

# GRAMMAR ESSENTIALS



*Excelsior Online Writing Lab*

# Grammar Essentials

Excelsior Online Writing Lab

This text is disseminated via the Open Education Resource (OER) LibreTexts Project (<https://LibreTexts.org>) and like the thousands of other texts available within this powerful platform, it is freely available for reading, printing, and "consuming."

The LibreTexts mission is to bring together students, faculty, and scholars in a collaborative effort to provide an accessible, and comprehensive platform that empowers our community to develop, curate, adapt, and adopt openly licensed resources and technologies; through these efforts we can reduce the financial burden born from traditional educational resource costs, ensuring education is more accessible for students and communities worldwide.

Most, but not all, pages in the library have licenses that may allow individuals to make changes, save, and print this book. Carefully consult the applicable license(s) before pursuing such effects. Instructors can adopt existing LibreTexts texts or Remix them to quickly build course-specific resources to meet the needs of their students. Unlike traditional textbooks, LibreTexts' web based origins allow powerful integration of advanced features and new technologies to support learning.



LibreTexts is the adaptable, user-friendly non-profit open education resource platform that educators trust for creating, customizing, and sharing accessible, interactive textbooks, adaptive homework, and ancillary materials. We collaborate with individuals and organizations to champion open education initiatives, support institutional publishing programs, drive curriculum development projects, and more.

The LibreTexts libraries are Powered by [NICE CXone Expert](#) and was supported by the Department of Education Open Textbook Pilot Project, the California Education Learning Lab, the UC Davis Office of the Provost, the UC Davis Library, the California State University Affordable Learning Solutions Program, and Merlot. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1246120, 1525057, and 1413739.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation nor the US Department of Education.

Have questions or comments? For information about adoptions or adaptations contact [info@LibreTexts.org](mailto:info@LibreTexts.org) or visit our main website at <https://LibreTexts.org>.

This text was compiled on 11/23/2025

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

About this Book

## 1: Punctuation

- 1.1: Apostrophes
- 1.2: Brackets
- 1.3: Colons
- 1.4: Commas
- 1.5: Dashes
- 1.6: Ellipses
- 1.7: Exclamation Marks
- 1.8: Hyphens
- 1.9: Parentheses
- 1.10: Periods
- 1.11: Question Marks
- 1.12: Quotation Marks
- 1.13: Semicolons
- 1.14: Try It Out
- 1.15: Putting It All Together
- 1.16: Time to Write

## 2: Parts of Speech

- 2.1: Nouns
- 2.2: Pronouns
- 2.3: Verbs
- 2.4: Adjectives
- 2.5: Adverbs
- 2.6: Propositions
- 2.7: Articles
- 2.8: Conjunctions
- 2.9: Interjections
- 2.10: Try It Out
- 2.11: Putting It All Together
- 2.12: Time to Write

## 3: 20 Most Common Grammar Errors

- 3.1: Wrong Word
- 3.2: Comma After Introductory Element
- 3.3: Documentation Common Error
- 3.4: Pronoun Reference
- 3.5: Spelling
- 3.6: Quotation Error
- 3.7: Unnecessary Comma
- 3.8: Capitalization

- [3.9: Missing Word](#)
- [3.10: Faulty Sentence Structure](#)
- [3.11: Missing Comma with Nonrestrictive Element](#)
- [3.12: Verb Tense Shift](#)
- [3.13: Missing Comma in Compound Sentence](#)
- [3.14: Apostrophe Errors](#)
- [3.15: Run-On Sentences](#)
- [3.16: Comma Splice](#)
- [3.17: Pronoun Agreement](#)
- [3.18: Poorly Integrated Quote](#)
- [3.19: Hyphens](#)
- [3.20: Sentence Fragment](#)
- [3.21: Try It Out](#)
- [3.22: Putting It All Together](#)
- [3.23: Time to Write](#)

[Index](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

## Licensing

---

*A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in [Back Matter/Detailed Licensing](#).*

## About this Book

---

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

This is a great question you might be asking yourself, and if you're not asking it, you probably should be. If you are a native speaker of English, you don't even have to think about it to use grammar correctly, at least for the most part. If you have ever watched a child develop language, you know that, at a very young age, children know what is necessary for language to make sense.

But sometimes, when it comes to formal speaking and writing, we're not familiar with the conventions or the "rules" for correctness. This is where the following pages can be really helpful.

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 always 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.

The Grammar Essentials area of the Excelsior OWL will provide you with a thorough overview of punctuation, grammar and usage, and some of the most common errors students in the United States struggle with. And, by using a little humor, we hope that 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.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 1: Punctuation

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

- Let's eat, Grandma!

and

- 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 sections 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.

[1.1: Apostrophes](#)

[1.2: Brackets](#)

[1.3: Colons](#)

[1.4: Commas](#)

[1.5: Dashes](#)

[1.6: Ellipses](#)

[1.7: Exclamation Marks](#)

[1.8: Hyphens](#)

[1.9: Parentheses](#)

[1.10: Periods](#)

[1.11: Question Marks](#)

[1.12: Quotation Marks](#)

[1.13: Semicolons](#)

[1.14: Try It Out](#)

[1.15: Putting It All Together](#)

[1.16: Time to Write](#)

---

1: Punctuation is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.1: Apostrophes

---

### Apostrophes

#### Do we really need 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.

### Possessives

#### 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; the apostrophe is used to show possession or ownership.

Examples:

- Sam's game plan
- My friend's DVD
- Beth's zombie

Here's a test you can use to determine whether an apostrophe is needed—we call it the "of" test. In other words, can you reword the sentence and substitute the apostrophe with "of"?

U  
s  
i  
n  
g  
a  
n  
A  
ppling “of” test  
o  
s  
t  
r  
o  
p  
h  
e

m  
y  
f  
r  
i  
e  
the DVD of my friend  
d  
,  
s  
D  
V  
D

B  
e  
t  
h  
,  
s  
z  
O  
the zombie plan of Beth  
m  
b  
i  
e  
p  
l  
a  
n

J  
a  
m  
e  
s  
,  
s  
c  
a  
the canned goods of James  
n  
e  
d  
g  
o  
o  
d  
s  
\*

\*  
J  
a  
m  
e  
s  
,  
i  
s  
a  
l

s  
o  
a  
c  
c  
e  
p  
t  
a  
b  
l  
e

If you just mean to make a word plural, you should not add an apostrophe. Here is an example of incorrect usage:

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

Here, you would not use an apostrophe because there is no ownership 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 sentence above would not pass the test and should read as follows:

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

### 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.

To make plural nouns that do not end in s possessive, add 's.

- The children's scary books
- The mice's tiny tails

To make plural nouns that end in s possessive, add just the '.

- My cats' treasures
- Our zombie fortresses' weaknesses

### Contractions

#### Using Apostrophes to Create Contractions

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:

- I am = I'm
- You are = you're
- It is = it's
- Did not = didn't

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

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

It's important to note that contractions and using apostrophes to stand in for omitted numbers are generally considered too informal for formal, academic writing.

Some students wonder why they should bother learning these rules, then. The answer is that there are plenty of writing situations where contractions are appropriate. It's just that 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 some situations related to apostrophes that seem to give a lot of people a lot of trouble. Here are some helpful tips:

- 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, the possessive its goes against the normal rules.
- Sometimes, you'll see writers use an apostrophe when referring to decades like the 1980's. However, it's standard now to write the 1980s without the apostrophe.
- To make a compound word such as mother-in-law possessive, just add an 's to the last word. Here is an example:
  - My mother-in-law's weekly phone calls make me really nervous.
- 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 certainly admirable.

