

A VISUAL REFERENCE

FOR EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

THE

# INFOGRAPHIC

GUIDE TO

# GRAMMAR

## SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Sentences must contain a **subject** and a **predicate** and be able to stand on their own.

The

article

young

adjective

woman

subject

sprinted

predicate

across the finish line.

prepositional phrase

## VERB TYPES

**ACTION VERBS**

The turtle **dived** into the water.

The boy **was** tired this morning.

**VERBS OF BEING**

**LINKING VERBS**

The coffee **tasted** too sweet.

Yes, you **can** join the club.

**AUXILIARY VERBS**

## PUNCTUATION MARKS

**Commas**

Her favorite kinds of ice cream were mint, chocolate, and strawberry.

## "WHO" OR "WHOM"?

TRY IT OUT WITH A QUESTION:

ORIGINAL

Who/whom is hungry?

SUBSTITUTION

He is hungry.

CONCLUSION

"Who" is correct.

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## INTRODUCTION

English is a challenging language to master, even for native speakers. Why? Well, for starters, it's been spiced by many dialects and regional variations. It has also borrowed freely from many other languages. Even today, new words and expressions frequently enter the language. One of the most challenging parts of the English language is the grammar: the standard set of rules for spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and word use.

English grammar is difficult to grasp thanks to its many layers of rules. That's where this book can help—it will lay out the basic rules of grammar (along with tricks to help you avoid common mistakes) in fifty easy-to-understand infographic spreads. With *The Infographic Guide to Grammar*, you will learn all about subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, interjections, complements, punctuation, and more. You'll also discover the right way to use commonly confused words, like *there/their/they're*, and find out what clauses are and how to use them. This book will help you understand the how and why behind English grammar, giving you more confidence in your writing and speaking.

Whether you're a new English learner, a student brushing up on your grammar lessons, an aspiring writer, or a grammar nerd, *The Infographic Guide to Grammar* teaches you everything you need and want to know about grammar in a fun, illustrated format.

# NOUNS



**PEOPLE**



**PLACES**



**THINGS**

Think of nouns as the **CELEBRITIES** of the grammar world: Sentences are really all about them. Nouns can be subjects or objects—or even both.



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## **DID YOU KNOW?**

*Noun* comes from the word *nōmen*, Latin for “name.”

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While all nouns serve as labels for **people, places, things**, or ideas, there are some specific terms for different types.

<b>COMMON NOUN</b> Non-specific person, place, or thing Examples: <b>grandmother, city</b>	<b>PROPER NOUN</b> Specific person, place, or thing Examples: <b>Grandma Jane, New York City</b>
<b>CONCRETE NOUN</b> Noun you experience with your senses Examples: <b>sunshine, song</b>	<b>ABSTRACT NOUN</b> Noun that is an idea, feeling, or state of being Examples: <b>pride, exhaustion</b>
<b>COUNT NOUN</b> Individual noun you can count Examples: <b>horse, dollar</b>	<b>NON-COUNT NOUN</b> Noun used when you can't count Examples: <b>food, rain</b>
<b>COLLECTIVE NOUN</b> Noun that represents a collection or group Examples: <b>family, hive</b>	<b>POSSESSIVE NOUN</b> Noun used to show ownership Examples: <b>father's key, people's ideas</b>



### GOOD TO KNOW:

**Attributive Nouns:** Nouns can act as adjectives to describe other nouns. Think of *chicken soup*, for example. Both words are nouns, but here *chicken* is being used to modify *soup*. In this case, *chicken* is an attributive noun.

# ADJECTIVES

## ≡ DETAILS AND SPECIFICS ≡

An **adjective** modifies a noun or pronoun to give more information about a person, place, or thing.

### — IDENTIFYING ADJECTIVES —

ADJECTIVES  
ANSWER:

1. WHICH ONE?
2. WHAT KIND?
3. HOW MANY?



### DID YOU KNOW?

*Adjective* comes from the Middle English *adjectif*, borrowed from Anglo-French and Late Latin.

## – TYPES OF ADJECTIVES –



### ARTICLES

- Point out or refer to a person, place, or thing as specific or unspecific; can be definite or indefinite
- **Definite Example:** the
- **Indefinite Examples:** a, an



### DEMONSTRATIVE

- Distinguishes the person, place, or thing being described
- **Examples:** this, that, these, those



### INDEFINITE

- Used to describe an entire group or indicate lack of familiarity or specificity
- **Examples:** all, another, any, both, each, less, neither, some, etc.



### POSSESSIVE

- Describes who has or owns something
- **Examples:** my, your, his, her, its, our, their



### INTERROGATIVE

- Begins a question
- **Examples:** what, which, whose



### PROPER

- Formed from a proper noun, and therefore always begins with a capital letter
- **Examples:** Thai food, French terry



# VERBS

## Describing an Action or State

A **verb** is a word that indicates an action or a state of being. It tells the story of the sentence.

## WHAT KIND OF VERB?



### ACTION VERBS

Verbs that show movement or change.  
*The turtle **dived** into the water.*



### VERBS OF BEING

Verbs that express a state, usually a variation of “to be.”  
*The boy **was** tired.*



### LINKING VERBS

These connect a sentence’s parts—and are usually forms of “be” in disguise. If you can swap the verb without changing the sentence’s meaning, it’s a linking verb.  
*The coffee **tasted** sweet. = The coffee **was** sweet.*



### AUXILIARY VERBS

These helpers express more about the main verb.  
*You **can** join the club.*

## TRANSITIVE VS. INTRANSITIVE VERBS

Action verbs can be either transitive or intransitive depending on whether or not there is a noun receiving the action (also known as a **direct object**).

### TRANSITIVE

**Eat, paint, kick**

**Example:**

He kicked (verb)  
the ball (direct object).

### INTRANSITIVE

**Sit, sneeze, arrive**

**Example:** They arrived

(verb) at the party  
(no direct object).

Some verbs can be both transitive and intransitive:

**Transitive:**

He closed the door.

**Intransitive:**

The door closed.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### Forms of “Be”



# ADVERBS

## Mighty Modifiers

An **adverb** tells us more about a verb, adjective, or even another adverb (yes, English is complicated). The fastest way to spot an adverb is to look for a word ending in *-ly*, though there are exceptions—like *fast*, *never*, *well*, *very*, *now*, and *quite*.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### DOUBLE DUTY

Some words are used as both adjectives and adverbs—without modification. These include *early*, *daily*, *weekly*, *hourly*, *fast*, *half*, *straight*, *just*, *late*, *low*, *most*, *clear*, and *clean*.



## ADVERBS IN ACTION

**Modifying a verb:** *My dad drove slowly through traffic.*

**Modifying an adjective:** *The sun was extremely bright.*

**Modifying another adverb:** *Cheetahs can run remarkably fast.*



**Verb tenses** relate action to time, telling us whether something has occurred in the past, is happening right now, or will take place in the future. These three main tenses are then subcategorized further, for a total of twelve possible tenses.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### QUICK SELF-CHECK TIPS

Not sure you're using the correct verb form for the tense? Try these tips:

- Use "Yesterday" to start your **past** tense sentence.
- Use "Today" to start your **present** tense sentence.
- Use "Tomorrow" to start your **future** tense sentence.

# Why 12 Tenses?

In English, there are only two ways to form a tense from the verb alone: the past and the present. For more detail, you must add a form of *have*, *be*, or *will*—called a **helping** or an **auxiliary verb**. Let's take a look.

## THE 12 ENGLISH VERB TENSES

		PARTICULAR USE			
		Simple	Progressive	Perfect	Perfect Progressive
		For an action that is <b>usual</b> or <b>repeated</b>	For an action that is <b>ongoing</b>	For an action that is <b>completed</b>	For an ongoing action that will be <b>completed at a definite time</b>
IN ACTION	PAST	1 ate	4 was/were eating	7 had eaten	10 had been eating
	PRESENT	2 eat	5 am/is/are eating	6 has/have eaten	11 has/have been eating
	FUTURE	3 will/shall eat	8 will be eating	9 will have eaten	12 will have been eating

# REGULAR

VS.

## EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

As if learning about tenses wasn't complicated enough, the English language stumps learners with **irregular verbs**. In fact, some of our most common verbs are irregular!

All verbs, both regular and irregular, have **5 FORMS:**

**INFINITIVE**  
**SIMPLE PRESENT**  
**SIMPLE PAST**  
**PRESENT PARTICIPLE**  
**PAST PARTICIPLE**

### REGULAR VERBS

To form the simple past or past participle forms, add *-d* or *-ed* to the infinitive (base form) of the verb.

**Example:**  
*work—worked*

### IRREGULAR VERBS

These verbs undergo significant changes between the infinitive, simple past, and past participle forms.

**Example:**  
*go—went, gone*

# IRREGULAR VERBS

## MOST COMMON IRREGULAR VERBS

When learning English, speakers memorize most of the **200+ irregular verbs** and their simple past and past participle forms. Some of the most common include:

INFINITIVE	SIMPLE PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
be	was, were	been
bring	brought	brought
do	did	done
feel	felt	felt
get	got	gotten, got
go	went	gone
lead	led	led
run	ran	run
say	said	said
see	saw	seen



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### Why Do We Have Irregular Verbs?

Most irregular verbs come from Old English, the earliest spoken version of the English language, used in Great Britain before 1100. Newer verbs are borrowed from other languages or are converted from nouns—and tend to be regular.



