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A comprehensive list of topics and explanations on grammar is available at:
<http://www.arts.uottawa.ca/writcent/hypergrammar/>

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Business Report Writing

How to write persuasive business reports

1. The Parts of Speech

Traditional grammar classifies words based on eight **parts of speech**: the verb, the noun, the pronoun, the adjective, the adverb, the preposition, the conjunction, and the interjection.

Each **part of speech** explains not what the word *is*, but how the word *is used*. In fact, the same word can be a noun in one sentence and a verb or adjective in the next. The next few examples show how a word's part of speech can change from one sentence to the next, and following them is a series of sections on the individual parts of speech, followed by an exercise.

Books are made of ink, paper, and glue.

In this sentence, "books" is a noun, the subject of the sentence.

Deborah waits patiently while Bridget **books** the tickets.

Here "books" is a verb, and its subject is "Bridget."

We **walk** down the street.

In this sentence, "walk" is a verb, and its subject is the pronoun "we."

The mail carrier stood on the **walk**.

In this example, "walk" is a noun, which is part of a prepositional phrase describing where the mail carrier stood.

The town decided to build a new **jail**.

Here "jail" is a noun, which is the object of the infinitive phrase "to build."

The sheriff told us that if we did not leave town immediately he would **jail** us.

Here "jail" is part of the compound verb "would jail."

They heard high pitched **cries** in the middle of the night.

In this sentence, "cries" is a noun acting as the direct object of the verb "heard."

The baby **cries** all night long and all day long.

But here "cries" is a verb that describes the actions of the subject of the sentence, the baby.

The next few sections explain each of the parts of speech in detail. When you have finished, you might want to test yourself by trying the exercise.

Written by Heather MacFadyen

Detailed explanations of the eight **parts of speech**: the verb, the noun, the pronoun, the adjective, the adverb, the preposition, the conjunction, and the interjection can be found at

<http://www.writingcentre.uottawa.ca/hypergrammar/partsp.html>

2. Punctuation

The **parts of the sentence** are a set of terms for describing how people construct sentences from smaller pieces. There is not a direct correspondence between the parts of the sentence and the parts of speech -- the subject of a sentence, for example, could be a noun, a pronoun, or even an entire phrase or clause. Like the parts of speech, however, the parts of the sentence form part of the basic vocabulary of grammar, and it is important that you take some time to learn and understand them.

Written by Frances Peck

The Comma

Comma usage is in some respects a question of personal writing style: some writers use commas liberally, while others prefer to use them sparingly. Most modern North American style guides now recommend using fewer commas rather than more, so when faced with the option of using a comma or not, you may find it wise to refrain.

For instance, the use of a comma before the "and" in a series is usually optional, and many writers choose to eliminate it, provided there is no danger of misreading:

We bought scarves, mittens and sweaters before leaving for Iceland. (comma unnecessary before "and")

We ate apples, plums, and strawberry and kiwi compote. (comma needed before "and" for clarity)

Comma Usage

1. Use a comma before a co-ordinating conjunction that joins independent clauses (unless the independent clauses are very short):

I wrapped the fresh fish in three layers of newspaper, but my van still smelled like trout for the next week. (commas with two independent clauses)

She invited him to her party and he accepted. (comma unnecessary with short clauses)

2. Use a comma after an introductory adverb clause and, often, after an introductory phrase (unless the phrase is very short):

After the hospital had completed its fund-raising campaign, an anonymous donor contributed an additional \$10,000. (after introductory adverb clause)

From the east wall to the west, her cottage measures twenty feet. (after introductory prepositional phrase)

In the bottom drawer you will find some pink spandex tights. (no comma with short, closely related phrase)

3. Use a comma to separate items in a series:

Playing in a band can be exciting, but many people do not realize the hardships involved: constant rehearsals, playing until 2 a.m., handling drunken audience members, and transporting heavy equipment to and from gigs. (the comma preceding "and" is optional unless needed to prevent misreading)

4. Use commas to set off **non-restrictive elements** and other parenthetical elements. A **non-restrictive modifier** is a phrase or clause that does not restrict or limit the meaning of the word it is modifying. It is, in a sense, interrupting material that adds extra information to a sentence. Even though removing the non-restrictive element would result in some loss of meaning, the sentence would still make sense without it. You should usually set off non-restrictive elements with commas:

The people of Haiti, who for decades have lived with grinding poverty and mind-numbing violence, are unfamiliar with the workings of a true democracy.

A **restrictive modifier** is a phrase or clause that limits the meaning of what it modifies and is essential to the basic idea expressed in the sentence. You should not set off **restrictive elements** with commas:

Those residents of Ottawa who do not hold secure, well-paying jobs must resent the common portrayal of the city as a land of opportunity.

Note that you can use two other punctuation marks to set off non-restrictive elements or other **parenthetical information**: **parentheses** and dashes. Enclosing parenthetical information in parentheses reduces the importance of that information:

Mr. Grundy's driving record (with one small exception) was exemplary.

5. Placing parenthetical information between dashes has the opposite effect: it emphasizes the material:

Mr. Grundy's driving record -- with one exception -- was exemplary.

Nevertheless, you should usually set off parenthetical information with commas.

Superfluous Commas

Equally important in understanding how to use commas effectively is knowing when *not* to use them. While this decision is sometimes a matter of personal taste, there are certain instances when you should definitely avoid a comma.

- Do not use a comma to separate the subject from its predicate:

[WRONG] Registering for our fitness programs before September 15, will save you thirty percent of the membership cost.

[RIGHT] Registering for our fitness programs before September 15 will save you thirty percent of the membership cost.

- Do not use a comma to separate a verb from its object or its subject complement, or a preposition from its object:

[WRONG] I hope to mail to you before Christmas, a current snapshot of my dog Benji. She travelled around the world with, a small backpack, a bedroll, a pup tent and a camera.

[RIGHT] I hope to mail to you before Christmas a current snapshot of my dog Benji.

[RIGHT] She travelled around the world with a small backpack, a bedroll, a pup tent and a camera.

- Do not misuse a comma after a co-ordinating conjunction:

[WRONG] Sleet fell heavily on the tin roof but, the family was used to the noise and paid it no attention.

[RIGHT] Sleet fell heavily on the tin roof, but the family was used to the noise and paid it no attention.

- Do not use commas to set off words and short phrases (especially introductory ones) that are not parenthetical or that are very slightly so:

[WRONG] After dinner, we will play badminton.

[RIGHT] After dinner we will play badminton.

- Do not use commas to set off restrictive elements:

[WRONG] The fingers, on his left hand, are bigger than those on his right.

[RIGHT] The fingers on his left hand are bigger than those on his right.

- Do not use a comma before the first item or after the last item of a series:

[WRONG] The treasure chest contained, three wigs, some costume jewellery and five thousand dollars in Monopoly money.

[WRONG] You should practice your punches, kicks and foot sweeps, if you want to improve in the martial arts.

[RIGHT] The treasure chest contained three wigs, some costume jewellery and five thousand dollars in Monopoly money.

