

20: Appendix B- Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics

✓ Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Understand and apply the rules for correct English grammar
- Understand and apply the rules for correct usage of written English
- Understand and apply the rules for correct English punctuation

Why is it important to know about grammar, usage, and punctuation?


Being correct goes beyond the basic grammar that language needs in order to function. Being correct means knowing the rules that a given culture has established to judge the language of individuals. Think about it: many years ago, ain't was not considered incorrect. How might you react to someone using that word today? We speak of this as usage. There are far more usage rules than grammar rules, and they are far more difficult to master. Many of them you just have to learn, and after you learn them, you have to use them over and over and over in order to incorporate them into your language.

It is important to remember that correctness is relative to a particular situation and the “rules” for usage will always be changing. Sometimes, it can be tough to keep up with all that change!

This is why a native speaker of English will find the following pages in Grammar Essentials helpful. And, if you are not a native speaker of English, learning or reviewing things like parts of speech, punctuation, and common errors can be helpful in your efforts to learn and feel comfortable with the English language.

By using a little humor, we hope this introduction into grammar and punctuation (using zombies, [memes](#), and funny stories) will be a little less painful than when you were in junior high and had to do things like memorize prepositions or diagram sentences.

Punctuation

 Meme - Punctuation Matters! Some people find inspiration in cooking their families and their dogs. vs. Some people find inspiration in cooking, their families, and their dogs.

Maybe you have heard the story about how punctuation saves lives. Clearly, there is a difference between

Correct: Let's eat, Grandma!

and

Incorrect: Let's eat Grandma!

In addition to saving lives, using punctuation properly will help your writing be clean and clear and help you build your credibility as a writer. The following pages will provide you with an overview of the basic rules regarding punctuation and will give you a chance to practice using the information you have learned.

Source: [Excelsior College OWL](#)

Apostrophes

When you send a text message, you probably do not bother with apostrophes right? It makes sense that we might not worry about properly punctuating possessives and contractions in a text message, but it's very important to remember that we do need to use apostrophes correctly in other writing situations.

Academics frequently debate about whether or not text messaging is going to kill the poor apostrophe. In his essay “Dear Apostrophe: C Ya,” Rob Jenkins (2012) writes, “[O]ne of my professors, talking about the way language evolves over time, predicted that the next evolutionary stage would involve common punctuation marks. Specifically, he said, the apostrophe would eventually cease to exist” (para. 1).

This may be true, but the apostrophe is not dead yet!

So if you have been text messaging so long that you forgot what the apostrophe is for, the following pages should be helpful.

Using Apostrophes to Make Words Possessive

Beginning writers sometimes mistakenly add apostrophes to make words plural, but this is not how the apostrophe is used.

Rule: The apostrophe is used to show possession or ownership.

✓ Possessives

Sam's game plan
my friend's DVD
Beth's zombie

Note: If you just mean to make a word plural, you should not add an apostrophe. For example,

Incorrect: The student's planned to buy their books but played Xbox instead.

Here, you would not use an apostrophe because no ownership is being established. You can double-check this example and see that this use of the apostrophe would not pass the "of" test.

The planned of the students just does not make sense.

The red sentence above would not pass the test and instead should read as follows:

Correct: The students planned to buy their books but played Xbox instead.

For those times when you are determining whether an apostrophe is needed, use this test - we call it the "of" test. In other words, can you reword the sentence and substitute the apostrophe with "of"?

? The "of" Test

Using an apostrophe

my friend's DVD	the DVD of my friend
Beth's zombie plan	the zombie plan of Beth
James's canned goods*	the canned goods of James

Plural Possessives

Making plural words possessive can be confusing at times because we so often add an s to a **noun** to make it plural. All of those s's can be a little overwhelming. But the rules are pretty clear on this issue:

Rule: To make plural nouns that do not end in s possessive, add 's. To make plural nouns that end in s possessive, add just the '.

✓ Possessive plural pronoun

my cats' treasures
our zombie fortresses' weaknesses

Using Apostrophes to Create Contractions

To those who care about punctuation, a sentence such as 'Thank God its Friday' (without the apostrophe) rouses feelings not only of despair but of violence. The confusion of the possessive 'its' (no apostrophe) with the contractive 'it's' (with apostrophe) is an unequivocal signal of illiteracy and sets off a Pavlovian 'kill' response in the average sticklet." ~Lynne Truss, author of Eats, Shoots & Leaves

Rule: Apostrophes are also used in contractions where the apostrophe takes the place of letters that are omitted when you join two words. Here are some examples:

✓ Contractions

I am = I'm
you are = you're

it is = it's
did not = didn't

Source: [Excelsior College OWL](#)

Omitted Numbers

Rule: You can also use an apostrophe to stand in for omitted numbers.

✓ Apostrophe for omitted numbers

I was born in '75, and I'm feeling old.

Note: Although there are plenty of writing situations where contractions are appropriate, contractions are too informal for most of the formal papers you write for college and should be avoided in those situations.

Tips from the Professor

While most of the rules regarding apostrophes are pretty straightforward, there are following situations related to apostrophes seem to give people trouble:

1. **It's** is a contraction for **it is**. If you need to make **it** possessive, as in **its creepy eyes**, you shouldn't use an apostrophe. Because of the contraction for it is, the possessive **its** goes against the normal rules.
2. Sometimes, you'll see writers use an apostrophe when referring to decades like **the 1980's**. However, it's standard to write **the 1980s** without the apostrophe.
3. To make a compound word such as **mother-in-law** possessive, just add an 's to the last word. For example: My **mother-in-law's** weekly phone calls make me really nervous.
4. If you need to show joint possession, only the last word should be made possessive, as illustrated in this example: **Alex and Megan's** zombie-proof fence is an admirable example of joint possession.

Brackets

You may not use brackets often, but they can become helpful punctuation in academic writing as you integrate quotes into your essays. Brackets let your readers know you have made changes to the quote in some way.

Rule: You should use brackets when you have to alter text within a quote to make something clear for your readers. The material inside the brackets is your addition. Be careful though! You may not change the meaning of the quote.

To understand how to use brackets, let's start with the original quote:

Original Quotation: "More than a decade ago, losses were already mounting to five billion dollars annually."

The examples below demonstrate the three ways to use brackets in a quotation:

✓ Three ways to use brackets

Clarify the meaning

Legal scholar Jay Kesan notes that "a decade ago, losses [from employees' computer crimes] were already mounting to five billion dollars annually" (2010).

Since your audience did not read the article, they won't understand which losses Jay Kesan is referring to in this quote. Therefore, you should use brackets to help your audience understand the context of the quotation.

Signal misspelling within the quote

Legal scholar Jay Kesan notes that "a deced [sic] ago, losses were already mounting to five billion dollars annually" (2010).

As tempting as it may be, you may not change anything within a quotation. Because you do not want your audience to think you made a mistake in spelling, you should use the term [sic] after a

misspelled word within a quotation.

Emphasize a point that was not emphasized in the original quotation

Legal scholar Jay Kesan notes that “a decade ago, losses were already mounting to *five billion dollars* annually” [emphasis mine] (2010).

Colons

Many writers think the colon is such a confusing piece of punctuation that they simply avoid it altogether, but it can be fun to use a colon every now and then. Plus, the colon can add some important variety to your writing. So why not review this list of uses for the colon and give it a try?

In most cases, essentially, a colon signals “anticipation”—the reader knows that what follows the colon will define, illustrate, or explain what preceded it. This is certainly the case in the colon’s first three uses, as described below:

✓ Using a colon

Rule: Use a colon to separate two **independent clauses** (complete thoughts) when you want to emphasize the second independent clause.

Example: Road construction in New York City might pose a problem if there is a zombie attack: It is best to know which streets are closed, as you do not want to end up lost during a dire situation

Rule: Use a colon to separate an independent clause from a **list** that follows the independent clause.

Example: I have collected a wide variety of important items in case there is a zombie attack: canned food, bottled water, and wood for boarding my windows.

TIP! You shouldn’t use a colon when the introductory portion of the sentence is a **dependent clause** (incomplete thought). The first part of the sentence must be an independent clause or a complete sentence. So the following would NOT work:

Incorrect: I have collected: canned food, bottled water, and wood for boarding my windows

Rule: Use a colon to separate an independent clause from an **appositive** (a noun or noun phrase that renames or identifies a noun or noun phrase right next to it) that follows the independent clause.

Example: I have the perfect solution to your problems with bullies at work: Chuck Norris

Rule: You should also use a colon at the end of a formal, business letter greeting.

Example: Dear Ms. Smith:

Rule: And, of course, you should use a colon to separate the hour from the minutes when writing numerical time.

Example: 3:00 a.m.

Commas



The Comma: Tricky, Mysterious, and Subjective?

People often think commas are tricky and mysterious, and while they may be tricky if we aren’t familiar with the rules, they are not mysterious at all. They are not subjective, and no matter what your third-grade teacher told you, it’s probably not a good idea to place a comma wherever you feel the need to take a breath. What happens if you have a stuffy nose from a cold? Your essay might be littered with **unnecessary commas**.

There are actually some pretty clear-cut rules regarding commas, and while some rules seem to be clearer than others, at least in terms of how much most people understand, there are some basic comma rules that can help you know when and when not to use a comma.

Source: [Excelsior College OWL](#)

With Coordinating Conjunctions

Rule: Use a comma with a coordinating conjunction when combining two independent clauses.

An **independent clause** is a term for a complete thought or sentence with both a subject and a verb. A **coordinating conjunction** is a conjunction that combines two equal elements and can combine two complete sentences. We have seven coordinating conjunctions in American English:

For	Or
And	Yet
Nor	So
But	

✓ A comma with coordinating conjunctions

Rule: Coordinating conjunctions can connect all kinds of words and phrases, but when they are used to connect independent clauses, we must place a comma before the coordinating conjunction, as illustrated in the following example:

Example: I am preparing for a zombie invasion, **and** I am building a strong zombie fort around my home.

Rule: If the coordinating conjunction does not connect two independent clauses, do not place a comma before the coordinating conjunction, as illustrated in the following example:

Example: I am preparing for a zombie invasion **and** am building a strong zombie fort around my home.

Items in a Series

Rule: Use a comma to separate items in a series (three or more things).

You should even place a comma between the last two, although some writing style guidelines now omit this comma. In academic culture, we still use the serial or “Oxford” comma, so even punctuation rules have a rhetorical context.

✓ Serial comma

In some situations, you may not use the serial comma, but in academic writing you should, as illustrated in these examples:

She stayed up all night watching scary movies and ate **popcorn, peanuts, and chocolate**.

She **ran into the house, shut the door, and locked all of the locks** because she thought a werewolf was behind her.

With Introductory Phrases

Rule: Use commas after introductory words or phrases.

Subordinating conjunctions are words that connect, but unlike **coordinating conjunctions**, which connect equal parts, subordinating conjunctions connect dependent clauses (incomplete thoughts) to independent clauses.

✓ A comma with subordinate introductory phrase

When you see a subordinating conjunction at the beginning of a sentence, this signals an introductory phrase, and you know a comma is coming at the end of that subordinate phrase, as illustrated in these examples:

Because his favorite team lost the Super Bowl, he would not speak to anyone about the game for two years.

