

Composition I: Join the Conversation

COMPOSITION I: JOIN THE CONVERSATION

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PART I

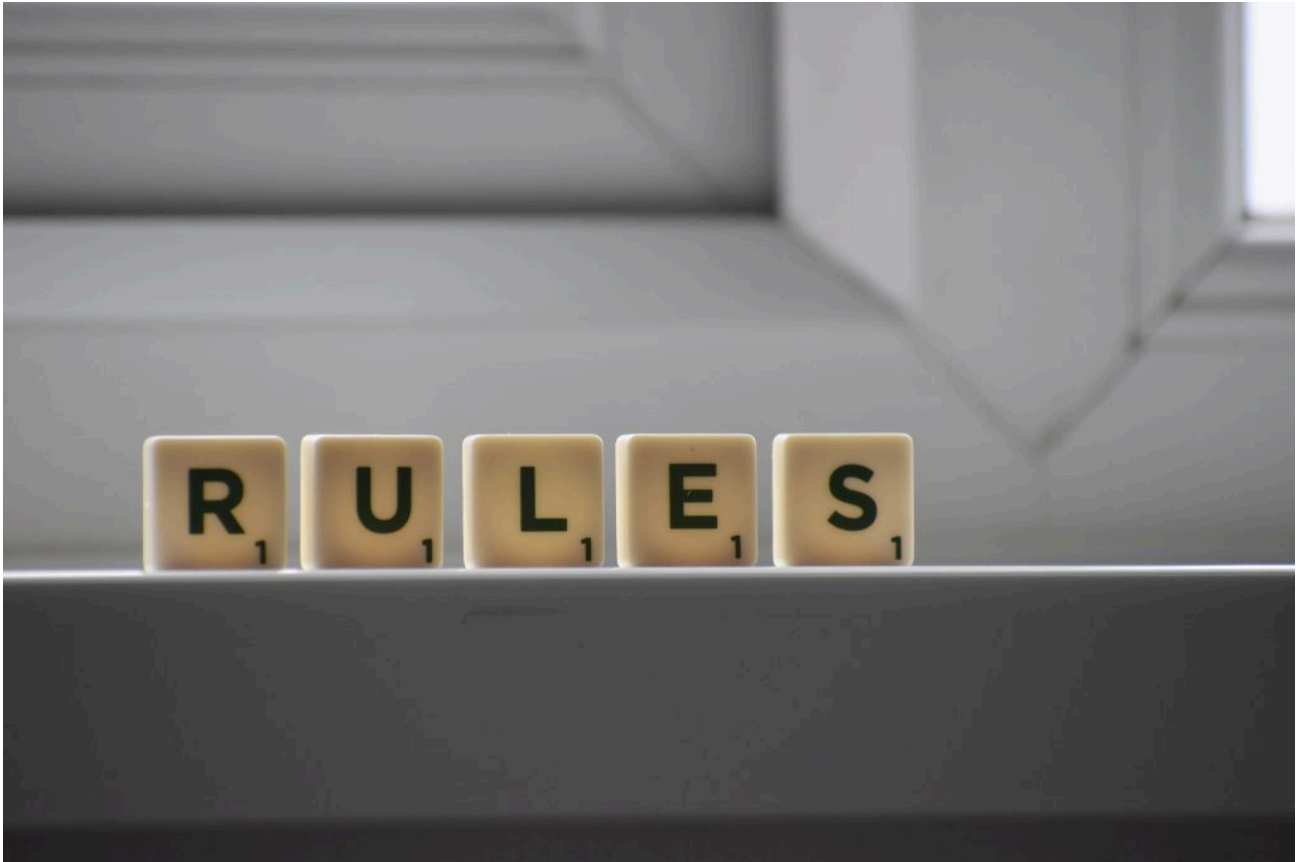
GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

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GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS HANDBOOK

Additional Resources

- [Links to Grammar Tools, available in Blackboard](#)
- [Appendix 2: Grammar and Mechanics Mini-Lessons, available in this textbook](#)



Similar cubes with rules inscription on windowsill in building by Joshua Miranda / Pexels

Outline

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Introduction

This handbook is a brief yet comprehensive reference for you to consult as you write papers and other assignments for a college course. You can refer to it as you draft paragraphs and polish sentences for clarity, conciseness, and point of view. You can read it to learn how to identify and revise common sentence errors and confused words. You can use it to help you edit your writing and fine-tune your use of verbs, pronouns, punctuation, and mechanics. And you can have it open as you integrate and cite quotations as well as other source material in your papers in APA style.

Designed as a reference tool, the handbook is organized to help you get answers to your questions. You do not need to read the entire handbook to get helpful information from it. For example, if your instructor has noted that you need to work on comma splices, you can refer to Sentence Errors, before you turn in a final draft of your writing. If you know you frequently misuse commas, refer to Punctuation, and check your sentences against the advice there. And if you, like many writers, can't remember which punctuation marks go inside and outside quotation marks, refer to Quotations. Becoming familiar with the handbook and the various topics will allow you to use it efficiently.

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Paragraphs and Transitions

Paragraphs help readers make their way through prose writing by presenting it in manageable chunks. Transitions link sentences and paragraphs so that readers can clearly understand how the points you are making relate to one another.

Effective Paragraphs

Paragraphs are guides for readers. Each new paragraph signals either a new idea, further development of an existing idea, or a new direction. An effective paragraph has a main point supported by evidence, is organized in a sensible way, and is neither too short nor too long. When a paragraph is too short, it often lacks enough evidence and examples to back up your claims. When a paragraph is too long, readers can lose the point you are making.

Developing a Main Point

A paragraph is easier to write and easier to read when it centers on a main point. The main point of the paragraph is usually expressed in a topic sentence. The topic sentence frequently comes at the start of the paragraph, but not always. No matter the position, however, the other sentences in the paragraph support the main point.

Supporting Evidence and Analysis

All the sentences that develop the paragraph should support or expand on the main point given in the topic sentence. Depending on the type of writing you are doing, support may include evidence from sources—such as facts, statistics, and expert opinions—as well as examples from your own experience. Paragraphs also may include an analysis of your evidence written in your own words. The analysis explains the significance of the evidence to the reader and reinforces the main point of the paragraph.

In the following example, the topic sentence is underlined. The supporting evidence discussed through cause-and-effect reasoning comes in the next three sentences. The paragraph concludes with two sentences of analysis in the writer's own words.

Millions of retired Americans rely on Social Security benefits to make ends meet after they turn 65. According to the Social Security Administration, about 46 million retired workers receive benefits, a number that reflects about 90 percent of retired people. Although experts disagree on the exact numbers, somewhere between 12 percent and 40 percent of retirees count on social security for all of their income, making these benefits especially important (Konish). These benefits become more important as people age. According to Eisenberg, people who reach the age of 85 become more financially vulnerable because their health care and long-term care costs increase at the same time their savings have been drawn down. It should therefore come as no surprise that people worry about changes to the program. Social Security keeps millions of retired Americans out of poverty.

Opening Paragraphs

Readers pay attention to the opening of a piece of writing, so make it work for you. After starting with a descriptive title, write an opening paragraph that grabs readers' attention and alerts them to what's coming. A strong opening paragraph provides the first clues about your subject and your stance. In academic writing, whether argumentative, interpretative, or informative, the introduction often ends with a clear thesis statement, a declarative sentence that states the topic, the angle you are taking, and the aspects of the topic the rest of the paper will support.

Depending on the type of writing you're doing, you can open in a variety of ways.

Open with a conflict or an action. If you're writing about conflict, a good opening may be to spell out what the conflict is. This way of opening captures attention by creating a kind of suspense: *Will the conflict be resolved? How will it be resolved?*

Open with a specific detail, statistic, or quotation. Specific information shows that you know a lot about your subject and piques readers' curiosity. The more dramatic your information, the more it will draw in readers, as long as what you provide is credible.

Open with an anecdote. Readers enjoy stories. Particularly for reflective or personal narrative writing, beginning with a story sets the scene and draws in readers. You may also begin the anecdote with dialogue or reflection.

The following introduction opens with an anecdote and ends with the thesis statement, which is underlined.