[RIGHT] You should practice your punches, kicks and foot sweeps if you want to improve in the martial arts.

Written by Frances Peck

The Semicolon

You will usually use the **semicolon** to link independent clauses not joined by a co-ordinating conjunction. Semicolons should join only those independent clauses that are closely related in meaning.

Abdominal exercises help prevent back pain; proper posture is also important.
The auditors made six recommendations; however, only one has been adopted so far.

Do not use a semicolon to link a dependent clause or a phrase to an independent clause.

[WRONG] Although gaining and maintaining a high level of physical fitness takes a good deal of time; the effort pays off in the long run.

[RIGHT] Although gaining and maintaining a high level of physical fitness takes a good deal of time, the effort pays off in the long run.

Generally, you should not place a semicolon before a co-ordinating conjunction that links two independent clauses. The only exception to this guideline is if the two independent clauses are very long and already contain a number of commas.

[WRONG] The economy has been sluggish for four years now; but some signs of improvement are finally beginning to show.

[RIGHT] The economy has been sluggish for four years now, but some signs of improvement are finally beginning to show.

It may be useful to remember that, for the most part, you should use a semicolon only where you could also use a period.

There is one exception to this guideline. When punctuating a list or series of elements in which one or more of the elements contains an internal comma, you should use semicolons instead of commas to separate the elements from one another:

Henry's mother believes three things: that every situation, no matter how grim, will be happily resolved; that no one knows more about human nature than she; and that Henry, who is thirty-five years old, will never be able to do his own laundry.

The Colon

Writers often confuse the colon with the semicolon, but their uses are entirely different.

When to Use a Colon

The **colon** focuses the reader's attention on what is to follow, and as a result, you should use it to introduce a list, a summation, or an idea that somehow completes the introductory idea. You may use the colon in this way, however, only after an independent clause:

He visited three cities during his stay in the Maritimes: Halifax, Saint John and Moncton.
Their lobbying efforts were ultimately useless: the bill was soundly defeated.
My mother gave me one good piece of advice: to avoid wasting time and energy worrying about things I cannot change.

When Not to Use a Colon

You should not place a colon between a verb and its object or subject complement, or between a preposition and its object:

[WRONG] His neighbour lent him: a pup-tent, a wooden canoe, and a slightly battered Coleman stove. (colon between verb and objects)
[RIGHT] His neighbour lent him a pup-tent, a wooden canoe, and a slightly battered Coleman stove.
[WRONG] Her three goals are: to improve her public speaking skills, to increase her self-confidence and to sharpen her sales techniques. (colon between verb and subject complement)
[RIGHT] Her three goals are to improve her public speaking skills, to increase her self-confidence and to sharpen her sales techniques.
[WRONG] We travelled to: London, Wales and Scotland. (colon between preposition and objects)
[RIGHT] We travelled to London, Wales and Scotland.
Written by Frances Peck

End Punctuation

The punctuation marks that signal the end of a sentence are the period, the question mark and the exclamation mark.

You use the **period**, by far the most common of the **end punctuation** marks, to terminate a sentence that makes a statement. You may also use periods with **imperative sentences** that have no sense of urgency or excitement attached:

Without a doubt, Lady Emily was much happier after her divorce.
Turn right at the stop sign.
Bring me a cup of coffee and a cheese danish.

When you want to express a sense of urgency or very strong emotion, you may end your imperative sentences and statements with an **exclamation mark**:

Look out below!
Leave this house at once!
I hate him!

Exclamation marks are, however, rare in formal writing. Use them sparingly, if at all.

You should use the **question mark** at the end of a **direct question**:

Who's on first?
Where is my flowered cape?

Be careful not to use a question mark at the end of an indirect question. Indirect questions are simply statements, and therefore end with a period:

I wonder who was chosen as Harvest King in the county fair.
She asked if she could play pinball.
The teacher asked who was chewing gum.

Written by Frances Peck

Quotation Marks

The exact rules for **quotation marks** vary greatly from language to language and even from country to country within the English-speaking world. In North American usage, you should place double quotation marks (") before and after directly quoted material and words of dialogue:

One critic ended his glowing review with this superlative: "It is simply the best film ever made about potato farming."
May replied, "This is the last cookie."

You also use quotation marks to set off certain titles, usually those of minor or short works -- essays, short stories, short poems, songs, articles in periodicals, etc. For titles of longer works and separate publications, you should use italics (or underlined, if italics are not available). Use italics for titles of books, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, films, plays, long poems, long musical works, and television and radio programs.

Once when I was sick, my father read me a story called "The Happy Flower," which was later made into a movie entitled *Flower Child*, starring Tiny Tim.

Sometimes, you will use quotation marks to set off words specifically referred to as terms, though some publishers prefer italics:

I know you like the word "unique," but do you really have to use it ten times in one essay?

"Well" is sometimes a noun, sometimes an adverb, sometimes an adjective and sometimes a verb.

Written by Frances Peck

Quotations Marks with Other Punctuation

One question that frequently arises with quotation marks is where to place other punctuation marks in relation to them. Again, these rules vary from region to region, but North American usage is quite simple:

1. Commas and periods always go inside the quotation marks.

I know you are fond of the story "Children of the Corn," but is it an appropriate subject for your essay?

"At last," said the old woman, "I can say I am truly happy."

2. Semicolons and colons always go outside the quotation marks.

She never liked the poem "Dover Beach"; in fact, it was her least favourite piece of Victorian literature.

He clearly states his opinion in the article "Of Human Bondage": he believes that television has enslaved and diminished an entire generation.

3. Question marks, exclamation marks, and dashes go inside quotation marks when they are part of the quotation, and outside when they do not.

Where is your copy of "The Raven"?

"How cold is it outside?" my mother asked.

Note that in North American usage, you should use single quotation marks (') only to set off quoted material (or a minor title) inside a quotation.

"I think she said 'I will try,' not 'I won't try,'" explained Sandy.

Written by Frances Peck

The Apostrophe

You should use an **apostrophe** to form the possessive case of a noun or to show that you have left out letters in a **contraction**. Note that you should not generally use contractions in formal, academic writing.

The convertible's engine has finally died. (The noun "convertible's" is in the possessive case)

I haven't seen my roommate for two weeks. (The verb "haven't" is a contraction of "have not")

To form the possessive of a plural noun ending in "s," simply place an apostrophe after the "s."

He has his three sons' futures in mind.

In many suburbs, the houses' designs are too much alike.

Possessive pronouns -- for example, "hers," "yours," and "theirs" -- do not take apostrophes. This is the case for the possessive pronoun "its" as well: when you write "it's" with an apostrophe, you are writing a contraction for "it is."

The spaceship landed hard, damaging its radar receiver. ("its" is the possessive pronoun)

It's your mother on the phone. ("it's" is the contraction of "it is")

Written by Frances Peck

The Dash

As noted in the section on commas, you can use a **dash** at the beginning and end of parenthetical information. Usually, you will use dashes when you want to emphasize the information, but you might also use them if the parenthetical information is too long or abrupt to be set off with commas.