Although they have stored a lot of food in their basement, I am not sure if they have enough for a zombie apocalypse.

Some of the most common subordinating conjunctions include the following:

because	although	after
while	since	Tip

When these same phrases appear at the end of a sentence, they are not set off by commas, except in cases of strong contrast—for instance, in the case of the word **although**.

He would not speak to anyone about the game for two years because his favorite team lost the Super Bowl.

I am not sure if they have enough for a zombie apocalypse, **although** they have stored a lot of food in their basement.

You should also place a comma after introductory words, as illustrated in this example:

However, video games make great presents for a teenager.

With Essential & Nonessential Information

Rule: Use commas in the middle of a sentence to set off words or phrases that are **not essential** to the meaning of the sentence.

✓ A comma with non-essential information

The New York Yankees, **who happen to be my favorite team**, have won more World Series than any other team in baseball.

The Boston Red Sox, **however**, won the World Series only seven times.

This rule can be a little tricky because of some misinformation we may have received at some point in elementary school. Were you ever taught that the trick to determining whether or not you need commas around information in the middle of a sentence was to pull out that information and see if the sentence was still complete? If the sentence was still complete, then you would know you needed a comma around that extra information.

Well, that doesn't always work so well.

The best tip is to think about how meaning would be affected if you pulled out the word or phrase. If the meaning is not really affected, the word or phrase is not essential and should be placed inside a set of commas.

✓ No comma with essential words or phrases

Rule: Conversely, it's important to remember that **essential** words or phrases should not be set off with commas.

Example: Her copy of Skyrim **that I borrowed last week** was the best game I have ever played and probably the best video game in the history of the world.

With Adjectives

Rule: Use a comma to separate coordinate **adjectives** describing the same **noun**.

✓ Commas and coordinate adjectives

An **adjective** is a word that describes a noun, and when we have two coordinate or "equal" adjectives describing the same noun, we need to place a comma between those adjectives, as illustrated in this example:

It was a **stressful, sleepless** night because I stayed up too late playing Dead Space.

If the adjectives aren't coordinate, or "equal," you should not separate them with a comma, as illustrated in this example:

Everyone knows the **white frame** house on Third Street is haunted.

A good trick to help you determine whether or not adjectives are coordinate is to try reading the sentence with the adjectives in reverse order or to add the word **and** between them. If the sentence would still make sense to you, the adjectives are coordinate, and you would need to separate them with a comma if they are describing a single noun.

With Shifts at the End

Rule: Use a comma to separate coordinate elements at the end of a sentence or to indicate a distinct shift at the end of a sentence.

✓ Commas to indicate a shift at the end of a sentence

This comma rule is pretty straightforward. If you have a distinct shift at the end in content or a shift at the end for emphasis, you should set off that shift at the end with a comma.

You want me to fight Chuck Norris for you? I am brave, **not crazy**.

You are going to stand in line for the new Halo 4, **aren't you?**

With Quotes

Rule: Use a comma between the main discourse and a quote.

✓ Comma before a quote

Whether you are writing dialog or setting up a quote from a source in your research essay, you should use a comma to separate the main discourse from your quote.

As Bilbo Baggins said, **"I like half of you half as well as I should like, and like less than half of you half as well as you deserve!"**

My favorite line in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is when the witches say, **"Double, double, toil and trouble; fire, burn; and cauldron, bubble."**

With Places & Dates

Rule: Use commas to set apart geographical names and to separate items in dates, except for between the month and the day.

✓ Comma between geographical names and items in dates

Geographical names: When I heard zombies had been located in **New York, New York**, I knew it was time to move to **Los Angeles, California**.

It is a good thing that letter made it to **4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey, England**.

Items in dates: I know the Mayan calendar indicates the end of the world on **December 21, 2012**, but I am going to stick with Nostradamus because he gave us until 3797.

Comma Abuse

Finally, don't abuse the poor comma. It hasn't done anything to you. Well, it may have caused you some stress from time to time, but you should not abuse it. You should *definitely* not use a comma in the following instances:

✓ Don't use a comma

1. To separate a subject from a verb.

Incorrect: My zombie **plan, involves** the complete and utter failure of your zombie plan.

2. Between two verbs or verb phrases in a compound predicate.

Incorrect: Do those vampires really sparkle in the **sunlight, and** drink only animal blood?

3. Between two nouns or noun phrases in a compound subject.

Incorrect: Aggressive **newbies, and campers** are ruining the gaming experiences for me.

4. To set off a dependent clause at the end of a sentence, except in cases of strong contrast.

Incorrect: My gaming confidence is at an all-time **low, because** I got pawned ten times by a second-grader.

Tip!

Students often struggle with commas when it comes to using them correctly with the coordinating conjunctions—**and, but, or, for, nor, so, and yet**.

The important thing to remember is that you have to keep in mind what else is around that conjunction. You can't assume that every time you use **and** you'll need a comma. Sometimes, you will, and, sometimes, you won't.

Dashes

The dash is kind of like the superhero of punctuation. Not only does it have a cool, sleek name, it's often referred to as the "super comma." But you can't just go around using dashes because you want super commas. There are some rules you should follow, and you don't want to overuse any one type of punctuation.

✓ Rules and Examples: Using a Dash

The following two rules should help you make good decisions regarding that dashing dash:

Rule: You use dashes to set apart or emphasize the content that is within the dashes or after a dash. The content within the dashes or after the dash gets more emphasis than it would if you just used commas or parentheses.

Examples: His ideas regarding an evacuation in case of a zombie attack are certainly controversial—even radical.

I think the reason those books became so popular—so much so that they became a cultural phenomenon—is that the world was ready for a little bit of magic.

Rule: You can also use dashes to set apart an **appositive phrase** or extra information that contains commas.

Example: The changes that came with the arrival of the eleventh doctor—the screwdriver, the TARDIS, and all of the side characters—certainly surprised many fans.

Of course, while the rules related to using dashes are relatively simple, there seems to be great confusion over how the dash is actually created in word processing programs.

To be sure, the dash is no **hyphen**. The hyphen is smaller and comes between words like mother-in-law. The dash is longer and is created by placing two hyphens in a row. When you space after the word after the dash, most word processing programs will turn those two little hyphens — into a dash—like so.

Ellipses

Many people use an ellipsis to show a pause or hint at the future in informal writing. Ellipses appear this way frequently in Facebook messages and emails. Interestingly, although this use of an ellipsis was technically incorrect at one time, it's becoming "more" correct over time with some style manuals suggesting you can use an ellipsis in this manner if you use it sparingly.

Still, in formal writing, it's not a good idea to use an ellipsis to show a pause or to create anticipation of some kind. Academic style guides recommend using an ellipsis to show that you have omitted words in quotes.

✓ Example: Ellipses

Here is an example of how to use ellipses in a formal, academic writing situation.

Quote: "Often, a school is your best bet—perhaps not for education but certainly for protection from an undead attack."
— **Max Brooks**, *The Zombie Survival Guide*

Example: "Often, a school is your best bet . . . for protection from an undead attack."

Of course, now that you know when to use an ellipsis you may be wondering how to make one. An ellipsis is three periods or dots, and most style guides call for a space between each dot. So, you would type period, space, period, space, and period. You also need a space before and after the ellipsis. One tip is to make sure your ellipsis does not stretch to the next line. It must be all on one line. If you are ending a sentence with an ellipsis, it may look like you have a four-dot ellipsis, but there is really no such thing. The first dot is your period. Then, you have your ellipsis. In this situation, you will also put a space between each period.

Example: According to Jones (2012), "*The Walking Dead* series added to the popularity of zombies. . . . However, several movies are responsible for the initial interest" (p. 31).

The key is that you shouldn't change the meaning of the quote. The second quote here isn't nearly so witty, but the basic idea hasn't been changed. When you have long quotes and you need to eliminate some unnecessary information from those quotes, an ellipsis can be very helpful.

Exclamation Marks

You won't use many exclamation marks in academic writing. The exclamation mark is kind of the equivalent of yelling, and most academic writing situations don't call for much yelling, though you may feel like yelling about some of your assignments.

However, exclamation marks do serve an important function by adding emphasis to commands or other phrases, and you may find yourself needing the exclamation mark when you write dialog for certain narrative assignments. In most cases, you should be careful with exclamation marks and make sure the situation calls for them.

✓ Difference between a comma and an exclamation mark

You can certainly see the difference between a sentence punctuated with a period and one punctuated with an exclamation mark.

Watch out.

Watch out!

Zombies are coming.

Zombies are coming!

Hyphens

Hyphenating Words

"The basic rule of hyphens . . . is that they're used to form compound modifiers, that is, to link two or more words that are acting as adjectives or sometimes adverbs." (Casagrande, 2006, p. 62)

✓ Using a Hyphen

Rule: When you have two or more words that modify or describe a noun that follows, you should hyphenate those words. But a word of caution: you shouldn't hyphenate the same words if they come after the noun.

Examples: I thought we were in a **long-term** relationship.

Everyone knew that relationship was not long term.

I really need a **fuel-efficient** car to save money for more video games.

To save money for video games, I bought a car with better fuel efficiency.

I have a **three-year-old** son who mimics every word you say.

I have a son who mimics every word you say; he is three years old.

Hyphens have other uses including acting with prefixes, suffixes, nouns, letters, and numbers and clarifying the meaning of words.

Rule: Hyphenate words that begin with **self**, **all**, **ex**, and words that begin with a capital letter or number.

Examples:

ex-husband

all-inclusive

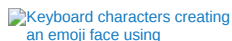
self-help

the A-team

Of course, we should also hyphenate compound numbers like **twenty-five** or **thirty-seven**

Finally, it's important to note that hyphen "rules" are more like the **Pirate Code** in that they are really more like guidelines. Even the "experts" will disagree about whether or not some words or groups of words should be hyphenated. It's definitely a good idea to double-check with the style manual you are using, such as the **APA** or **MLA** manuals, and for tricky words, you can consult a good dictionary.

Parentheses



Parentheses: More Than Helpful Emoticon Tools

Interestingly, parentheses can do more than make smiley faces :) and sad faces :(like these. Although they are quite handy for these important emoticons, they serve an important function in formal writing, as well.

Rule: Parentheses are used to set off information in a sentence that is important but not really a part of the main message. It's important to remember that your sentence should make sense if you eliminate the parentheses and all that is contained between them.

Source: [Excelsior College OWL](#)

✓ Using Parenthesis

The Headless Horseman (as the old legend goes) eliminated the disruption Ichabod Crane brought to Sleepy Hollow.

You'll probably use parentheses most often in your research papers because both APA and MLA formatting require in-text citations using parentheses. So right after a quote or any other borrowed information, you should include an in-text citation in parentheses, as illustrated in these examples:

APA (Jones, 2011, p.131).

MLA (Jones 131).

TIP: The period comes after the parenthesis in both APA and MLA format. The exception to this rule is with block quotes. When using block quotes, in both APA and MLA format, the period comes before the in-text citation.