Betty stood outside the salon, wondering how to get in. It was June of 2020, and the door was locked. A sign posted on the door provided a phone number for her to call to be let in, but at 81, Betty had lived her life without a cell phone. Betty's day-to-day life had been hard during the pandemic, but she had planned for this haircut and was looking forward to it: she had a mask on and hand sanitizer in her car. Now she couldn't get in the door, and she was discouraged. In that moment, Betty realized how much Americans' dependence on cell phones had grown in the months she and millions of others had been forced to stay at home. Betty and thousands of other senior citizens who could not afford cell phones or did not have the technological skills and support they needed were being left behind in a society that was increasingly reliant on technology.

Closing Paragraphs

The conclusion is your final chance to make the point of your writing stick in readers' minds by reinforcing what they have read. Depending on the purpose for your writing and your audience, you can summarize your main points and restate your thesis, draw a logical conclusion, speculate about the issues you have raised, or recommend a course of action, as shown in the following conclusion:

Although many senior citizens purchased and learned new technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant number of older people like Betty were unable to buy and/or learn the technology they needed to keep them connected to the people and services they needed. As society becomes increasingly dependent on technology, social service agencies, religious institutions, medical providers, senior centers, and other organizations that serve the elderly need to be equipped to help them access and become proficient in the technologies essential to their daily lives.

Transitions

Transitional words and phrases show the connections or relationships between sentences and paragraphs and help your writing flow smoothly from one idea to the next.

Flow

A paragraph flows when ideas are organized logically and sentences move smoothly from one to the next.

Transitional words and phrases help your writing flow by signaling to readers what's coming in the next sentence. In the paragraph below, the topic sentence and transitional words and phrases are underlined.

Some companies court the public by mentioning environmental problems and pointing out that they do not contribute to these problems. For example, the natural gas industry often presents natural gas as a good alternative to coal. However, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, the drilling and extraction of natural gas from wells and transporting it through pipelines leaks methane, a major cause of global warming ("Environmental Impacts"). Yet leaks are rarely mentioned by the industry. By taking credit for problems they don't cause and being silent on the ones they do, companies present a favorable environmental image that often obscures the truth.

Transitional Words and Phrases

Following are some transitional words and phrases and their functions in paragraphs. Use this list when drafting or revising to help guide readers through your writing.

Type of Transition	Examples
to compare or show similarity	likewise, similarly, in like manner
to contrast or change direction	but, yet, however, nevertheless, still, at the same time, on the other hand, conversely
to add to	also, and, furthermore, next, then, in addition
to give examples	for example, for instance, to illustrate, specifically, thus
to agree or concede	certainly, of course, to be sure, granted
to summarize or conclude	finally, in conclusion, in short, in other words, thus, in summary
to show time	first, second, third, next, then, soon, meanwhile, later, currently, concurrently, at the same time, eventually, at last, finally
to show a spatial relationship	here, there, in the background, in the foreground, in the distance, to the left, to the right, near, above, below

Table H1

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Clear and Effective Sentences

This section will help you write strong sentences that convey your meaning clearly and concisely.

Emphasis

The most emphatic place in a sentence is the end. To achieve the strongest emphasis, end with the idea you want readers to remember. Place introductory, less important, or contextual information earlier in the sentence. Consider the differences in these two sentences.

Less Emphatic Angel needs to start now if he wants to have an impact on his sister's life.

More Emphatic If Angel wants to have an impact on his sister's life, he needs to start now.

Concrete Nouns

General nouns name broad classes or categories of things (*man, dog, city*); concrete nouns refer to particular things (*Michael, collie, Chicago*). Concrete nouns provide a more vivid and lively reading experience because they create stronger images that activate readers' senses. The examples below show how concrete nouns, combined with specific details, can make writing more engaging.

All General Nouns Approaching the library, I see people and dogs milling about outside, but no subjects to write about. I'm tired from my walk and go inside.

Revised with Concrete Nouns Approaching Brandon Library, I see skateboarders and bikers weaving through students who talk in clusters on the library steps. A friendly collie waits for its owner to return. Subjects to write about? Nothing strikes me as especially interesting. Besides, my heart is still pounding from the walk up the hill. I wipe my sweaty forehead and go inside.

Active Voice

Active voice refers to the way a writer uses verbs in a sentence. Verbs have two “voices”: active and passive. In the active voice, the subject of the sentence acts—the subject performs the action of the verb. In the passive voice, the subject receives the action, and the object actually becomes the subject. Although some passive sentences are necessary and clear, a paper full of passive-voice constructions lacks vitality and becomes wordy.

Active-voice verbs make something happen. By using active verbs wherever possible, you will create stronger, clearer, and more concise sentences.

Passive Voice On the post-training survey, the anti-harassment tutorial was rated highly informative by employees.

Revised in Active Voice On the post-training survey, employees rated the anti-harassment tutorial highly informative.

Conciseness

Concise writing considers the importance of every word. Editing sentences for emphasis, concrete nouns, and active voice will help you write clearly and precisely, as will the following strategies. To be concise, eliminate wasted words and filler—*not* ideas, information, description, or details that will interest readers or help them follow your thoughts.

Use Action Verbs

Using action verbs is one of the most direct ways to cut unneeded words. Whenever you find a phrase like the ones below, consider substituting an action verb.

Instead of the phrase . . .	Use an action verb
reach a decision, come to a decision	decide
made a choice	chose
hold a meeting	meet
arrive at a conclusion	conclude
have a discussion	discuss

Table H2

Cut Unnecessary Words and Phrases

Eliminate words and phrases that do not add meaning. Consider the following sentences, which say essentially the same thing.

Wordy In almost every situation that I can think of, with few exceptions, it will make good sense for you to look for as many places as possible to cut out needless, redundant, and repetitive words and phrases from the papers, reports, paragraphs, and sentences you write for college assignments. (49 words)

Concise Whenever possible, cut needless words and phrases from your college writing. (11 words)

The wordy sentence is full of early-draft language in three chunks. The first chunk comes at the beginning of the sentence. Notice how *In almost every situation that I can think of, with few exceptions, it will make good sense for you to look for as many places as possible* is reduced to *Whenever possible* in the concise sentence.

The second chunk of the wordy sentence is *needless, redundant, and repetitive*. The concise version reduces those four words to *needless* because the words have the same meaning. The third chunk of the wordy sentence comes at the end. Notice how *papers, reports, paragraphs, and sentences you write for college assignments* is reduced to *your college writing*. The meaning, although expanded to all writing, remains the same.

The following phrases are common fillers that add nothing to meaning. They should be avoided.

- a person by the name of
- for all intents and purposes
- in a manner of speaking
- more or less

Some common filler phrases have single-word alternatives, which are preferable.

Replace a common filler phrase . . .	With a single word
at all times	always
at the present time	now
at this point in time	now
for the purpose of	for
due to the fact that	because
the reason being	because
in the final analysis	finally
last but not least	finally

Table H3

Avoid *there is/there are* and *it is*

Starting a sentence with *there is*, *there are*, or *it is* can be useful to draw attention to a change in direction. However, starting a sentence with one of these phrases often forces you into a wordy construction. Wordiness means the presence of verbal filler; it does not mean the number of words, the amount of description, or the length of a composition.

Wordy There is often uncertainty about whether or not employees are required to turn on their cameras during online meetings, and there are some employees who don't. However, it is the expectation of employers that cameras be turned on.

Concise Employees are often uncertain whether they must turn on their cameras during online meetings, and some don't. However, employers expect cameras to be turned on.

Parallelism

Within a sentence, parallelism—the repetition of a word or grammatical construction— creates symmetry and balance, makes an idea easier to remember, and sounds pleasing to the ear. In the first example below, the parallelism is established by the repetition of the phrase beginning with *who*. In the second example, the parallelism is created by the underlined nouns.

Unparallel After 25 years, the battle over the reintroduction of wolves continues between environmental activists, who support it, and hunters and people who own cattle ranches and are opposed.

Parallel After 25 years, the battle over the reintroduction of wolves continues between environmental activists, who support it, and cattle ranchers and hunters, who oppose it.

Unparallel Exercises that improve core strength include crunches, leg lifts, and when you do push-ups and planks.

Parallel Exercises that improve core strength include crunches, leg lifts, push-ups, and planks.

Variety

Varying the length and structure of sentences makes your writing more interesting to read.