# PRONOUNS

## NOUN SUBSTITUTES

A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of a noun to add variety and avoid repetition.

### PRONOUN POWER

#### Which sentence sounds more natural?

Jack came into the room, picked up **Jack's** pencil, sat down at **Jack's** desk, and began to work on **Jack's** final exam.

Jack came into the room, picked up **his** pencil, sat down at **his** desk, and began to work on **his** final exam.



#### GOOD TO KNOW:

##### **Singular *They/Their***

The words *they*, *their*, *them*, and *themselves* are sometimes used as singular pronouns when talking about someone whose gender isn't specified, or someone who chooses not to use *he* or *she*. While the gender-neutral purpose is new, the use of the singular *they* is not: The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the use as far back as 1375!

# PRONOUN CLASSIFICATIONS



## PERSONAL

Represent people, places, or things

- I, me, you, he, him, she, her, it, we, us, they, them
- *I came to see you today.*



## POSSESSIVE

Show ownership

- Mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs
- *That car is ours.*



## DEMONSTRATIVE

Point to something

- This, that, these, those
- *This is her lunchbox.*



## RELATIVE

Relate one part of the sentence to another

- Who, whom, which, that, whose
- *The girl who was sick went home.*



## REFLEXIVE

Emphasize or reflect back to someone or something else

- Myself, yourself, yourselves, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, themselves
- *You must ask yourself what you want.*



## INDEFINITE

Make non-specific references

- All, another, any, anybody/anyone, anything, each, everybody/everyone, everything, few, many, nobody, none, one, several, some, somebody/someone
- *Nobody was home.*



## RECIPROCAL

Express mutual action

- Each other, one another
- *They talked to each other on the way.*



## INTERROGATIVE

Ask a question

- Who, whom, what
- *What can I do if that happens?*

# PREPOSITIONS & PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Linking

Words

A **preposition** connects a noun or a pronoun to another word in the sentence to show the relationship between the two. It often indicates the position of something in the sentence—**under**, **over**, **above**, **below**, or **beneath**.

## SPOTTING PREPOSITIONS

*They sat **in** the corner.*

**In** is a preposition connecting

**they**

and

**corner.**

*Jack and Jill went **up** the hill.*

**Up** is a preposition joining

**went**

and

**hill.**



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### ENDING SENTENCES?

Should you end a sentence with a preposition? You can. While some grammar sticklers may frown upon ending a sentence this way in formal written English—such as a book or an article—the practice is perfectly acceptable. In fact, when speaking, people often do:


***Whom are you talking with?/What was that about?***

# COMMON PREPOSITIONS

Look for words like:				
about	before	during	over	up
above	behind	for	since	upon
across	between	from	through	with
after	but	into	toward	within
against	by	like	under	without
among	despite	of	until	
around	down	onto		
at				


## WHEN IS A PREPOSITION NOT A PREPOSITION?

All prepositions must be used in **prepositional phrases**, which consist of the preposition and a noun or pronoun (and sometimes adjectives and adverbs). If the word is used alone, it's an adjective or adverb. See the difference?



**The flag went up the pole.**  
(**Up** is a preposition connecting **went** and **pole**.)

≠



**The flag was up.**  
(**Up** is an adjective modifying **flag**.)

**Isn't that sneaky?**

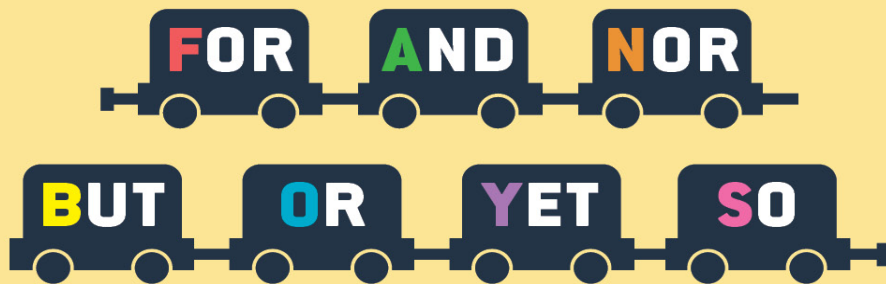
# CONJUNCTIONS

## Connectors

Think of **conjunctions** as words that join two parts of a sentence together. There are three types: *coordinating*, *correlative*, and *subordinating*. Let's get to know them.

## Coordinating Conjunctions

Remember the seven coordinating conjunctions easily using the mnemonic **FANBOYS**, an acronym of *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*.



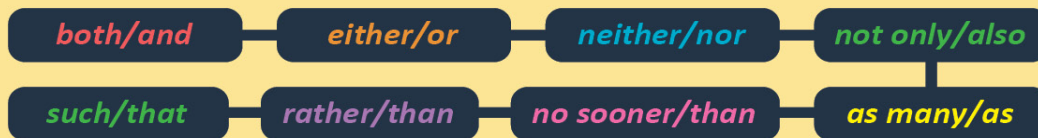
### Examples:

*I bought apples **and** bananas.*

*I waited **for** the green arrow **and** turned left.*

# Correlative Conjunctions

These conjunctions come in pairs—both must appear in the sentence for it to work. They include:



## Examples:

I would **rather** bike **than** walk.

**Neither** the boy **nor** the girl knew the answer.

# Subordinating Conjunctions

These sneaky conjunctions are used at the beginning of **dependent clauses**, sections of a sentence that add detail or indicate cause but that cannot stand alone. Look for (among others):



## Examples:

**Because** she was late, she missed the train.

**After** I ate, I felt better.



## GOOD TO KNOW:

### STARTING A SENTENCE?

While it was once considered incorrect to start a sentence with a subordinating conjunction, it is now considered OK. And that's a good thing, as doing so can enhance flow between sentences and add variety.

# INTERJECTIONS!

Expressing Emotion

**WHAT?**  
**REALLY?**  
You need help on  
interjections?  
**NO WAY!**

## Interjections

are words or phrases that express surprise, displeasure, and other strong emotions. They often stand alone, and you'll use them in spoken dialogue much more than in written communication.



## PUNCTUATE!

Hey! Looking for oomph?  
Use an exclamation point!



Whoa. Feeling something  
milder? Opt for a period.



## USE SPARINGLY

Interjections are meant  
to surprise and interrupt;  
exercise moderation when  
using them.



## SALTY INTERJECTIONS

Many off-color interjections—  
OK, curse words—not suitable  
for print use non-letter sym-  
bols to stand in for the words.



That **\$@\*#** car wouldn't start  
again!



## GOOD TO KNOW:

### FOR INTERJECTIONS ONLY

Any part of speech can be used as an interjection, such as *Good!* (adjective), *Idiot!* (noun), and *Go!* (verb). Some words, however, are exclusively interjections, such as *Ouch!* and *Oops!*



# SENTENCE FUNCTIONS

## “ THE SENTENCE: ” Expressing a Complete Thought

A **sentence** is made up of one or more words and expresses a complete thought in a statement, question, request, command, or exclamation.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### FRAGMENTS

A sentence fragment looks like a complete sentence but isn't, often because it is a subordinate clause. Let's take this example:

▶ *Because he was hungry.*

Here, the first word is capitalized and the clause ends with a period, but it cannot stand alone. A correct, complete sentence needs an independent clause:

▶ *Because he was hungry, the small boy ordered a large hamburger.*

# Sentence Types

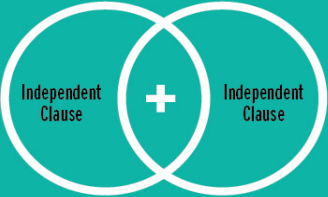
There are **4** categories of sentences: **simple**, **compound**, **complex**, and **compound-complex**. Using all four types and mixing them up gives your writing variety.

**1**



**SIMPLE**  
Expresses one complete thought with one independent clause and no dependent clause.  
*The small boy ordered a large hamburger.*

**2**



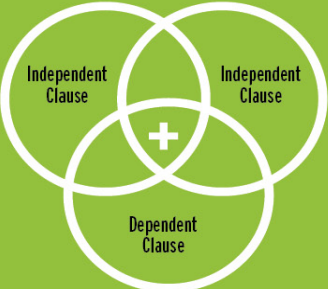
**COMPOUND**  
Has two independent clauses—joined by **and** (or another conjunction or a semicolon)—and no dependent clause.  
*The small boy ordered a large hamburger, and the server brought him ketchup.*

**3**



**COMPLEX**  
Has one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.  
*Because he was hungry, the small boy ordered a large hamburger.*

**4**



**COMPOUND-COMPLEX**  
Has at least two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.  
*Because he was hungry, the small boy ordered a large hamburger, and the server brought him ketchup.*

# SUBJECTS AND PREDICATES

## MAJOR PARTS OF A SENTENCE

Sentences can be very short or very long. At a minimum, though, they must contain a **SUBJECT** and a **PREDICATE** and be able to stand on their own.

### **SUBJECT: What the Sentence Is About**

The complete **subject** is the person, place, or thing that serves as the topic of the sentence—along with all the words that describe it.

#### **FINDING THE SUBJECT**

To locate the subject, ask yourself:  
“Who or what is the sentence about?”

### **PREDICATE: Action, State of Being, or Condition**

The complete **predicate** is what the person, place, or thing is doing or what condition it is in—along with all the words that modify it.



## GOOD TO KNOW:

### Imperative Sentences

*Go find my shoes.*

Where's the subject in this sentence? Some imperative sentences—those that express commands or requests—drop the “you” in the subject. The meaning is really:

You go find my shoes.