I think you would look fine wearing either the silk blouse -- the one with the blue pattern -
- or the angora sweater. (abrupt interruption)

The idea of returning to the basics in the classroom -- a notion which, incidentally, has been quietly supported for years by many respected teachers -- is finally gaining some currency with school administrators. (lengthy interruption containing internal commas)

You can use a dash to conclude a list of elements, focusing them all toward one point.

Chocolate, cream, honey and peanut butter -- all go into this fabulously rich dessert.

Dashes also mark sharp turns in thought.

We pored over exotic, mouth-watering menus from Nemo Catering, Menu du Jour, Taste Temptations, and three other reputable caterers -- and rejected them all.

Written by Frances Peck

Test Yourself: Identifying Punctuation Errors

Indicate whether each sentence is punctuated correctly or incorrectly.
See answers below.

1. I wrote letters to: my aunt, the cable company, and my close friend Bernice who moved to Boston four years ago.

1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

2. "Can working with a computer really improve one's writing?" they asked.

1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

3. They read they studied and they reviewed, yet they could not define the term 'onomatopoeia' on the English exam.

1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

4. Children sometimes knock at the Wilsons' door, as if taunting the couple to show themselves, but neither the old man nor his sister ever answers.

1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

5. We cancelled our subscription to the magazine after it ran a homophobic article; likewise, a number of our friends boycotted the publication.

1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

6. My sister's skin used to be as smooth as a child's.

1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

7. Aaron asked the counsellor if there were many job opportunities for music teachers and if he would have to leave the province to get a good position?

1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

8. They wanted very badly to see Peter Weirs new film, but fate in the form of the year's worst snowstorm intruded.
1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

9. How could the rent review administrators have made such a decision, and how will your landlord live with himself?
1. Correct
 2. Incorrect
-

10. "Take me with you," she said. "This little town and it's little people are more than I can bear, but I know everything will be different in New York".
1. Correct
 2. Incorrect

Written by Frances Peck

Answers: Identifying Punctuation Errors

1. Answer:

The answer *Incorrect* is correct.

Explanation:

You should have punctuated the sentence as follows:

I wrote letters to my aunt, the cable company, and my close friend Bernice, who moved to Boston four years ago.

You should never use a colon between a preposition and its objects. The comma after "company" is optional, but you need the comma after "Bernice" because the material that follows is non-restrictive.

2. Answer:

The answer *Correct* is correct.

Explanation:

The material inside the quotation marks is dialogue and is a question; therefore, the question mark must fall inside the final quotation marks.

3. Answer:

The answer *Incorrect* is correct.

Explanation:

You should punctuate the sentence as follows:

They read, they studied, and they reviewed, yet they could not define the term "onomatopoeia" on the English exam.

You need the comma after "read" to separate the items in the list. The comma after "studied" is optional. In North American usage, you should use double quotation marks around "onomatopoeia", but in British usage the single quotation marks are correct.

4. Answer:

The answer *Correct* is correct.

Explanation:

"Wilson's" is the correct possessive form of the plural noun "Wilson's." You need the first comma before the parenthetical phrase "as if taunting the couple to show themselves," and you need the second before the co-ordinating conjunction "but," which links the two independent clauses.

5. Answer:

The answer *Correct* is correct.

Explanation:

The semicolon correctly joins the two independent clauses, and the comma is necessary after the conjunctive adverb "likewise."

6. Answer:

The answer *Incorrect* is correct.

Explanation:

You should punctuate the sentence as follows:

My sister's skin used to be as smooth as a child's.

You need the second apostrophe to indicate that the noun "child's" is possessive.

7. Answer:

The answer *Incorrect* is correct.

Explanation:

You should punctuate the sentence as follows:

Aaron asked the counsellor if there were many job opportunities for music teachers and if he would have to leave the province to get a good position.

The sentence is an indirect question and therefore needs a period at the end, not a question mark.

8. Answer:

The answer *Incorrect* is correct.

Explanation:

You should punctuate the sentence as follows:

They wanted very badly to see Peter Weir's new film, but fate, in the form of the year's worst snowstorm, intruded.

OR

They wanted very badly to see Peter Weir's new film, but fate -- in the form of the year's worst snowstorm -- intruded.

You need the apostrophe in "Weir's" to indicate the possessive (if you thought that his name was "Peter Weirs," then "Weirs" or "Weirs's" would also be correct). The phrase "in the form of the year's worst snowstorm" is non-restrictive, or parenthetical, and you must set it off in some fashion. Most writers would use commas, but you could use dashes if you wished to emphasize the parenthetical information.

9. Answer:

The answer *Correct* is correct.

Explanation:

You need the comma before the co-ordinating conjunction "and," which joins two independent clauses, and you need the question mark because this is a direct question.

10. Answer:

The answer *Incorrect* is correct.

Explanation:

You should punctuate the sentence as follows:

"Take me with you," she said. "This little town and its little people are more than I can bear, but I know everything will be different in New York."

The original sentence contained only two mistakes: (1) "its" is the possessive case and therefore is spelled without the apostrophe, and (2) the period belongs inside the closing quotation marks.

Test Yourself: Adding Punctuation

Using a separate sheet of paper, punctuate each sentence, then compare your answer to the one provided. See answers below.

1. Last Tuesday the committee agreed on its guest speakers for the coming year.

2. I really enjoyed Lost Ground the new short story by William Trevor said Samuel.

3. Guido who is my fathers cousin was born in Naples.

4. His form was excellent his dive was superior to his other competitors attempts.

5. My sisters favourite foods are as follows pepperoni pizza applesauce and strawberries.

Written by Frances Peck

Answers: Adding Punctuation

1. Answer:

This sentence requires no punctuation.

Explanation:

You could place a comma after "Tuesday," but omitting it is better because the introductory phrase is short and only slightly parenthetical.

2. Answer:

"I really enjoyed 'Lost Ground,' the new short story by William Trevor," said Samuel.

Explanation:

If you are following North American usage, you need double quotation marks around the words spoken by Samuel and single quotation marks around the title of the short story, because it is a minor title and is already inside double quotation marks (in British usage you write the single quotation marks by default). The comma after "Ground" is necessary because the phrase that follows is non-restrictive, and the comma must fall inside the single quotation mark. The comma after "Trevor" is required to introduce "said Samuel" (this is a convention of dialogue), and the comma must fall inside the double quotation marks.

3. Answer:

Guido, who is my father's cousin, was born in Naples.

Explanation:

You need commas around the non-restrictive clause "who is my father's cousin," and you need the apostrophe in "father's" is needed to indicate the possessive.

4. Answer:

His form was excellent; his dive was superior to his other competitors' attempts.

Explanation:

You need a semicolon to link the two independent clauses. Place the apostrophe after the "s" to show the possessive of the plural noun "competitors."

5. Answer:

My sister's favourite foods are as follows: pepperoni pizza, applesauce, and strawberries.