Simple Sentences

A simple sentence has one idea expressed in a single main clause (also known as an independent clause). A main clause contains a subject and a predicate and can stand alone as a sentence. A simple sentence can be short or long, as shown in the examples below. The phrases in the long sentence add information, but the sentence remains a simple sentence nonetheless because it has only one clause.

The coronavirus spread around in the world in 2020.

School-age children and college students were pushed into virtual learning environments in March 2020, with schools closing for unspecified lengths of time.

Compound Sentences

A compound sentence contains two or more main clauses that are equally important to the meaning of the sentence. (A main clause contains a subject and a predicate and can stand alone as a sentence.) You can create compound sentences in the following ways:

Compound Sentence Using a Coordinating Conjunction

Create a compound sentence by using a coordinating conjunction—*for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, or *so* (*fanboys*)—to join main clauses. To remember the coordinating conjunctions, use the mnemonic device *fanboys*.

Restaurants and small retailers experienced steep drops in revenue during the pandemic, **and** many were forced to close.

Restaurants and small retailers experienced steep drops in revenue during the pandemic, **yet** many survived the downturn.

Compound Sentence Using a Semicolon

A semicolon can join two main clauses that are closely related in meaning. When using a semicolon, you must have a complete sentence before and after it.

Restaurants and small retailers experienced steep drops in revenue during the pandemic; many were forced to close.

Compound Sentence Using a Semicolon and Transitional Word or Phrase

A transitional words or phrases such as *however, in fact, meanwhile, therefore, consequently, as a result, instead, or furthermore* indicates the relation of two or more equally important ideas in the main clauses.

Restaurants and small retailers experienced steep drops in revenue during the pandemic; **however, many survived** the downturn.

Complex Sentences

A complex sentence contains one main clause (a clause that contains a subject and a predicate and can stand alone as a sentence) and one or more subordinate clauses (also known as dependent clauses). Subordinate clauses begin with a subordinating word or phrase such as *although, because, even if, when, whenever, since, as though, whether, as long as, until, or while*. The main clause expresses the main idea of the sentence, and the subordinate clause expresses the less important idea. Like a main clause, a subordinate clause has a subject and verb; however, unlike a main clause, it cannot stand alone as a sentence. A subordinate clause punctuated as a sentence is a type of sentence fragment. The subordinate clauses in the following sentences are underlined.

Although the federal government provided financial assistance, the money came too late for many businesses. When schools and universities shut down in March of 2020, students had to learn at home, a situation that proved challenging for many households.

Compound-Complex Sentences

A compound-complex sentence contains two or more main clauses (clauses that contain subjects and predicates and can stand alone as sentences) and one or more subordinate clauses (clauses that begin with a subordinating word such as *although, because, even if, when, whenever, since, as though, whether, as long as, until, and while*). A compound-complex sentence is an effective structure to use when you want to express three or more ideas in a single sentence. The example sentence has two main clauses (italics) and three subordinate clauses (underline).

When school districts reopened, *parents had to decide whether they wanted their children to attend classes in person*, and *they had to be ready for classes to move online* if there were outbreaks of the coronavirus in their community.

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Sentence Errors

These four common sentence errors can make your writing hard to read: fragments, comma splices, run-on sentences, and mixed constructions.

Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is a group of words that lacks a subject, a verb, or both, or it is a subordinate clause (a clause that begins with a subordinating word such as *although, because, since, and so on*) punctuated as though it were a sentence by itself. Although most are grammatical errors, sentence fragments can be used judiciously in conventional writing so long as the purpose is clear to readers and the fragment is clearly intended.

Unintentional Sentence Fragments

Often a sentence fragment follows a complete sentence and expands on it, as illustrated in the examples below (fragments are underlined). You can correct most fragment errors by attaching the fragment to the sentence to which it belongs or by rewriting the fragment as a complete sentence.

Sentence Fragment People think that they will be happy if they are well off. That money will make everything better,

Revised by Attaching the Fragment to a Complete Sentence People think that they will be happy if they are well off and that money will make everything better.

Sentence Fragment Psychologist David Myers explains how students have increasingly chosen to attend college to make more money. Thus further explaining his point of people's desire to use money to gain happiness.

Revised by Attaching the Fragment to a Complete Sentence Psychologist David Myers explains how students have increasingly chosen to attend college to make more money, thus further explaining his point of people's desire to use money to gain happiness.

Sentence Fragment Although income grew, people's happiness did not. With rich people reporting that even though they had plenty of money, their happiness had not changed much.

Revised by Adding a Verb Although income grew, people's happiness did not. Rich people reported that even though they had plenty of money, their happiness had not changed much.

Sentence Fragment For many people, increased income is being spent on the things that people are unable to pay less for. Things like taxes, childcare, transportation, and housing.

Revised by Adding a Subject and a Verb For many people, increased income is being spent on things that people are unable to pay less for. These include taxes, childcare, transportation, and housing.

Intentional Sentence Fragments

Intentional sentence fragments force quick reading, inviting readers to stitch meaning to together. Intentional fragments are most common in creative writing and advertising.

The rabbit darted out of the shadows. A flash of movement. The dog lunged and strained at the leash.

Comma Splices

A comma splice is a common error that occurs when two complete sentences are joined by a comma. You can correct a comma splice by adding a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*), adding a period and creating two sentences, adding a coordinating conjunction and creating a compound sentence, or subordinating one clause and creating a complex sentence.

Comma Splice The author sheds light on the financial sacrifice many mothers make, they take care of their children without compensation and often lose professional status.

Revised with a Coordinating Conjunction The author sheds light on the financial sacrifice many mothers make, for they take care of their children without compensation and often lose professional status.

Comma Splice Many college students see their education as the way to become wealthy, some are sacrificing happiness to pursue high-paying careers.

Revised with a Period Many college students see their education as the way to become wealthy. Some are sacrificing happiness to pursue high-paying careers.

Comma Splice Psychologist David Myers conducted multiple surveys asking people about their attitudes about money, the results revealed that people felt they needed more regardless of how much they had.

Revised with a Semicolon Psychologist David Myers conducted multiple surveys asking people about their attitudes about money; the results revealed that people felt they needed more regardless of how much they had.

Comma Splice Love cannot be paid for, it is a gift that parents give because they love their children.

Revised with a Semicolon and Transitional Word or Phrase Love cannot be paid for; indeed, it is a gift that parents give because they love their children.

Comma Splice Students are choosing majors to enable them to earn more money, they are under the misconception that earning money guarantees happiness.

Revised with a Subordinate Clause Students are choosing majors to enable them to earn more money because they are under the misconception that earning money guarantees happiness.

Run-on Sentences

In a run-on sentence, two or more complete sentences are not separated by any punctuation. Like comma splices, most run-on sentences can be revised in one or more of the following ways: adding a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*), adding a period and creating two sentences, separating the sentences with a semicolon, separating the sentences with a semicolon and transitional word or phrase (such as *on the other hand, however, consequently, and so on*), or turning the less important sentence into a subordinate clause starting with a subordinating word such as *although, because, if, when, since, and so on*.

Run-on Sentence The DNR eventually designated the area as crucial habitat the protection came too late to save the nesting birds.

Revised with a Comma and a Coordinating Conjunction The DNR eventually designated the area as crucial habitat, but the protection came too late to save the nesting birds.

Run-on Sentence Most people realize that being wealthy won't just happen many college students choose a major that will ensure they make money.

Revised with a Period Most people realize that being wealthy won't just happen. Many college students choose a major that will ensure they make money.

Run-on Sentence Parents do not expect any financial reward they care for their children out of love and responsibility.

Revised with a Semicolon Parents do not expect any financial reward; they care for their children out of love and responsibility.

Run-on Sentence The average American family's expenses have risen faster than incomes they have saved less than prior generations.

Revised with a Semicolon and Transitional Word or Phrase The average American family's expenses have risen faster than incomes; as a result, they have saved less than prior generations.

Run-on Sentence College students have the opportunity to choose any major they tend to choose those that offer immediate opportunities to earn money when they graduate.

Revised with a Subordinate Clause Although college students have the opportunity to choose any major, they tend to choose those that offer immediate opportunities to earn money when they graduate.

Mixed Sentence Constructions

A mixed sentence contains parts that do not fit together because of grammar or meaning. In the following example, the writer needs to revise either the second part to fit with the first part or the first part to fit with the second. (See Editing Focus: Mixed Sentence Constructions for more on mixed sentence constructions.)