Periods

The period seems pretty straightforward. After all, for most of us, this was the first punctuation we learned when we were learning to read. **See Jane run.** To our first-grader selves, that meant, **See Jane run, stop, take a break, keep going. You can do this thing.**

Periods are certainly important punctuation because they are what we most often use to separate complete thoughts or independent clauses. Periods are how we end our sentences most of the time.

Rule: However, periods do serve another important function in the world of punctuation: You should use a period with abbreviations.

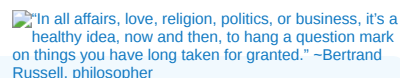
✓ Using a period in an abbreviation

Dr.	Mrs.	Mr.
Ms.	a.m. (or A.M.)	p.m. (or P.M.)

Then, of course, there is the question about how many spaces should come after a period. If you learned to type on those things called typewriters, you learned to double space after all periods at the ends of sentences. However, this isn't always the case anymore. We just single space after all periods, though you should consult the style guide you are using. **APA** style now requires a single space after a period at the end of a sentence, after requiring a double space in the sixth edition.

The lesson here is clear. The "rules" change all the time and are dependent upon your style guide. It's important to stay up to date.

Question Marks



✓ Using a Question Mark

Rule: You should use a question mark at the end of a question - like this:

Example: When did our professor say that essay was due?

However, there is one situation involving question marks that seems to give people a lot of trouble. What about when you have a sentence that is part statement and part question? What do you do then? You have a couple of options, depending upon the situation. You might have a sentence like this:

Rule: In the following case, the statement before the question isn't complete, so you can simply use a comma to separate the statement from the question.

Example: The question I have is, how are we going to get out of here?

Rule: If the sentence is awkward, change it so the first part, the statement part, is a complete sentence. In this situation, you might have a sentence like the following:

Example: One question remains: How are we going to get out of here?

Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are how we tell our readers we are including words that aren't our own. Whether we're using dialog or quote material from our research, quotation marks are important punctuation. The reality is that punctuation marks can really make a difference in whether or not you are breaking the law. After all, if you use someone's words and don't let your readers know you are using someone else's words, that constitutes plagiarism, which is most certainly illegal.

So, if you have doubts about this whole quotation thing, the following pages will be extremely helpful. This [super-cool video](#) can help as well.

Quotation Marks with Dialog

You may not find yourself needing to use dialog very often in academic writing, but you may be asked to write narrative essays in some classes, which often contain dialog.

Rule: When you use dialog, it's important to use quotation marks to set apart the speech from the rest of your text. Otherwise, separating the dialog from the rest of the writing can be very confusing for readers.

✓ Using quotation marks with dialog

"This time," my basketball coach said, "I know you can do it." It turned out he did not really know what he was talking about.

Quotation Marks with Quoted Material

Rule: You should use quotation marks any time you use words directly from another source. Sometimes, students think putting a citation or reference at the end "covers it," but you must use quotation marks to indicate borrowed words.

✓ Using quotation marks to indicate quoted material

"Quotation marks serve primarily to tell the reader the exact words someone used" (Hope, 2010, p. 21).

If you [paraphrase](#) a source, this means you have put the information in your own words, and you don't need to use quotation marks. You should still cite with an [in-text citation](#), but you shouldn't use quotation marks.

The key to borrowing information from sources is to remember that any words appearing inside quotation marks belong to someone else. Words that do not appear inside quotation marks are assumed to be yours.

Single Quotes

Now that you know what quotation marks are used for, you may wonder about the single quotation marks—the one that look like 'this.'

Single quotation marks are used for quotes within quotes, as illustrated in the following example:

✓ Using single quotation marks

The article read, "When the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers was interviewed, he said he was 'upset' about the call that affected the game."

You may encounter situations where you'll close single quotation marks and double quotation marks at the same time, leaving you with “**something like ‘this.’**” Don't worry if this happens. It is correct. It just means the quote within the quote ended at the same time the main quote ended.

Jane asked, "Did you know that Bob said 'I love you?'"

Semicolons

It's true. The semicolon is used for more things than just winking in text. ;)

One of the main uses of a semicolon is to separate two independent clauses. The semicolon isn't like a **comma**; it's really more like a **period**. Using a semicolon like a comma can definitely create some trouble.

✓ First, let's take a step back and explain the difference between an independent clause and a dependent clause. An **independent clause** expresses a complete thought. An independent clause is usually called a sentence. Conversely, a **dependent clause** is a group of words that may contain a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought.

Independent clause:

I ran quickly to escape the zombie I encountered on Main Street.

Dependent clause:

Although I ran quickly to escape the zombie I encountered on Main Street,

Can you see the difference? The first example is a complete sentence, and the second example isn't. (Of course, we also know the first one ends well, and we aren't so sure about the second one.)

So now that you understand what an independent clause is and that a semicolon connects two independent clauses, we can begin to look at how the semicolon can be used.

Semicolons to Join Clauses

Rule: You should use a semicolon when you're joining two independent clauses without a connecting word. The semicolon functions, structurally, just like a period. The difference is that the semicolon between the two independent clauses shows they are connected, as illustrated in the following examples:

✓ Using semicolons

If you want me to vote for you, you are going to need to tell me what I want to hear; if you are lying, I guess I will worry about that later.

I am so tired of spending so much money on canned food for my zombie apocalypse hoard; I am pretty sure the grocery store clerks are laughing at me behind my back.

Using Semicolons in Lists

So right after telling you that semicolons shouldn't be used like commas, we should discuss one situation where the semicolon does function more like a comma. However, this is a very particular situation, so you'll want to pay close attention.

Rule: You should use semicolons when you are separating **items in a list that contains commas**. Here is an example:

✓ Semicolons in lists

At the Comicon conference, I met Jeanne, from Dallas, Texas; James, from Bend, Oregon; and Stacey, from Bangor, Maine.

Because the items in the series contain commas themselves, it would be confusing to add more commas to the situation. In this particular instance, the semicolon separates the items in a series.

Tips!

Semicolons can feel a little confusing because sometimes they're used to separate items in a series, as mentioned on the previous page, but they are really nothing like a comma. In terms of sentence structure, they can separate independent clauses, just like a

period.

If you have the habit of using a semicolon like a comma, it's important to work to break that habit. When you edit your writing, it's a good idea to circle all of the semicolons you have used. Then, ask yourself why each semicolon is there. If you're using it like a strong comma, you'll need to revise.

Time to Write

Now that you have a stronger understanding of the punctuation rules, it's time to think about how these rules might apply to your own writing. One key strategy is to think about areas in which you struggle. If you don't have problems with apostrophes, then you shouldn't worry too much about apostrophes.

However, it's important to keep punctuation in general in mind when you edit. Edit your writing in several passes; you can't catch every issue in one sweeping edit. So, with that in mind, it's a good idea to devote one edit to simply looking for punctuation issues. It's most helpful to review the rules right before you edit, especially the rules for the types of punctuation you have had struggles with, perhaps commas or semicolons.

Parts of Speech



You're probably quite familiar with the "grammar police"—those people who find it necessary to correct any grammar mistake you make. In fact, you might be a member of the "grammar police" squad yourself, but if you're not, you probably get a little tired of the corrections. After all, this person understood what you were saying. Why is it necessary to correct?

Usually, members of the "grammar police" squad aren't necessary. When we speak in informal conversations, as long as we are being understood, the particulars of correctness are not an issue.

However, there are times when correctness is really important, and when you write for an academic audience or a professional audience, correctness is a pretty big deal. The fact is that people judge us based on our writing, and correctness is a part of that. With that in mind, the following pages, which cover grammar and proper usage of the major parts of speech, will be helpful.

Source: Excelsior College OWL

Nouns

A **noun** is a person, place, object, idea, or event. "The word *noun*, in fact, comes from *nomen*, the Latin word for *name*" (Kolln, 1994, p. 276). Nouns are the first words you learned as a child, and you probably have a really strong sense of what a noun is. After all, how could we possibly talk about anything if we're unable to give it a name?

So you may be wondering why in the world we have to complicate something as simple as nouns by discussing so many different types of nouns. The answer is that it's important to learn about the different types of nouns as you work to ensure proper structures and agreements in your sentences.

Proper Nouns

A **proper noun** refers to a specific person, place, organization, etc. Proper nouns are capitalized because they are specific nouns.

Some examples of proper nouns are **Steven**, **Apple** (the company), **New York**, and the **Seattle Seahawks**.

Common Nouns

A **common noun** refers to a general group or class of people, places, objects, etc. One way to identify a common noun is called the "**the**" test. If you can use the noun with the article **the** (or another article like **a** or **an**) in front of it, the word is likely a common noun.

Some examples are **the game**, **the movie**, and **the ghost**.

Of course, it's important to remember that the "**the**" test does not work all the time. It's just a good guideline. Some exceptions to the "**the**" test would be with proper nouns (discussed on the previous page) like the **Dallas Cowboys** and the **Boston Red Sox**. Even though they would pass the "**the**" test, they are proper nouns, not common nouns.

Collective Nouns

Nouns can get a little tricky when it comes to a discussion of collective nouns. Collective nouns are nouns such as **family**, **team**, and **majority**. The tricky part comes when we have to make a decision about whether these nouns are singular or plural because we have to choose verbs that will agree with these nouns.

And, now, here's the really tricky part: There are no hard and fast rules. The verb you choose to agree with the collective noun actually depends upon how you want your readers to perceive the noun. Is it a single unit or a group of individuals? Even then, it depends upon context. Take the collective noun **family**, for example.

✓ Using the correct verb tense with a collective noun

In the example below each member went his or her separate way, so you would see the collective noun **family** as a group of individuals; therefore, you should use a plural verb instead of a singular verb.

Example: The **family have** all gone their separate ways since Grandma died.

But let's look at the example below where the family is seen as a single unit; here you would need a singular verb to agree with the collective noun.

Example: The whole **family is** coming to my house for Thanksgiving this year. I had better learn to cook a turkey.

In her book, *Rhetorical Grammar*, Martha Kolln (1991) says “[collective nouns] can be treated as either singular or plural, depending on context and meaning” (p. 47). So, it really does depend on the situation.

You may be wondering how this information is helpful. The key is to think about how you might perceive the collective noun and then, of course, to consider how it's used in the sentence.

And, after all, there are only about 200 collective nouns in the English language, so you really only have to worry about 200 of these. Okay, that's a lot. But this is a great example of how, very often, there are no hard and fast rules for grammar.

Verbal Nouns

A verbal noun is a type of noun that is derived from a verb. It looks like a verb but actually functions in a sentence like a noun. Here are some examples:

✓ Verbal Nouns

Running from zombies is hard work

Jogging is a good exercise that will help you prepare, but you have to do it every day.

We had a **meeting** to compare our zombie action plans.

Verbal nouns and something called **gerunds** (a form of a verb or verb phrase that functions as a noun phrase and subject in a sentence) are very similar. In fact, the first two examples above are examples of verbal nouns that are also gerunds. But, a verbal noun can be more than a gerund. In the last example, the word **meeting**, is functioning like a noun but isn't a noun phrase that's the subject of a sentence.

It can certainly get a little confusing, and even the grammar experts disagree sometimes about the differences between verbal nouns and gerunds. The key thing for you to remember is that, when we are talking about nouns, verbs can sometimes function in your sentences like nouns.