Explanation:

You need the apostrophe in "sister's" to show that the noun is possessive, the colon after "follows" because the clause preceding the colon is independent and introduces a list, and the comma after "pizza" because it is an element in the list. The comma after "applesauce" is optional.

3. Building Sentences

Some English sentences are very basic:

Shakespeare was a writer.

Einstein said something.

The Inuit are a people.

You *could* write an entire essay using only simple sentences like these:

William Shakespeare was a writer. He wrote plays. It was the Elizabethan age. One play was Hamlet. It was a tragedy. Hamlet died. The court died too.

It is not likely, however, that your essay would receive a passing grade. This chapter helps you learn to recognise different types of sentences and to use them effectively in your own writing.

Written by David Megginson

Why Sentence Structure Matters

Although ordinary conversation, personal letters, and even some types of professional writing (such as newspaper stories) consist almost entirely of simple sentences, your university or college instructors will expect you to be able to use all types of sentences in your formal academic writing. Writers who use only simple sentences are like truck drivers who do not know how to shift out of first gear: they would be able to drive a load from Montréal to Calgary (eventually), but they would have a great deal of trouble getting there.

If you use phrases and clauses carefully, your sentences will become much more interesting and your ideas, much clearer. This complex sentence develops a major, central idea and provides structured background information:

Since it involves the death not only of the title character but of the entire royal court, Hamlet is the most extreme of the tragedies written by the Elizabethan playwright William Shakespeare.

Just as a good driver uses different gears, a good writer uses different types of sentences in different situations:

- a long complex sentence will show what information depends on what other information;
- a compound sentence will emphasize balance and parallelism;
- a short simple sentence will grab a reader's attention;
- a loose sentence will tell the reader in advance how to interpret your information;
- a periodic sentence will leave the reader in suspense until the very end;
- a declarative sentence will avoid any special emotional impact;
- an exclamatory sentence, used sparingly, will jolt the reader;
- an interrogative sentence will force the reader to think about what you are writing; and
- an imperative sentence will make it clear that you want the reader to act right away.

Written by David Megginson

The Structure of a Sentence

Remember that every clause is, in a sense, a miniature sentence. A simple sentence contains only a single clause, while a compound sentence, a complex sentence, or a compound-complex sentence contains at least two clauses.

The Simple Sentence

The most basic type of sentence is the **simple sentence**, which contains only one clause. A simple sentence can be as short as one word:

Run!

Usually, however, the sentence has a subject as well as a predicate and both the subject and the predicate may have modifiers. All of the following are simple sentences, because each contains only one clause:

Melt!

Ice **melts**.

The ice **melts** quickly.

The ice on the river **melts** quickly under the warm March sun.

Lying exposed without its blanket of snow, the ice on the river **melts** quickly under the warm March sun.

As you can see, a simple sentence can be quite long -- it is a mistake to think that you can tell a simple sentence from a compound sentence or a complex sentence simply by its length.

The most natural sentence structure is the simple sentence: it is the first kind which children learn to speak, and it remains by far the most common sentence in the spoken language of people of all ages. In written work, simple sentences can be very effective for grabbing a reader's attention or for summing up an argument, but you have to use them with care: too many simple sentences can make your writing seem childish.

When you do use simple sentences, you should add transitional phrases to connect them to the surrounding sentences.

The Compound Sentence

A **compound sentence** consists of two or more independent clauses (or simple sentences) joined by co-ordinating conjunctions like "and," "but," and "or":

Simple

Canada is a rich country.

Simple

Still, it has many poor people.

Compound

Canada is a rich country, **but** still it has many poor people.

Compound sentences are very natural for English speakers -- small children learn to use them early on to connect their ideas and to avoid pausing (and allowing an adult to interrupt):

Today at school Mr. Moore brought in his pet rabbit, and he showed it to the class, and I got to pet it, and Kate held it, and we coloured pictures of it, and it ate part of my carrot at lunch, and ...

Of course, this is an extreme example, but if you over-use compound sentences in written work, your writing might seem immature.

A compound sentence is most effective when you use it to create a sense of balance or contrast between two (or more) equally-important pieces of information:

Montréal has better clubs, but Toronto has better cinemas.

Special Cases of Compound Sentences

There are two special types of compound sentences which you might want to note. First, rather than joining two simple sentences together, a co-ordinating conjunction sometimes joins two complex sentences, or one simple sentence and one complex sentence. In this case, the sentence is called a **compound-complex sentence**:

compound-complex

The package arrived in the morning, but the courier left before I could check the contents.

The second special case involves punctuation. It is possible to join two originally separate sentences into a compound sentence using a semicolon instead of a co-ordinating conjunction:

Sir John A. Macdonald had a serious drinking problem; when sober, however, he could be a formidable foe in the House of Commons.

Usually, a conjunctive adverb like "however" or "consequently" will appear near the beginning of the second part, but it is not required:

The sun rises in the east; it sets in the west.

The Complex Sentence

A **complex sentence** contains one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. Unlike a compound sentence, however, a complex sentence contains clauses which are *not* equal. Consider the following examples:

Simple

My friend invited me to a party. I do not want to go.

Compound

My friend invited me to a party, but I do not want to go.

Complex

Although my friend invited me to a party, I do not want to go.

In the first example, there are two separate simple sentences: "My friend invited me to a party" and "I do not want to go." The second example joins them together into a single sentence with the co-ordinating conjunction "but," but both parts could still stand as independent sentences -- they are entirely equal, and the reader cannot tell which is most important. In the third example, however, the sentence has changed quite a bit: the first clause, "Although my friend invited me to a party," has become incomplete, or a dependent clause.

A complex sentence is very different from a simple sentence or a compound sentence because it makes clear which ideas are most important. When you write

My friend invited me to a party. I do not want to go.

or even

My friend invited me to a party, but I do not want to go.

The reader will have trouble knowing which piece of information is most important to you. When you write the subordinating conjunction "although" at the beginning of the first clause, however, you make it clear that the fact that your friend invited you is less important than, or **subordinate**, to the fact that you do not want to go.

Written by David Megginson

The Order of a Sentence

Not all sentences make a single point -- compound sentences, especially, may present several equally-important pieces of information -- but most of the time, when you write a sentence, there is a single argument, statement, question, or command which you wish to get across.

When you are writing your sentences, do not bury your main point in the middle; instead, use one of the **positions of emphasis** at the beginning or end of the sentence.

The Loose Sentence

If you put your main point at the beginning of a long sentence, you are writing a **loose sentence**:

loose

I am willing to pay slightly higher taxes for the privilege of living in Canada, considering the free health care, the cheap tuition fees, the low crime rate, the comprehensive social programs, and the wonderful winters.

The main point of this sentence is that the writer prefers to live in Canada, and the writer makes the point at the very beginning: everything which follows is simply extra information. When the readers read about the free health care, the cheap tuition fees, the low crime rate, the comprehensive social programs, and the wonderful winters, they will already know that these are reasons for living in Canada, and as a result, they will be more likely to understand the sentence on a first reading.