Mixed Sentence By starting my general studies classes last semester gave me the opportunity to take classes in my major this fall.

Second Part Revised By starting my general studies classes last spring, I had the opportunity to take classes in my major this fall.

First Part Revised Starting my general studies classes last spring gave me the opportunity to take classes in my major this fall.

Just because . . . doesn't mean Constructions. *Just because . . . doesn't mean* constructions are common in speech but should be avoided in writing.

Just because Just because I want to be a doctor doesn't mean I will get into medical school.

Revised Simply wanting to be a doctor doesn't guarantee admission to medical school.

Revised Although I want to be a doctor, I will need to work hard to get into medical school.

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Words and Language

The English language is rich and always evolving, offering you many ways and words to express yourself in writing and speech.

Language Varieties

English is not one language but many, made up of regional and social dialects. In addition, groups speak using specialized language among themselves that can be difficult for outsiders to understand. As a writer, be aware of the audience for your writing. Use language that your readers will understand directly or from context.

Dialects

English dialects are distinctive versions of the language used in geographical regions and/or by particular social or ethnic groups. Standard American English, the English spoken by newscasters, is one such dialect, as are African American Vernacular English, Creole, Appalachian English, and others. English dialects have many features in common, but each has particulars of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. (For an in-depth discussion of dialects and academic writing, see Spotlight on ... Variations of English.)

Slang

Groups of people with similar skills and interests often develop slang that allows them to express ideas quickly and vividly. Slang also signals knowledge about a particular topic, such as meme culture, music, sports, and more. Slang is generally considered too casual for most academic writing, but it may be appropriate for personal essays. In your papers, be aware of your purpose and audience when choosing to use slang. Avoid using slang that your readers are unlikely to understand.

Technical Expressions

Experts in many professional fields use specialized and technical expressions that allow them to communicate efficiently and clearly with each other. Such language is often incomprehensible for nonexperts and should be avoided in writing for general readers. (For tips on writing about a technical topic for an audience of nonspecialists, see Spotlight on ... Discipline-Specific and Technical Language.)

Biased Language

Biased words and expressions exclude or demean people on the basis of gender, sex, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, social class, or physical or mental traits.

Biased Language Based on Sex and Gender

English includes words and expressions that are considered biased based on sex and gender, such as *mankind*, *businessman*, *chairman*, *fireman*, and so on. These are commonly replaced by gender-neutral words such as *humanity*, *businessperson*, *chair* or *chairperson*, and *firefighter*. (See Spotlight on ... Bias in Language and Research for more on language bias.)

In addition, the English pronoun *he* has traditionally been used as the gender-neutral pronoun. For example, the construction *A doctor should have a caring attitude toward his patients* was once common but is now widely viewed as gender biased because many doctors are not men. For a discussion of the pronoun *he* used as the gender-neutral pronoun, see Pronouns.

Labels and Stereotypes

Be sensitive to labels and stereotypes that may insult a group of people you are writing about. Avoid labels that don't put people first, such as *cancer victim* and *wheelchair-bound*. Don't make assumptions about entire groups of people that promote stereotypes, such as *teenagers are rebellious*, *elderly people don't hear well*, *conservatives are rich*, or *women are more emotional than men*. (See Spotlight on ... Bias in Language and Research for more on language bias.)

Exact Words

As a general rule, use plain, direct words in your writing. Avoid reaching for a word that sounds fancy or impressive, especially if you are unsure about the meaning. If you use a word that is only vaguely familiar to you, look it up in a dictionary to ensure you are using it correctly. (You can type the word and "def" to get a definition.) Doing so has the added benefit of building your vocabulary.

Words Commonly Confused

The words in the following list are commonly confused or misused by writers. As you write, consult this list or use a reliable online tool, such as Merriam-Webster, to check the meanings and usage of words you're unsure of. Keep a list of words that cause you trouble as you become aware of them. Then, after you draft a document, do a search for the words on your list. (For a discussion of homonyms, homographs, and homophones, see Editing Focus: Words Often Confused.)

Confusing Words	Definitions and Examples
accept, except	<i>Accept</i> means “to receive willingly.” <i>Except</i> is used mostly as a preposition meaning “excluding.” He <u>accepted</u> all the gifts <u>except</u> mine.
advice, advise	<i>Advice</i> is a noun meaning “guidance.” <i>Advise</i> is a verb meaning “to recommend.” My mother gives good <u>advice</u> when she <u>advises</u> me about my college courses.
affect, effect	The verb <i>affect</i> means “to produce a change in.” The noun <i>effect</i> means “result.” The wine <u>affected</u> me, but it seemed to have no <u>effect</u> on my roommate.
all ready, already	<i>All ready</i> means “completely prepared.” <i>Already</i> means “happened by or before now.” We were <u>all ready</u> for the trip, but the train had <u>already</u> left.
all right, alright	<i>All right</i> is always two words meaning “acceptable” or “satisfactory.” <i>Alright</i> is an informal spelling.
all together, altogether	<i>All together</i> means “everyone or everything together.” We put the tickets <u>all together</u> for safekeeping. <i>Altogether</i> means “completely” or “entirely.” The book is <u>altogether</u> incomprehensible.
allusion, illusion	An <i>allusion</i> is an indirect or implied reference. The poem includes an <u>allusion</u> to the Bible. An <i>illusion</i> creates a false impression of reality. Magic relies upon <u>illusion</u> , seeing what you believe instead of what is really there.
A lot	<i>A lot</i> is always two words meaning “much” or “many.” <u>A lot</u> is a misspelling.
apart, a part	<i>Apart</i> denotes a separation. Social distancing requires people to stand six feet <u>apart</u> from each other. A <i>part</i> denotes a segment of something. The dog is <u>a part</u> of our family.
bare, bear	As verbs, <i>bare</i> means “to uncover.” <i>Bear</i> means “to endure.” <u>Bear</u> with me while I <u>bare</u> my soul.
complement, compliment	<i>Complement</i> means “to add to” or “to complete.” <i>Compliment</i> means “to make an approving remark.” Many people now <u>compliment</u> the fresh gray paint that <u>complement</u> the exterior stone on the house. <i>Complimentary</i> also means “free” or “without cost.” Because they sold advertising space for the newspaper, they received <u>complimentary</u> tickets to the game.
conscience, conscious	<i>Conscience</i> is a noun that refers to the awareness of one’s actions being right or wrong. I have a guilty <u>conscience</u> . <i>Conscious</i> is an adjective meaning “awake” or “alert.” She remained <u>conscious</u> after hitting her head on the windshield.
disinterested, uninterested	<i>Disinterested</i> means “impartial.” <i>Uninterested</i> means “not interested.” She was chosen as a <u>disinterested</u> party to hear both sides of the disagreement. Unfortunately, she was <u>uninterested</u> in the dispute.
elicit, illicit	<i>Elicit</i> is a verb meaning “to bring out.” <i>Illicit</i> means “unlawful.” His claims <u>elicited</u> a response from the mayor about the effort to stop demand for <u>illicit</u> drugs.
emigrate, immigrate	People <i>emigrate</i> , or leave, one country. They <i>immigrate</i> to a new country to live. When my family <u>emigrated</u> from Chile, they <u>immigrated</u> to the United States.