Compound Nouns

A compound noun is a noun made up of two or more words. Sometimes, compound nouns are hyphenated, but there are plenty of examples of compound nouns that are not hyphenated. There are also compound nouns that are written as one word. Here are some examples:

✓ Compound Nouns

mother-in-law
waste-paper basket
full moon
blackboard

Some compound nouns that used to be hyphenated are no longer hyphenated, and some compound nouns that used to be two words became one word. The “rules” change based upon common usage.

Paper-clip is now just **paperclip**. And **healthcare** is now generally considered just one word, but some people still say it should be two words, **health care**.

“Rules” of correctness change constantly, and rules related to compound nouns change rather quickly. If you’re in doubt about how to write a compound noun, be sure to check a good online dictionary.

Pronouns

Pronouns are actually just another type of noun, but because they’re such an important noun type and so commonly used, they’re usually classified as a separate part of speech. A **pronoun** is a noun that takes the place of a noun or groups of nouns, and because pronouns are “standing in” for nouns, you have to be sure that the pronoun you choose to “stand in” agrees in number, person, and gender.

Personal (Definite) Pronouns

Personal pronouns are pronouns that take the place of common and proper nouns and refer to people and things. Essentially, they “stand in” for people and things when you want to make sure you are not repeating yourself by having to rename people and things all the time. Let’s look at an example.

✓ Personal (Definite) Pronouns

In this example, the author doesn’t have to repeat **my brother**, thanks to the personal pronoun **he**.

Example: My brother is staying up late to watch a “Walking Dead” marathon. **He** is going to have nightmares!

Personal pronouns can be singular and plural, and there are first, second, and third person personal pronouns.

Personal (Definite) Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I, me	we, us
Second Person	you	you
Third Person	she, her, he, him, it	they, them

Indefinite Pronouns

What is the difference between definite and indefinite pronouns? A definite pronoun would be a pronoun that refers to something specific, so a **personal** pronoun would also be a definite pronoun. (Refer back to the **Personal Pronouns** for examples.)

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to anything specific, so words like **someone** and **everybody** are indefinite pronouns. Indefinite pronouns can also be **singular or plural**.

While any pronoun that refers to a specific person or thing would be a definite pronoun, it can be helpful to refer to a list of indefinite pronouns if you need to use pronouns that refer to people or things in general and do not refer to anyone or anything specific. The list below can help.

✓ Indefinite Pronouns

Singular	Plural	Singular or Plural
anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, something	both, few, many, several	all, any, most, none, some

Singular & Plural Pronouns

Singular pronouns are simply pronouns that refer to singular nouns. But it can get a little tricky when you think about the fact that singular pronouns can be **personal** pronouns, which, as you have learned, refer to a person or thing. They will also be **definite** or **indefinite**, which means they can refer to someone or something specific (definite) or not (indefinite).

Plural pronouns are simply pronouns that refer to plural nouns. But, like singular pronouns, plural pronouns can also be personal and definite or indefinite, and they refer to plural nouns or groups of nouns.

✓ Singular and Personal Pronouns

Singular pronouns: Words like **he** and **she** are singular, personal, definite pronouns, and words like **anybody** and **anyone** are singular, indefinite pronouns.

Plural pronouns: Word such as **they** and **we** are plural, personal, definite pronouns, and words like **many** and **both** are plural, indefinite pronouns.

Tip! Don't worry if you feel a little confused about the fact that singular and plural pronouns can also be personal pronouns. They are definite or indefinite as well. However, most likely, you won't find yourself in situations where you have to label pronoun types. What you do need to know is that, when you choose a singular or plural pronoun, you have to make sure it agrees with the noun you're replacing. So, if you're replacing a singular noun, be sure to use a singular pronoun.

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns are pronouns that show ownership. Some possessive pronouns can be used before nouns and function as adjectives (words that describe nouns).

✓ Possessive Pronouns

Pronouns such as **my**, **her**, or **his** are **possessive** because you would say things like **my books**, **her computer**, and **his zombie plan**.

Other possessive pronouns stand alone. These are pronouns such as **mine**, **yours**, **hers**, and **his**. An example would be **That book is hers**.

Relative & Demonstrative Pronouns

Relative pronouns relate **subordinate clauses** (clauses that cannot stand alone) to the rest of a sentence. Words like **that**, **which**, **who**, and **whom** are examples of relative pronouns.

Demonstrative pronouns stand in for a thing or things, and we choose these words based on how close these things are to us. For things that are nearby, we use the pronouns **this** and **these**. For things that are far away, we use the pronouns **that** and **those**.

Reflexive Pronouns

Reflexive pronouns end in **self** or **selves**, and they're used when a pronoun is both the subject and the object of a sentence.

✓ Reflexive Pronouns

She is going to can all of those beans for her zombie storage room **herself**.

I am going to treat **myself** to a little vacation from all of this worry about a zombie apocalypse and spend the day playing Halo on my Xbox.

Reflexive pronouns can also be used to show emphasis in a sentence, as illustrated in this example:

I myself had to go through all of those web pages to find the one that would be the most helpful for our escape plan.

Subjective & Objective Pronouns

Subjective and objective pronouns are simply pronouns that occur in either the subject or the object of the sentence. Subjective pronouns tell us who or what the sentence is about. Objective pronouns receive the action in the sentence.

There are some pronouns that are always subjective and others that are always objective.

	Singular	Plural
Subjective	I, you, he, she, it	we, you, they
Objective	me, you, her, him, it	us, you, them

Sometimes, determining which pronoun we should use in a sentence can be a little confusing, especially when it comes to **I** and **me**. You might want to write:

Incorrect: My mother bought my brother and I new clothes for the first day of school, even though we insisted we did not want to go.

The pronoun **I** in this sentence is actually incorrect because it appears in the object of the sentence. The sentence should read something like this:

Correct: My mother bought my brother and me new clothes for the first day of school, even though we insisted we did not want to go.

The trick is to take out the other person in the sentence to see if you would use **I** or **me**. For example:

Incorrect: “My mother bought **I** new clothes for school.”

Correct: “My mother bought **me** new clothes for school.”

Pronoun Agreement & Reference

Issues with pronoun agreement and pronoun references are common struggles for many beginning writers, but these problems are easy to correct once you realize the issue and just pay close attention to the pronouns you’re using in your writing.

Pronoun Agreement Errors

Pronoun agreement errors occur when the pronoun you are using to “stand in” for a noun does not agree with that noun in number, place, or gender.

Correct: Clara needs to pick up **her** book.

Using the singular pronoun **her** does agree with Clara. It does not feel natural for a native speaker to say the following:

Incorrect: Clara needs to pick up **their** book.

In the above sentence, **Clara** is the noun and **her** is the pronoun that agrees with Clara.

A common pronoun agreement error occurs when a writer uses a singular noun like **student** to represent students in general. Then, later, the writer may use **they** as a pronoun to replace **student** because the writer means students in general. This often occurs when people try to avoid that structure and use cumbersome word choices such as he/she, he or she, or (wo)men as there is no gender-neutral singular pronoun in the English language. Using these variations is not preferred, and rewriting the sentence is a better option.

How to rewrite the sentence will depend on which style guide you are using. Both the MLA 8th edition and the APA 7th edition support using the singular they. On the other hand, The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) 17th edition does not support using the singular they in formal writing unless the person being discussed prefers they. CMOS recommends rewriting the sentence so that the noun and pronoun both agree.

✓ Pronoun Agreement

For example, you may see something like this:

If **a student** really thinks about how much **they** are paying for college, **they** are likely to be more focused in class.

According to the most recent MLA and APA style guidelines, this is correct. However, according to CMOS, the sentence should be rewritten.

You could rewrite it like this:

Correct: If **students** really think about how much **they** are paying for college, **they** likely to be more focused in class.

Here is another example.

Incorrect: When **a chef** adds a recipe to **his or her** Facebook page, **he or she** will often get many likes seemingly instantaneously.

Rewritten with the singular they:

Correct: When **a chef** adds a recipe to **their** Facebook page, **they** will often get many likes seemingly instantaneously.

Rewritten with a plural subject and plural pronoun:

Correct: When **chefs** add a recipe to **their** individual Facebook page, **they** will often get many likes seemingly instantaneously.

Rewritten without pronouns:

Correct: When **a chef** add a recipe to Facebook, likes appear seemingly instantaneously.

When in doubt, it is always safe to choose a plural subject so that the pronoun **they** flows more smoothly (and will be correct in number according to all style guides).

Pronoun Reference Errors

Pronoun reference errors can also be problems for beginning writers because it's so easy to get in a hurry when you write and forget that you need to think about how clear your writing will be for your audience.

A common pronoun reference error occurs when students write about several different people or things and then use a pronoun later like **she** or **it**, but the audience has no idea what **she** or **it** refers to.

Here is a simple example to give you an idea about what a pronoun reference error looks like:

Incorrect: My mother and my aunt told me I should consider going to college, and she was right.

Here, the audience wouldn't be sure which person the writer is referring to. Is it the mother or the aunt?

You want to be careful with your writing and make sure you're clear and correct with your pronouns. Most of the time, slowing yourself down and working on some careful editing will reveal problems like these which can be easily corrected.

Tips from the Professor

Most beginning writers have a pretty good sense of correct pronoun usage, but a good editing strategy will help you make sure you have not missed any issues with pronoun agreement or pronoun reference.

One strategy is to edit your writing one time, just looking at pronouns, in addition to other editing passes. If you have had trouble with pronouns in the past, you should circle all of your pronouns and ask yourself questions about their purpose and what they refer to.

Note

Most academics now agree that the singular **they** is correct. Please always refer to your style guide, as some style guides still recommend not using the singular **they**.

Verbs

Verbs are the parts of speech that show action or indicate a state of being. We put them with nouns, and we create complete sentences. Like nouns, verbs are foundational in our vocabulary, and we learned verbs as children shortly after we learned nouns. The following pages will help you learn more about verbs, as there really is a lot to consider when it comes to verbs, such as making our subjects and verbs agree, using active versus passive voice, and keeping our verbs in the same tenses.

We'll explain the types of verbs first, to give you context and help you establish some "verb vocabulary," but most writers will want to pay close attention to issues of **tense**, **subject-verb agreement**, and **active versus passive voice** in the pages that follow.

Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs are sometimes called the **helping** verbs because they work with the main verb in a sentence and "help it out". Together, the auxiliary verb and the main verb form a unit.

✓ Auxiliary Verbs

Steven **is leaving** and taking his football with him. How are we going to play now?

Her favorite team **has finished** at the top of the conference, so she **is going** to buy a team jersey. I hope she buys me one, too.

Common Auxiliary Verbs

am	did	is
are	do	was
be	does	were
can	had	will
could	have	would

Linking Verbs

Linking verbs join or "link" the subject of a sentence with the rest of the sentence. They make a statement by linking things, as opposed to showing any kind of action.

Common linking verbs are any of the **to be** verbs: **am**, **is**, **are**, **was**, **were**, **be**, **been**, and **being**. However, **become** and **seem** are also common, and other verbs have the potential to be linking verbs. It really depends upon the sentence.

✓ Linking Verbs

Here is an example of a common linking verb used in a sentence:

My environmental biology class **is** interesting because our teacher thinks Bigfoot might exist.

