in words and second number as a numeral.**
- 10. Use numbers to express time with a.m. and p.m.**
- 11. Numbers or words can precede *o'clock, in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the evening.***
- 12. Use numbers to express weights, measurements, and temperatures.**
- 13. Use a combination of numbers and words to express large numbers. It is easier to read as a combination.**
- 14. Use numbers to express percentages and spell out the word *percent*.**
- 15. Simple fractions are written as words when they can be expressed in two words and when it is the only fraction in a sentence.**
- 16. Use numbers to express long fractions, mixed fractions (whole numbers and fractions together), and multiple fractions within the same sentence.**

17. Use numbers to express grades, scores, and voting results.

## **Commonly Confused Words and Phrases**

**You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.**

**-Inigo Montoya, *The Princess Bride***

Spell check will only catch words that do not appear in the dictionary. Spell check will not catch words that are used incorrectly. The following are the most commonly mixed up words. When in doubt, look up the words in the dictionary.

**Accept** (verb) means to take, to receive, or to accept. *She accepted the award on his behalf.*

**Except** (preposition) means excluding. *Everyone except Bill was invited.*

**Advice** (noun) is a recommendation. *I went to the boss for advice.*

**Advise** (verb) means to give information or counsel. *She advised me to attend the conference.*

**Almost** (adjective) means nearly. *Almost everyone is here today.*

**Most** (adjective) means the greatest in amount. *Most students are happy midterms are over.*

**All ready** (phrase) means completely prepared. *The class is all ready to begin the next chapter.*

**Already** (adverb) means previously. *I already completed my assignment.*

**A lot** (adverb) refers to a large number. *She drinks a lot of coffee.*

**Allot** (verb) means to parcel out. *He did not allot enough time for the exam.*

**Alot** is not a word.

**Affect** (verb) means to impress, to influence, or to change. *The sunshine affected her mood in a positive way.*

**Effect** (noun) is a result or a consequence. *The effect was a more cheerful disposition.*

**All right** - (adverb) two words meaning good, agreeable, acceptable, or reliable. *He is feeling all right again.*

**Alright** - nonstandard spelling. Do not use for formal documents, tests, papers, or business.

**Among** (preposition) means with more than two or in the midst of. *He walked among the trees. He shared the cookies among his five friends.*

**Between** (preposition) refers to the space separating two points or shared by two things.

*The keys fell between the bookcase and the wall. Let's keep the secret between you and me.*

**Assure** (verb) means to declare, to promise, or to proclaim confidently. *He assured us that he would pay for the meal.*

**Ensure** (verb) means to guarantee or secure. *This letter of recommendation ensures that I will be hired.*

**Insure** (verb) means to protect from loss or harm. *Police recommend that residents insure their valuable items.*

**Beside** (preposition) means next to. *Fred sat beside Mary at dinner.*

**Besides** (adverb) means in addition to or also. *Besides dinner, Fred and Mary went to a show.*

**Bimonthly** (adjective) means every other month. *We have to wait 8 more weeks for the bimonthly newsletter.*

**Semimonthly** (adjective) means twice a month. *Twice a month we receive the semimonthly local journal.*

**Capital** (noun) refers to wealth. Also refers to a city serving as the seat of government. *Fred invested a lot of capital in the project. Olympia is the capital of Washington.*

**Capitol** (noun) refers to the building used by the United States Congress. This reference is always capitalized. Capitol can also refer to a state legislative building, but it is not capitalized. *Dave visited the United States Capitol. Dave has been to the state capitol building in Olympia on several occasions.*

**Cite** (verb) means to reference or quote. *Fred cited many psychology journals in his paper.*

**Site** (noun) refers to a position or a location. *The job site is in the middle of the state.*

**Compliment** (noun) refers to praise or admiration. *He told her that the book was brilliant, and she accepted the compliment.*

**Complement** (noun) means to complete or to enhance. *The light wine perfectly complemented the spicy meal.*

**Could care less** (phrase) means that you care. It is often misused to mean that you do not care. *Could care less* means that you care.

**Couldn't care less** (phrase) means that you do not care. *I could not care less about the Kardashians.*

**Could have/could've** (contraction of the verbs could and have) *I could've gone to the movies.*

**Could of** (always incorrect) It sounds like *could've* when it is spoken, but *could of* is never correct.

**Defiantly** (adverb) means challenging or resisting. *He defiantly glared at the teacher for giving him detention.*

**Definitely** (adverb) means clearly and positively. *She will definitely be at the assembly to accept her prestigious award.*

**Disinterested** (adjective) means unbiased. *The judge was disinterested in the case.*

**Uninterested** (adjective) means indifferent or having no interest at all. *Dave is uninterested in celebrity entertainment news.*

**Elicit** (verb) means to bring out or bring forth. *The principal elicited a confession from the students.*

**Illicit** (adjective) means illegal, unlawful, or immoral. *The use of illicit drugs is a crime.*

**Farther** (adverb) refers to actual distance. *How much farther are we driving?*

**Further** (adverb) means additionally. *We should talk about this further.*

**TIP:** the word *far* is hidden in the word *farther*. Farther refers to distance.

**Fewer** (adjective) refers to countable items. *Ten items or fewer allowed in this checkout lane.*

**Less** (adjective) refers to amounts or quantities. *There is less water in Lake Washington than in the Pacific Ocean.*