Loose sentences are the most natural for English speakers, who almost always talk in loose sentences: even the most sophisticated English writers tend to use loose sentences much more often than periodic sentences. While a periodic sentence can be useful for making an important point or for a special dramatic effect, it is also much more difficult to read, and often requires readers to go back and reread the sentence once they understand the main point.

Finally, it is important to remember that you have to structure a loose sentence as carefully as you would structure a periodic sentence: it is very easy to lose control of a loose sentence so that by the end the reader has forgotten what your main point was.

The Periodic Sentence

If your main point is at the end of a long sentence, you are writing a **periodic sentence**:

periodic

Considering the free health care, the cheap tuition fees, the low crime rate, the comprehensive social programs, and the wonderful winters, **I am willing to pay slightly higher taxes for the privilege of living in Canada.**

The main point of this sentence is that the writer prefers to live in Canada. At the beginning of this sentence, the reader does not know what point the writer is going to make: what about the free health care, cheap tuition fees, low crime rate, comprehensive social programs, and

wonderful winters? The reader has to read all of this information *without* knowing what the conclusion will be.

The periodic sentence has become much rarer in formal English writing over the past hundred years, and it has never been common in informal spoken English (outside of bad political speeches). Still, it is a powerful rhetorical tool. An occasional periodic sentence is not only dramatic but persuasive: even if the readers do not agree with your conclusion, they will read your evidence first with open minds. If you use a loose sentence with hostile readers, the readers will probably close their minds before considering any of your evidence.

Finally, it is important to remember that periodic sentences are like exclamatory sentences: used once or twice in a piece of writing, they can be very effective; used any more than that, they can make you sound dull and pompous.

Written by David Megginson

The Purpose of a Sentence

The other classifications in this chapter describe *how* you construct your sentences, but this last set describes *why* you have written the sentences in the first place. Most sentences which you write should simply state facts, conjectures, or arguments, but sometimes you will want to give commands or ask questions.

The Declarative Sentence

The **declarative sentence** is the most important type. You can, and often will write entire essays or reports using *only* declarative sentences, and you should always use them far more often than any other type. A declarative sentence simply states a fact or argument, without requiring either an answer or action from the reader. You punctuate your declarative sentences with a simple period:

Ottawa is the capital of Canada.

The distinction between deconstruction and post-modernism eludes me.

He asked which path leads back to the lodge.

Note that the last example contains an **indirect question**, "which path leads back to the lodge." An indirect question does not make a sentence into an interrogative sentence -- only a direct question can do that.

The Interrogative Sentence

An **interrogative sentence** asks a direct question and always ends in a question mark:

Who can read this and not be moved?

How many roads must a man walk down?

Does money grow on trees?

Note that an indirect question does not make a sentence interrogative:

Direct/Interrogative

When was Lester Pearson prime minister?

Indirect/Declarative

I wonder when Lester Pearson was prime minister.

A direct question requires an answer from the reader, while an indirect question does not.

The Rhetorical Question

Normally, an essay or report will not contain many regular direct questions, since you are writing it to present information or to make an argument. There is, however, a special type of direct question called a **rhetorical question** -- that is, a question which you do not actually expect the reader to answer:

Why did the War of 1812 take place? Some scholars argue that it was simply a land-grab by the Americans ...

If you do not overuse them, rhetorical questions can be a very effective way to introduce new topics or problems in the course of a paper; if you use them too often, however, you may sound patronising and/or too much like a professor giving a mediocre lecture.

The Exclamatory Sentence

An **exclamatory sentence**, or **exclamation**, is simply a more forceful version of a declarative sentence, marked at the end with an exclamation mark:

The butler did it!

How beautiful this river is!

Some towns in Upper Canada lost up to a third of their population during the cholera epidemics of the early nineteenth century!

Exclamatory sentences are common in speech and (sometimes) in fiction, but over the last 200 years they have almost entirely disappeared from academic writing. You will (or should) probably never use one in any sort of academic writing, except where you are quoting something else directly. Note that an exclamation mark can also appear at the end of an imperative sentence.

The Imperative Sentence

An **imperative sentence** gives a direct command to someone -- this type of sentence can end either with a period or with an exclamation mark, depending on how forceful the command is:

Sit!

Read this book for tomorrow.

You should not usually use an exclamation mark with the word "please":

Wash the windows!
Please wash the windows.

Normally, you should not use imperative sentences in academic writing. When you do use an imperative sentence, it should usually contain only a mild command, and thus, end with a period:

Consider the Incas.

Written by David Megginson

Test Yourself: Sentence Usage

After reading the previous sections, decide whether the following sections are effective or ineffective sentences.

-
1. Albert Einstein's famous quotation "God does not play dice" was his reaction to the disturbing theory that the universe is essentially the outcome of random events.
 1. This is an effective sentence
 2. This is not an effective sentence

-
2. Racism should be unacceptable in American society by now, but every year the newspapers still report on racially-motivated attacks, questionable police shootings, and groups who actively promote the superiority of whites over blacks or blacks over whites.
 1. This is an effective sentence
 2. This is not an effective sentence

-
3. The citizens of Vancouver have gone too long without decent bicycle paths!
 1. This is an effective sentence
 2. This is not an effective sentence

Written by David Megginson

Answers: Sentence Usage

1. Answer:

The answer *This is not an effective sentence* is correct.

Explanation:

Einstein's quotation is very effective (though he turned out to be wrong), and it deserves a position of emphasis in the sentence. Consider how much more effective the sentence becomes when you move the quotation to the end:

Quantum physicists argued that the universe is essentially the outcome of random events, but Albert Einstein replied that "God does not play dice."

Moving the quotation to the end makes this a periodic sentence, with the quotation as its climax.

2. Answer:

The answer *This is an effective sentence* is correct.

Explanation:

The writer of this sentence is presuming that reader will agree that racism *should* be unacceptable, but then goes on to present evidence that, despite the best intentions of people like the reader, racism is still common. For this type of an argument, a loose sentence like this one works well: the writer begins with an uncontroversial statement to gain the reader's confidence, then proceeds gradually to introduce more controversial points.

3. Answer:

The answer *This is not an effective sentence* is correct.

Explanation:

While the issue of bicycle paths is an important one, the writer has made a serious mistake here by using an exclamatory sentence -- it makes the tone look forced and the writer, insincere. Use an exclamatory sentence only when a point is truly shocking.

4. Writing Paragraphs

A **thesis** is a single, focused argument, and most **paragraphs** prove or demonstrate a thesis through explanations, examples and concrete details. This chapter will help you learn to write and analyse the types of paragraphs common in academic essays.

Written by Dorothy Turner

Start with an Outline

A brief **outline** will make it easier to develop topic sentences and to arrange your paragraphs in the most effective order.

You should begin your outline by stating the thesis of your paper:

The English Civil War was caused by a combination of factors, including the empowerment and organization of Puritan forces, the absolutist tendencies of James I and the personal ineptitude of his son Charles I.