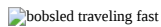
Here are some examples of how other verbs can become linking verbs:

That house **looks** haunted.

Those old shoes **smell** funny.

Tip! Because linking verbs and auxiliary verbs are often the same words, you may wonder how you can tell the difference between a linking verb and an auxiliary verb. The key is that linking verbs join the subject and the predicate of a sentence, and in some ways, allow the predicate to rename the subject; auxiliary verbs will be used with other verbs.

Action Verbs



bobsled traveling fast

Action verbs are the verbs you can probably identify as verbs quickly and easily. These are the words that show action, words like **jump**, **run**, and **eat**.

There are two main classes of action verbs: **transitive** and **intransitive**, and there aren't separate lists for each class. Action verbs can be both transitive and intransitive because it all depends on the structure of the sentence.

A transitive verb expresses action toward a person or thing named in the sentence. An intransitive verb expresses action without making any reference to an object.

Source: [Excelsior College OWL](#)

✓ Examples: Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Transitive	The college freshman ate Ramen noodles.	Sophia speaks French.
Intransitive	The college freshman complained loudly.	Sophia speaks fluently.

Tenses

Verbs can be in the present tense, present progressive tense, past tense, past progressive, present perfect, or past perfect. According to Martha Kolln, author of [Rhetorical Grammar](#), there are two grammatical features of verbs that are especially useful: tense and agency, which will be discussed later in the pages on [passive voice](#).

It's important to understand tense because you want to be consistent with your verb tenses in your writing. It's a common mistake to [shift tenses](#) without realizing it. This discussion of tenses can increase your "tense awareness," which will lead to fewer errors.

Let's take the verb **to eat** as an example and see how it looks in the different tenses with the subject **I**.

Tense	Example
present tense (present point in time)	I eat dinner.
present progressive (present action of limited duration)	I am eating dinner.
past tense (specific point in the past)	I ate dinner yesterday.
past progressive (past action of limited duration)	I was eating .
present perfect (completed action from a point in the past ending at or near present)	I have eaten dinner.
past perfect (past action completed before another action also in the past)	I had just eaten dinner when the phone rang.

When it comes to verb tenses, it's important to be consistent and to be aware of any shifts. If you shift, there needs to be a reason for the shift. Also, APA will often require past tense in your essays, while MLA requires present tense, even if the words have been written in the past. For example, to set up a quote in APA, you might write something like this:

✓ APA vs. MLA verb tense examples

APA: Smith (2009) wrote, "This verb stuff is confusing" (p. 10)

MLA: Smith writes, "This verb stuff is confusing" (10).

For a more in-depth explanation of APA recommendations for verb tense usage in literature reviews and research papers, go to: [Verb Tense Shift](#)

Subject-Verb Agreement

"The basic rule of sentence agreement is simple: A subject must agree with its verb in number. Number means singular or plural." (Rozakis, 2003, p. 62) The subject may be either singular or plural, and the verb selection should match the subject. The task

sounds simple, but it's not always easy to make the subject and verb match without some thought. Subject-verb agreement errors are common errors many beginning writers make, and they are highly-stigmatized errors, which means people will judge you for them.

✓ Subject-verb agreement

Here are some tips to help you avoid subject-verb agreement errors.

Rule: When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by **and**, use a plural verb.

Example: Suzy **and** her friend **are** missing the best movie ever!

Rule: When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by **or**, use a singular verb.

Example: The pen **or** the pencil **is** in the drawer, my purse, my book bag, or perhaps, my pencil pouch.

Rule: Do not be confused by a phrase that comes between your subject and your verb.

Example: **Russell Wilson**, as well as the rest of the Seattle Seahawks, **is** ready for the game against the Green Bay Packers.

Collective nouns can be tricky. Sometimes, they take a singular verb, and sometimes they take a plural verb. It depends upon how they are being used. Be sure to refer to the [Collective Nouns](#) page for more information and examples.

Rule: Fractions should be treated as singular or plural, depending upon the noun they are referring to.

Examples: **Two-thirds** of the **zombies** in "The Walking Dead" **move** slowly. The rest can apparently sprint

Two-thirds of your **cake was** eaten before you got home.

Active Versus Passive Verbs

As mentioned earlier, grammarian Martha Kolln mentions agency as one of the most important aspects of verbs you should know about. Agency involves understanding the relationship between the subject and the verb in a sentence and whether or not the subject is the agent in the sentence.

✓ Active and Passive verbs

Take a moment to read the following two sentences.

Amy **grabbed** the zombie survival guide.

The zombie survival guide **was grabbed** by Amy.

Can you see how these sentences are different? In the first sentence, the verb **grabbed** is active because its subject, **Amy** is the doer or agent. Amy did the grabbing.

In the second sentence, **was grabbed** is passive because it describes an action done to its subject, **guide**. The doer of the action, Amy, is now the object of the preposition **by**.

Use active verbs whenever possible as they allow you to express yourself clearly, succinctly, and strongly. Active verbs imply that you're confident with what you are saying; you believe in your words. Looking back at the two sentences, you can see that the first one uses fewer words and makes no mistake as to who did the action. The latter sentence is wordy and does not directly address Amy.

Tip! You can use a little strategy to see if you're using passive voice by checking to see if you can add **by zombies** after the verb. If you can, then you likely have passive voice and should restructure your sentence. In the example above, you can write, **was grabbed by zombies**, so you know this is passive voice. Since business writing and APA Style require that you use active voice whenever possible, you should restructure your sentences so they use active voice.

Purposeful Passive Voice

There are occasions when you might want to use passive verbs, such as when you don't want to mention the doer, the result of the action is more important than the doer, or the doer is unknown. Let's take the following scenario and apply it to all three reasons for using a passive verb.

✓ Purposeful passive voice

Tom and Mark, two brothers, are preparing their home for the zombie apocalypse. Tom is throwing canned goods across the room to Mark, who is stacking them on a shelf. They continue to throw canned goods across the room, despite knowing that it's against their mother's wishes. Tom throws a can of creamy corn to Mark and accidentally hits a vase. The vase breaks into pieces. Their mother asks what happened.

The responses could go as follows:

Tom **threw** the creamy corn and **broke** the vase.

OR

The vase **was broken** when the creamy corn **was thrown** at it.

The first sentence uses the active verbs **threw** and **broke**. It simply tells what happened and squarely blames Tom.

The second sentence uses the passive verbs **was broken** and **was thrown**. It doesn't mention who threw the can of corn, keeping the doer unknown. Also, it might be reasonable to believe that Tom thinks letting his mother know that the vase is broken is more important than identifying who broke the vase.

Tip! There are some situations when passive voice can be useful, so it's not the case that passive voice is "wrong." It's just that, in business writing, you should use active voice because it makes for lively, more engaging writing. A good way to spot passive voice is to look for **to be verbs**. You should limit those as well.

Adjectives

An **adjective** modifies (describes / distinguishes) **nouns** and **pronouns**. In other words, adjectives change nouns or pronouns in some way. So **movie** is a noun, and a **scary movie** has been changed by the adjective **scary**.

It's important to remember, too, adjectives, as in the case of a **scary movie**, give you a way to inject your point of view into your writing. You might also describe a **loveable book**, a **beautiful dress**, or an **ominous sky**. There's a certain amount of subjectivity, of course, in all of these words, so you'll want to work to keep your audience in mind when choosing your adjectives and do your best to make sure your adjectives (or descriptors) are specific, concrete, and will make sense to both you and your audience.

Tip! You should avoid imprecise adjectives in business writing. Business writing requires precision. For example, you should use **five** in place of "many," and **avoid generalized descriptors** such as a lot, great, some, and all other words that are open to interpretation.

Order of Adjectives

Adjectives need to be placed in a particular order. What information do you post first? If you're a native English speaker, you can probably figure out the order without any thought. That's because you understand English grammar—even if it's only because you know what "sounds" right. And, if you're a non-native English speaker, you've probably been schooled in the order.

✓ Order of Adjectives

Think about it. Why would we automatically write four gorgeous, long-stemmed, red, silk roses rather than four silk, long-stemmed, gorgeous, red roses? What drives the order in our description. The first example leads us down a logical path; the second example doesn't let us know which details are most important.

Rule: Here is the specific order for English language adjectives—

1. Intensifier
2. Quality
3. Size
4. Age, color.

Look at the two sentences again:

Four gorgeous provides the intensifier and quality;

long-stemmed provides the size;

red, provides the color;

and **silk** provides an additional detail.

Now look at the order of the adjectives in one of your own sentences and see if it makes sense to you. Below, you'll find a table illustrating the royal order of adjectives.

The Royal Order of Adjectives

Determiner	Observation	Physical Description				Origin	Material	Qualifier	Noun
		Size	Shape	Age	Color				
a	beautiful			old		Italian		touring	car
an	expensive			antique			silver		mirror
four	gorgeous		stemmed		red		silk		roses
her			short		black				hair
our		big		old		English			sheepdog
those			square				wooden	hat	boxes
that	dilapidated	little						hunting	cabin
several		giant		young		American		basketball	players
some	delicious					Chinese			food

Types of Adjectives

Comparatives and **superlatives** are types of adjectives, but one (comparatives) provides a relative distinction while the other (superlatives) signifies the most extreme.

Comparative adjectives often end in **er**, and superlative adjectives often end in **est**.

✓ Comparative Adjectives

My World of Warcraft mage is **tougher** than your character.

Superlative:

My World of Warcraft mage is the **toughest** character ever.

Irregular Adjectives

There are also some adjectives that are irregular when you turn them into the comparative and superlative, and some, usually adjectives with two syllables, require that you simply add **more** or **most** in front of them.

The following examples are of some regular and some irregular adjectives.

✓ Irregular Adjectives

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative

kind	kinder	kindest
strong	stronger	strongest
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst
careful	more careful	most careful
awesome	more awesome	most awesome (as in This is the <i>most awesome</i> textbook ever!)

Adverbs

Adverbs are words that modify or describe a **verb**, **adjective**, or another adverb. Just as an adjective changes a noun, an adverb changes a verb, adjective, or adverb. Adverbs are easily identified because they often end in **ly**, but this is certainly not always the case.

Descriptions make our writing rich and specific, so we shouldn't be afraid of using adjectives and adverbs in our sentences.

✓ Adverbs in a Sentence

Look at these three sentences. As you can see, the last sentence is the most descriptive and informative. The use of adverbs and adjectives helps our writing come alive.

Jon walked to the store to get canned goods for his zombie stash.

Jon walked to the large store to get canned goods for his zombie stash.

Jon walked **urgently** to the **massively** large store to get canned goods for his zombie stash.

Order of Adverbs

Adverbs most commonly describe how, but below is a more comprehensive list of the most common types of adverbs.

Type of Adverb	Example
Adverbs of manner (or how)	Christine sang the song atrociously . No more karaoke for her!
Adverbs of time	Michelle did her homework yesterday , but she did the wrong assignment.
Adverbs of place	I met my friend at the coffee shop , and that's where we saw the first signs of the outbreak.
Adverbs of degree	It's too quiet in here.
Adverbs of frequency	Michael Jordan rarely misses a free throw, but Shaq frequently does.
Adverbs of purpose	I clean the litter box every day to keep the house from smelling .