*The young woman*

*sprinted.*

Here, “the young woman” is the subject; “sprinted” is the predicate.



## Making Smooth Sentences

# SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT



**There is only one rule about subject-verb agreement:**

You must make verbs agree with their subjects in number and in person. Of course, this is English, so this rule can be tricky to follow.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### TRICKY INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

Here are two key rules about indefinite pronouns:

- 1** *Each, everybody, everyone, everything,* and *no one* are **singular** and take a singular verb.
- 2** *All, any, most,* and *some* can be **singular** or **plural** depending on what they are referring to: the verb form should match the subject in number.

# SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT CHEAT SHEET

Subject Complication	Singular or Plural Verb?	Example
Titles of books, movies, and songs	Always singular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <i>Fellowship of the Ring</i> is a long movie.</li> </ul>
Prepositions and prepositional phrases	Depends—ignore the preposition or prepositional phrase to make agreement easier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The box of Popsicles was in the freezer. (Box = singular—ignore “of Popsicles”)</li> </ul>
Indefinite pronouns	Singular pronoun, singular verb; plural pronoun, plural verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somebody owns that cabin.</li> <li>• A few of us own that cabin.</li> </ul>
Amount—as a single unit, such as time, money, food, fractions, or volume	Always singular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ten dollars is the price.</li> <li>• Half of the pie is uneaten.</li> </ul>
Collective nouns	Singular for collective noun conveying unity; plural for collective noun conveying plurality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The United States is a big country.</li> <li>• The faculty were in agreement.</li> </ul>



## WHAT ABOUT SCISSORS AND PANTS?

Using *pants, trousers, shears, spectacles, glasses, tongs, or scissors* alone? Choose a plural verb: *The pants are on sale.* Add the word “pair” and you need to use a singular verb: *The pair of pants is on sale.*



# COMPOUND SUBJECTS

## TWO OR MORE SUBJECTS? SIMPLE RULES OF THUMB



**Compound subjects** consist of two or more individual nouns or noun phrases connected by “**and**” or “**or**” to form a single, longer noun phrase. They’re tricky because they can confuse subject-verb agreement.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

**EXCEPTION:** If the subjects are joined by “and” and they can be thought of as a unit, use a singular verb.

**Example:** *Is spaghetti and meatballs on the menu?*

## MAKE IT EASIER BY FOLLOWING 4 SIMPLE RULES:

### 1 SUBJECTS JOINED BY “AND” TAKE A PLURAL VERB.

**Why?:** Using “and” makes them plural.

**Example:** *The student and the teacher play the game.*

### 2 SINGULAR SUBJECTS JOINED BY “OR” OR “NOR” TAKE A SINGULAR VERB.

**Why?:** You’re referring to one or the other, not both.

**Example:** *Neither the teacher nor his student plays the game.*

### 3 PLURAL SUBJECTS JOINED BY “OR” OR “NOR” TAKE A PLURAL VERB.

**Why?:** Both subjects are plural.

**Example:** *Either the students or the teacher plays the game.*

### 4 VERBS AGREE WITH THE SUBJECT CLOSEST TO THEM.

**But:** Only if you have one singular and one plural subject.

**Examples:** *The students or the teacher plays the game.  
The teacher or the students play the game.*



# COMPLEMENTS

## MAKING SENSE: 5 KINDS OF COMPLEMENTS

While some sentences contain only a subject and a verb, others use more words to make things clearer, tell a story, or ask a question. These additional sentence components are called **complements**, and they fall into five categories.

# 1

### DIRECT OBJECT

A direct object receives the action of the verb and is usually a noun or pronoun. Ask yourself “Who or what?” to find it.

**EXAMPLE:**

*Mom drank coffee.*

Coffee is the direct object.



# 2

### OBJECT COMPLEMENT

An object complement follows and modifies or refers to a direct object. It can be a noun, pronoun, adjective, or phrase.

**EXAMPLE:**

*I painted my bedroom yellow.*

Bedroom is the direct object, and yellow is the object complement.



# 3

## INDIRECT OBJECT

An indirect object comes between the verb and the direct object and answers the question “To whom?” or “For whom?”

### EXAMPLE:

*Melissa tossed Anthony the ball.*



*Anthony is the indirect object, and ball is the direct object.*

# 4

## PREDICATE ADJECTIVE

A predicate adjective is an adjective that comes after a linking verb (e.g., *to be, appear, feel, remain, taste, stay*) to describe the subject, answering the question “What?”

### EXAMPLE:

*The peach tasted sour.*



*Sour is the predicate adjective, and tasted is the linking verb.*

# 5

## PREDICATE NOMINATIVE

A predicate nominative is a noun or pronoun that also comes after a linking verb, but it renames the subject and answers the question “Who?” or “What?”

### EXAMPLE:

*That tall man is my uncle.*



*Uncle is the predicate nominative.*

# PHRASES

A **phrase** is a group of words that adds detail to a sentence but doesn't have a subject and a verb. Phrases can be part of sentences but cannot stand alone.

## ✦ ADDING DETAIL: ✦ 5 TYPES OF PHRASES

# 1 ✦

### Adjective Phrases

These phrases give more detail about a noun, and they are usually found right after the word or words they modify.

**Example:**

A few kids **from my school** will be coming over Saturday.

From my school is an **adjective phrase** modifying kids.

# 2 ✦

### Adverb Phrases

These words modify a verb and appear right after it.

**Example:** We will play **on the field**.

On the field is an **adverb phrase** telling us where we will play.



## GOOD TO KNOW:

**GERUNDS:** A **gerund** is a present participle that acts as a noun (subject). Try this example: *Dancing made us happy.* Here, *dancing* is the subject, and *made* is the verb.

### 3 ✨

#### Participial Phrases

Participial phrases using a present participle are formed by adding *-ing* to a verb, and act as adjectives.

**Example:** *Reaching high,* Janie caught the fly ball.

*Reaching high* is the **participial phrase**.

### 4 ✨

#### Infinitive Phrases

An infinitive is “to + verb,” and this construction can act as a subject.

**Example:** *To make partner* is his big goal.

*To make partner* is the **infinitive phrase**.

### 5 ✨

#### Appositive Phrases

An appositive is a noun (or, rarely, a pronoun) that gives more information about another noun or pronoun.

**Example:** My older sister, *the really tall girl,* was late to class.

*The really tall girl* is the **appositive phrase** further describing my older sister.

# CLAUSES

## Complex Phrases

A **clause** is a phrase with a subject and a verb and any complements the verb requires. Depending on the type, it may or may not be able to stand alone as a sentence.

## Independent Clauses

Because they express a complete thought, these clauses can stand alone. Two or more together can be joined by a conjunction in a sentence.



Example:

**1** *The leaves fell from the tree.*

(single independent clause)

+



Example:

**1** *The leaves fell from the tree, and*

**2** *I raked them into a pile.*

(two independent clauses)



## GOOD TO KNOW:

### PUNCTUATION

Independent clauses connected by *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, or *yet* should be separated by a comma. Independent clauses without a conjunction take a semicolon.

► **Examples:**

*It was windy, so the leaves fell from the trees.*

*It was windy; the leaves fell from the trees.*

## Subordinate Clauses

Also known as dependent clauses, these clauses do not make sense by themselves. Look for *because*, *when*, *who*, *whom*, and other conjunctions or relative pronouns.

**Example:**

*Because it was windy,  
the leaves fell from the tree.*

*Because it was windy*  
**DOESN'T MAKE SENSE ALONE;**  
it needs to connect with  
the rest of the sentence.




# RESTRICTIVE CLAUSES



## Categorizing Clauses: Necessary or Not?

**Clauses** can also be categorized by whether or not they are necessary to the meaning of a sentence. After all, sometimes we need more detail, and sometimes we don't.



Also known as an essential clause or defining clause, a **restrictive clause** is essential to the sentence's meaning.

### ► EXAMPLE

*The sandwich **that I just purchased** is on the counter in the kitchen.*

The restrictive clause, *that I just purchased*, distinguishes the sandwich from any and all others.

# NON-RESTRICTIVE CLAUSES



**Non-restrictive clauses** could be omitted from a sentence without changing its meaning.

## ► EXAMPLE

*The car, **which has only 50,000 miles on it**, needs a new timing belt.*

Omitting **which has only 50,000 miles on it** does not fundamentally change the sentence's meaning; the clause is non-restrictive.



## GOOD TO KNOW:

**THAT vs. WHICH:** In general, the word **that** introduces restrictive clauses, and the word **which** begins non-restrictive clauses. Non-restrictive clauses are typically set off by commas, while restrictive clauses are not.



# PARALLELISM AND LOGICAL SENTENCES

## Conveying Thoughts Clearly

Sometimes you must organize related thoughts, show that actions are sequential, or build to a climax to make a point. These cases call for **parallelism**, which means using the same grammatical structure for all the similar parts of a sentence. Here's how.



### USE A CONSISTENT VOICE

Ensure that you're using a consistent voice (active or passive) and an introduction to each clause in a series.



*I was worried that the test would be too hard, I would not be prepared, and my pencil would be forgotten at home.*



*I was worried that I would forget my pencil, I would not be prepared, and the test would be too hard.*



## WATCH YOUR VERB TENSE AGREEMENT

Don't mix verb tenses.



*I washed, dried, and was curling my hair.*



*I washed, dried, and curled my hair.*



## SIMPLIFY ITEMS IN PAIRS OR IN A SERIES

Present actions, attributes, or items in a series in a simple and coherent way.