Watch this video of the grammar professor, as she helps her student understand how to use apostrophes correctly.

Video format not supported.

---

1.1: Apostrophes is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.2: Brackets

### Brackets

#### Using Brackets for Clarity

You may not use brackets often, but they can become helpful punctuation in academic writing as you integrate quotes into your essays. You should use brackets when you have to alter text within a quote to make something clear for your readers.

The brackets let your readers know you have made changes to the quote in some way. The material inside the brackets is your addition.

For example, if you need to add information to a quote for clarity, you would use brackets.

- She said, “They [the vampire hunters] were after me, but it was all a big mistake.”
  - Here, your readers would know the vampire hunters were not a part of that particular quote and you added the words for clarity.

#### Activity

### Try It Out: Brackets

The paragraph on the next slide includes quotes from research on the author of the paragraph needs to add brackets around certain phrases within the quotes to let readers know the information has for clarification and is not a part of the original quote.

Try dragging the brackets below to the boxes with the dotted lines

Brackets

[ ]



✓ Check



↻ Reuse <> Embed



1.2: Brackets is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.3: Colons

---

### Colons

#### When do you use the colon?

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 and excitement 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:

- Use a colon to separate two independent clauses (complete thoughts) when you want to emphasize the second independent clause.
  - 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.
- Use a colon to separate an independent clause from a list that follows the independent clause.
  - 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:

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

---

- 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.
  - I have the perfect solution to your problems with bullies at work: Chuck Norris.
- You should also use a colon at the end of a formal, business letter greeting.
  - To Whom It May Concern:
- And, of course, you should use a colon to separate the hour from the minutes when writing numerical time.
  - 3:00 a.m.

## Try It Out: Colons

The letter on the next slide from Little Bo Peep is missing the colon addition to the sheep.

Try dragging the colon below to the box with the dotted line to pr

Colon

:



✓ Check



Reuse



Embed

H-P

1.3: Colons is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.4: Commas

### 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.

#### With Coordinating Conjunctions

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
- And
- Nor
- But
- Or
- Yet
- So

You may have heard of these referred to as the FANBOYS, which is a great way to help you remember all seven of the coordinating conjunctions.

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:

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

TIP! If the coordinating conjunction does not connect two independent clauses, you would not need a comma before the coordinating conjunction, as illustrated in the following example:

- I am preparing for a zombie invasion and am building a strong zombie fort around my home.

#### In a Series

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. 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

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. 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.

## Essential & Nonessential Information

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

- 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, have 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.

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

- 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

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

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.

## Shifts at the End

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.

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

Use a comma between the main discourse and 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.”

## Places & Dates

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

- 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.
- 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:

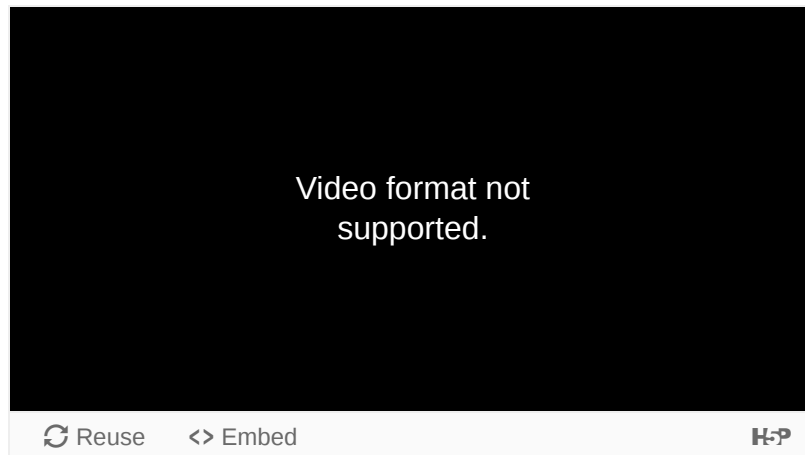
- To separate a subject from a verb.
  - My zombie plan, involves the complete and utter failure of your zombie plan.
- Between two verbs or verb phrases in a compound predicate.
  - Do those vampires really sparkle in the sunlight, and drink only animal blood?
- Between two nouns or noun phrases in a compound subject.
  - Aggressive newbies, and campers are ruining the gaming experiences for me.
- To set off a dependent clauses at the end of a sentence, except in cases of strong contrast.
  - My gaming confidence is at an all-time low, because I got pawned ten times by a second-grader.

## Tips from the Professor

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.

In the following interactive video, the Grammar Professor will explain more about why you have to think about what surrounds your coordinating conjunction before you can decide whether or not you need that comma.



## Activity

### Try It Out: Commas I

The passages on the following slides are missing some commas. So find the missing commas, even though you can't help the narrator

Try dragging the comma below to the box with the dotted line to p

Comma

,



✓ Check



Reuse

Rights of use

Embed

H-P

## Activity

### Try It Out: Commas II

In this second round of comma practice, the passage is missing some commas. See if you can find the missing commas in this passage as you learn all about Egyptian mummies.

Try dragging the comma below to the box with the dotted line to practice.

Comma

,



✓ Check



Reuse

<> Embed

H-P

1.4: Commas is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.5: Dashes

---

### Dashes

#### What is that dash for anyway?

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.

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

- 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.

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.

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

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. Then, after you space after the word after the dash, most word processing programs will turn those two little hyphens — into a dash—like so.

---

1.5: Dashes is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.6: Ellipses

---

### Ellipses

#### What are those three little dots for?

A lot of people seem to 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 probably not a good idea to use an ellipsis to show a pause or to create anticipation of some kind. Generally, academic style guides recommend using an ellipsis to show that you have omitted words in quotes. 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*

With an ellipsis:

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

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.

#### Making the Ellipsis

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 has added to the new popularity of zombies. . . . However, several movies are responsible for the initial interest" (p. 31).

---

1.6: Ellipses is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.7: Exclamation Marks

---

### Exclamation Marks

#### When should you use an exclamation mark?

Honestly, you won't use a lot of 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.

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!

In most cases, you should be careful with exclamation marks and make sure the situation calls for them. They are generally considered pretty informal, and a particularly famous writer had this to say about them:

“Cut out all these exclamation points. An exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke.”

— F. Scott Fitzgerald, author of *The Great Gatsby*

---

1.7: Exclamation Marks is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.8: Hyphens

---

### 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)

Okay, what? What are compound modifiers?

The rule is actually simpler than it seems. Essentially, 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 also have other uses including acting with prefixes, suffixes, nouns, letters, and numbers, and clarifying the meaning of words. Generally, you will hyphenate words that begin with self, all, ex, and words that begin with a capital letter or number. Here are some 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.

I am getting married next month, and I think my future father in law really likes me. My future wife said he bought us a super extravagant honeymoon package. I was worried for a long time that my future in laws did not like me very much but I know now that I was worried for nothing. This is an amazing wedding gift. It is an all expense paid package vacation to a tropical island near the Bermuda Triangle. I know what you might be thinking, but I have read that the reports from the Bermuda Triangle are greatly exaggerated. I am sure everything will be fine. The only strange thing is that I heard my future sister in law on the phone making long term plans for a family reunion without me. She probably just forgot that I am about to be a part of the family. Still, I think it does seem a little bit suspicious now that I think about it. I also overheard my fiancé's father tell her that he did not want her going on our honeymoon. He said something about letting me enjoy a short vacation by myself. I suppose I could use a little time. I think I might need to rest up if I am going to join this family.

 Check Reuse Embed

1.8: Hyphens is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.9: Parentheses

---

### 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.

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.

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.

---

1.9: Parentheses is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.10: Periods

---

### Periods

#### Periods: We Go Way Back!

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.