everyday, every day	<i>Everyday</i> is an adjective meaning “common,” “ordinary,” or “used daily.” <i>Every day</i> is a noun phrase meaning “every day.” <i>Everyday tasks are ones you do every day, like brushing your teeth and washing dishes.</i>
farther, further	<i>Farther</i> refers to distance. <i>I can't carry these groceries any farther.</i> <i>Further</i> means “in addition,” “more,” and “to a greater extent” and refers to abstractions like time or amount. <i>I can't discuss this issue any further.</i>
fewer, less	<i>Fewer</i> refers to items that can be counted. <i>Less</i> refers to items that cannot be counted: <i>I have fewer assignments than my roommate, and she has less time than I do. Cacti need less water than other plants.</i>
good, well	<i>Good</i> is an adjective. <i>That color looks good on you.</i> <i>Well</i> is an adverb. <i>Marguerite speaks Chinese well.</i> <i>Well</i> is used as an adjective only in reference to health. <i>She looks well after recovering from the flu.</i>
imply, infer	<i>Imply</i> means “to suggest.” <i>Your email implies you're upset.</i> <i>Infer</i> means “to conclude.” <i>I infer from your email that you're upset.</i>
its, it's	<i>Its</i> is a possessive pronoun. <i>The dog wagged its tail.</i> <i>It's</i> is a contraction of “it is” or “it has.” <i>It's my turn.</i> <i>Its</i> followed by an apostrophe is incorrect.
lay, lie	<i>Lay</i> means “to put or set something down.” <i>Please lay the books on the table.</i> <i>Lie</i> means “to be in or move into a horizontal position” or “to be situated.” <i>I need to lie down and rest my eyes.</i> <i>The towns lie near the waterfalls.</i> Note also that <i>lay</i> is the past tense of <i>lie</i> . <i>I fell asleep as soon as I lay down to rest my eyes.</i>
lead, led	The past tense of the verb <i>to lead</i> is <i>led</i> . The noun <i>lead</i> (rhymes with <i>red</i>) is the metal. <i>Nina led a group of tourists past the old lead mine.</i>
lose, loose	<i>Lose</i> is a verb meaning to “mislay” or “not win.” <i>I lose a sock every time I do laundry.</i> <i>These teams never lose their games.</i> <i>Loose</i> means “not tight” or “not secure.” <i>The loose shutters may be unsafe in a storm.</i>
myself, herself, himself, yourself, ourselves, themselves, yourselves	Do not use the <i>-self</i> pronouns in place of a personal pronoun in an effort to sound more formal: <i>Malia and I [not myself] wrote the report.</i> <i>The report was written by Malia and me [not myself].</i> Use the <i>-self</i> pronouns in the following situations: <i>Malia wrote the report herself.</i> <i>She treats herself to brunch on Sundays.</i>
peak, peek, pique	<i>Peak</i> means “a highest point” or “to reach a highest point.” <i>After a difficult climb, the hikers finally reached the peak.</i> <i>Peek</i> means “a secretive look” or “to take a secretive look.” <i>My brother peeked at his birthday gifts.</i> As a verb, <i>pique</i> means “to spark interest.” <i>The two classes piqued her interest in physics.</i> As a noun, <i>pique</i> also means “irritation.” <i>His pique at her probing questions was obvious.</i>
precede, proceed	<i>Precede</i> means “to go before.” <i>The example that precedes this one is peak/peek/pique.</i> <i>Proceed</i> means “to go forward.” <i>The judge's decision allowed the lawsuit to proceed.</i>
prejudice, prejudiced	<i>Prejudice</i> is a noun that is sometimes used incorrectly in place of <i>prejudiced</i> , an adjective. <i>His outrageous views were highly prejudiced [not prejudice].</i>

principal, principle	<i>Principal</i> has several meanings: “a chief or head, particularly of a school,” “a capital sum of money,” or “first or highest in rank, importance, or value.” <i>Principle</i> refers to a “rule of conduct or action.” <i>The school principal outlined the principles behind the code of conduct. The small principal in their savings account is not their principal source of income.</i>
raise, rise	<i>Raise</i> means “to lift” or “to grow” and always takes an object. <i>She raised her hand to tell the story of how she raised three children on her own. Rise</i> means “to get up” and does not take an object. <i>Like the sun, the moon rises in the eastern sky.</i>
set, sit	<i>Set</i> means “to put” or “to place” and takes an object. <i>He set the groceries on the table. Sit</i> means “to be seated” and does not take an object. <i>She sits in the same seat for every class.</i>
than, then	<i>Than</i> is used to compare. <i>I am older than you. Then</i> indicates time. <i>Do your homework, and then we’ll get pizza.</i>
that, which	<i>That</i> is used to introduce information essential to the meaning of a sentence. <i>The phone that I bought five years ago no longer charges fully. Which</i> is most often used to introduce information that is nonessential to the meaning of a sentence. <i>My iPhone 7, which I bought five years ago, no longer charges fully.</i> (For more on nonessential and essential information, see Editing Focus: Commas with Nonessential and Essential Information.)
that, who, which	Use <i>that</i> and <i>which</i> to refer to things and most animals. <i>The tiger that had escaped was found. Use who</i> to refer to people and animals with names. <i>Doctors who treated COVID-19 patients were often called heroes.</i>
their, there, they’re	<i>Their</i> is a possessive pronoun. <i>There</i> indicates place. <i>They’re</i> is a contraction of “they are.” <i>The Smiths rescued their missing cat from that tree over there; they’re happy to have him back.</i>
to, too, two	<i>To</i> can be a preposition indicating direction. <i>I am going to the pool.</i> Or it can be part of an infinitive (the <i>to</i> form of a verb). <i>I like to swim. Too</i> means “also” or “excessively.” <i>Do you like to swim too? Two</i> is a number. <i>I swim two times every week.</i>
unique, unusual	<i>Unique</i> means “one of a kind.” <i>Unusual</i> means “uncommon.” Saying that something is more unique than something else is incorrect because something unique cannot be compared. Use <i>unusual</i> instead when comparing.
weather, whether	<i>Weather</i> refers to the state of the atmosphere. <i>Whether</i> refers to alternatives. <i>Whether we attend the game in person or watch it on TV depends on the weather.</i>
who’s, whose	<i>Who’s</i> is the contraction of “who is” or “who has.” <i>Who’s going to the game? Whose</i> is the possessive form of “who.” <i>Whose backpack is this?</i>
your, you’re	<i>Your</i> is the possessive form of “you.” <i>You’re</i> is the contraction of “you are.” <i>You’re going to be relieved that I found your earring behind the desk.</i>

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Point of View

Point of view refers to the vantage point from which a story, event, report, or other written work is told. The point of view in which you write depends on the genre in which you are writing. For example, you will likely use first person in personal narrative writing. For most academic writing, you'll use third person. (See Editing Focus: Characterization and Point of View for a related discussion of point of view in narrative writing.)

First Person

In the first-person point of view, the writer or narrator (*I, we*) is present in the writing. First person is commonly used in personal writing genres, such as literacy narratives, memoirs, and profiles, as well as in fiction.

After midnight—my paper started, my exam studied for—I leave the library and head back to my apartment. In the dark, I listen closely when I hear footsteps behind me, and I step to the edge of the sidewalk to let a man pass. At my door, I fumble for my key, open the door, turn on the light, and step inside. I am safe, ready to eat, read a bit, and return to my paper.

Second Person

Second-person point of view is used occasionally when an outsider (*you*) becomes part of a story. It should not be confused with a writer or speaker using “you” when directly addressing an audience (*you*). Nor should it be confused with giving instructions (*drive forward, add one cup of brown sugar, close the door*) or with its similar use in textbooks such as this one. However, second person is not considered appropriate in most academic writing.

Writers often slip into second person when they intend to write in third person. In the example below, the writer starts in third person and shifts by accident to second person. To check your sentences for second person, search your documents for *you*, and revise as needed.

Shift from Third Person to Second Person The federal government should raise the minimum wage because it has the responsibility to ensure people earn a wage you can live on. The current minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour, is not enough to pay rent, let alone support a family. Many people cannot lift themselves out of poverty. A higher minimum wage can help you.

Revised The federal government should raise the minimum wage because it has the responsibility to ensure workers earn a wage they can live on. The current minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour, is not enough to pay a single person's rent, let alone support a family. Many people cannot lift themselves out of poverty. A higher minimum wage can help them.

Third Person

The third-person point of view (*he, she, it, they*) is customary for fiction and for academic writing, such as research papers, reports, visual and textual analysis papers, argumentative essays, and the like. Third-person point of view emphasizes the information instead of the writer.

The hikers and other passive trail users argue that mountain bikes should not be allowed on narrow trails traditionally traveled by foot and horse. They point out that the bikes' wide, treaded tires cause erosion, that the bikers' high speeds startle hikers and horses, and that their presence on trails disrupts the tranquility that hikers and bird watchers seek.

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Verbs

In a sentence, a verb expresses an action, an occurrence, or a state of being.

Subject-Verb Agreement

In many sentences, making the verb agree with the subject is straightforward: *I run every day. My sister runs every other day. Sometimes our brother joins us, and all of us run together.* However, subject-verb agreement gets tricky in the following circumstances. (See Editing Focus: Subject-Verb Agreement for more on subject-verb agreement.)