*Jennifer is very kind and is very organized.*



*Jennifer is very kind and organized.*



## INCLUDE THE RIGHT WORDS

Be sure to include all the words you need in the sentence.



*To learn more, I talked to the girl and neighbor.*



*To learn more, I talked to the girl and her neighbor.*



## KEEP THINGS IN ORDER OF EMPHASIS OR TIMING

Place actions in chronological order or items with differing degrees of importance in increasing order.



*Use equipment properly or risk death or injury.*



*Use equipment properly or risk injury or death.*

# CAPITALIZATION

## Using Uppercase

When you **capitalize**, you write a word with the first letter in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase.

### General Capitalization Guidelines:

#### CAPITALIZE...



...the first word of a sentence and every first word after a period, question mark, or exclamation point.

Example: *Hello! My name is Joe.*



...proper nouns; don't capitalize the "the" preceding proper nouns.

Example: *I went to the Grand Canyon.*



...days of the week, months of the year, and names of holidays.

Example: *I am visiting on Friday, November 29, the day after Thanksgiving.*



#### DON'T CAPITALIZE...

...the names of seasons.

Example: *I'm planning to go camping this summer.*



...people's first and last names and their nicknames.

Example: *This is my friend James; we call him Jim.*



...family names when used immediately before, or instead of, a personal name.

**Example:** Did **Mom** already arrive? **Aunt Ann** loves the pie my mom planned on bringing. Yes, your mom is by the dessert table.



...the names of brands, companies, and institutions, such as schools and associations.

**Example:** I think that **Nike** sneakers are the most popular shoes at **Memorial Middle School**.



...the names of streets and roads; cities; states and provinces; countries; and natural and human-made landmarks.

**Example:** I live in **New Hampshire**, not far from **Mount Washington**.

## DON'T CAPITALIZE...



...words like “country” if they’re used before the proper noun.

**Example:** The **country** of **Wales** is my favorite place to visit in the United Kingdom.



...titles when they are used before names or as a form of direct address.

**Example:** The players learned how to fish from **Captain** Mike.

**Example:** Put me in, **Coach!**

## DON'T CAPITALIZE...



...a title if it follows a name or is used instead of a name.

**Example:** Mike, the **captain**, spotted the whale first.



...titles when they are used as descriptive terms rather than as part of the name.

**Example:** The **captain**, Mike Torrez, brought us in early to avoid the storm.



...the first word in a quote if it forms a complete sentence.

**Example:** The scientist said, **“The** planet Earth is about 25,000 miles in circumference.”

## DON'T CAPITALIZE...



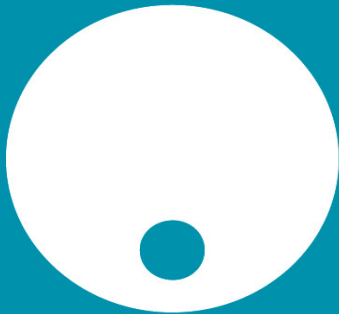
...the first letter of a quote that is an incomplete sentence.

**Example:** In the full report, she explains that the Earth rotates **“about** one thousand miles per hour.”

# ENDING A SENTENCE

## Punctuation Choices

When ending a sentence, you have three choices: a **period**, a **question mark**, or an **exclamation point**.



## THE PERIOD

Use a period when your sentence states a fact or makes a command.

### Examples:

- *My best friend works as an elementary school teacher.*
- *Be ready when I arrive at your house.*



# THE QUESTION MARK

A question mark shows doubt in a sentence or conveys that a question is being asked.

## **Examples:**

- *What did you say?*
- *Can you be ready when I arrive?*



# THE EXCLAMATION POINT

An exclamation point expresses strong feelings or tells you something extraordinary happened.

## **Examples:**

- *You don't say!*
- *She actually called him!*

# APOSTROPHES &

7

## MARKS WITH MEANING: USING THEM CORRECTLY

The **apostrophe** can cause confusion, but it doesn't have to. Three basic situations require an apostrophe:

1

### MAKING A CONTRACTION

The use of an apostrophe tells you at least one letter was omitted as two words were joined, creating a contraction.

- ▶ ***Do not*** becomes ***don't***.
- ▶ ***He would*** becomes ***he'd***.

2

### INDICATING POSSESSION

Use an apostrophe to indicate ownership.

- ▶ ***Diana's car is parked on the street.***
- ▶ ***The teacher's desk is up front.***

3

### FORMING A PLURAL (rare)

Use an apostrophe to make a word plural when readers would be confused by an "s" alone.

- ▶ ***Count by 2's.***
- ▶ ***Dot your i's and cross your t's.***

# CONTRACTIONS



## QUICK CHECK: FAMILY NAMES

Apostrophes can be confusing when it comes to family names.

Are you talking about something that several people collectively own? Use an apostrophe after (not before) the “s” that makes the word plural.



▶ ***The Smiths' car is there.***

Are you sending holiday greetings? Do not use an apostrophe; use the plural form of your name.



▶ ***With love, from the Smiths.***



## GOOD TO KNOW:



### ITS VS. IT'S

When do you use the possessive pronoun *its* or the contraction *it's*? Try out the sentence with “it is” to choose correctly. **Which one?:** *Its raining tonight* or *It's raining tonight*. *It's* is correct because the sentence is: *It is raining tonight*.



# COMMAS

## CREATING A PAUSE

The **comma** creates a slight pause in a sentence and helps readers understand how items relate to one another.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

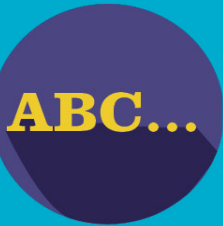
**SERIAL COMMA:** Known as the *serial*, *Oxford*, or *Harvard comma*, this use separates the last two items in a series. Depending on your instructor, audience, or company, its use may be optional.

**Serial comma:** *I bought apples, bananas, and oranges.*

**No serial comma:** *I bought apples, bananas and oranges.*

## COMMAS WITH A SERIES

Use a comma to separate items in a series and to eliminate confusion about how many or which one.



Which sentence is easier to understand and does more to describe the subject?

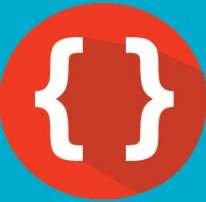
- ▶ *Her favorite flavors of ice cream were mint chocolate and strawberry.*
- ▶ *Her favorite flavors of ice cream were mint, chocolate, and strawberry.*

In the first sentence, it seems like there are only two flavors, while in the second it becomes clear that we're talking about three flavors.

---

## COMMAS WITH CLAUSES

Use a comma to separate the two clauses of a compound sentence when they are connected by *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so* (our mnemonic FANBOYS).



- ▶ *The light turned green, and he hit the gas.*

Use commas to enclose clauses that aren't essential to the sentence's meaning.

- ▶ *The tires, which I've had for three years, need to be replaced.*
- 

## COMMAS IN DATES

Use a comma after the month and date, and after the year if the sentence continues.



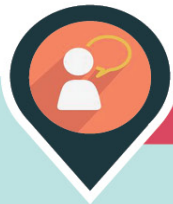
- ▶ *The date of incorporation was Friday, June 14.*
- ▶ *Friday, June 14, 2019, was a special day.*



**Quotation marks** show which words are yours and which belong to someone else.

# QUOTATION MARKS

**Borrowing Words**



## DIRECT QUOTATIONS

Most commonly, quotation marks show readers the exact words someone said, in the exact order they were said.

**She told her student,  
“Keep your eyes on your own paper.”**



## DIALOGUE

Quotation marks are used in written dialogue to capture a conversation. Use them to open and close each speaker's contribution.

**Anna said, “Your phone is ringing.”  
“I’ll get it,” John said, “right after I find my keys.”**



## QUOTING SOURCES

When quoting from a source, enclose all quoted material in quotation marks.

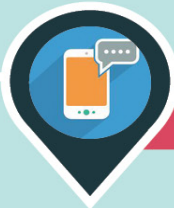
**The text said, “I’ll be at the park at 6:00 p.m., but I won’t wait longer than an hour.”**



## TITLES

Quotation marks are also used for titles of short works, such as short poems, short stories, newspaper or magazine articles, book chapters, songs, and TV show episodes.

**Her mother’s favorite poem was “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost.**



## SLANG OR TECHNICAL TERMS

Slang, jargon, and other words outside their normal usage can be put in quotation marks or italics.

**Her grandma didn’t know what “LOL” meant.**



## GOOD TO KNOW:

### PUNCTUATION AND QUOTATION MARKS

Periods and commas always go inside closing quotation marks. Colons and semicolons go outside closing quotation marks. If a question mark or exclamation point was originally part of the quoted text, the punctuation mark goes inside the closing quotation mark; if it was not part of the original quote, it goes outside the closing quotation mark.



# COLONS & SEMICOLONS

## Proper Punctuation: Introducing and Connecting

### Semicolons



**Semicolons** indicate a pause that is more significant than a comma but less significant than a period. Most often, they connect two complete thoughts that could be two separate sentences but are logically connected.

*I rode to town on my horse.*

*He started out at a trot.*

*I rode to town on my horse;*

*he started out at a trot.*



Semicolons can also stand in for commas when clearer punctuation is needed.

*The contest winners came from Sacramento, California; Nashville, Tennessee; and Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

# Colons



**Colons** introduce more information. These must be used after an independent clause, but what they introduce may not always be a complete sentence.