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

- Dr.
- Mr.
- Mrs.
- Ms.
- a.m.
- 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. Generally, 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.

---

1.10: Periods is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.11: Question Marks

---

### Question Marks

#### The Question Mark: It Raises Some Good Questions

Question marks are pretty simple. You should use a question mark at the end of a question like this:

- 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:

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

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

Of course, the sample sentence is a bit awkward, so it might be preferable to rewrite the sentence. You could change the sentence so the first part, the statement part, is a complete sentence. In this situation, you might have a sentence like the following:

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

---

1.11: Question Marks is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

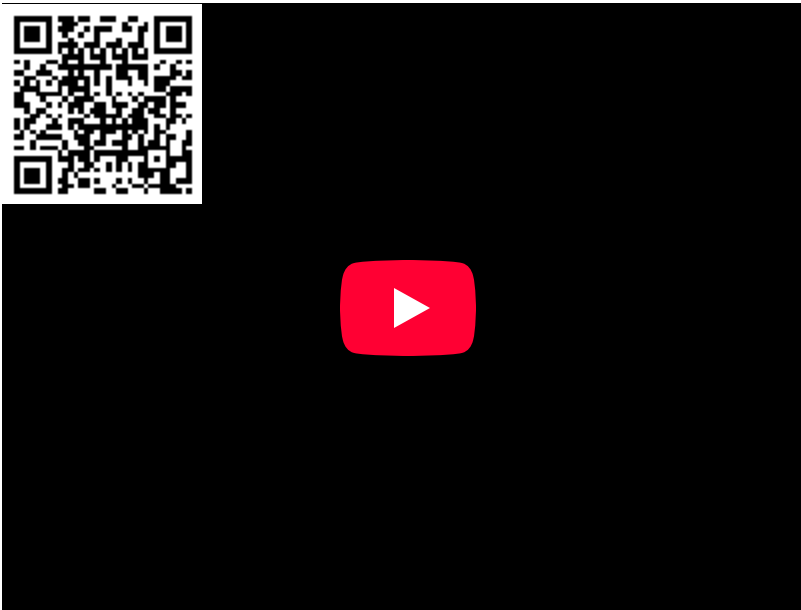
## 1.12: Quotation Marks

### Quotation Marks

#### Don't Forget the 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.



### Dialog

#### 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.

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.

- 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.

### Quoting Sources

#### Quotation Marks with Quoted Material

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.

- "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

### What are those single quotes for?

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:

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 even 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.

## Try It Out: Quotation Marks

The paragraphs on the next few slides share some interesting information about the famous author, Edgar Allan Poe, but the author of the paragraph needs to place quotation marks around titles and quoted material.

After reviewing the passages, drag the quotation marks from the top right, and then place them in the correct places in the paragraph.

Start Activity

1.12: Quotation Marks is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.13: Semicolons

### Semicolons

#### The Semicolon: It's Not a Strong Comma

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.

Examples:

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 has a happy ending, 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.

### Joining Clauses

#### Semicolons to Join Clauses

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:

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.

### In Lists

#### 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.

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

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

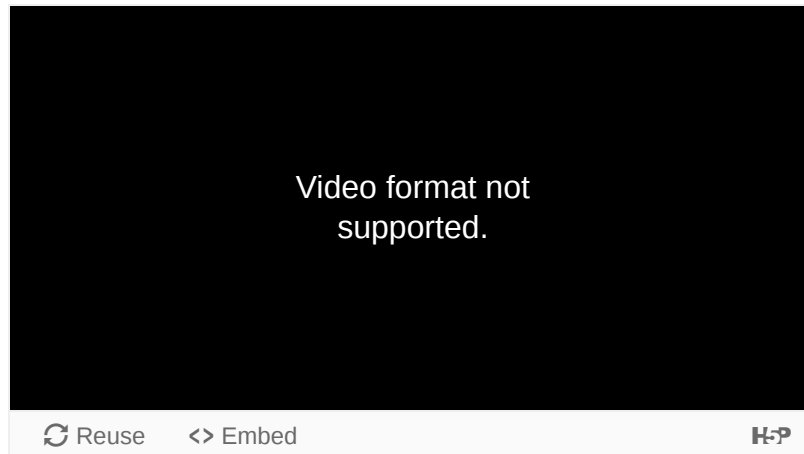
Because the items in the series contain commas themselves, it would be confusing to add more commas to the situation. In this particular instance, the semicolon separates the items in a series.

## Tips from the Professor

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.

The following video from the Grammar Professor can help you if you continue to struggle with semicolons.



## TRY IT OUT: SEMICOLON

The paragraphs on the next few slides provide some interesting info about zombie films, but are missing some semicolons.

Here's a hint: Remember that the semicolon can function to separate independent clauses or complete sentences just like a period.

Try dragging the semicolon below to the box with the dotted line to

Semicolon

;



☒ Check 



 Reuse  Embed 

1.13: Semicolons is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.14: Try It Out

### Try It Out

#### Activity

### Try It Out: Punctuation

The passages on the following slides written about the Most Interesting Place in the World is missing some punctuation. Your job is to edit the passages by placing the correct punctuation in its correct location.

Try dragging the comma below to the box with the dotted line to place it correctly.

Comma

,



✓ Check



↻ Reuse   <> Embed

H-P

1.14: Try It Out is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.15: Putting It All Together

---

### Putting It All Together

You have certainly had a lot to take in as you considered each type of punctuation. To help you review, watch and listen to the presentation below, which provides a basic overview of what you have learned about punctuation.

---

---

1.15: Putting It All Together is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 1.16: Time to Write

---

### 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 the 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. It's important to 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.

It's your turn now, and knowing more about the rules of punctuation is a helpful part of a good editing process!

---

1.16: Time to Write is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 2: Parts of Speech

2.1: Nouns

2.2: Pronouns

2.3: Verbs

2.4: Adjectives

2.5: Adverbs

2.6: Propositions

2.7: Articles

2.8: Conjunctions

2.9: Interjections

2.10: Try It Out

2.11: Putting It All Together

2.12: Time to Write

---

2: Parts of Speech is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.1: Nouns

### 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.

- The family have all gone their separate ways since Grandma died.

Here, because each member went his or her separate way, you would see the collective noun family as a group of individuals; therefore, you would use a plural verb instead of a singular verb.

But let’s look at another example.

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

Here, the family is seen as a single unit, so you would need a singular verb to agree with the collective noun.

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:

- 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:

- 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.



---

2.1: Nouns is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.2: Pronouns

### 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.

The menu on the left will take you to the different pronoun types, and there are quite a few: personal, definite, indefinite, singular, plural, possessive, relative, demonstrative, reflexive, subjective, and objective. That's a long list, right?

The pronouns discussed in the following pages will probably not cause any trouble for native speakers, but you may find it interesting to realize how complicated this all is and, yet, how easily most of us can usually use pronouns without a problem. Still, issues with pronoun agreement (making the pronouns agree with the nouns they define) and pronoun reference (making sure it is clear what noun a pronoun is replacing) often appear in the writing of beginning writers. If you have ever had a pronoun issue marked on one of your essays, you are in the right place!

### Personal 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.

My brother is staying up late to watch a "Walking Dead" marathon. He is going to have nightmares!

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

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 |

### Definite & 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 page to see 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           | anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, something |
| Plural             | both, few, many, several                                                                                                                      |
| Singular or Plural | 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).

So words like "he" and "she" are singular, personal, definite pronouns, and words like "anybody" and "anyone" are singular, indefinite pronouns.

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.