Next, list the topic sentences for each of the paragraphs (or sections) of the paper:

1. The war and its aftereffects lasted twenty years.
2. Historically, the Protestants had believed themselves persecuted.
3. In the 1620s Protestants dominated Parliament and attempted to enact legislation which would provide guidelines for both religious worship and political representation.
4. During his reign in the early 1600s, James I had attempted to silence Puritan protests and to solidify the role of the monarchy as unquestioned head of state.
5. Charles I's lack of personal diplomacy and his advisers' desire for personal power gave the Puritans the excuses they needed to declare war on the monarchy.

You might notice that the topic sentences derive directly from the thesis, and explain, prove, or expand on each of the thesis' claims.

Once you have an outline at hand, you can follow three steps to help you write your paragraphs effectively:

1. Use your thesis to help you organise the rest of your paper.
2. Write a list of topic sentences, and make sure that they show how the material in each paragraph is related to your thesis.
3. Eliminate material that is not related to your thesis and topic sentences.

Written by Dorothy Turner

Writing Topic Sentences

A **topic sentence** (also known as a **focus sentence**) encapsulates or organises an entire paragraph, and you should be careful to include one in most of your major paragraphs. Although topic sentences may appear anywhere in a paragraph, in academic essays they often appear at the beginning.

It might be helpful to think of a topic sentence as working in two directions simultaneously. It relates the paragraph to the essay's thesis, and thereby acts as a signpost for the argument of the paper as a whole, but it also defines the scope of the paragraph itself. For example, consider the following topic sentence:

Many fast-food chains make their profits from adding a special ingredient called "forget sauce" to their foods.

If this sentence controls the paragraph that follows, then all sentences in the paragraph must relate in some way to fast food, profit, and "forget sauce":

Made largely from edible oil products, this condiment is never listed on the menu.

This sentence fits in with the topic sentence because it is a description of the composition of "forget sauce."

In addition, this well-kept industry secret is the reason why ingredients are never listed on the packaging of victuals sold by these restaurants.

The transitional phrase "In addition" relates the composition of "forget sauce" to secret fast-food industry practices.

"Forget sauce" has a chemical property which causes temporary amnesia in consumers.

Now the paragraph moves on to the short-term effect on consumers:

After spending too much money on barely edible food bereft of any nutritional value, most consumers swear they will never repeat such a disagreeable experience.

This sentence describes its longer-term effects:

Within a short period, however, the chemical in "forget sauce" takes effect, and they can be depended upon to return and spend, older but no wiser.

Finally, I finish the paragraph by "proving" the claim contained in the topic sentence, that many fast-food chains make their profits from adding a special ingredient called "forget sauce" to their foods.

Analyzing a Topic Sentence

Topic sentences often act like tiny thesis statements. Like a thesis statement, a topic sentence makes a claim of some sort. As the thesis statement is the unifying force in the essay, so the topic sentence must be the unifying force in the paragraph. Further, as is the case with the thesis statement, when the topic sentence makes a claim, the paragraph which follows must expand, describe, or prove it in some way. Topic sentences make a point and give reasons or examples to support it.

Consider the last paragraph about topic sentences, beginning with the topic sentence itself:

Topic sentences often act like tiny thesis statements.

This is my **claim**, or the point I will prove in the following paragraph. All the sentences that follow this topic sentence must relate to it in some way.

Like a thesis statement, a topic sentence makes a claim of some sort. As the thesis statement is the unifying force in the essay, so the topic sentence must be the unifying force in the paragraph.

These two sentences show how the reader can compare thesis statements and topic sentences: they both make a claim and they both provide a focus for the writing which follows.

Further, as is the case with the thesis statement, when the topic sentence makes a claim, the paragraph which follows must expand, describe, or prove it in some way.

Using the transitional word "further" to relate this sentence to those preceding it, I expand on my topic sentence by suggesting ways a topic sentence is related to the sentences that follow it.

Topic sentences make a point and give reasons or examples to support it.

Finally, I wrap up the paragraph by stating exactly how topic sentences act rather like tiny thesis statements.

Written by Dorothy Turner

Test Yourself: Topic Sentences

Choose the best among the several topic sentences for each paragraph below.

1. I saw around Velva a release from what was like slavery to the tyrannical soil, release from the ignorance that darkens the soul and from the loneliness that corrodes it. In this generation my Velva friends have rejoined the general American society that their pioneering fathers left behind when they first made the barren trek in the days of the wheat rush. As I sit here in Washington writing this, I can feel their nearness. (from Eric Sevareid, "Velva, North Dakota")

1. Family-sized farms are not productive.
 2. I grew up on a family-sized farm, near a town called Velva.
 3. Many politicians deplore the passing of the old family-sized farm, but I'm not so sure.
 4. People moved away from the cities in the late nineteenth century, in search of fertile land for farming.
-

2. The first is the wear-and-tear hypothesis that suggests the body eventually succumbs to the environmental insults of life. The second is the notion that we have an internal clock which is genetically programmed to run down. Supporters of the wear-and-tear theory maintain that the very practice of breathing causes us to age because inhaled oxygen produces toxic by-products. Advocates of the internal clock theory believe that individual cells are told to stop dividing and thus eventually to die by, for example, hormones produced by the brain or by their own genes. (from Debra Blank, "The Eternal Quest" [edited]).

1. There are two broad theories concerning what triggers a human's inevitable decline to death.
 2. Some scientists believe that humans contain an "internal time clock" which forces them eventually to die.
 3. We all must die some day.
 4. My biology professor gave an interesting lecture Thursday.
-

3. The strictest military discipline imaginable is still looser than that prevailing in the average assembly-line. The soldier, at worst, is still able to exercise the highest conceivable functions of freedom -- that is, he or she is permitted to steal and to kill. No discipline prevailing in peace gives him or her anything remotely resembling this. The soldier is, in war, in the position of a free adult; in peace he or she is almost always in the position of a child. In war all things are excused by success, even violations of discipline. In peace, speaking generally, success is inconceivable except as a function of discipline. (from H.L. Mencken, "Reflections on War" [edited]).
 1. Soldiers need discipline.
 2. We commonly look on the discipline of war as vastly more rigid than any discipline necessary in time of peace, but this is an error.
 3. Although soldiers are not always disciplined, they serve an important social function in wartime.
 4. In times of peace, soldiers often convert easily from wartime pursuits to the discipline necessary successfully to compete in even the most competitive marketplace.
-

4. In Montreal, a flashing red traffic light instructs drivers to careen even more wildly through intersections heavily populated with pedestrians and oncoming vehicles. In startling contrast, an amber light in Calgary warns drivers to scream to a halt on the off chance that there might be a pedestrian within 500 meters who might consider crossing at some unspecified time within the current day. In my home town in New Brunswick, finally, traffic lights (along with painted lines and posted speed limits) do not apply to tractors, all terrain vehicles, or pickup trucks, which together account for most vehicles on the road. In fact, were any observant Canadian dropped from an alien space vessel at an unspecified intersection anywhere in this vast land, he or she could almost certainly orient him-or-herself according to the surrounding traffic patterns.
 1. People in Calgary are careful of pedestrians.
 2. Although the interpretation of traffic signals may seem highly standardized, close observation reveals regional variations across this country, distinguishing the East Coast from Central Canada and the West as surely as dominant dialects or political inclinations.
 3. People in Montreal drive faster than people in Alberta, and Maritimers generally don't pay any attention to traffic signals at all.
 4. Canadians do not follow traffic signals properly.