*She knew my favorite foods: chocolate and peanut butter.*



If the material after the colon is a complete sentence, capitalize the first letter.

*They were committed: It would take seven weeks to hike overland to the base of K2.*

## WHEN TO USE A COLON



In a business letter greeting.  
▸ *Dear Colleague:*



Between the hour and minutes in time.  
▸ 4:30



To divide a title and subtitle.  
▸ *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus*



To name a chapter and verse of the Bible.  
▸ *John 3:16*

# HYPHENS, EM DASHES, & EN DASHES

## WORD DIVIDERS

**HYPHENS** and **DASHES** separate words and thoughts. A **HYPHEN** is shorter, while **EN** and **EM DASHES** are longer.

## USING HYPHENS



### HYPHEN

In general, use a **HYPHEN** to:

- 1 Create compound adjectives.

#### EXAMPLES

twentieth-century, ready-made

- 2 Spell out numbers.

#### EXAMPLE

sixty-four

# USING DASHES



## EM DASH

An **EM DASH** —which is the longest dash—introduces a sudden idea or gives more information.

### EXAMPLES

- 1 The entire group—consisting of boys, girls, and chaperones—purchased tickets.
- 2 I found my notebook in the car—a great relief after weeks of searching.



## EN DASH

An **EN DASH** is used to show a range, such as spans of time or page numbers.

### EXAMPLE

The American Civil War (1861–1865) pitted brother against brother.



## GOOD TO KNOW:



### NO HYPHEN NECESSARY

Don't use a hyphen when the modifier preceding the noun contains an adverb ending in *-ly*.

**EXAMPLE:** The highly regarded teacher won the award.



# PARENTHESES

## Enclosing Extra Information

Parentheses set off extra information—material that may not be necessary (but can be helpful).

---

### USES

---



#### Setting Off Part of a Sentence

Use parentheses when you want to set off a word or phrase from the rest of the sentence. The parentheses show that the word(s) inside could be omitted without affecting the sentence's meaning.

---

I chose the spiciest chili powder and used plenty of it (though I'm not sure that Janie liked it).



## Dates

Enclose dates and date ranges, like for birth and death dates or historical eras (and remember to use an en dash).

George Washington (1732-1799) was the first American president.

# 123...

## Series

Use parentheses when writing about items in a series using numbers or letters.

I told the students to (a) break into groups, (b) choose a team leader, and (c) begin working.



## Political Affiliations

Politicians' party affiliation and home state, city, or county are enclosed in parentheses.

Senator John Smith (D-MA) entered the race.



## Alternate Endings

A letter or letters in parentheses at the end of a word indicate an alternate ending.

Please make sure to tell your child(ren).

# BRACKETS

Square **brackets** are most commonly found in dictionaries, where they enclose the history of the word being defined. Other than this usage, there are a few key places where you'll find them.

**Parentheses and brackets** always come in pairs, with an opening mark and a closing mark.

## In Quotations

You'll often find square brackets in quoted passages when the use of a pronoun needs clarification. The brackets show that the enclosed text is not part of the original quote, and their use should not change the sentence's meaning.

"She [Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge] is known for her commitment to charitable causes."

### Inside Parentheses

Use brackets when you'd normally use parentheses but the words are already enclosed.

The cofounder of the suffragist movement (Susan B. Anthony [1820–1906]) pushed for the Nineteenth Amendment.

### To Point Out a Mistake in Quoted Text

On very rare occasions, you'll use brackets to indicate that material you're quoting has a mistake, but you're not correcting it. The designation "[sic]" acknowledges the mistake and explains it's not yours.

"The event took place on April 31 [sic]."

**Sic** means "so" or "thus" in Latin and is used in brackets to note "this is the way the text really appears."

# **BOLD**, *Italics*,

**Bold**, *italics*, and underlining all emphasize words. Although you should use these elements sparingly, here's when to use them:

*Titles*

**EMPHASIS**

*Foreign Words &  
Written Sounds*



## **GOOD TO KNOW:**

### **ITALICIZING PUNCTUATION**

Commas, periods, exclamation points, question marks, and other forms of punctuation are only italicized if they are part of a work's title.

# and Underlining

The names of movies, books, poem collections, plays, operas, TV shows, works of art, magazines, newspapers, ships, aircraft, spacecraft, and trains are all *italicized*.

Example:

We rode Amtrak's *City of New Orleans* back to Chicago.

Use underline when you're writing titles by hand.

Example:

We saw Hamlet.

To emphasize certain words, you *italicize* them. Sometimes, especially in graphic design, **bolding** will be used.

Example:

I *certainly* didn't know **that**.

Words from another language are *italicized*. So are onomatopoeia, or written sounds.

Examples:

My mom will be *chez moi*.

*Brr*, it's really cold!

Examples:

Did you see *A Raisin in the Sun*?

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a great play.

# ELLIP

An **ellipsis** is a punctuation mark comprising three dots (periods) with no spaces between them.



## Ellipses have two main functions:

- To signal word omission from a quoted passage
- To express mood



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### SPACES AND ELLIPSES

Style guides and teachers don't always agree. Sometimes ellipses are followed by a space, and sometimes they're not. To complicate matters, some style guides combine a period and ellipsis to show that the sentence before the omitted text was complete.

# SEES...



## OMISSION

To save space, use an ellipsis when cutting out a word or phrase that isn't relevant to the meaning of the material you're quoting.

### EXAMPLE:

"Yesterday, while doing something else,  
I found her car keys."

"Yesterday...I found her car keys."



## MOOD

An ellipsis can express uncertainty or suspense, or indicate a thought is trailing off.

### EXAMPLES:

I'm not sure about this...

What would you do if...?



# THE SLASH

The slash has **four** main uses in writing.

## 1 / URLs

Separates portions of the address in a URL.

<https://nps.gov/state/ak>



## 2 / Or

Stands in for *or*.

**Students may bring their mothers/fathers to the open house.**

### 3 / Per

Stands in for *per* when discussing units of measure.

The rate of ascent was 500 feet/hour.



### 4 / Fractions

Expresses partial numbers.

Add  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of milk.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

The slash is also called a *virgule* or a *solidus* and dates back to Roman times.

The English language is chock-full of **abbreviations** and **acronyms**, which are shortened words or phrases.



# ABBREVIATIONS

An *abbreviation* is a series of letters that serves as a shortened version of a longer word. You still read or speak the full word.



## DID YOU KNOW?

*Abbreviation* comes from the word *brevis*, which is Latin for "short."





**PRES.**  
President



**DIY**  
Do it yourself

## & ACRONYMS

An *acronym* is a new word formed by the initial letters of the words it comprises.



**BLT**  
Bacon, lettuce,  
tomato



**ASAP**  
As soon as  
possible

# IDENTIFYING YOUR PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

---

## Content and Connection

Knowing your specific audience will guide what you write and the words you use.



### **Determine Purpose**

Most writing aims to reach, educate, or persuade.

Be specific: Are you making a case for why your curfew should be extended? Explaining the origins behind the ancient city of Machu Picchu?

Ask yourself: *What is my goal?*

### **Identify Your Audience**

Who will benefit from or be persuaded by your writing?

Again, be specific.

Ask yourself: *Whom am I talking to?*

### **Consider Content**

What will make your writing believable or persuasive?

Recent research? Numbers and statistics? Direct quotes?

Ask yourself: *What do I need to make sure readers know?*

*What facts will persuade them?*

### **Decide On Definitions**

If you're including jargon or technical terms, do you need to include definitions?

Ask yourself: *Will my readers know what I'm talking about?*

### **Create Connection**

Think of a suspenseful story or a passionately argued opinion-editorial column: Using the right voice and tone can create a specific mood.

Ask yourself: *How would I talk to my audience in person?*

### **Call to Action**

Are you asking your audience to do anything at the end of your writing? Learn more? Consider the issue? If so, include a *call to action*.

Ask yourself: *What should my audience want to do after reading my writing?*

# Active & Passive Voice

## Voice: Expressing Action

Sentences with action verbs and direct objects can be written in *active voice* or *passive voice*.

Understand the difference between the two.



### A Quick Refresher

- ▶ An *action verb* shows movement or change, rather than a state of being.
- ▶ A *direct object* receives the action of the verb.

## ACTIVE VOICE IS CLEARER

A sentence in active voice is easier to understand than the same sentence in passive voice. Use active voice whenever possible to make your writing crisp, clear, and direct.



### Active Voice

The subject is in charge.  
It performs the action  
of the verb.

**Example:**

*The boy **threw** the ball.*



### Passive Voice

The subject isn't in charge.  
Instead, it is acted upon by  
the verb, and the direct object  
becomes the subject.

**Example:**

*The ball **was thrown**  
by the boy.*

## Converting Passive Voice to Active Voice

1. Look for the prepositional phrase; that's where you're likely to find your subject. In the previous example, it's *by the boy*.
2. Remove the auxiliary verb: *was*.
3. Correct the verb tense: *thrown* becomes *threw*.
4. Make the subject the direct object: *the ball*.
5. **Final:** *The boy threw the ball.*



# USING TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND PHRASES

Common Uses and Examples	USAGE	
	123	To show sequence or explain steps
		To indicate cause and effect
		To compare
		To contrast
	+	To show addition or emphasis
		To indicate time
		To generalize
		To show place
		To indicate exceptions or signal concession

We learn to speak when we're really young, so talking often comes naturally. Sometimes writing doesn't. Use transitional words and phrases to keep your sentences and paragraphs flowing.