For example, words like "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). Examples would be pronouns like "my, her", or "his" because you would say things like "my books, her computer", and "his zombie plan".

Other possessive pronouns stand alone. These are pronouns like "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.

- 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:

- 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:

- 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.

- 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:

- 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 8<sup>th</sup> edition and the APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition support using the singular they. On the other hand, The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) 17<sup>th</sup> 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.

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:

- If students really think about how much they are likely to be more focused in class.

Here is another example.

- 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:

- 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:

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

Rewritten without pronouns:

- When a chef adds 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:

- 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?

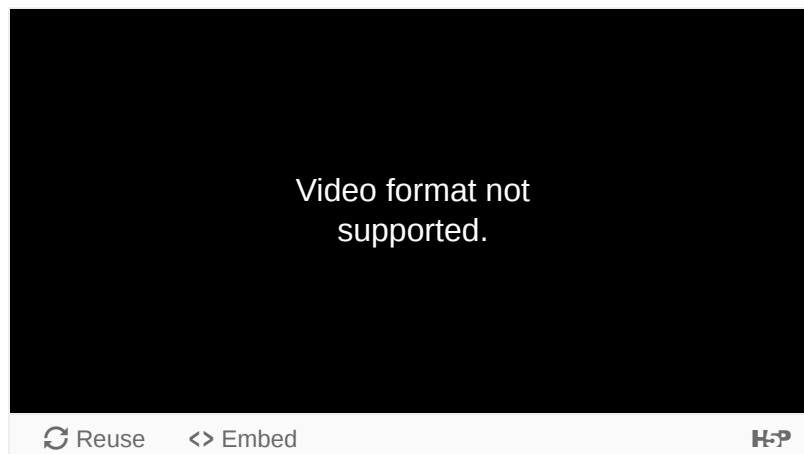
You want to be careful with your writing and make sure you're clear and correct with your pronouns. Most of the time, slowing yourself down and working on some careful editing will reveal problems like these which can be easily corrected.

### 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.

In this video, the Grammar Professor will review common issues writers have with pronouns.



NOTE: Because the use of the singular they is new, you may find some people who disagree, but 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.

---

---

[2.2: Pronouns](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.3: Verbs

### 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. Here are some examples of sentences containing 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
- are
- be
- can
- could
- did
- do
- does
- had
- have
- is
- was
- were
- will
- 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. 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.

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

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.

Transitive:

The college freshman ate Ramen noodles.

Intransitive:

The college freshman complained loudly.

Transitive:

Sophia speaks French.

Intransitive:

She 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:

- Smith (2009) wrote, "This verb stuff is really confusing" (p. 10).

In MLA, you would set up the same quote with a present tense verb, like this:

- Smith writes, "This verb stuff is really 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.

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

- When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by and, use a plural verb.
  - Suzy and her friend are missing the best movie ever!
- When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by or, use a singular verb.
  - The pen or the pencil is in the drawer, my purse, my book bag, or perhaps, my pencil pouch.
- Do not be confused by a phrase that comes between your subject and your verb.
  - 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.
- Fractions can be especially tricky, but the rule is that fractions should be treated as singular or plural, depending upon the noun they are referring to.
  - 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 verb 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.

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.

We want to use active verbs whenever possible as they allow us to express ourselves clearly, succinctly, and strongly. Active verbs imply that we’re confident with what we’re saying; we believe in our words. Looking back at the two sentences, we 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! A little strategy you can use to test to see if you’re using passive voice is to see if you can add by zombies after the verb. If you can, then you likely have passive voice and may want to restructure your sentence. In the example above, you could certainly say, was grabbed by zombies, so you know this is passive voice.

### Purposeful Passive Voice

There are occasions when we might want to use passive verbs, such as when we 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.

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.
- 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.

Of course, in the grand scheme of things, what is a vase in the face of a zombie apocalypse, but you get the idea!

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 most college-level essays, your professors will want you to 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 will want to limit those as well.

### Try It Out

---

2.3: Verbs is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.4: Adjectives

### Adjectives

An adjective modifies (describes or 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.

### 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.

Below, you'll find a table illustrating the royal order of adjectives. Again, native English speakers follow the order—but we don't always know WHY. 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.

### The Royal Order of Adjectives

| Determiner | Observation | Physical Description |         |         |       | Origin   | Material | Qualifier  |
|------------|-------------|----------------------|---------|---------|-------|----------|----------|------------|
|            |             | Size                 | Shape   | Age     | Color |          |          |            |
| a          | beautiful   |                      |         | old     |       | Italian  |          | touring    |
| an         | expensive   |                      |         | antique |       |          | silver   |            |
| four       | gorgeous    |                      | stemmed |         | red   |          | silk     |            |
| her        |             |                      | short   |         | black |          |          |            |
| our        |             | big                  |         | old     |       | English  |          |            |
| those      |             |                      | square  |         |       |          | wooden   | hat        |
| that       | dilapidated | little               |         |         |       |          |          | hunting    |
| several    |             | giant                |         | young   |       | American |          | basketball |
| some       | delicious   |                      |         |         |       | Chinese  |          |            |

Adapted from Adjectives. (n.d.) Capital Community College Foundation. Retrieved from [grammar.ccc.commnet.edu](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu).

There are some rules, though. Here is the specific order for English language adjectives—intensifier, quality, size, 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.

### 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:

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

Superlative:

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

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.

Adjective:

- Kind
- Strong
- Good
- Bad
- Careful
- Awesome

Comparative:

- Kinder
- Stronger
- Better
- Worse
- More careful
- More awesome

Superlative:

- Kindest
- Strongest
- Best
- Worst
- Most careful

- Most awesome (as in "This is the *most awesome* OWL ever!")

---

2.4: Adjectives is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.5: Adverbs

### 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.

Look at these three sentences:

- 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.

As you can see, the last sentence is the most descriptive and informative. The use of adverbs and adjectives helps our writing come alive. The following page on adverbs will provide helpful tips on how to correctly use adverbs and give you examples of how adverbs can add descriptive detail to your writing.

### 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.                            |

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.

### The Royal Order of Adverbs

| 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. |                     |

Adapted from Adverbs. (n.d.) Capital Community College Foundation. Retrieved from [grammar.ccc.commnet.edu](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu)

2.5: Adverbs is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.6: Propositions

---

### Prepositions

Perhaps you had to memorize every preposition (there are well over 100) when you were in junior high school, but have you ever thought about the importance of these “little” words? 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:

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.

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. It would be a lot of fun and quite enlightening to write some sentences using some of the prepositions on the following page and then comparing those sentences with a friend from a different part of the country.

### Common Prepositions

Although you no longer have to memorize the preposition list, it can be helpful to review the list of some of the most common prepositions and think about the meaning for each one.

Of course, it’s important to remember that many of these words can also be different parts of speech. English is fun, right?

### Common Prepositions

- aboard
- about
- above
- across
- after
- against
- along
- amid
- among
- around
- as
- at
- before
- behind
- below
- beneath
- beside
- between
- beyond
- but

- by
- considering
- despite
- down
- during
- except
- excluding
- following
- for
- from
- in
- inside
- into
- like
- near
- of
- off
- on
- onto
- outside
- over
- past
- regarding
- since
- than
- though
- to
- toward
- under
- underneath
- until
- up
- upon
- versus
- with
- within
- without

### Preposition Tips

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

- 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?

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

2.6: Propositions is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.7: Articles

---

### Articles

Well, if you thought prepositions were “little” words, wait until we consider the part of speech called 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.

Articles are the smallest of the small but still serve an important function. We have three articles in the English language: "a, an" and "the".

"The" is the definite article, which means it refers to a specific noun in a group.