The Royal Order of Adverbs

And like adjectives, adverbs have a "royal order." While you may already have an innate sense of this order, it can be helpful to review the rules.

Verb	Manner	Place	Frequency	Time	Purpose
Beth swims	enthusiastically	in the pool	every evening	before dusk	to keep in shape.
Dad walks	impatiently	into town	every morning	before work	to get a newspaper.
Joe naps		in his room	every afternoon	after lunch.	

Prepositions

Prepositions are little words with a big purpose: they show relationships of time, place, and space. We might call them “glue” words because they bring other words together in ways that create meaning. Look at something you’ve read recently and take out the prepositions. Here is an example of a sentence written with and without prepositions:

✓ Using Prepositions in a Sentence

Correct: With prepositions: As soon **as** I closed the door, the turkeys that had been waiting **at** the wood line ran **to** eat the corn I had just put out **for** the squirrels.

Incorrect: Without prepositions: As soon I closed the door, the turkeys that had been waiting the wood line ran eat the corn I had just put out the squirrels.

They may be generally small in letters, but prepositions are important words that give great meaning for time and place relationships among actions, objects, and ideas. It’s important to distinguish if you are throwing a ball **to** someone or **at** someone. Did you want your sandwich **with** or **without** onions? Do you need that zombie fort built **at** the end of summer or **before** the end of summer?

Even though they are small words, prepositions can be difficult—particularly for someone learning English—because their use isn’t always logical. As an example, most mid-Westerners speak of standing **in line**, but many on the East coast speak of standing **on line**.

Common Prepositions

aboard	at	despite	like	than
about	before	down	near	though
above	behind	during	of	to
across	below	except	off	toward
after	beneath	excluding	on	under
against	beside	following	onto	underneath
along	between	for	outside	until
amid	beyond	from	over	up
among	but	in	past	upon
around	by	inside	regarding	verses
as	considering	into	since	with

✓ Prepositions

As you work to make good decisions about your preposition choices, you should consider the following preposition tips:

1. It’s actually acceptable to end a sentence with a preposition. Contemporary scholars and writing style guides acknowledge the acceptability of ending a sentence with a preposition (Casagrande, 2006). It’s natural and conversational to write short sentences that end with prepositions.

- Did you find what you were looking **for**?

However, you should be aware that some professors prefer that you don’t end a sentence with a preposition. See how correctness is relative?

2. You should avoid unnecessary prepositions because using prepositions unnecessarily can make your writing wordy and even confusing.

- I am not [for] sure I have the answer.

Frank apparently fell off [of] his horse while doing a stunt for a YouTube video.

3. The difference between **beside** and **besides** can be confusing. **Beside** means next to. **Besides** means in addition to.

4. The difference between **between** and **among** can also be confusing. You should use **between** when referring to two people or things, and you should use **among** when referring to more than two people or things.

Articles

Articles are similar to **adjectives** in that they modify **nouns**, but unlike adjectives, they don't really describe a noun; they just identify a noun.

We have three articles in the English language: **a**, **an** and **the**.

1. **The** is the **definite article**, which means it refers to a **specific** noun in a group.
2. **A** is an **indefinite article**, which means it refers to **any** member of a group. You would use the indefinite article when you aren't trying to distinguish a particular noun and use if the noun begins with a consonant.
3. **An** also is an indefinite article because it refers to any member of a group. In general, you would use **an** if the noun begins with a vowel.

✓ When to use "a" or "an"

Use the article **a** when the noun begins with a consonant:

a game

Use the article **an** when the noun begins with a vowel

an opportunity

Then, as always in English grammar, there are a few tricky exceptions. If a noun begins with **h**, you should think about the sound it makes.

Because the pronunciation of **hour** uses a silent h, you should use the article **an**

an hour

But since the pronunciation of **horse** includes the "h" sound, the article is **a**

a horse

And if a noun starts with a vowel, but it makes a y sound, you should use **a** instead of **an**.

a university

a user

Conjunctions

If words are the building blocks for our writing, then good transitions are the cement that holds them together. To make these transitions in our writing we need to turn to conjunctions. A conjunction is a word or words used to show the connection between ideas.

The following sections will provide you with details about what conjunctions are and what they do. But, this **classic video** will provide you with a fun overview before you learn more.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions coordinate or join two equal parts. They are particularly important because, when **used with a comma**, they can actually connect complete sentences. Of course, they don't always have to connect complete sentences. Coordinating conjunctions can also connect smaller, equal parts of a sentence.

The key to using coordinating conjunctions is to think about what they are coordinating. This will help you make decisions about which one to use and how to punctuate. First, however, we should look at the list of coordinating conjunctions. There are only seven, and you may have heard of them as the FANBOYS.

For
And
Nor

But
Or
Yet
So

Refer to the section on [Commas](#) to learn when you should and should not use a comma with a coordinating conjunction.

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions connect parts that aren't equal. In fact, you can tell by their name that they make a phrase subordinate to the main phrase or clause.

Rule: A subordinating conjunction sets off a phrase, so there should always be words with it.

Common Subordinating Conjunctions

after
although
because
before
even

though
since
though
when

✓ Subordinating conjunction

Rule: When a subordinating conjunction appears at the beginning of a sentence, the subordinating phrase is always set off with a comma. When a subordinating conjunction appears at the end of a sentence, the subordinating phrase is not usually set off with commas.

Examples:

Because my alarm clock did not go off, I missed the full moon and will now have to wait until next month to go out and play.

I missed the full moon and will now have to wait until next month to go out and play **because my alarm clock did not go off**.

Exceptions to the Rule: When you use words like **although** or **even though** at the end of a sentence. Because these set-off phrases show contrast, they still get a comma, even when they are used at the end of the sentence.

Examples:

Although I tried, I could not outrun the werewolf.

I could not outrun the werewolf, **although I tried**.

You will notice the comma with the **although** phrase, no matter where it appears in the sentence, but the **because** phrase follows the standard "rule."

It's also important to note that **although** cannot stand alone like a conjunctive adverb:

Incorrect: Although, I tried to outrun the werewolf.

Note: The above example is a common, incorrect usage of **although** and actually makes a sentence fragment, which is a serious grammatical error.

Conjunctive Adverbs

The conjunctions that are not exactly conjunctions are conjunctive adverbs. "Conjunctive adverbs are used to connect other words. Therefore, conjunctive adverbs act like conjunctions even though they are not technically considered to be conjunctions. Conjunctive adverbs are also called transitions because they link ideas." (Rozarkis, 1997, p. 55)

Conjunctive adverbs are words like **however**, **moreover**, **therefore**, and **furthermore**. They provide important transitions between ideas and are commonly used to help create a nice, flowing work.

✓ Using conjunctive adverbs

Often, you'll see a conjunctive adverb used after a semicolon to start a new independent clause, as illustrated in this example:

Example: I have several back-up zombie plans in place; **however**, I am sure my first plan is the best plan.

However, it's also important to note that you don't have to use a conjunctive adverb every time you use a **semicolon** and you don't have to use a **semicolon** to use a conjunctive adverb. Conjunctive adverbs work well after periods, too.

Note: You don't have to use a conjunctive adverb every time you use a **semicolon** and you don't have to use a **semicolon** to use a conjunctive adverb. Conjunctive adverbs work well after periods, too.

Interjections

"Interjections are short exclamations like **Oh!**, **Um** or **Ah!** They have no real grammatical value but we use them quite often, usually more in speaking than in writing" (Interjections, 2001, para. 1).

While interjections are very short, they communicate a great deal because they are typically used to express emotion. "While any word that shows strong feelings can be an interjection, look for the usual suspects: Wow!, Zap!, Pop!, and the rest of the family" (Rozakis, 1997, p. 59).

✓ Interjection

"Ouch! That hurts!" I said to the vampire.

Woops! Did I forget to include you in the zombie plan?

Because interjections communicate strong emotions, they should not be over-used. "With interjections, a little goes a long way. Use these marks of punctuation as you would hot pepper or hysterics, because they are strong and edgy" (Rozakis, 1997, p. 59).

Sentence Structure

This section is a quick review of the fundamentals of the sentence. If you encounter unfamiliar terminology in this book or in your class, refer to this section for help. For more on sentence grammar, refer to your copy of Rules for Writers by Diana Hacker (Bedford/St. Martin's Press) for a thorough discussion of sentence grammar, along with exercises.

Basic Sentence Patterns

✓ Subject + verb

The simplest of sentence patterns is composed of a **subject** and **verb** without a direct object or subject complement. It uses an **intransitive verb**, that is, a verb requiring no direct object:

Control **rods remain** inside the fuel assembly of the reactor.

The **development** of wind power practically **ceased** until the early 1970s.

All amplitude-modulation (AM) **receivers work** in the same way.

The **cross-member** exposed to abnormal stress eventually **broke**.

Only two **types** of charge **exist** in nature.

? Subject + linking verb + subject complement

Another simple pattern uses the **linking verb**, any form of the to be verb without an action verb:

The chain **reaction is** the basis of nuclear power.

The **debate** over nuclear power **has** often **been** bitter.

Folding and **faulting** of the earth's surface **are** important geologic processes.

Windspeed seems to be highest during the middle of the day.

The silicon solar **cell can be** difficult and expensive to manufacture.

✓ Subject + verb + direct object

Another common sentence pattern uses the **direct object**:

Silicon conducts **electricity** in an unusual way.

The anti-reflective coating on the the silicon cell reduces **reflection** from 32 to 22 percent.

Prestressing of the concrete increases the load-carrying **capacity** of the members.

✓ Subject + verb + indirect object + direct object

The sentence pattern with the **indirect object** and **direct object** is similar to the preceding pattern:

We are sending **you** the **balance** of the payment in this letter.

I am writing **her** about a number of problems that I have had with my Execucomp wordprocessor.

The supervisor mailed the **applicant** a **description** of the job.

I am writing **you** about a number of problems...

Austin, Texas, has recently built its **citizens** a **system** of bikelanes.

✓ Subject + verb + direct object + object complement

The sentence pattern using the **[direct object]** and **object complement** is not common but worth knowing:

The walls are usually painted **black**.

The plant shutdown left the entire **area** an economic **disaster**.

The committee declared the new **design** a **breakthrough** in energy efficiency.

The low cost of the new computer made **competition** much too **difficult** for some of the other companies.

✓ Passive voice pattern

The passive voice is not ordinarily considered a "pattern," but it is an important and often controversial construction. It reverses the subject and object and, in some cases, deletes the subject. (See the section on problems with the [weak use of the passive](#).) Compare these example active and passive voice sentences:

Passive voice	Active voice
Saccharin is now permitted as an additive in food.	The FDA now permits saccharin as an additive in food.
This report is divided into three main sections.	I have divided this report into three main sections.
Windmills are classified as either lift or drag types.	Engineers classify windmills as either lift or drag types.
The valves used in engine start are controlled by a computer.	A computer usually controls the valves used in an engine start.
The remains of Troy were destroyed by later builders on the site.	Later builders on the site of Troy destroyed the remains of citadel.
Some restaurant locations can be leased.	You can lease some restaurant locations.