### EXAMPLE WORDS

*first, second, before, after, then, afterward, next, as soon as, still, furthermore, last, finally*

*therefore, thus, as a result, so, since, consequently*

*similarly, actually, indeed, likewise, in fact*

*however, nevertheless, on the one hand, on the other hand, despite, still, regardless*

*besides, also, furthermore, in addition, another, moreover*

*before, during, after, while, earlier, later, after a bit*

*generally, in general, typically, usually*

*above, below, beyond, in front of, behind, lower, higher*

*of course, no doubt, sure, naturally, certainly*

# PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

## Paragraphs with Purpose

A paragraph is a group of sentences united by a single topic or point. Knowing how to construct a paragraph will help you write coherently and persuasively.

In general, there are  
**3 TYPES** of paragraphs:

- 1. INTRODUCTORY**
- 2. BODY**
- 3. CONCLUDING**



## INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS:

explain the why, what, and how of your writing. They include:

- A hook, which snares your audience's attention
- A thesis explaining your position or the point of the article, paper, etc.
- A transition telling your audience what to expect next



## BODY PARAGRAPHS:

provide evidence. They:

- Introduce the point of the paragraph
- Provide evidence or examples to support your point
- Offer a transition to the next paragraph (remember, use transitional words!)



## CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS:

summarize. They:

- Restate your thesis and the points you've made
- Help your readers understand what you want them to take away
- May include a call to action

# FIXING REPETITION AND INTRODUCING **VARiETy**

## Making Writing Sparkle

Clarity is important in writing, but so is variety. Keep your readers interested by avoiding repetition in sentence length and word choice.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

#### SYNONYMS AND ANTONYMS

Synonyms are equivalents, while antonyms are opposites.

#### EXAMPLE:

**Fast**

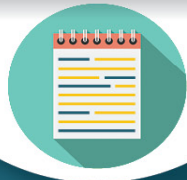
**SYNONYMS:** speedy, quick

**ANTONYMS:** slow, sluggish



## DID YOU KNOW?

A thesaurus expands your vocabulary with synonyms and antonyms. You can find online and print versions.



## SENTENCE LENGTH

Remember the four basic types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex? Express your thoughts in a variety of sentence types to keep your reader engaged.

- **SHORT SENTENCES**  
add emphasis or contrast.
- **LONGER SENTENCES**  
keep your ideas flowing.

*(For a refresher, see Sentence Functions in Chapter 2.)*



## SENTENCE VARIETY

You can make your writing more interesting and engaging by including a variety of sentence types in each paragraph. Vary the length, complexity, and word choices in your sentences to keep your content from sounding too repetitive.

For example:

*She looked at the clock.*  
(simple sentence)

+

*If she didn't hurry,  
she would miss the train.*  
(complex sentence)

+

*The tickets were sold out,  
and it was her only chance to  
get home for the holidays.*  
(compound sentence)

=

**SENTENCE VARIETY**

# Foreign Words

## FOREIGN VISITORS: When Words Are Borrowed

English is a language of borrowed words, with influences from German, French, and many other tongues. When using foreign words and phrases, how do you write them?



### ***i*** ITALICIZE

Put the foreign word in italics when it is:

- *Unfamiliar or requires a definition*
- *Used for the first time*
- *A single word or a brief phrase*

### ***i*** DON'T ITALICIZE

Italics aren't necessary when the word is:

- *Familiar*
- *Used again, after an initial italicization*

# & Phrases



## GOOD TO KNOW:

### LOCAL CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Depending on where you live, cultural and linguistic influences may play a role in what is familiar or not familiar. For example, Texans know Tejano music, so there is no need to italicize Tejano.



### “ ” USE QUOTES

Using a direct quote from a foreign-language speaker or source?

- Don't italicize
- Enclose the entire statement in quotation marks

### A PROPER NOUNS

When using a foreign-language proper noun, do capitalize, but don't italicize.

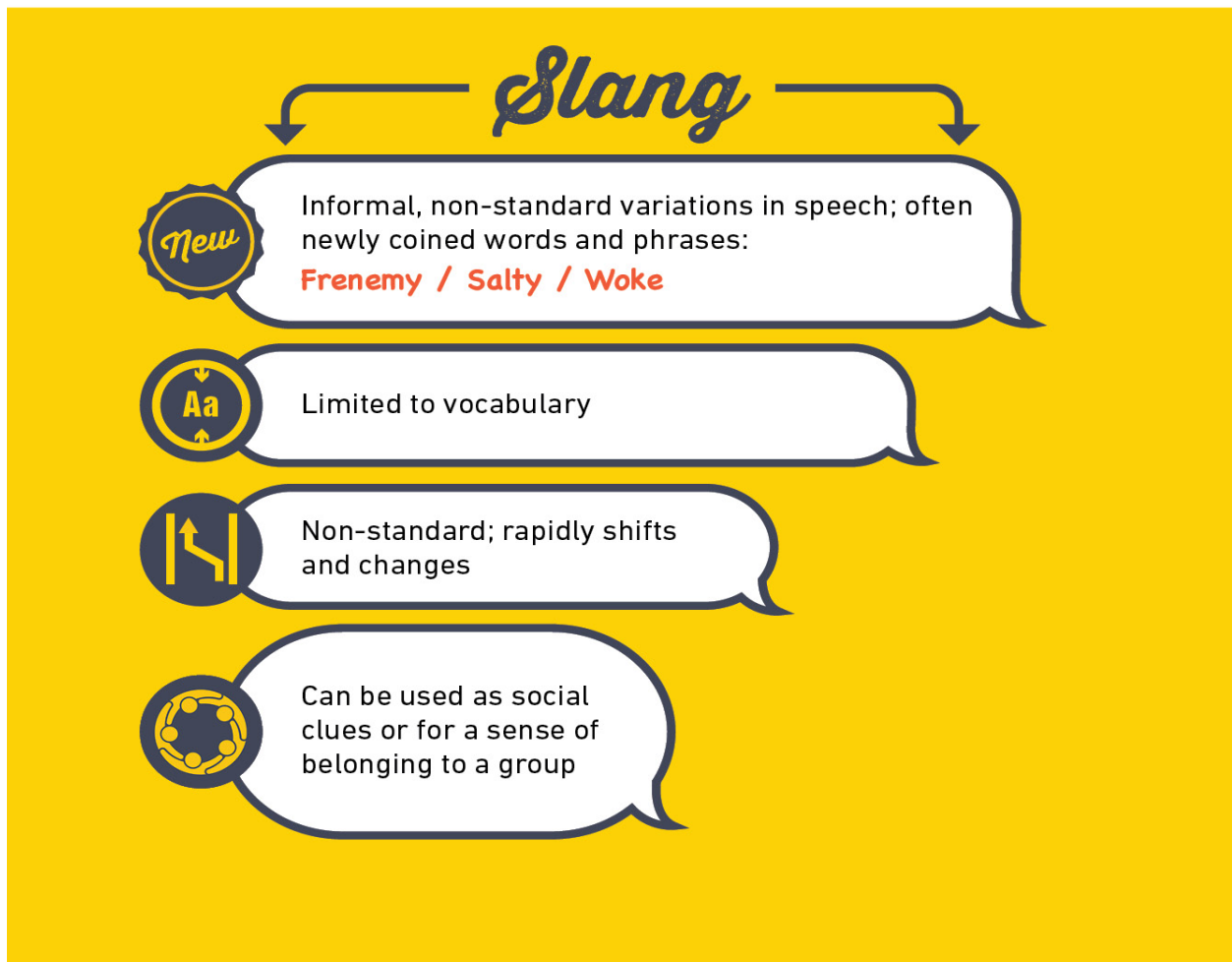
*Would you like champagne?*  
*I got it in Champagne.*



# Slang & Dialect

## Many Shades of Language

A shared language isn't spoken the same way by all its speakers. **Slang** and **dialect** are both variations in language, but that's where their similarity ends. Understand them better using the following guide.





## DID YOU KNOW?

The United States has no official language, though English is most commonly spoken.