Agreement with Compound Subjects

Two or more subjects joined by *and* take a plural verb in most sentences:

Yoga and meditation are effective activities for relieving stress.

However, when the parts of the subject form a single idea or unit, the verb is singular:

Macaroni and cheese is my favorite meal.

When compound subjects are joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb agrees with the word closest to it:

Either your aunts or your mother remembers where your great-grandmother's grave is located.

Neither the image nor the words convey the message of the advertisement clearly.

Agreement When Words Come between Subject and Verb

The verb must agree with the subject even when words and phrases come between them:

The cost of the flights is prohibitive.

A box of invitations with stamps and return addresses was on the desk.

Agreement When the Verb Comes Before the Subject

The verb must agree with the subject, even when it comes before the subject:

Are James and Tamara at the front of the line?

There were three people ahead of us in line.

Under the table are a newspaper and a magazine.

Agreement with *Everyone* and Other Indefinite Pronouns

An indefinite pronoun is general; it does not refer to a specific person, place, or thing. Most indefinite pronouns take a singular verb, but not all. Those that take a singular verb include *anybody*, *anyone*, *anything*, *each*, *everybody*, *everyone*, *everything*, *nobody*, *no one*, *nothing*, *one*, *somebody*, *someone*, and *something*.

Everyone in the class has prepared a research proposal.

Nobody among the accused suspects admits to the crime.

The following indefinite pronouns take a plural verb: *both*, *few*, *many*, *others*, and *several*.

Several of the students in the class have proposed researching hurricanes.

Both of the suspects deny committing the crime.

Several indefinite pronouns take a singular or plural verb depending on whether the word they refer to is singular or plural. These include *all*, *any*, *enough*, *more*, *most*, *neither*, *none*, and *some*.

Most of the class has proposed researching a topic related to climate change. (*Most* refers to *class*.)

Most of the students in the class have proposed researching a topic related to climate change. (*Most* refers to *students*.)

Neither the students nor the teachers have proposed a field trip. (*Neither/nor* refers to *students* and *teachers*.)

Agreement with Collective Nouns

Collective nouns such as *audience, band, class, crowd, family, group, or team* can take a singular or a plural verb depending on the context. When the group acts as a single unit, which is the most common construction, use a singular verb:

The band rehearses every day.

When the group acts individually, use a plural verb, or to avoid confusion, add the word *members* and use a plural verb.

The jury do not agree on a verdict.

The jury members do not agree on a verdict.

Agreement with Words Such as *News* and *Statistics*

Some nouns that end in *-s*, such as *athletics, economics, measles, news, physics, politics, and statistics* seem plural but are usually regarded as singular in meaning. In most situations, these words take a singular verb:

Day after day, the news was bad.

Statistics fulfills a math requirement for many college majors.

When a word like *economics, politics, or statistics* refers to a specific situation, use a plural verb:

The economics of the situation are hard to comprehend.

Agreement with Titles and Words Used as Words

Whether singular or plural in form, titles and words used as words take singular verbs:

Directed by Spike Lee, *Da 5 Bloods* centers around four veterans returning to Vietnam to find the remains of their squad leader and the fortune they hid together.

Children is the plural form of *child*.

Verb Tense

Tense expresses the time of a verb's action—the past, present, or future. Tense comes naturally in speech, but it can be tricky to control in writing. The following guidelines will help you choose the appropriate tense for your writing and use it consistently. (See Editing Focus: Verb Tense Consistency for a related discussion of consistent verb tense.)

Verb Tense in Narrative Writing

Personal experience stories, such as literacy narratives, memoirs, personal essays, or profiles, can be written in either the past or the present tense. Although the most natural way to tell a story about a past experience is to write in the past tense, the present tense can draw readers into the story and give the illusion that the experience is happening as they are reading it. In the following examples, the writer describes driving with her Native American grandfather to a tribal conference. Notice the difference between the past and present tense.

Narrative Writing Using Past Tense I sat silently next to Grandfather and watched him slowly tear the thin white paper from the tip of the cigarette. He gathered the tobacco in one hand and drove the van with the other. I memorized his every move as he went through the motions of the prayer, which ended when he blew the tobacco out the window and into the wind.

Narrative Writing Using Present Tense I sit silently next to Grandfather and watch him slowly tear the thin white paper from the tip of the cigarette. He gathers the tobacco in one hand and drives the van with the other. I memorize his every move as he goes through the motions of the prayer, which ends when he blows the tobacco out the window and into the wind.

Verb Tense in Academic Writing

Academic disciplines differ in their tense preferences for signal phrases used in formal essays and reports to introduce and discuss evidence. A signal phrase is a verb that tells readers the words or ideas that follow come from another source. Signal phrases include words such as *argues*, *asserts*, *claims*, *comments*, *denies*, *discusses*, *implies*, *proposes*, *says*, *shows*, *states*, and *suggests*. (For more discussion and a more extensive list of signal phrases, see Editing Focus: Integrating Sources and Quotations.)

acknowledges	declares	observes
admits	endorses	poses
agrees	explains	posits
argues	finds	proposes
asserts	grants	reports
believes	illustrates	reveals
claims	implies	says
comments	insists	shows
concedes	maintains	states
concludes	notes	suggests
thinks	writes	

Table H5

If you are writing for a course in English, a foreign language, or a related discipline and using MLA documentation style, you generally will use the present tense or the present perfect tense in signal phrases.

Present Tense The film critic Manohla Dargis claims that . . .

Present Perfect Tense The film critic Manohla Dargis has claimed that . . .

When you are analyzing a work of literature, common practice is to use the literary present tense in discussing both the work of the author and the action that occurs in the work:

Being cool is key to the lives of the speakers in “We Real Cool,” a poem by Gwendolyn Brooks. Brooks uses short lines and stanzas in which speakers list what it means to be cool: dropping out of school, staying out late, playing pool, drinking, carousing, and so on. Being cool unites the speakers, and they celebrate their lifestyle, even as they acknowledge in the final line of the poem that their coolness may cause them to die young.

(For more on literary present tense, see Editing Focus: Literary Works Live in the Present.)

If you are writing for a course in history, art history, philosophy, religion, or a related discipline in the humanities, you generally will use the present tense or the present perfect tense in signal phrases.

Present Tense The historian Eduardo Galeano argues that . . .

Present Perfect Tense The historian Eduardo Galeano has argued that . . .

On the other hand, if you are writing for a course in the social sciences, such as psychology, political science, or economics; a course in the natural sciences, such as biology, chemistry, or physics; or a technical field such as engineering, you will generally use past tense or present perfect tense for most signal phrases.

Past Tense The study found that individuals who identify as transgender . . . (past tense)

Present Perfect Tense: Several recent studies have found that individuals who identify as transgender . . .

Verb Tense Consistency

Whichever tense you choose, be consistent throughout a piece of writing. You may need to shift tenses to

indicate actual changes in time, but the governing tense should remain constant. (See Editing Focus: Verb Tense Consistency for a related discussion of consistent verb tense.)

Inconsistent Blinking back tears, I clutched my two-year-old son to my chest, kiss his forehead, and will gather my things. It is 2003, and I was headed to active duty in Iraq with the National Guard. I hug my spouse, my mom, my dad, my brothers, and my grandma. Then I turn and climbed on the bus that takes me to a future that, in all honesty, was terrifying to me.

Consistent Blinking back tears, I clutched my two-year-old son to my chest, kissed his forehead, and gathered my things. It was 2003, and I was headed to active duty in Iraq with the National Guard. I hugged my spouse, my mom, my dad, my brothers, and my grandma. Then I turned and climbed on the bus that would take me to a future that, in all honesty, was terrifying to me.

Irregular Verbs

Most verbs are regular and form the past tense and past participle forms by adding *-d* or *-ed*.

I bake/I baked/I have baked

She discovers/she discovered/she has discovered

They shovel/they shoveled/they have shoveled

Some verbs, however, are irregular and form the past tense and participle in another way. Below are a few of the approximately 200 irregular verbs in English. For a comprehensive list of irregular verbs, see this list.

begin/began/begun

bring/brought/brought

buy/bought/bought

do/did/done

drive/drove/driven

fall/fell/fallen

go/went/gone

have/had/had

is/was/been

lead/led/led

hide/hid/hidden

ring/rang/rung

run/ran/run

see/saw/seen

sing/sang/sung

sit/sat/sat

shake/shook/shaken

speak/spoke/spoken

take/took/taken

wear/wore/worn

write/wrote/written

Verb Mood

Verbs have three moods: indicative, imperative, and subjunctive. Mood can be said to indicate a speaker's attitude or intention.