Written by Dorothy Turner

Answers: Topic Sentences

1. Answer:

The answer *Many politicians deplore the passing of the old family-sized farm, but I'm not so sure.* is correct.

Explanation:

Sevareid argues that farming is destructive as a way of life, no matter what romantic notions are attached to it. He is not writing about the productivity of farms, about his own life story ("I grew up on a family-sized farm..."), and his main point is not that people moved away from the cities in the late the nineteenth century.

2. Answer:

The answer *There are two broad theories concerning what triggers a human's inevitable decline to death.* is correct.

Explanation:

This paragraph is a straightforward description of two possibilities, neither of which is preferred over the other. In this case, it would be wrong to mention only one of the possibilities (the "internal time clock") in the topic sentence, or to treat it as a philosophical discussion of death itself ("we all must die..."). As for the biology professor, He or she might very well have given an interesting lecture, but that has nothing to do with the content of the paragraph.

3. Answer:

The answer *We commonly look on the discipline of war as vastly more rigid than any discipline necessary in time of peace, but this is an error.* is correct.

Explanation:

The topic sentence must emphasize the comparative nature of the paragraph. Mencken does argue that soldiers need discipline, but this is not all he argues in this paragraph. Likewise, while soldiers may well serve an important function in wartime, and while they may well be able to compete well in peacetime, neither of these points is discussed in the paragraph.

4. Answer:

The answer *Although the interpretation of traffic signals may seem highly standardized, close observation reveals regional variations across this country, distinguishing the East Coast from Central Canada and the West as surely as dominant dialects or political inclinations.* is correct.

Explanation:

It is not enough simply to list all of the arguments in the paragraph ("People in Montreal drive faster..."), or to pick only one point to highlight ("People in Calgary are careful of pedestrians"). Instead, the topic sentence should highlight the interpretative nature of driving habits and their regional variations. Since the paragraph stresses the *differences* among drivers in different parts of the country, it would be entirely wrong simply to state in the topic sentence that "Canadians do not follow traffic signals properly."

More information on grammar, parts of speech, phrases, diction etc. is available at <http://www.arts.uottawa.ca/writcent/hypergrammar/>

5. Quotations

Quotations consist of someone else's words. A major part of referencing, they are used primarily to bolster an argument by providing a detailed, formal reference to an authoritative piece of writing and/or research.

If you are quoting less than four lines of text simply incorporate the quote into the body of the report and set off the quoted material in quotation marks. For example:

Evans admits that timing had a hand in the Purist Company's success: "My concerns about chemicals coincided with the growing concerns of consumers." His goal is to now increase the company's business overseas . . .

If you are quoting more than four lines of text, lead into the quotation with a colon, leave two lines, indent at least ten spaces and run the quote as a block separate to your text. For example:

Our volunteers have a wide range of skills, but the core of them is business skills. They would include everything from business planning and financial management, to sales and marketing, production processes, and IT management. The assignments on offer to business volunteers are a many and varied as the skills they require. They could be developing a marketing plan for a publisher in Fiji, or people in restaurant operations in Cambodia.

In the above example quotation marks are unnecessary – quotation marks are only necessary when the quote is quoted within the body of the text.

If the quoted passage does not begin with a sentence beginning or a capital letter, indicate this with an ellipsis. For example:

In selecting staff to operate our customer support lines, we have to be on the lookout for people who have ". . . the patience of a Saint, and the general wisdom of The Dalai Lama . . ."

If you alter the quote in any way be sure to indicate the missing matter with ellipsis marks. For example:

"In recent years volunteering has become more popular . . . The 2006 census, which measured volunteerism for the first time, found that 18 per cent of over-15s had done voluntary work in the year before the survey was taken . . ."

If you need to change a quote so that it's grammatically correct, place the correction in brackets. For example:

Support reps understand that "A strong sense of humour may be the only thing standing between (them) and a nervous breakdown."

Source: Flanagan, S. (2007), Report Writing Skills. CSU Organizational Development.

6. A little grammar therapy

That, which & who

Use **which** for things and **who** for people. Use **that** for things and, informally, for people. It is quite unfashionable to use that for people. (The consensus seems to be that using that for people is still acceptable in speech and informal writing, but you should avoid doing it in formal writing.)

Examples:

- The man **who** swam the channel. The clause *who swam the channel* is linked to *The man*. As *The man* is a person, the clause starts with the relative pronoun *who*. *That* could also have been used, but it runs the risk of annoying readers.)
- The PC **which** keeps breaking down is under guarantee until March. Which keeps breaking down is a clause. It adds information about (i.e., links to) *the PC*.)
- Please accept my resignation. I don't want to belong to any club **that** will accept me as a member. (Groucho Marx quote)

Who & whom

The word **who** can only be used when it is the subject of a verb. That might sound confusing, but it just means it is like the words I, he, she, we, and they. Just like **who**, each of these words can only be the subject of a verb. The difference with who is that some people are unsure when to use who and whom. Confusing that pair is no different from confusing these pairs: I/me, he/him, she/her, and they/them.

Examples:

- **Who** paid for the meal? *Who* is the subject of the verb to pay.
- I have not seen the man **who** lives in the hut by the beach for a week. *Who* is the subject of the verb *lives*.
- I wonder **who** is in charge. *Who* is the subject of the verb to be; i.e., who is.

Who's & whose

Who's is short for who is or who has. This is a 100% rule - it has no other uses.

Whose is a bit more complicated. It sits before a noun to state, or ask to whom it belongs.

Example:

- A king *whose* crown is too big.
- *Whose* crown is this?

Difference between i.e. and e.g.

i.e., which starts with i, means "in other words," and *e.g.*, which starts with e, means "for example." I = in other words. E = example. Put a comma after i.e. and e.g.

Examples:

- Our pet, Dart (i.e., the dog we brought home from the animal rescue shelter), loves to curl up on his rug in front of the fireplace.
- Our dog, Dart, loves games (e.g., fetch, frisbee, hide & seek).

Numbering

Write out numbers one to nine; use numerics from 10 on.

Hyphen examples:

- 51 (fifty-one)
- 234 (two hundred and thirty-four)
- 3,567 (three thousand five hundred and sixty-seven)

It's & its

Its is the possessive form of 'it'. **Its** is a possessive pronoun meaning *of it* or *belonging to it*.

It's is a contraction of **it is** or **it has**.

A simple test: If you can replace **it's** in your sentence with **it is** or **it has**, then your word is **it's**; otherwise, your word is **its**.

The misunderstood apostrophe

General rule of thumb: Use an apostrophe for contractions and to show possession. Do not use apostrophes for plurals.