"A" or "an" is the 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.

Whether you use "a" or "an" depends on the noun that follows it. In general, you would use "a" if the noun begins with a consonant and "an" if the noun begins with a vowel.

- a game
- 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.

- an hour
- 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
- an umbrella

---

2.7: Articles is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.8: Conjunctions

### 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 pages will provide you with details about what conjunctions are and what they do. But, this classic Conjunction Junction from 1973 will provide you with a fun overview before you learn more.



Disney Educational Productions. (2011, December 8). *Schoolhouse rock: Grammar - conjunction junction music video*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPoBE-E8VOc>

### 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

If you are using a coordinating conjunction to connect two complete sentences, you must also use a comma.

- I knew that phrase from the debate would be a meme, but I am surprised at how quickly it happened.

If you aren't connecting two complete sentences and are just connecting smaller, equal parts of a sentence, you should not use a comma.

- I knew that phrase from the debate would be a meme but am surprised at how quickly it happened.

You will notice there is no comma because we no longer have two complete sentences (or independent clauses)—one before and after the coordinating conjunction. In the second sentence, the conjunction is simply coordinating a compound predicate.

Coordinating conjunctions can also coordinate smaller words and phrases. The idea is that they coordinate equal parts:

- Apples and oranges
- Running for office or staying home to relax
- Werewolves and vampires
- Small but powerful

### 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.

Common subordinating conjunctions are "after, although, because, before, even though, since, though", and "when".

The key to using subordinating conjunctions correctly is to remember that a subordinating conjunction sets off a phrase, so there should always be words with it.

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.

The exceptions (and there are always exceptions, right?) are 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.
- 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.

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, which will be discussed on the next page.

- Although, I tried to outrun the werewolf.

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

## Activity

## Try It Out: Conjunctions

In the passages on the next slides on ghost hunting, you'll notice that the author has used a variety of conjunctions—coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs.

One of the trickiest things about using these conjunctions correctly is knowing how to punctuate them correctly. With that in mind, you will now read the passages that follow and drag the correct punctuation to the correct places in the passages.

Try dragging the comma below to the box with the dotted line to complete the sentence.

Comma

,



✓ Check



↻ Reuse

<> Embed

H-P

2.8: Conjunctions is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.9: Interjections

---

### 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).

- “Ouch! That hurts!” I said to the vampire.
- Whoops! 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).

---

2.9: Interjections is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.10: Try It Out

---



---

2.10: Try It Out is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.11: Putting It All Together

You have learned about many different parts of speech and some basic guidelines to correct usage. This is a lot to take in for sure! To help you review, go through the presentation below, which provides a basic overview of what you have learned about the parts of speech.

---

2.11: Putting It All Together is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 2.12: Time to Write

---

If you're a native speaker of English, most of the information in the Parts of Speech chapter comes pretty naturally for you, but all of us have trouble with some aspects of grammar and usage from time to time.

As you edit, you should not worry about every single part of speech or what its function is. Instead, you should consider any struggles you have in your writing, review those guidelines, and keep that in mind as you edit. For example, if you have trouble with pronoun agreement, you should review the section on pronouns before you edit, so the guidelines for correctness will be fresh in your mind.

It's your turn now, and knowing more about correctness can help you as you edit your work and get it ready to submit to your professor.

---

2.12: Time to Write is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### 3: 20 Most Common Grammar Errors

- 3.1: Wrong Word
- 3.2: Comma After Introductory Element
- 3.3: Documentation Common Error
- 3.4: Pronoun Reference
- 3.5: Spelling
- 3.6: Quotation Error
- 3.7: Unnecessary Comma
- 3.8: Capitalization
- 3.9: Missing Word
- 3.10: Faulty Sentence Structure
- 3.11: Missing Comma with Nonrestrictive Element
- 3.12: Verb Tense Shift
- 3.13: Missing Comma in Compound Sentence
- 3.14: Apostrophe Errors
- 3.15: Run-On Sentences
- 3.16: Comma Splice
- 3.17: Pronoun Agreement
- 3.18: Poorly Integrated Quote
- 3.19: Hyphens
- 3.20: Sentence Fragment
- 3.21: Try It Out
- 3.22: Putting It All Together
- 3.23: Time to Write

---

3: 20 Most Common Grammar Errors is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.1: Wrong Word

---

### Wrong Word

Wrong word errors are really common and are number one on the list. Sometimes, we make a wrong word error when we are using the thesaurus and trying to find the biggest word we can find in order to make ourselves sound really smart. This isn't the greatest strategy. Sometimes, it's better just to be simple, and it's always better just to be clear.

We also have to be careful of the spell checker. Sometimes, we misspell words, and then the spell checker makes a change to a word we don't want. Of course, we may be in a hurry and never even notice. Take a look at this sentence to see the problems wrong word errors can create:

- Sometimes, I will just sit and watch strangers in the crowd, but it is defiantly awful when I accidentally make eye contact with one of them.

In this sentence, writing "defiantly" when we mean "definitely", *definitely* changes the meaning in the sentence.

Here is the sentence again with the correct word:

- Sometimes, I will just sit and watch strangers in the crowd, but it is definitely awful when I accidentally make eye contact with one of them.

---

3.1: Wrong Word is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.2: Comma After Introductory Element

---

### Comma After Introductory Element

It's important to remember that introductory words and phrases—any words or phrases that come before the main clause in a sentence—should be set off with a comma. Here is an example of a sentence that does not include the required comma and then the correction:

- (Missing Comma) In case you were wondering I never allow myself to be exposed to direct sunlight unless I have my scarf, my sunglasses, and a large umbrella.
- In case you were wondering, I never allow myself to be exposed to direct sunlight unless I have my scarf, my sunglasses, and a large umbrella.

For more information on this comma rule, be sure to check out the Comma section in the Punctuation chapter.

---

3.2: Comma After Introductory Element is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.3: Documentation Common Error

---

### Documentation Common Error

#### Incomplete or Missing Documentation

The third most common error on the list relates to proper documentation. It's so important to remember to cite all borrowed information. No matter your documentation style, whether it is APA format, MLA format, or Chicago Style, all require some kind of citation for quoted, paraphrased, and summarized material.

REMEMBER: You must not only cite people's words, but you must also cite their ideas. Errors of this nature can get you into a lot of trouble because incomplete or missing documentation is plagiarism.

For more information on proper documentation in APA, MLA, or Chicago Style, be sure to check out the [Citation & Documentation](#) area of the Excelsior OWL.

---

3.3: Documentation Common Error is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.4: Pronoun Reference

---

### Pronoun Reference

Pronoun reference errors also make the list because pronouns seem to give a lot of beginning writers some trouble. A pronoun reference error occurs when you use a pronoun like "he" or "she", and it's not clear what that pronoun refers to. Here is an example:

- When Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker were battling with their light sabers, he became angry.

Who does "he" refer to? It isn't clear. A pronoun should clearly refer to its antecedent (the word it replaces), so if the antecedent is not clear, you need to revise. Here's an example of how you might correct the pronoun reference error:

- When Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker were battling with their light sabers, Luke became angry.

---

3.4: Pronoun Reference is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.5: Spelling

---

### Spelling

In the age of spell checkers, it's hard to imagine that spelling errors would top the most common error list, but they do. First, it's important to remember to run the spell checker. Even though you have to remember to check your spell checker, spell checkers are a good place to start when it comes to spelling errors.

Still, there are plenty of spelling errors the spell checker won't catch. In addition to possibly creating wrong-word errors, as discussed earlier, spell checkers also miss misspelled words like names and other proper nouns, as illustrated in the following example:

- On my vacation to France, I went to Pares and visited the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre museum, and Jim Morrison's grave.