## Dialect

A variety of language spoken in a specific geographical area or by a specific group of people:

**Soda / Cola / Pop**



Unique in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation



Can be standard or non-standard



Indicates a speaker comes from a specific geographical area



## GOOD TO KNOW:

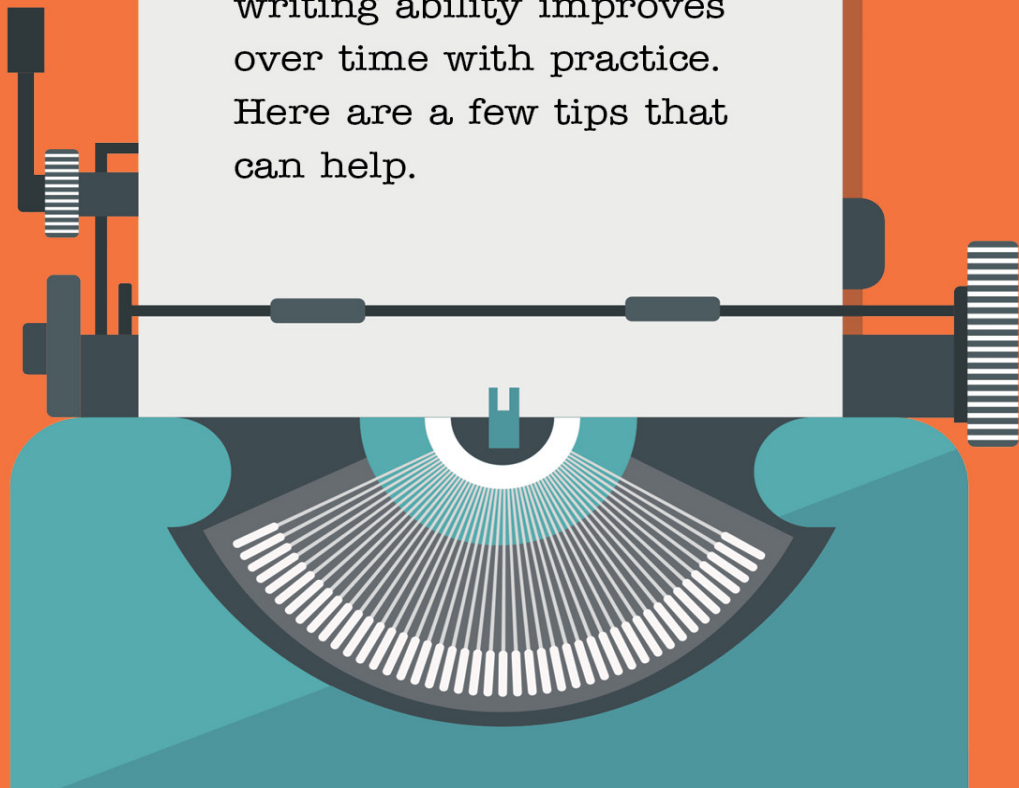
*Many Dialects* There are more than twenty-five recognized dialects of American English, from North Midland to Gulf Southern—and more than one hundred additional English dialects spoken worldwide.

# Improving

## **4** Tips to Improve Your Writing

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Like any skill, your writing ability improves over time with practice. Here are a few tips that can help.



# Writing

## # 1

### **READ GOOD WRITING**



Fill your eyes and ears with good writing, and your own will improve. Read articles from such news sources as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and more. Choose novels and short stories that have received recognition or ask a local librarian for guidance.

## # 2

### **READ ALOUD**



It's one thing to write words on a page and another to hear them spoken aloud. Your writing will have a more natural rhythm when it flows like you're talking. Get comfortable reading passages aloud to yourself or others.

## # 3

### **USE DIGITAL TOOLS**



Most word processing programs, like Microsoft Word and Notes, come with a built-in spellcheck and grammar function, or you can download program extensions like Grammarly that flag common mistakes.

## # 4

### **RELY ON A PROOFREADER OR EDITOR**



When it matters, ask for help. Writers and reporters rely on proofreaders or editors, and you can too. Ask a parent, teacher, or knowledgeable friend, classmate, or colleague to help.

# STYLE GUIDES:

## A Brief Overview

### *Establishing Standards and Rules*

A style guide helps writers from very different backgrounds be consistent with grammar. There are several major style guides, and it's important to know which one your industry, academic institution, publication, or company prefers, as specifics of punctuation and citations vary.



### **GOOD TO KNOW:**

#### **SPECIALTY STYLE GUIDES**

*If you're a student or scholar writing for the behavioral sciences, or you're a research doctor or medical scholar, you'll want to refer to the specialty guide for your industry, such as the APA (American Psychological Association) or AMA (American Medical Association) style guides.*

## Professional Writing and Editing

### *AP Style (Associated Press)*

- ▶ **General usage:** newspapers, magazines, and public relations
- ▶ **Guidelines:** punctuation, abbreviations, and how to write names, dates, and addresses; also covers other “mechanics of style,” such as spelling, capitalization, and treatment of numbers

### *Chicago Manual of Style*

- ▶ **General usage:** writers, editors, proofreaders, indexers, copywriters, designers, and publishers
- ▶ **Guidelines:** bibliographies, citations, grammar, style, and word usage

## Academia and Research

### *Turabian*

- ▶ **General usage:** students, researchers, and based on the *Chicago Manual of Style*
- ▶ **Guidelines:** bibliographies and citations

### *MLA (Modern Language Association)*

- ▶ **General usage:** high school students, scholars, journal publishers, and academic and commercial presses
- ▶ **Guidelines:** source citations, especially to avoid accusations of plagiarism

# CLICHÉS, GENERALIZATIONS, PLATITUDES, AND JARGON

**WORDS OF CAUTION:**  
*Tips for Avoiding Traps*

There's as much magic in knowing the right words to use as in knowing which ones to avoid. Familiarize yourself with the common traps shown here and the tips to keep them out of your writing.



## CLICHÉS

These worn-out, overused expressions can make your writing feel stale and overly simple.

**Example:** *She felt like a million bucks.*

- ! **QUICK TIP:** Use clichés in your first draft but find a more original way to express the same idea in your second and final drafts.



## GENERALIZATIONS

These are broad statements made about a group of people or things. Often, they're not true—and they can be offensive.

**Example:** *Politicians are greedy.*

- ! **QUICK TIP:** If a statement is really broad or begins with “all,” you might be making a generalization.



## PLATITUDES

These are statements of the obvious, said as if they were new ideas.

**Example:** *Just be yourself.*

- ! **QUICK TIP:** As with clichés, you can usually find a more original way to express your idea.



## JARGON

These are technical words or phrases specific to a particular industry or context.

**Example:**

*I whiffed on my first shot off one yesterday, but luckily my partner let me take a mulligan.*

*(I missed my golf shot off the first hole yesterday, but luckily my teammate let me have a do-over.)*

- ! **QUICK TIP:** Be sure to define jargon terms if you're writing for an audience that won't know what they mean.



# COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS



LEARN THE DIFFERENCES TO AVOID MISTAKES



## GOOD TO KNOW:

**Homophones** are pronounced the same way but have very different meanings; for example, *eye* and *I*.

### THEIR/THERE/THEY'RE

Don't let this trio of homophones confound you.

**Their** indicates possession by two or more people:  
**Their** car is in the shop.

**There** indicates a certain location:  
*I found the ball over **there**.*

**They're** is a contraction of "they are":  
**They're** going to come over later.

### YOUR/YOURE

**Your** indicates possession:  
*That is **your** coat.*

**You're** is a contraction of "you are":  
**You're** going with me.

### WHOSE/WHO'S

As with *your*, **whose** indicates possession:  
**Whose** coat is that?

**Who's** is a contraction of "who is":  
**Who's** coming with me?



Even native English speakers struggle with some words and expressions. Take the time to learn which word is right in which context, and you'll always choose with confidence.

### ITS/IT'S

**Its** is for possession:  
*My device needs charging;  
**its** cord is on the counter.*

**It's** is a contraction of "it is"; remember to check if the sentence sounds right when you substitute "it is": **It's** snowing again.

### TOO/TO/TWO

**Too** is an adverb meaning "also":  
*Now she is sick **too**.*  
It can also mean "excessively" or "very":  
*It is **too** cold.*

**To** is a preposition: *They're going **to** the store.*  
It can also be an adverb:  
*She was unconscious **for a moment but then** came **to**.*

**Two** indicates the number:  
*She had **two** cookies.*

### LOOSE/LOSE

**Loose** is an adjective describing something that is not secure or evading capture:  
*The dog is on the **loose**.*  
*I have a **loose** tooth.*

**Lose** is a verb:  
*We are going to **lose** the game.*

# WHO &

## Which Pronoun?

If you struggle to decide whether to use **WHO** or **WHOM** in writing and speech, just remember: **Who** is always the subject of the verb in the sentence, while **Whom** is the object. You can use the words **He** (subject) and **Him** (object) to help you figure out which to use:

**WHO = HE** and **WHOM = HIM**



### SUBSTITUTION

If you can substitute **HE** and the sentence makes sense, you should use **WHO**. If **HIM** makes sense, you should use **WHOM**.

### Try it out with a question:

**Original:** **WHO/WHOM** is hungry?

**Substitution:** **HE** is hungry.

**Conclusion:**  
**WHO** is correct.

# WHOM

## SCRAMBLING

Sometimes it's less obvious, and you might need to pick the statement or question apart to make the correct choice between **WHO** and **WHOM**. Make a question into a statement, or a statement into a question, and use the substitution trick.

### Make a question into a statement:

**Original:**  
**WHO/WHOM** did you call?

**Substitution:**  
I called **HIM**.

**Conclusion:**  
**WHOM** is correct.

### Make a statement into a question:

**Original:** The child **WHO/WHOM** is crying on the bench.

**Substitution:** Is **HE** crying on the bench?

**Conclusion:**  
**WHO** is correct.

# MORE COMMON MISTAKES

These words can also cause confusion.

## EFFECT/AFFECT

**EFFECT** is most commonly used as a noun meaning “result”:

*The boat ride had a bad **effect** on me.*

**AFFECT** is most commonly used as a verb, and means “to impact” or “to produce a change.”

*The boat ride **affected** me badly.*

HINT

You can use the acronym **RAVEN** to remember which word to use:

Remember: **A**ffect-**V**erb, **E**ffect-**N**oun.



## FARTHER/FURTHER

Use **FARTHER** for physical distance you can measure:

*How much **farther** is our destination?*

Use **FURTHER** when you can't measure the distance:

*Before we go any **further**, let's make sure we're clear.*



HINT

Remember, **FARTHER** contains **FAR**, so it is for distance you can measure.