**TIP:** use **fewer** with nouns you can count individually and **less** with nouns you cannot count individually.

**Foreword** (noun) refers to a short introduction to a book or article. *Mary wrote the foreword in Dr. Sam Jones's new book.*

**Forward** (adverb) means to move ahead. *Sam took one step forward as the line advanced.*

**Good** (adjective) means desirable. *A number of students received a good score on the test.*

**Well** (adverb) means satisfactorily. *He did well on the exam.*

(adverb) means healthy. *He was ill and now he is well.*

**Graduated** (verb) Schools graduate students, but students graduate from school. Students do not graduate high school. It is incorrect because it is giving an intransitive verb a direct object. *Gonzaga University graduated 500 students in May.*

**Graduated From** (intransitive verb) Graduated is an intransitive verb and does not need a direct object. *Mary graduated from college.*

**Irregardless** is not a real word.

**Regardless** (adjective) means to have no regard for. *Regardless of her good intentions, she still arrived late.*

**Its** (possessive pronoun) means *it* has ownership or possession. *The shoe has lost its laces.*

**It's** (contraction of the pronoun *it* and the verb *is* or *has*) *It's our last chance to see the band before they retire.*

**Later** (adverb) means after a certain time. *He will sign the contract later.*

**Latter** (adjective) refers to the second of two choices. *Between the tea and the coffee, I choose the latter.*

**Lay** (transitive verb) means to place or to set. *Lay* requires a direct object in order to complete the meaning. *We will lay tiles in the bathroom.*

**Lie** (intransitive verb) means to rest or to recline. *Lie* does not require a direct object, but is often followed by a preposition. *I am going to lie down for a nap.*

**Literally** (adverb) means actually or without exaggeration. *The flight literally took 4 hours.* Do not use the word *literally* to exaggerate. If someone says, "I literally died laughing," it means they are dead. The word they are looking for is figuratively.

**Figuratively** (adverb) means metaphorically or not in a real sense. *She was figuratively bursting with excitement.* She is not really exploding; she is just very excited.

**Lightening** (verb) means to become brighter. *The sunshine is lightening her hair.*

**Lightning** (noun) refers to an electrical flash during a storm. *The lightning bolt struck the building during the thunderstorm.*

**Lose** (verb) means to be without or to suffer defeat. *The dieter wants to lose weight.*

**Loose** (adjective) means free from restriction or not tight. *After dieting for months, his old clothes were very loose.*

**Nauseous** (adjective) means sickening. *The nauseous aroma of the sock soup turned Mary's stomach.*

**Nauseated** (verb) means to feel sick or queasy. *After eating the sock soup, Dave felt nauseated.*

**Principal** (noun) refers to the leader. *The principal of the school was in charge of the teacher's evaluation.*

**Principal** (adjective) means main. *The principal freeway through Seattle is I-5.*



**Principle** (noun) refers to a rule or a set of beliefs. *The family has good moral principles.*

**Real** (adjective) means actual or genuine. *A real diamond is worth more than a fake diamond.*

**Really** (adverb) means actually or truly. *He is really excited to go on vacation.*

**Set** (transitive verb) means to place. This is a transitive verb and requires a direct object in order to complete its meaning. *Sarah set the table for dinner.*

**Sit** (intransitive verb) means to rest. This is an intransitive verb and is often followed by a prepositional phrase. *Dave likes to sit in a recliner. Please sit down at the table.*

**Should have/Should've** (contraction of the verb should and have) *I should have gone to bed earlier.*

**Should of** (always incorrect) It sounds like *should've* when it is spoken, but *should of* is never correct.

**Stationary** (adjective) means standing still. *Fred rode the stationary bike at the gym.*

**Stationery** (noun) refers to paper. *Mary wrote a letter on fancy stationery.*

**TIP:** The “e” in stationery is for “envelope.” When you write a letter on stationery, you need to mail it in an envelope.

**Sure** (adjective) means certain. *She is sure that she wants to go on vacation.*

**Surely** (adverb) means undoubtedly or certainly. *Michael Phelps will surely win the gold medal.*

**Than** (conjunction) is used to compare things. *I like coffee more than tea.*

**Then** (adverb) refers to time. *We grabbed coffee and then we went for a walk.*

**There** (adverb) means in that place. *I put my keys over there.*

**They're** (contraction of the words *they are*) *They're coming to visit soon.*

**Their** (possessive pronoun) shows that *they* have ownership or possession of something. *Their car needed new tires.*

**To** (preposition) means in a direction toward. *Sarah is going to the store.*

**Too** (adverb) means in addition to or also. *Dave wants to go too.*

**Were** (verb) plural, past tense of the verb *be*. *Fred and Mary were at the concert.*

**We're** (contraction of the words *we are*) *We're going to the concert too.*

**Where** (adverb) refers to a location. *Where are we going next?*

**Would have/Would've** (contraction of the verb would and have) *I would have called earlier, but I lost your number.*

**Would of** (always incorrect) It sounds like *would've* when it is spoken, but *would of* is never correct.

**Your** (pronoun) means that it belongs to you. Your shows possession. *Your shoes are by the front door.*

**You're** (contraction of the pronoun *you* and the verb *are*) *You're going to be late. You're the fastest runner on the team.*

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