The spell checker missed these errors. Here is the corrected version of the sentence:

- On my vacation to France, I went to Paris and visited the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre museum, and Jim Morrison's grave.

So, be sure to run your spell checker, but, then, don't forget to double and triple check your writing. Spell checkers do not catch everything.

---

3.5: Spelling is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.6: Quotation Error

---

### Quotation Error

Using quotation marks correctly can be a little tricky, especially when you need to use other types of punctuation with them. Mechanical errors related to quotation marks make the most-common error list because beginning writers often forget that commas and periods go inside the quotation marks. Here is an example:

- “When you are courting a nice girl, an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder, a second seems like an hour. That’s relativity”, said Einstein.

In this case, the comma placed outside the quotation marks is incorrect. The comma should be placed inside the quotation marks like this:

- “When you are courting a nice girl, an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder, a second seems like an hour. That’s relativity,” said Einstein.

It’s important to note, however, that not all punctuation automatically goes inside the quotation marks. Question marks are a little trickier. If the only part in quotations is a question, then the question mark should go inside the quotation marks; otherwise, the question mark actually goes outside of the quotation marks. Tricky for sure!

Also, beginning writers often forget that titles of shorter works, like essays and short stories, should be placed inside quotation marks. Longer works, like books and magazines, should be placed in italics.

- I read the essay “The Marginal World” by Rachel Carson in the book *Best American Essays of the Century*.

---

3.6: Quotation Error is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.7: Unnecessary Comma

---

### Unnecessary Comma

When beginning writers are first learning comma rules, they have a tendency to forget that the rules all depend upon the situation. So, when you learn to place a comma before a coordinating conjunction like "and, but," or "so" when you join two independent clauses, you might have an urge to place a comma before "and, but," or "so" every time you use these words. You should avoid this urge!

Just because you need to use commas with coordinating conjunctions sometimes doesn't mean you'll use them all the time.

- I have a wide variety of supernatural powers, but wish I had the power to go out in the daylight.

In this example, you don't need a comma before the "but" because you aren't combining two independent clauses. Here is a corrected version of the sentence:

- I have a wide variety of supernatural powers but wish I had the power to go out in the daylight.

You should also be careful that you aren't using commas unnecessarily around information that is essential to the sentence. The comma rule is that non-essential information should be set off with commas, but essential information should not.

- I find that a little fear is the best seasoning, for my food, so I often sneak up on my husband while he cooks and frighten him.

In this example, "for my food" is not extra information that should be set off with commas. But, you do need a comma before the "so" to separate the two independent clauses. Here is a corrected version of the sentence:

- I find that a little fear is the best seasoning for my food, so I often sneak up on my husband while he cooks and frighten him.

For more information on these comma rules, be sure to check out the Comma section in the Punctuation chapter.

---

3.7: Unnecessary Comma is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.8: Capitalization

---

### Capitalization

Some teachers blame text messaging. After all, how many times have you written out a quick text message, not worrying about where you need to capitalize? You, like many others, have probably done this quite often.

Interestingly, capitalization errors appeared on the most-common error list even before everyone was walking around with their heads over their cell phones text messaging every other minute.

Of course, the reality is that teachers now often complain that students don't even capitalize "I" in a sentence. That could likely be related to text messaging. Still, other capitalization errors may not be.

Whatever the reasons behind the errors, it's important to be aware of capitalization rules. Be careful to capitalize words that should be capitalized, such as proper nouns, and not capitalize words that should not be capitalized.

But, how can you know what should and shouldn't be capitalized? If you are unsure, review the differences between proper nouns and common nouns in the Parts of Speech chapter.

Capitalization errors can really have a negative impact on the impressions your readers have of your writing. Take a look at the following sentence:

- i took a walk in central park and saw a Mime, who was pretending to be a Policeman, get sprayed with mace by an elderly woman because she thought he was trying to steal her purse.

Now, take a look at the sentence with correct capitalization:

- I took a walk in Central Park and saw a mime, who was pretending to be a policeman, get sprayed with mace by an elderly woman because she thought he was trying to steal her purse.

It's important to edit carefully and review the rules if necessary!

---

3.8: Capitalization is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.9: Missing Word

---

### Missing Word

Missing word errors make this list because we are too often in a hurry when we edit. Our brains are great. We can read right through sentences and put in the words that need to be there even if words are missing. Of course, others might quickly notice the error, so we have to find ways to slow ourselves down and edit carefully. You don't want to write a sentence like the following example that is missing a small word with big meaning:

- I enjoy walking alone in the woods at night because I never what I will meet while I am out there in the dark.

Did you see the error? Look at the revised sentence below:

- I enjoy walking alone in the woods at night because I never know what I will meet while I am out there in the dark.

---

3.9: Missing Word is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.10: Faulty Sentence Structure

---

### Faulty Sentence Structure

Have you ever had a teacher say, “That sentence starts one way and ends another”? If you have, don’t feel badly. Others make this same mistake all the time. Sometimes, we simply lose our train of thought when we write, and we literally start a sentence one way and end it another, as illustrated in the following example:

- I occasionally get the urge to study late at night for instance my exams are going to take me longer than usual to study for because this works.

It’s tough to make sense of this sentence, right?

Of course, this is not the only faulty sentence structure error you might make. It’s important to pay close attention to your sentence structure to make sure you have both a subject and a verb. And, if you are listing items or phrases in a sentence, make sure you keep the items in your list in the same form. Doing so keeps your sentences “parallel,” which is a good thing.

Here is an example of a sentence without parallel structure:

- I start my day with breakfast, exercising, and checking out the latest blogs.

In the sentence above, "breakfast" is a noun, and "exercising" and "checking" begin verb phrases. The items on the list are not in the same form. Here is a correction where the items listed are in the same form:

- I start my day by eating breakfast, exercising, and checking out the latest blogs.

---

3.10: Faulty Sentence Structure is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.11: Missing Comma with Nonrestrictive Element

---

### Missing Comma with Nonrestrictive Element

Just as you should not put commas around essential or restrictive information in a sentence, you must remember to put commas around information that is non-essential or nonrestrictive.

If the information is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, you need to be sure to set it off with commas. Here is an example of a sentence without proper commas around the nonrestrictive element:

- Moving into a cave especially one that is already occupied is not a decision one should make without considerable forethought.

Here is the corrected version:

- Moving into a cave, especially one that is already occupied, is not a decision one should make without considerable forethought.

If you have trouble deciding whether or not you need commas around “extra” information in your sentences, be sure to review the comma rules in the Punctuation chapter.

---

3.11: Missing Comma with Nonrestrictive Element is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

### 3.12: Verb Tense Shift

#### Verb Tense Shift

You want to be sure that you are always consistent with your verb tense. When you shift verb tenses for no reason, and this is an easy mistake to make, you can really confuse your readers.

If you're writing in the present tense, be sure you stay in the present tense. If you're writing in the past tense, be sure you stay in the past tense. The exception would be if you need to shift tenses to tell a story, but that would be purposeful shifting. It's the random, accidental shifting that causes the problems, as illustrated in this example:

She grabs my hand then flipped me like I weighed nothing. This showed what a good self-defense course has done.

Here is what a corrected version of the sentence looks like:

She grabbed my hand then flipped me like I weighed nothing. This showed what a good self-defense course has done.

You should also be aware that certain types of writing require either past or present tense. For example, research in APA format often needs to be presented in the past tense, but a literary analysis written in MLA format needs to be presented using present tense verbs. It's called the literary present tense. Below is a table of APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition verb tense recommendations for literature reviews and research papers.