## GOOD/WELL



**GOOD** is an adjective and modifies nouns:

*That was a **good** meal.*

**WELL** is an adverb and modifies verbs:

*She wasn't feeling **well**.*

*That meeting didn't go **well**.*

## FEWER/LESS

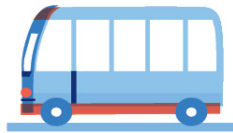


Use **FEWER** when you can count the items being discussed:

*I have **fewer** apples than you do.*

Use **LESS** when you can't:  
*She has **less** energy than I do.*

## FIGURATIVELY/LITERALLY



**FIGURATIVELY** makes use of a figure of speech:

*I was **figuratively** thrown under the bus.*

**LITERALLY** means "without exaggeration."

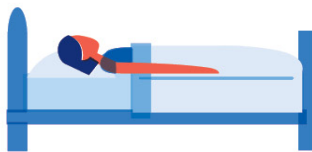
Unless you were actually thrown under the bus, you cannot say *I was **literally** thrown under the bus.*

## LIE/LAY

In the present tense, the **LIE/LAY** choice is pretty simple. You **LAY** something down, and people **LIE** down on their own. In the past tense, things get confusing, so memorize this table:

PRESENT TENSE	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
<i>Lie</i>	<i>Lay</i>	<i>Lain</i>
<i>Lay</i>	<i>Laid</i>	<i>Laid</i>

*After hearing the news, I **lay** down on my bed.*



*I **laid** the book on the table.*



# COMMONLY MISUSED PHRASES

## Language Traps: Confusing Phrases

Knowing the proper phrase and its spelling can go a long way toward improving your communication, whether it's professional or personal.

### INCORRECT ✘

For all intensive purposes

One in the same

On accident

Tongue and cheek

Case and point

Should/could/would of

Mind your peas and cues

Make due

Tow the line

Nip it in the butt



## GOOD TO KNOW:

### Choosing the Right Saying

Have you ever heard or said, “I **could** care less”?  
The correct phrase is actually “I **couldn’t** care less,”  
because you’re emphasizing that it is not possible for  
you to care less about the subject in question.

## ✓ CORRECT

For all intents and purposes

One and the same

By accident

Tongue in cheek

Case in point

Should/could/would have

Mind your p’s and q’s

Make do

Toe the line

Nip it in the bud



# MODIFIER PROBLEMS

## In the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time

When you're using modifiers, the words should be as close as possible to whatever they describe or elaborate on. Otherwise, mistakes can happen.



### MISPLACED MODIFIERS

When a modifier is in the wrong place in a sentence, it can modify the wrong word.

**Incorrect**

*We can't sell drinks to the attendees in glass bottles.*

**What?**

*The attendees are in glass bottles?*

**Correct**

*We can't sell drinks in glass bottles to the attendees.*



### LIMITING MODIFIERS

These words—which include *almost*, *even*, *hardly*, *just*, *merely*, *nearly*, and *only*—should be placed directly in front of whatever they're modifying.

**Incorrect**

*We've nearly eaten a dozen cupcakes!*

**What?**

*Have you nearly eaten? Or have you eaten nearly a dozen?*

**Correct**

*We've eaten nearly a dozen cupcakes!*



## DANGLING MODIFIERS

These words don't have anything to hang on to in a sentence—they dangle.

### **Incorrect**

*Short of the goal line, the fans held their breath as the quarterback tripped.*

### **What?**

*Why were the fans short of the goal line?*

### **Correct**

*The fans held their breath as the quarterback tripped short of the goal line.*



## SQUINTING MODIFIERS

These two-way modifiers could describe a word on either side of them, so clarification is key.

### **Incorrect**

*Running up hills quickly strengthens your leg muscles.*

### **What?**

*Does running quickly strengthen your muscles?  
Or does it strengthen your muscles quickly?*

### **Correct**

*Running quickly up hills strengthens your leg muscles.  
(If "quickly" describes the speed of running.)*

*Running up hills strengthens your leg muscles quickly.  
(If "quickly" describes the speed of muscle strengthening.)*



# RUN-ON SENTENCES

# AND WORDINESS

## Too Many Words

Contrary to their name, run-on sentences aren't necessarily long. In fact, they can be short. A run-on is a sentence that contains two or more independent clauses that are not joined properly. Usually, a punctuation mark or conjunction is needed to fix the problem.




**Quick Tip:** Remember, sentences need to be complete thoughts.



### Example:

*Dave brought his own lunch  
we bought hot lunch.*




## 3 Ways to Solve Run-On Sentences

- 1 **Insert a period:** *Dave brought his own lunch.  
We bought hot lunch.*
- 2 **Use a semicolon:** *Dave brought his own lunch;  
we bought hot lunch.*
- 3 **Add a conjunction:** *Dave brought his own lunch,  
but we bought hot lunch.*

When you use more words than necessary, your writing is wordy. Wordiness can result from overly long transitional phrases or too much use of passive voice.

### Keep It Short

- Instead of *due to the fact that* ▶ use *since* or *because*.
  - Instead of *last but not least* ▶ use *finally*.
  - Instead of *a small number of* ▶ use *a few*.
  - Instead of *the majority of* ▶ use *most*.
- 

# DOUBLE NEGATIVES

Two Wrongs Don't Usually Make a Right



A double negative combines the negative form of a verb with a negative pronoun, adverb, or conjunction.

- **Negative Verb Forms:**  
cannot, did not, have not
- **Negative Pronouns:**  
nobody, nothing
- **Negative Adverbs:**  
never, hardly
- **Negative Conjunctions:**  
neither/nor



## GOOD TO KNOW:

### WHAT ABOUT “AIN’T”?

This contraction—meaning *am not*, *is not*, *are not*, *has not*, or *have not*—is centuries old. While it’s considered unacceptable in formal writing, *ain’t* peppers spoken English from time to time. You’ll see it or use it when quoting a source or when you want to sound folksy.

*“I ain’t telling you anything you want to know, Sheriff!”*

### ✘ When They’re Wrong

Most of the time, a double negative is grammatically incorrect.

*I didn’t see nothing*  
should be ▶ *I didn’t see anything.*

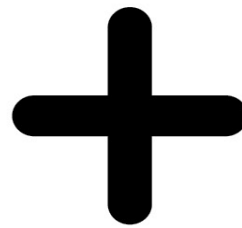
*She didn’t have neither vanilla nor chocolate*  
should be ▶ *She didn’t have either vanilla or chocolate.*

### ✔ When They’re Right

Sometimes, a double negative lets a speaker speak factually—but not in a complimentary way. These are correct but awkward sentences.

*She isn’t unqualified.*

*He isn’t unattractive.*



# FUSSY GRAMMAR

## When Accuracy Counts

Throughout life, you'll encounter situations in which total grammatical accuracy is in your best interest. These instances include formal writing assignments, such as school papers, exams, and published work, and other high-stakes situations, such as cover letters and job applications.

### Between you and me

Why wouldn't you say *between you and I*? The reason is that *between* is a preposition, and it requires an object pronoun, in this case *me*.

### To whom it may concern

This alternative to the salutation *Dear Sir or Madam* in a piece of formal correspondence should always use *whom*.

There are other instances in which you'll encounter fussy grammarians who expect only the finest in sentence construction from you. Be prepared with this final roundup of correct expressions.

### The reason is...

You say either *The reason is...* or *because* when explaining. *The reason is because* is redundant.

### Toward vs. Towards

Drop the "s." In American English, the proper spelling is *toward*, *beside*, *amid*, or *among*, not *towards*, *besides*, *amidst*, or *amongst*.

### Since

Fussy grammarians will tell you that *since* refers to the passage of time. All other uses should be replaced with *because*.

### First vs. Firstly

Use *first* without exception. You're enumerating a list or explaining steps. The same goes for *second* instead of *secondly*, and so forth.











**THE  
INFOGRAPHIC  
GUIDE TO  
GRAMMAR**

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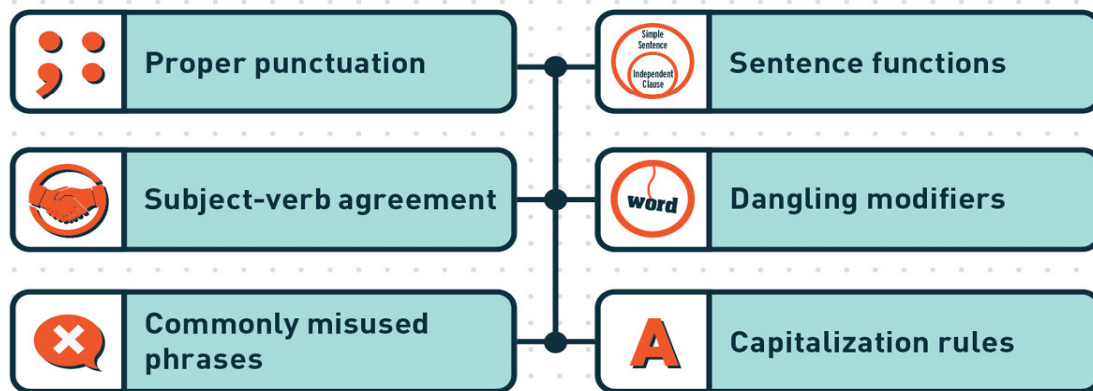
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interesting**

+



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**JARA KERN** has a knack for organizing ideas and expressing them in sparkling copy, which has helped her nurture a thriving career in copywriting. When she's not strategizing or writing, you'll find her running trails or learning about birds and bugs with her three children.



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