Indicative Mood

Use the indicative mood to state a fact or an opinion or to ask a question:

Thousands of women currently serve in the military.

I think college tuition is expensive.

The weather was awful for much of the winter but will improve soon.

Have you submitted your request for time off?

Imperative Mood

Use the imperative mood to give instructions and commands. The subject, *you*, is often implied but not stated:

(You) Use the online form to request time off.

(You) Submit your request for time off by Friday.

You must submit your request on time.

Subjunctive Mood

Use the subjunctive mood to express wishes, suggestions, or requirements or to state hypothetical or unlikely conditions:

The rules state that every member be present for the vote.

I wish you were here to see the exhibition.

The governing board could be more effective if all members were active.

Students who failed the class would have passed had they completed all assignments.

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Pronouns

A Pronoun is a word used in place of a noun. Some pronouns are *I, you, he, she, we, they, who*, and *everyone*. The noun a pronoun replaces or refers to is its antecedent. (See Editing Focus: Pronouns for a related discussion of pronouns.)

Pronoun Reference

A pronoun should refer to a clear and specific antecedent.

Clear Antecedent All nine members of the school board voted in favor of changing the district's mascot. They explained their reasoning during the meeting. (*They* refers clearly to *members*.)

Unclear Antecedent In Smith's essay, she explains why many American families have less money saved and more debt than families in the 1970s.

Revised In her essay, Smith explains why many American families have less money saved and more debt than families in the 1970s.

Problems with pronoun reference occur in the following situations:

Vague *this, that, which, or it*. The pronouns *this, that, which*, and *it* should not refer to words expressing an idea, an event, or a situation.

Vague Reference The school board voted to change the district's mascot without holding special meetings with the public. This made some community members angry. (*Are community members angry about the vote or about the lack of special meetings?*)

Revised The school board voted to change the district's mascot without holding special meetings with the public. Their decision to avoid public discussion before the vote made some community members angry.

Indefinite *it, they, or you*. The pronouns *it, they*, and *you* should have a definite antecedent in a sentence.

Indefinite *it* Crittenden explains that mothers are taken for granted and disrespected, even though our society calls it the most important job in the world.

Revised Crittenden explains that mothers are taken for granted and disrespected, even though our society calls motherhood the most important job in the world.

Indefinite *they* Japan has considerable wealth compared to Ireland, but they have a low subjective well-being index.

Revised Japan has considerable wealth compared to Ireland, but Japanese citizens have a low subjective well-being index.

Indefinite you The federal government should raise the minimum wage to ensure you earn a wage you can live on.

Revised The federal government should raise the minimum wage to ensure workers earn a wage they can live on.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

In many sentences, making a pronoun agree with its antecedent is straightforward: My neighbors gave me the keys to their apartment. However, pronoun-antecedent agreement gets tricky in the following circumstances.

Agreement with Generic Nouns and Indefinite Pronouns

Generic nouns refer to a type of person or job someone performs, such as *athlete, child, scientist, doctor, or hair-dresser*. Indefinite pronouns include words such as *anyone, each, everyone, everything, many, most, and none*.

All generic nouns and most indefinite pronouns are singular in meaning. Traditionally, these words took the singular pronouns *he/him/his* because English does not have a gender-neutral third-person pronoun that refers to people: *Everyone has his own opinion* or *A doctor needs to show that he cares about his patients*.

More recently, writers have been replacing *he/him/his* or *his/her* with *they/them/their* when the person's gender is unknown or unimportant or when the person has indicated a preference for non-gendered pronouns:

Everyone has their own opinion.

A doctor needs to show that they care about their patients.

These plural pronouns are increasingly accepted and intentionally used by writers, teachers, and editors. Many prominent publications and style guides indicate that the plural pronoun should replace binary or singular ones in most cases. If using a plural pronoun does not fit the situation (such as in a paragraph where the pronoun *they* is also used several times to indicate a group), try rewriting the sentence in either of these ways:

Remove the pronoun. *Everyone has an opinion.*

Make the antecedent plural. *People have their own opinions. Doctors need to show that they care about their patients.*

Agreement with Collective Nouns

Collective nouns such as *audience, band, class, crowd, family, group, or team* can take a singular or plural pronoun depending on the context. When the group acts as a single unit, which is the most common construction, use a singular pronoun. When the group members act individually, use a plural pronoun. If using the plural sounds awkward, add the word *members* so that the plural is clear.

The band went through its complete playlist.

The band loaded their instruments on the bus. The band members loaded their instruments on the bus.

Pronoun Case

Pronouns have three cases: subjective, objective, and possessive. Pronouns change case according to their function in a sentence.

Subjective case pronouns function as subjects: *I, we, you, he/she/it, they, who/whoever*:

Antonio and I share an apartment downtown in a neighborhood we like.

Objective case pronouns function as objects: *me, us, you, him/her/it, them, whom/whomever*:

The manager gave us a tour of the building.

Possessive case pronouns show ownership: *my/mine, our/ours, your/yours, his/her/hers/its, their/theirs, whose*:

Our friends live in the building too.
Pronoun case gets tricky in the circumstances explained below.

Case in Compound Structures

Compound subjects use subjective case pronouns. Compound objects use objective case pronouns.

Subjective Case Antonio and I have occasional disagreements about the dishes.

Objective Case Occasional disagreements about the dishes come up between Antonio and me.

Case After *than* or *as*

In a comparison, the case of the pronoun indicates which words have been left out:

Antonio cares more about having a clean kitchen than I [do].

Sometimes I think Antonio cares more about a clean kitchen than [he cares about] me.

Who or *Whom*

Use the subjective case *who* in place of a subject—whether it is the subject of the sentence or the subject of a clause:

Who is going to the concert? (subject of sentence)

Give the tickets to whoever can use them. (subject of clause)

She is the person who is best qualified for the job. (subject of clause)

She is the person who I think is best qualified for the job. (subject of clause; the intervening words “I think” don’t change the subject or verb of the clause)

Use the objective case *whom* in place of an object, whether it is the object of a verb, preposition, or clause:

I don’t know whom to ask. (object of verb)

To whom should I give the extra concert tickets? (object of preposition)

Give the tickets to whomever you choose. (object of clause)

We or *us* with a Noun

Use *we* with a subject. Use *us* with an object.

We citizens must vote in order to make our voices heard. (subject)

Legislators need to hear from us citizens. (object)

Case Before or After an Infinitive

Use the objective case before and after an infinitive (the *to* form of a verb: *to run*, *to walk*, *to eat*):

The agent asked Antonio and me to write a review.

We agreed to give him a positive review.

Case Before a Gerund

Generally, use the possessive case of a pronoun before a gerund (the *-ing* form of a verb used as a noun: *gentle snoring*, *elegant dining*):

He grew tired of their partying late into the night.

The rental agreement depends on your approving the lease terms.

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Punctuation

This section covers the major marks of punctuation: commas, apostrophes, semicolons, colons, periods, question marks, exclamation points, dashes, and parentheses. (For using brackets and ellipses, see Quotations.)

Commas

Commas alert readers to brief pauses within sentences.

Commas with Main Clauses

Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*) joining main clauses:

Businesses in the metropolitan area are growing, and unemployment is down.

Many job seekers use online sites like Indeed.com, but a few still send traditional cover letters and résumés through the mail.

A solution must be determined soon, or the problem will continue.

Commas with Introductory Information

Use a comma after an introductory element at the start of a sentence:

After class is over, we should get lunch and review our notes.

Shuffling his feet nervously, he waited for the train.

However, the circumstances have not changed.

Commas with Nonessential and Essential Information

(See Editing Focus: Commas with Nonessential and Essential Information for a related discussion of commas.)

Nonessential information refers to information that is usually *not* necessary to the basic meaning of a sentence. Nonessential information is set off by commas. In the following sentence, the word *original* tells readers which labs no longer meet the needs of the teachers and students. The underlined information adds information but does not change the meaning of the sentence and thus is nonessential to the basic meaning:

The original technical education labs, which were installed 50 years ago, no longer meet the needs of the teachers and students.