✓ Simple sentence

A simple sentence is one that contains **subject** and a **verb** and no other independent or dependent clause.

One of the tubes **is attached** to the manometer part of the instrument indicating the pressure of the air within the cuff.

To measure blood pressure, a **device** known as a sphygmomanometer and a **stethoscope are needed**. (*compound subject*)

There **are** basically two **types** of stethoscopes. (*inverted subject and verb*)

The **sphygmomanometer is** usually **covered** with cloth and **has** two rubber tubes attached to it. (*compound verb*)

✓ Compound sentences

A compound sentence is made up of two or more independent clauses joined by a **coordinating conjunction** (*and, or, nor, but, yet, for*) and a comma, an adverbial conjunction and a semicolon, or a semicolon.

In sphygmomanometers, too narrow a cuff can result in erroneously high readings, and too wide a cuff can result in erroneously low readings.

Some cuffs hook together; others wrap or snap into place.

✓ Compound predicates

A **predicate** is everything in the verb part of the sentence *after* the subject (unless the sentence uses inverted word order). A **compound predicate** is two or more predicates joined by a **coordinating conjunction**. Traditionally, the conjunction in a sentence consisting of just two compound predicates is not punctuated.

Another library media specialist **has been using** Accelerated Reader for ten years **and has seen** great results.

This cell phone app **lets users share pictures instantly with followers and categorize photos with hashtags**.

Basic Parts of the Sentence

✓ Subject

The subject of a sentence is that noun, pronoun, or phrase or clause about which the sentence makes a statement.

Einstein's general **theory** of relativity has been subjected to many tests of validity over the years.

Although a majority of caffeine drinkers think of it as a stimulant, heavy **users** of caffeine say the substance relaxes them.

Surrounding the secure landfill on all sides are impermeable barrier **walls**.

(inverted sentence pattern)

In a secure landfill, the **soil** on top and the **cover** block storm water intrusion into the landfill.

(compound subject)

✓ Verb phrase

The main verb, or verb phrase, of a sentence is a word or words that express an action, event, or a state of existence. It sets up a relationship between the subject and the rest of the sentence.

The first high-level language to be widely accepted, FORTRAN, **was implemented** on an IBM 704 computer.

Instruction in the source program **must be translated** into machine language. *(passive construction)*

The operating system **controls** the translation of the source program and **carries** out supervisory functions. *(compound verb)*

✓ Predicate

The predicate is the rest of the sentence coming after the subject. It can include the main verb, subject complement, direct object, indirect object, and object complement.

The pressure in a pressurized water reactor **varies from system to system**.

The pressure **is maintained at about 2250 pounds per square inch to prevent steam from forming**.

The pressure **is then lowered to form steam at about 600 pounds per square inch**.

In contrast, a boiling water reactor **operates at constant pressure**.

✓ Subject complement

The subject complement is that noun, pronoun, adjective, phrase, or clause that comes after a linking verb (some form of the *be* verb):

The maximum allowable concentration is ten **parts** H₂S per million parts breathable air.

The deadening of the sense of smell caused by H₂S is the **result** of the effects of H₂S on the olfactory nerves of the brain.

Continuous exposure to toxic concentrations of H₂S can be **fatal**.

✓ Direct object

A direct object—a noun, pronoun, phrase, or clause acting as a noun—takes the action of the main verb. A direct object can be identified by putting *what?*, *which?*, or *whom?* in its place.

The housing assembly of a mechanical pencil contains the mechanical **workings** of the pencil.

Lavoisier used curved glass **discs** fastened together at their rims, with wine filling the space between, to focus the sun's rays to attain temperatures of 3000° F.

The dust and smoke lofted into the air by nuclear explosions might cool the earth's **atmosphere** some number of degrees.

A 20 percent fluctuation in average global temperature could reduce biological **activity**, shift weather **patterns**, and ruin **agriculture**.

(compound direct object)

The cooler temperatures brought about by nuclear war might end all **life** on earth.

On Mariners 6 and 7, the two-axis scan platforms provided much more **capability** and **flexibility** for the scientific payload than those of Mariner 4.

(compound direct object)

✓ Indirect object

An indirect object—a noun, pronoun, phrase, or clause acting as a noun—receives the action expressed in the sentence. It can be identified by inserting *to* or *for*.

In the application letter, tell *[to]* the potential **employer** that a resume accompanies the letter.

The company is designing *[for]* senior **citizens** a new walkway to the park area.

Do not send *[to]* the personnel **office** a resume unless someone there specifically requests it.

✓ Object complement

An object complement—a noun or adjective coming after a direct object—adds detail to the direct object. To identify object complements, insert *[to be]* between the **direct object** and **object complement**.

The supervisor found the **program** *[to be]* **faulty**.

The company considers the new **computer** *[to be]* a major **breakthrough**.

Most people think the space **shuttle** *[to be]* a major **step** in space exploration.

Problem Modifiers

A **modifier** is any element—a word, phrase, or clause—that adds information to a noun or pronoun in a sentence. Modifier problems occur when the word or phrase that a modifier is supposed to modify is unclear or absent, or when the modifier is located in the wrong place within the sentence. Modifier problems are usually divided into two groups: **misplaced modifiers** and **dangling modifiers**:

✓ Correcting misplaced modifiers

Sentence	Problem	Corrective Revision
They found out that the walkways had collapsed <u>on the late evening news</u> .	<i>Did the walkways collapse on the late evening news?</i>	On the late evening news, we heard that the walkways had collapsed.
The committee <u>nearly spent</u> a hundred hours investigating the accident.	<i>So how much time did the committee spend? A minute? An hour?</i>	The committee spent nearly a hundred hours investigating the accident.
The supervisor said <u>after the initial planning</u> the in-depth study would begin.	<i>Did the supervisor say it after the initial planning? And when will the study begin?</i>	The supervisor said that the in-depth study would begin after the initial planning

✓ Correcting dangling modifiers

Sentence	Problem	Corrective Revision
<u>Having damaged the previous one</u> , a new fuse was installed in the car.	<i>Who damaged that fuse?</i>	Because the previous fuse had been damaged, a new one had to be installed. or Having damaged the previous one, I had to install a new fuse in my car.
After receiving the new dumb waiter, household chores became so much easier in the old mansion.	<i>Who received the dumb waiter?</i>	After we received the dumb waiter, it was immediately installed. or After receiving the dumb waiter, we immediately installed it.
Using a grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, a contraflow lane was designed for I-45 North.	<i>Who used that money?</i>	When the Urban Mass Transportation Administration granted funds to the city, planners began designing a contraflow lane for I-45 North. or Using a grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, city planners designed a contraflow lane for I-45 North.
Pointing out the productivity and health problems plaguing US workers, aerobic fitness programs may become much more common in American industry, according to the spokeswoman.	<i>Who pointed that out?</i>	Because of the productivity and health problems plaguing US workers, aerobic fitness programs may become much more common in American industry, according to the spokeswoman. or Pointing out the productivity and health problems plaguing US workers, the spokeswoman said that aerobic fitness programs may become much more common in American industry.

Tip! To correct misplaced modifier problems, you can usually relocate the misplaced modifier (the word or phrase). To correct dangling modifiers, you can rephrase the dangling modifier, or rephrase the rest of the sentence that it modifies.

Note: One particularly effective way to correct dangling modifiers is to create a summary appositive, that is, a noun or pronoun summarizing what was just said followed by an adjective clause:

<i>Dangling modifier problems</i>	<i>Summary appositive revisions</i>
Stars that were formed relatively recently should have higher concentrations of heavy elements than do the older stars, which is confirmed by observation.	Stars that were formed relatively recently should have higher concentrations of heavy elements than do the older stars, a prediction that is confirmed by observation.
Most astronomers now believe that the energy of quasars comes from giant black holes in the cores of the quasars, which fits the growing belief that black holes are present in the cores of many galaxies, our own included.	Most astronomers now believe that the energy of quasars comes from giant black holes in the cores of quasars, a theory that fits the growing belief that black holes are present in the cores of many galaxies, our own included.

Parallelism

Parallelism refers to the way that items in a series are worded. You want to use the same style of wording in a series of items—it makes it easier on the reader. Widely varied wording is distracting and potentially confusing to readers. Here are some examples, with revisions and some comments:

✓ Creating parallelism

Problem: The report discusses **how telescopes work, what types are available, mounts, accessories, and techniques** for beginning star gazers. (*The "how" and the "why" clauses are not parallel to the "mounts," "accessories," and "techniques" phrases.*)

Revision: The report discusses how telescopes work; what types of telescopes, mounts, and accessories are available; and how to begin your hobby as a star gazer.

Problem: The report discusses **how telescopes work, what types are available, mounts, accessories, and techniques** for beginning star gazers. (*The "how" and the "why" clauses are not parallel to the "mounts," "accessories," and "techniques" phrases.*)

Revision: The report discusses how telescopes work; what types of telescopes, mounts, and accessories are available; and how to begin your hobby as a star gazer.

Problem: While the dialysis solution remains in the peritoneal cavity, the dialysis is achieved, a process that includes **the removal of nitrogenous wastes and correcting electrolyte imbalances and fluid overloads**. (*The "removal" phrase and the "correcting" phrase are not parallel to each other.*)

Revision: While the dialysis solution remains in the peritoneal cavity, the dialysis is achieved, a process that includes the removal of nitrogenous wastes and the correction of electrolyte imbalances and fluid overloads.

Problem: This report is intended for people **with some electronics background but have little or no knowledge of geophysical prospecting**. (*The "with" phrase is not parallel with the "have little" clause—this one is not even grammatical.*)

Revision: This report is intended for people with some electronics background but with little or no knowledge of geophysical prospecting.

Parallelism problems occur when different types of phrasing are used in the same areas of a document: such as for list items in a vertical list, or for all headings at a certain level within a specific part of a document. At times, working on parallelism of phrasing is pedantic and unnecessary. However, in many instances, parallel phrasing can give readers important cues about how to interpret information. A jumble of dissimilar styles of phrasing for similar elements can be confusing. Shown below are those different styles—don't mix 'em!

✓ Parallelism styles

Questions	Noun Phrasing
How are groundwater samples collected?	Method of groundwater sample collection
How should soil samples be handled?	Soil sample handling
Must monitor wells be used to collect groundwater for laboratory analysis?	Purpose of monitor wells in groundwater collection for laboratory analysis
What should the samples be analyzed for?	Purpose of soil sample analysis
Gerund Phrasing	Sentences
Collecting groundwater samples	Groundwater samples must be collected properly.
Handling soil samples	Soil samples must be handled using the specified method.
Using monitor wells in groundwater collection for laboratory analysis	Monitor wells must be used to collect groundwater for laboratory analysis.
Analyzing samples	Samples must be analyzed for specific elements.
Infinitives	Imperatives
To collect groundwater samples	Collect groundwater samples.
To handle soil samples	Handle soil samples properly.
To use monitor wells in groundwater collection for laboratory analysis	Use monitor wells in groundwater collection for laboratory analysis.
To analyze samples	Analyze samples.