Use an apostrophe to show the omission of letters in a contraction:

- I'm (I am)
- you're (you are)
- he's (he is)
- we're (we are)
- they're (they are)
- isn't (is not)

Use an apostrophe with "s" for possessives of singular nouns.

Use an apostrophe plus "s" to show the possessive form of a singular noun, even if that singular noun already ends in "s":

- Harold's crayon
- today's weather report
- the boss's problem
- Star Jones's talk show
- Victoria Beckham's husband

Use an apostrophe without "s" for possessives of most plural nouns. To form the possessive of a plural noun that already ends in "s", add an apostrophe:

- the girls' swing set (the swing set belonging to the girls)
- the students' projects (the projects belonging to the students)
- the Johnsons' house (the house belonging to the Johnsons)

If the plural noun does not end in “s”, add an apostrophe plus “s”:

- the women's conference (the conference belonging to the women)
- the children's toys (the toys belonging to the children)

When two or more nouns possess the same thing, add an apostrophe plus “s” to the last noun listed:

- Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia Ice Cream
- Emma and Nicole's school project (Emma and Nicole worked together on the same project)

When two or more nouns separately possess something, add an apostrophe to each noun listed:

- Tim's and Marty's ice cream (Each boy has his own ice cream).
- Emma's and Nicole's school projects (Each girl has her own project).

Lynn Truss

7. The 15 rules of power writing

Adapted from the work of Meg Thornton – StoriesThatClick.com

Identify which ‘rules’ you break the most.

1. Be brief

- It is only a matter of time before the building will be condemned.
- Ultimately, the building will be condemned.

2. Use easy words

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Encountered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Saw |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Compose | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Write |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altercation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fight |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heighten | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Raise |

3. Use the active voice

Active is direct and more powerful

- The report was read by Suzan
- Suzan read the report



- The entire stretch of highway was paved by the crew.
- The crew paved the entire stretch of highway.

4. Ditch 'ing'

- Jane Armstrong will be hosting our visitors on . . .
- Jane Armstrong will host our visitors on . . .

- The OH&S Board is planning to meet on . . .
- The OH&S Board plans to meet on . . .

5. Don't overdo, Dude

Intensifiers and qualifiers weaken your writing

Avoid – *very, so pretty, like, basically, totally, too, rather, absolutely, essentially, actually*

- They had a very heated discussion about a rather petty issue
- They had a heated discussion about a petty issue

6. Be Specific

Vague wording is unclear and boring

- The new technology will increase collaboration between the public and the police
- The new technology will help the public and police collaborate

7. Don't smother verbs

Simple verbs bring sentences to life

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have a need for | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Need |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have a tendency to | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make a proposal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Propose |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make a statement | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take action | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Act |
- We will take the new initiative into consideration
 - We will consider the new initiative

8. Rewrite common phrases

Remove unneeded words from prepositional phrases

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> In order to | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> To |
| <input type="checkbox"/> For the purpose of | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> For |

- As a matter of fact
- In fact
- In the event of
- If
- One of the problems
- One problem
- In the majority of instances
- Usually
- At the present time she is evaluating the impact on the community
- She is evaluating the impact on the community



9. Be positive

Use the positive form to make yourself clear

- The board does not think the budget would allow for new community engagement projects
- The board thinks the budget prohibits new community engagement projects



10. Delete 'there'

Eliminate *there is, there are, there were*

- There were a great number of mistakes in the report
- The report was filled with mistakes
- There are plenty of reasons why the case will be dismissed
- The case will be dismissed for several reasons



11. 'Which' hunt

Who and *which* are often unnecessary

- The annual fundraising event for the homeless, which was held downtown, was more fun than our department picnic.
- The annual fundraising event for the homeless, held downtown, was more fun than our department picnic.
- The shy girl, who I knew from high school, is now an impressive public speaker.
- The shy girl I knew from high school is now an impressive public speaker.



12. Cut 'that' out

That and *the fact that* are often expendable

- They knew that they were over the limit.
- They knew they were over the limit.
- In spite of the fact that he knew he was outnumbered, he continued to resist arrest.
- He knew he was outnumbered, but he continued to resist arrest.

- She was late due to the fact that she had a flat tire.
- She was late because she had a flat tire.



13. Don't be stuffy

Overly descriptive writing is hard to read. Being pretentious is a turnoff.

- I would like to take this opportunity to extend to you my heartfelt congratulations.
- Congratulations



14. Keep sentences short

Long sentences are hard to follow.

- The major advantages of the community involvement program are that it builds trust between community leaders and elected officials, it eases tensions in the focus area, and it enables us to provide alternatives
- The community involvement program has 3 major advantages:
 - it builds trust between community leaders and elected officials
 - it eases tensions in the focus area, and
 - it enables us to provide alternatives.



15. End strongly

Place emphatic words near the end of sentences

- The community opposed the proposed development
- The proposed development stirred community opposition

- Bird life was destroyed by the loss of wetlands in the Richmond delta
- The loss of wetlands in the Richmond delta destroyed bird life

8. Commonly confused words

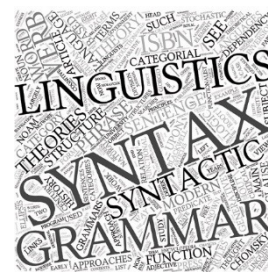
Adverse means hostile.
Averse means unwilling.

Immoral means morally wrong.
Amoral means not related to morality.

Allude means to refer to indirectly.
Elude means to avoid or evade.

A **lot** means a large extent or to a large extent. (The word **alot** does not exist.)
To **allot** means to apportion something.

An **allusion** is an indirect reference to something.
An **illusion** is deception.



Climactic pertains to the highest point.
Climatic pertains to the weather.

Use **may** for permission.
Use **can** for ability.

Council is a committee elected to lead or govern.
To **counsel** is to advise.

To **cancel** means to forbid.
A **sensor** is a detector.
Censure is displeasure.

Discrete means individually distinct.
Discreet means inconspicuous.

Disinterested means impartial.
Uninterested means not interested.

To **imply** means to state indirectly.
To **infer** means to deduce.

To **lay** means to place in a horizontal position.
To **lie** means: (1) to be in a horizontal position (note, the past tense is “lay”) (2) to speak an untruth.

Lead (rhymes with bead) is associated with being in charge or being in front.
The past tense of the verb to lead is **led**.

Use **amount of** before singular things you cannot measure.
Use **quantity of** before singular or plural things you can measure.
Use **number of** before plural things you can measure.

To **precede** means to come before (usually in time).
To **proceed** means to go forwards or to continue.

Principal means main.
A **principal** is the head (of a department).
Principle means general law or code of conduct.

To **prescribe** means to recommend or to authorize.
To **proscribe** means to forbid.

Use **if** to introduce a condition.
In all other circumstances, use **whether**.

Inquiry and **enquiry** are interchangeable.

Stationary means not moving.
Stationery is writing or office supplies (e.g., paper, pens).

It's is a contraction for it is or it has.
Its is a possessive pronoun.
There is absolutely, positively, no such word as its'.

Adapted from Grammar-Monster.com