If you're ever unsure about tense requirements, be sure to ask your professor.

| Paper Section                                                             | Recommended tense | Example                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Literature review (or whenever discussing other researchers' work)        | Past              | Quinn (2020) presented                                                       |
|                                                                           | Present Perfect   | Since then, many investigators have used                                     |
| Method<br>Description of procedure                                        | Past              | Participants completed a survey                                              |
|                                                                           | Present Perfect   | Others have used similar approaches                                          |
| Reporting of results                                                      | Past              | Results were nonsignificant<br>Scores increased<br>Hypotheses were supported |
| Discussion of implications of results                                     | Present           | The results indicate                                                         |
| Presentation of conclusions, limitations, future directions, and so forth | Present           | We conclude<br>Limitations of the study are                                  |

3.12: Verb Tense Shift is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.13: Missing Comma in Compound Sentence

---

### Missing Comma in Compound Sentence

When you join two independent clauses (complete sentences) with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet—also known as the FANBOYS), you must place a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

The rule is very clear, here. The comma before the coordinating conjunction works *with* the coordinating conjunction to help make a proper boundary between the two independent clauses.

- I understand that vampires and ghouls need love but I don't think they really understand just how attached I am to my vital, bodily fluids.

In this example, the sentence is missing the comma before the but because the but joins two complete thoughts. Leaving out this necessary comma creates an error because you have two sentences connected without a proper boundary between those sentences.

Here is a correction for the sentence:

- I understand that vampires and ghouls need love, but I don't think they really understand just how attached I am to my vital, bodily fluids.

For more information on this comma rule, be sure to check out the Comma section in the Punctuation chapter.

---

3.13: Missing Comma in Compound Sentence is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.14: Apostrophe Errors

---

### Apostrophe Errors

Apostrophes give many writers a lot of trouble. Sometimes, you might be tempted to put an apostrophe where it does not belong, such as when you are simply making a word plural. Other times, you need to make a word possessive, but you might forget to use the apostrophe.

Then, of course, there is that whole "its" / "it's" thing that confuses most everyone.

Remember, the rule is to use an apostrophe when you need to show possession or ownership. The exception is with its.

"Its" shows ownership because "it's" means "it is". So, it's like "it's" is already taken, so "its" gets to be an ownership exception. To make sure you are using "it's" correctly, just say "it is" when you read it. If it makes sense, you're fine. However, if you're trying to show ownership, and it is would not work in the sentence, you need to make the change to "its".

For more information on the apostrophe, be sure to check out the Apostrophe section in the Punctuation chapter (or if you just need to brush up your skills, visit the Apostrophe Refresher). Otherwise, you might end up with a sentence like this:

- Its abundantly clear, to me, that creature's of the night are just misunderstood and misguided beings who sometimes err in judgment and eat their neighbors' as well as their neighbors families.

And, you would want a sentence like this:

- It's abundantly clear, to me, that creatures of the night are just misunderstood and misguided beings who sometimes err in judgment and eat their neighbors as well as their neighbors' families.

---

3.14: Apostrophe Errors is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.15: Run-On Sentences

---

### Run-On Sentences

#### Fused or Run-On Sentence

A fused sentence is sometimes called a run-on sentence. The concept is simple. If your teacher marks fused sentence or run-on on your paper, it's because you have put two complete thoughts or independent clauses together without the proper punctuation or any kind of sentence boundary. Here is an example:

- There were a thousand zombies cheering for the home team when I walked onto the field I don't think even one of them noticed me.

And, here is the corrected sentence:

- There were a thousand zombies cheering for the home team when I walked onto the field; I don't think even one of them noticed me.

The key is to remember that you must have some kind of boundary between your independent clauses. You can use punctuation, such as the period or the semicolon, or you can use a comma *with* a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet).

NOTE: A comma alone cannot separate independent clauses. Using a comma to separate independent clauses actually creates a comma splice.

---

3.15: Run-On Sentences is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.16: Comma Splice

---

### Comma Splice

Many students think a comma splice is just any kind of comma error, but a comma splice is a very specific type of comma error.

A comma splice occurs when you use a comma to separate two independent clauses. A comma is not strong enough to perform this function, which causes the problem. It's important to remember to use proper punctuation to separate your independent clauses; otherwise, you end up with a sentence like this:

He promised me, if I didn't report him, he would never do it again, however, the next night, he was back, playing his bagpipes under my balcony.

Here, you should notice the only comma error is the one between "again" and "however". The reason this is a comma splice is because "the" actually begins a new sentence or independent clause, but there is not a proper boundary between these two sentences. Here is how the sentence could be corrected:

He promised me, if I didn't report him, he would never do it again; however, the next night, he was back, playing his bagpipes under my balcony.

---

3.16: Comma Splice is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.17: Pronoun Agreement

---

### Pronoun Agreement

Pronoun agreement can be trickier than it might seem on the surface. The rule is that we must make sure our pronouns agree in number and gender with the nouns they are replacing. For example, when we write a sentence about a girl named Sophia, we would use "she" as the pronoun to refer to her.

But things get a little more confusing when we are talking about a kind of abstract person, and the “rule” on this subject has recently changed in most circles. In the recent past, to avoid sexist language, we couldn’t write "he" or "she". Instead, we had to write "he or she".

But, because most people would just end up writing "they", which technically does not agree in number, the “rule” began to change. This is a great example of how living languages, like English, change, and the change happens when people make a change happen. It’s really pretty exciting!

It used to be incorrect to use what we now call “the singular they.” Here is an example:

- If you want a child to learn, it is helpful if you make learning fun for them.

Now, many style guides accept the use of "they" or "them" to refer to a singular noun.

So, now, this would be considered correct:

- If you want a child to learn, it is helpful if you make learning fun for them.

When in doubt, using a plural noun is safest:

- If you want children to learn, it is helpful if you make learning fun for them.

This way, you avoid any awkwardness of the singular "them", and your pronoun is now also in agreement with "children".

NOTE: Because the use of the singular "they" is new, you may find some people who disagree, but 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".

---

3.17: Pronoun Agreement is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.18: Poorly Integrated Quote

---

### Poorly Integrated Quote

Any teacher who has ever assigned and graded writing has probably complained about this error. Too often, beginning writers will simply “plop” a quote into a paragraph without any setup or context. This is incredibly confusing for your readers, so it’s important to make sure you smoothly integrate your quotes into the sentences around the quote.

Although there are no “rules” for such things, it’s always a good idea to provide a phrase of some kind to set up your quote and some commentary after your quote to make sure your readers understand the relevance of the quote. Otherwise, you may end up with a quote like this:

Albert Einstein was a great man and a great scientist. He was one of the most advanced thinkers of our age. “The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing” (Einstein Quotes, 2012).

Here, it feels like the quote is just dropped in without a clear context. If you struggle with quote integration, you’ll want to check out lessons on effective source integration.

---

3.18: Poorly Integrated Quote is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.19: Hyphens

---

### Hyphens

Hyphens can be a little tricky, but they are important. For example, there is a world of difference between a dirty-movie theater and a dirty movie theater. You probably wouldn't want to go to either one, but there is a big difference between the two.

Hyphens are tricky because location is also very important in determining whether or not you need to hyphenate words.

The rule is pretty clear, however. Most of us just need a reminder. When you have two or more words that modify or describe a noun that follows, you should hyphenate those words. You should not hyphenate the same words if they come after the noun.

Take a look at the following example where hyphenation errors exist in several places:

- It was clear that, after his two dollar hair-cut, Bertram began suffering from low self esteem.

Here is what the correction should look like:

- It was clear that, after his two-dollar haircut, Bertram began suffering from low self-esteem.