Numbers vs. Words

The main hurdle to overcome is to learn that in business contexts, we use numerals in text—even ones below 10—if they are critical values. In other words, we break the rules that are taught in regular writing courses and that are used in normal publishing and copyediting practice. That's because in the business and scientific context, we are vitally interested in numbers, statistical data, even if it's a 2 or 5 or—yes—even a 0.

The difficulty is in defining the rules.

✓ Number vs words

Rule: You should use numerals, not words, when the number is a key value, an exact measurement value, or both.

Example: In the sentence "Our computer backup system uses 4 mm tape" the numeral is a key element, just as it is in a recipe: "This recipe calls for 4 cups of unbleached flour." But consider this one: "There are four key elements that define a desktop publishing system." A word, not a numeral, is preferable here because—well, how to explain it? The number of elements is exact all right, but it's just no big deal. Four, five—who cares?

To summarize the rules that we normally apply:

- Don't start sentences with numerals—write the number out or, better yet, rephrase the sentence so that it doesn't begin the sentence.
- For decimal values less than 1, add a 0 before the decimal point: for example, .08 should be 0.08.
- Make a firm decision on how to handle 0 and 1 when they refer to key, exact values and stick with it. (Style varies wildly in business writing on these two villains.) Some styles choose to use words for these; they resign themselves to the slight inconsistency but better readability.
- Use numerals for important, exact values, even when those values are below 10.
- Use words for numerical values that are unimportant, such as in the sentence "There are six data types in the C programming language."

- When you must use fractions, avoid the symbols that may be available in the character set used by your software. Construct the fraction like this: 5-1/4. Be sure and put the hyphen between the whole number and the fraction.
- It would be nice if all fractions could be reset as decimals, but such is not the case when you have things like 1/8 floating around. Stay consistent with either decimals or fractions in these situations.
- Don't make numerical values look more exact than they are. For example, don't add ".00" to a dollar amount if the the amount is rounded or estimated.
- For large amounts, you can write things like 36 million or 45 billion, but, for some reason, *not* 23 thousand.
- Apply these rules in specific scientific contexts only. Be sensitive to what the standard practices are in the context in which you are writing.
- As for percentages, Microsoft style says spell out "percent," and to avoid use of the symbol except, for example, to save space in tables. Use the word "percent" and insert a space between it and the numeral. Always use a numeral with percent, no matter how small the numeral. Use "percentage" as a stand-alone noun. For example, Over 15 *percent* of my income goes to pet food and A big percentage of my income goes to pet food.

✓ Examples of numbers vs. words

Here are some examples where these rules are applied:

Some 19 million tons of sulphur dioxide are discharged from US sources alone each year, and another 14 million tons from Canada. *(Using the number "19" and the word "million" indicates an approximate amount. "19,000,000" might make some readers think it was an exact amount.)*

It was not until after December 1952, when 4000 people died in London from air pollution in just a few days, that real gains in pollution-control legislation were made.

The US Army's standard airborne Doppler navigator weighs 28 lb (12.7 kg), requires 89 W of power, and operates at 13.325-GHz frequency.

All vitrain of the European classification, if more than 14 micrometers thick, has been regarded as anthraxylon.

In 1971, 11 countries accounted for about 91 percent of world production of coal.

The Department of the Interior has just published a report that reviews 65 different coal gasification processes.

Combustion turbines total about 8% of the total installed capability of US utility systems and supply less than 3% of the total energy generated.

Internal combustion engines in small power plants account for about 1% of the total power-system generating capability of the US.

The water-cement ratio will generally range from 4 gal of water per sack of cement to about 9 gal per sack. *(These are exact values here; in business writing, use the numeral even if it is below 10.)*

The problem is located in piston number 6. *(When there are enumerated items or parts, business writing uses the number, as in this example. But notice that no "#" or "No." is used.)*

The signal occurs in 6-second intervals.

The order is for 6-, 8-, and 12-foot two-by-fours.

Use Code 3 if a system shutdown occurs.

Mined coals commonly contain between 5 and 15 percent mineral matter.

The above illustration shows a 20-unit coaxial cable with 9 working coaxial pairs and 2 standby coaxials, which automatically switch in if the electronics of the regular circuits fail.

There are 59 different species of the coffee shrub, but only 4 are of commercial importance.

Most grinds of coffee contain particles ranging in size from 0.023 to 0.055 inches in diameter.

Using carrier frequencies between 0.535 MHz and 1.605 MHz in the US, AM broadcasting stations sprang up all over the country beginning in the 1910s.

As a base from which to work, 2-1/2 to 3 gal of water are needed for each sack of cement for complete hydration and maximum strength. *(These are exact values; therefore, in the business-writing context, we use numerals. Notice how fractional values are handled: put a hyphen between the whole number and the fraction to prevent misreading.)*

The order for twelve 30-foot beams was placed yesterday.

The order was for 30 fifteen-gallon tubs.

They used six 8-pound sacks of nails.

The microprocessors of the 70s and 80s operated under the control of clocks running at 1 to 5 MHz, that is, 1 to 5 million counts per second.

Your eye has a bandwidth of 370 trillion Hz, the visible spectrum.

Transmission rates on ETHERNET range from 1 to 10 megabits per second (0.125 to 1.25 million bytes per second).

In 1978, the satellite carriers' revenues were about \$88 million, and by 1986, they are expected to reach \$800 million.

Most communications satellites are in geostationary orbit: at an altitude of 22,300 miles over the surface of the earth and at a distance of 26,260 miles from the center of the earth (the earth's radius being 3960 miles).

Aggregates constitute about 70 percent of a concrete mix.

Uniform compaction of 95% or better of standard AASHO densities is recommended.

In her textbook, Chapter 7 discusses the different audiences of technical prose and translation techniques for communicating effectively with the less specialized ones.

The wheels of the four-wheel tractor give it increased speed over the Crawler, but because of the weight distribution over four wheels rather than over two wheels or tracks, this vehicle has less traction.

Hundreds of thousands of people will have purchased microcomputers by the end of 1980. Tens of millions of them will

bought them by the end of the century.

There are two telephones in service today for every three people in the US.

In 1965, Dr. Gordon Moore announced his "law" that the complexity of a chip would double every year for ten years. *(Use the word "ten" here because it is not an exact amount.)*

The typical stand-alone microcomputer system consists of seven physical components. *(Use the word "seven" here because, even though it seems like an exact amount, it is not a key value. It doesn't have the same significance as the "7" would have in "7 quarts of oil.")*

If you are using page-zero addressing, use a RAM for memory page zero.

Primary fuel cells are those through which reactants are passed only one time.

Before recharging, a zinc-carbon battery must have a working voltage not less than one volt. *(Even in business-writing contexts, rules for one and zero vary. Just pick a style and stay with it. Using the word "one" is the standard in this example.)*

Japan has roughly one-third of the US production of dry batteries. *(In running text, always write out fraction like this, and hyphenate them. However, you'd still write "5-1/2 inches.")*

The radial fractures are so extensive that they are the dominant structural element over half of Mars's surface. *(And just to be sure, "half" by itself in running text is always a word.)*

A nanosecond is one-billionth of a second.

Inside the UP are three 16-bit registers. *(When you have two separate numerical values side by side, one has to be a word, and the other a numeral. Styles vary here, but make the numeral the higher number. Contrast with the next example.)*

Data from the frequency counter take the form of 16 seven-bit ASCII words.

Sales of batteries have increased from \$510 million on the average during 1957-1959 to \$867 million in 1966 and are projected to exceed \$1.8 billion in 1980.

The speed of light is roughly 300 million meters per second.

Fifty-three representatives of different software development companies showed up at the meeting. *(Never start a sentence with a numeral in any writing context. With this example, some rewriting might be a wise idea to get the numerical out of the beginning of the sentence, as in the following rewrite.)*

At the meeting, 53 representatives of different software development companies showed up.

Symbols and Abbreviations

In business-writing contexts, you may often have to decide whether to use " or ' for inches or feet or whether to use inches, in, or in.

Symbols and abbreviations are distracting to readers; they are different from the normal flow of words. However, there are plenty of cases where the written-out version is more distracting than the symbol or abbreviation. Also, the context (specifically, technical or nontechnical) has a lot to do with which to use.

Imagine a document that has only one or two references to numerical measurements in inches. There is no reason to use symbols or abbreviations here—just write the thing out. But imagine a document with numerous feet and inch references: using symbols or abbreviations in this case is better, more readable, more efficient for both reader and writer.

But which? Imagine the amount of foot and inch references there would be in a carpentry project (for example, a dog house). In this case, the symbols, "′" and "″" would be preferable. However, this would be an extreme case; otherwise, use the abbreviations.

When you use symbols, especially for feet, inches, and some math symbols, use a symbols-type font. Avoid the "smart" quotes for feet and inches. Use the multiplication symbol for measurement contexts.

Which are the standard symbols and abbreviations to use? Go with the standards in the field in which you are writing, or with those found in a standard reference book such as a dictionary. Don't make them up yourself (for example, "mtrs" for meters)!

What about plurals? Very few abbreviations take an s to indicate plural: for example 5 in. means 5 inches. For the few that you think might take the s, check a dictionary.

What about obscure abbreviations and symbols? If you are concerned that readers might not recognize the abbreviation or symbol, write its full name in regular text and then put the abbreviation and symbol in parentheses just after the first occurrence of that full name.

✓ Abbreviations and symbols in text

High resolution displays use larger video bandwidths, up to 30 MHz or more.

Most touch-sensitive displays use a matrix of either LED/photodiodes or transparent capacitor arrays to detect a physical touch.

The part of the memory that is easily alterable by the operator consists of RAM chips.

A satellite in geostationary orbit looks at the earth with a cone angle of 17.3° corresponding to an arc of 18,080 km along the equator.

The arc from 53° W to 139° W will cover 48 states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) and is said to provide conus coverage.

Fairchild Industries, Inc., was an early participant in commercial satellites.

The voice was compressed from the usual 64-kb/s pulse code modulation (PCM) to 32 kb/s per channel by near-instantaneous companding (a modified PCM technique).

Terrestrial microwave radio communications require repeaters spaced every 20 to 40 mi from each other.

Over a period of several days the spacecraft is tracked from the ground and positioned on station (i.e., in the preassigned orbital spot) in order to commence operations.

A velocity increment of approximately 155 ft/s per year is required to correct drift problems in satellites.

The ancient battery-like objects made by the Parthians in 250 BC were thin sheets of copper soldered into a cylinder 1.125 cm long and 2.6 cm in diameter.

The standard electrodes are the normal and the 0.1 normal (N) calomel electrodes in which the system is Hg|KCl solution saturated with HgCl.

Such batteries contain 4400 cc of water in which NaOH is dissolved.

Water pressure in the heat recovery loop can be as much as 25 psig.

✓ General Proofreading Tips

- Take a break between writing and proofreading.
- Revise first, edit second.
- Proofread for one element at a time. For example, on one reading, focus only on punctuation.
- Know your own common mistakes and search for them in your text.
- Read the text out loud to pay more attention to what is actually on the paper.
- Read backward to slow down and to avoid skimming the document.
- Ask someone else to read your document for you and to provide feedback.
- Do not rely on spellcheck but pay attention to spellcheck's suggestions.

All links live as of June 2021.

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