If you need help figuring out where hyphens should and should not be, be sure to check out the Hyphen section in Punctuation chapter.

---

3.19: Hyphens is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.20: Sentence Fragment

### Sentence Fragment

Sentence fragments always make the list of the most common errors, and they are among the most seriously stigmatizing errors we can make. To put it simply, a sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence that you have punctuated as if it is a complete sentence.

Sometimes, fragments are missing a verb. Sometimes, fragments are missing a subject. Sometimes, a fragment is simply a dependent clause punctuated like a complete sentence. Here are some examples:

- The haunting of the house on the craggy hill just outside of town.
- Because they are hairy and frightening with large, pointed fangs and shiny, yellow eyes.

You'll notice that each of these so-called sentences is not a complete sentence. They are both missing parts that would make them complete.

You always have options about how you correct a sentence fragment, but here are some possible corrections for our two sample sentence fragments:

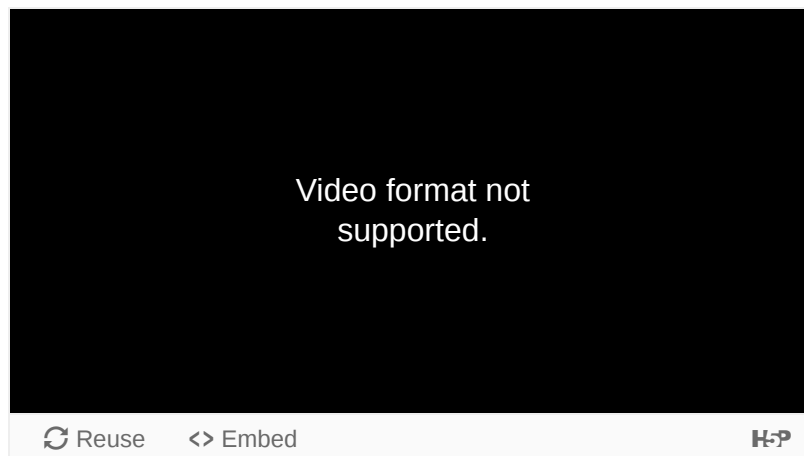
- The haunting of the house on the craggy hill just outside of town was the subject of a recent documentary.
- I am afraid of those spiders because they are hairy and frightening with large, pointed fangs and shiny, yellow eyes.

### Tips from the Professor

Fragments are among the most serious errors in academic writing. While you may read fiction and informal prose that contain sentence fragments, in academic writing, fragments are generally frowned upon. In fact, research on how errors are perceived by people indicates that fragments are what we call “status marking” errors, which means people will make negative assumptions about the intelligence of the writer when they see fragments in writing.

Of course, making a sentence fragment error has nothing to do with your intelligence. Usually, for native speakers of English, making a sentence fragment error is more about not editing carefully or just not being practiced in the rules.

In this video, the Grammar Professor will review what a fragment is and how you can avoid fragments in your academic writing.



3.20: Sentence Fragment is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.21: Try It Out

---



---

3.21: Try It Out is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

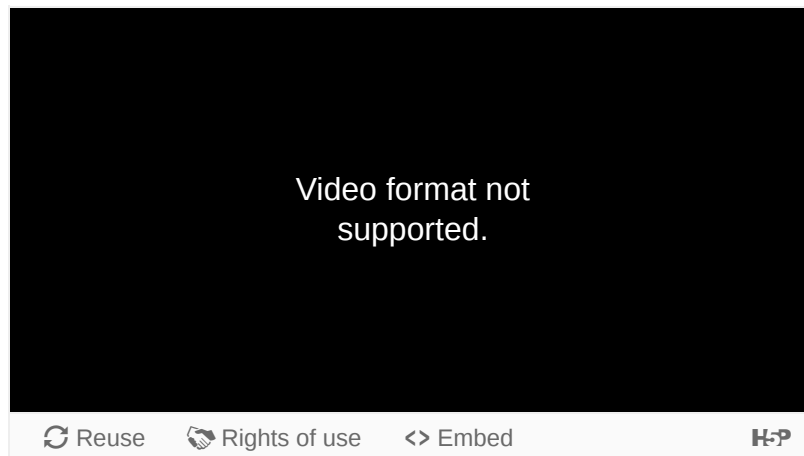
## 3.22: Putting It All Together

---

### Putting It All Together

In this section of Grammar Essentials, you have learned about the 20 most common errors students make and how you can avoid them. Hopefully, you have also learned that, if you have had these errors marked on your papers, you aren't alone. The key is having awareness, as this can help you when you edit.

To help you review, check out the video below, which provides a basic overview of what you have learned about the 20 most common errors students in the United States make.



NOTE: Because the use of the singular "they" is new, you may find some people who disagree, but 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".

---

3.22: Putting It All Together is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## 3.23: Time to Write

---

### Time to Write

Now that you have the knowledge about the most common errors students in the U.S. make, think about your own writing. Which of these errors have you struggled with?

The next step is to be considerate of these errors as you edit. Review the most common errors list, paying close attention to issues you have had marked by teachers. Which ones stand out to you?

It's your turn now. Understanding these common errors can lead to better editing strategies, which helps you have cleaner, clearer writing.

---

3.23: Time to Write is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

## Index

---

### D

dire

## Glossary

---

**Sample Word 1** | Sample Definition 1



## Detailed Licensing

### Overview

**Title:** Grammar Essentials (Excelsior Online Writing Lab)

**Webpages:** 66

**Applicable Restrictions:** Noncommercial

**All licenses found:**

- [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#): 93.9% (62 pages)
- [Undeclared](#): 6.1% (4 pages)

### By Page

- Grammar Essentials (Excelsior Online Writing Lab) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - Front Matter - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [TitlePage](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [InfoPage](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [Table of Contents](#) - [Undeclared](#)
    - [Licensing](#) - [Undeclared](#)
    - [About this Book](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - 1: Punctuation - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.1: Apostrophes](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.2: Brackets](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.3: Colons](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.4: Commas](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.5: Dashes](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.6: Ellipses](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.7: Exclamation Marks](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.8: Hyphens](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.9: Parentheses](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.10: Periods](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.11: Question Marks](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.12: Quotation Marks](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.13: Semicolons](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.14: Try It Out](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.15: Putting It All Together](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [1.16: Time to Write](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - 2: Parts of Speech - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.1: Nouns](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.2: Pronouns](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.3: Verbs](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.4: Adjectives](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.5: Adverbs](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.6: Propositions](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.7: Articles](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.8: Conjunctions](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.9: Interjections](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.10: Try It Out](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.11: Putting It All Together](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [2.12: Time to Write](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - 3: 20 Most Common Grammar Errors - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.1: Wrong Word](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.2: Comma After Introductory Element](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.3: Documentation Common Error](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.4: Pronoun Reference](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.5: Spelling](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.6: Quotation Error](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.7: Unnecessary Comma](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.8: Capitalization](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.9: Missing Word](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.10: Faulty Sentence Structure](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.11: Missing Comma with Nonrestrictive Element](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.12: Verb Tense Shift](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.13: Missing Comma in Compound Sentence](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.14: Apostrophe Errors](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.15: Run-On Sentences](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.16: Comma Splice](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.17: Pronoun Agreement](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.18: Poorly Integrated Quote](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.19: Hyphens](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.20: Sentence Fragment](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.21: Try It Out](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.22: Putting It All Together](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [3.23: Time to Write](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
  - Back Matter - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [Index](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
    - [Glossary](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)

- [Glossary](#) - *Undeclared*

- [Detailed Licensing](#) - *Undeclared*