Essential information, on the other hand, is necessary to the meaning of the sentence. In following example, the word *original* is no longer part of the sentence; the underlined words convey necessary information about the labs:

The technical education labs that were installed 50 years ago no longer meet the needs of the teachers and students.

You can test whether information is nonessential by removing the information. If the meaning of the sentence is unchanged, the information is nonessential. If the meaning becomes too general or changes, the information is essential. In the sentence above, only the labs installed 50 years ago, as opposed to other labs, no longer meet the needs of teachers and students. Note, also, the use of *which* with nonessential information and *that* with essential information.

Commas Around Nonessential Information

Place commas around information that is not essential to the meaning of a sentence:

The entire technology department, which consists of nine teachers and five staff members, has contributed to a report on the needed updates to the technical education labs. The technology department chair, who teaches welding, wrote the final report. Updates to the labs will begin in June, when school is not in session.

No Commas Around Essential Information

Do not place commas around essential information:

According to the technical education teachers, the labs need equipment that students are likely to encounter in the workplace.

Faculty who teach auto mechanics have requested updates to their lab.

The teachers are concerned about the labs because students are not learning the skills they need.

The amount of lab space that needs to be updated is substantial.

The department has consulted the industry expert Stacy James.

Serial (Oxford or Harvard) Commas

For clarity, use a comma between items in a series:

He studied all the notes, emails, memos, and reports related to the data breach.

Be aware, however, that certain style manuals, such as the *AP Stylebook*, do not use the serial comma, also called the Oxford or Harvard comma.

Commas with Numbers, Dates, Titles with Names, and Addresses

The sign gave the city's population as 122,887.

Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison died on August 5, 2019.

Diana Wong, M.D., is a practicing obstetrician.

The mailing address for the Smithsonian Institution is 600 Maryland Avenue SW, Washington, D.C., 20002.

Common Comma Errors

Misplaced commas can make sentences choppy and obscure the intended meaning.

No Comma after a Subject or a Verb

Anyone who was still at the party, left when the band stopped playing.

The party ended, after the band stopped playing.

No Comma after a Conjunction Connecting Parts of a Compound Subject, Verb, or Object

Some musicians in the band, and many of the guests danced until midnight. (compound subject)

The band stopped after two hours, and took a well-deserved break. (compound verb)

Guests enjoyed the music, and the dancing. (compound object)

No Comma after a Series

The band played 80s rock, punk, and new wave, all night long.

No Comma before an Indirect Quotation

Online reviews say, that the band is the best in the area.

Apostrophes

An apostrophe has two functions. It indicates possession, and it forms contractions.

Apostrophes to Show Possession

Use an apostrophe and -s to indicate possession with a singular noun or an indefinite pronoun:

Jack's brother is my sister's coworker.

In their family, everyone's favorite dessert is ice cream.

If the 's in a singular noun is pronounced, add apostrophe -s:

The business's inconsistent hours caused customers to go elsewhere.

Los Angeles's airport, LAX, is one of the busiest in the United States.

If the 's is not pronounced in a singular noun, some writers choose to add an apostrophe alone; however, MLA, APA, and Chicago use the apostrophe and s in these cases:

David Myers' book, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, was published in 1992.

David Myers's book, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, was published in 1992.

When the noun is plural and ends in -s, place the apostrophe after the final -s:

American households' incomes have grown since the 1970s because more women have entered the workforce.

These families' expenses have risen too.

When the noun is plural and does not end in -s, add an apostrophe and -s:

Social media's effect on contemporary life cannot be underestimated.

During the pandemic, parents' stress grew as they helped with their children's schooling.

Apostrophes to Form Contractions

Contractions are common in speech and in informal writing. Use an apostrophe in contractions:

When I say I can't, I mean I won't.

It's the best option under the circumstances.

You're the best friend anyone can have," Mikayla said.

They're driving to their favorite hangout spot.

Common Apostrophe Errors

Apostrophes are not used to form plural nouns, singular verbs, or personal or relative pronouns.

Not in Plural Nouns

How many hotel rooms [not *room's*] should be reserved for the wedding?

The Lewis and the Riveras [not *Lewis's* and *Rivera's* or *Lewis'* and *Riveras'*] have confirmed their reservations.

Not with Verbs Ending in -s

Nikki runs [not *run's*] every day.
Jamal walks [not *walk's*] to work.

Not with Possessive Personal Pronouns or Relative Pronouns

The book is yours [not *your's*].
The dog was barking and wagging its [not *it's*] tail.
Whose [not *who's*] apartment is this?

Other Punctuation

Semicolons

The semicolon joins main clauses (a clause that contains a subject and a predicate and can stand alone as a sentence). A semicolon is also used to separate items in a series that contain commas.

Use a semicolon to join main clauses that are closely related in meaning and that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*).

Originally built in 1928, the school had been remodeled multiple times; the result was an architectural mashup.

Use a semicolon to join main clauses that are connected by a transitional word or phrase such as *for example, however, therefore, indeed, or after all*:

The governor has proposed increased funding to K-12 public schools; however, the legislature must approve the budget.

Use a semicolon between items in a series that contain internal commas:

The candidates for the award are Michael, who won the essay competition; Sasha, the top debater; and Giselle, who directed several student productions.

Colons

A colon introduces lists, summaries, and quotations. A colon also separates titles from subtitles.

A colon can introduce a list:

Successful athletes have the following qualities: physical ability, mental toughness, commitment, and optimism.

A colon can also introduce a summary or an explanation, which may or may not be a main clause (a clause that contains a subject and a predicate and can stand alone as a sentence):

The team had one goal left before the end of the season: to win the state championship.

Book titles often include a subtitle. A colon separates the subtitle from the title:

Forcing the Spring: Inside the Fight for Marriage Equality

End Punctuation

A sentence ends with a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point.

A period ends declarative (statement) and imperative (command) sentences:

The administration canceled classes.

Do not attempt to drive to school this morning.

A question mark ends a direct question and indicates uncertainty in dates:

Where is Times Square?

She asked, “What time is it?”

An exclamation point ends an emphatic or emotional sentence:

“What a mess!” she blurted out.

“Stop! That hurts!” he shouted.

Dashes and Parentheses

Dashes and parentheses enclose nonessential information in a sentence.

Use a dash or dashes to set off nonessential information, to indicate a contrast or a pause, or to mark a change of direction.

We did not notice the rain at first—it began so softly—but soon we were soaked.

Nothing is as exciting as seeing a snowy owl in a winter farm field—except maybe seeing two snowy owls.

Use parentheses to enclose nonessential information such as explanations, asides, examples, and dates.

He graduated with high honors (*magna cum laude*) and found a job immediately.

The city of Madison (home of the University of Wisconsin) is the state capital of Wisconsin.

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Mechanics

Capital Letters

Use capital letters in the following situations.

Capitalize the first word of a sentence: The weather is rainy today.

Capitalize proper nouns and proper adjectives: Monday, New Orleans, Mexico, Florida, Halloween, United States Constitution, Department of Education, University of Texas, Native American, Islam, Italian, Freudian.

Capitalize titles that precede a person’s name: Dr. Atul Gawande, Senator Tammy Baldwin. [But: Atul Gawande, a doctor; Tammy Baldwin, a senator]

Many online resources, such as this one, list words that should be capitalized. You can also consult a dictionary, such as Merriam-Webster, to determine whether to capitalize a word.

Titles of Works

Titles of books, articles, stories, plays, poems, films, and other works are handled differently depending on the documentation style you are using. The guidelines here follow MLA style.

Capitalization in Titles and Subtitles

Capitalize the first and last words in a title and subtitle and other important words. Do not capitalize articles (*a, an, the*), coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*), or prepositions (*above, with, of, in, through, beyond, under*) unless they are the first or last words in the title or subtitle.

Forcing the Spring: Inside the Fight for Marriage Equality (book)

Judas and the Black Messiah (film)

“American Military Performance in Vietnam: Background and Analysis” (article)

Italics for Titles of Long Works

Use italics for long works that are published, produced, or released separately from other works. These

include books, long poems, plays, movies, videos, published speeches, periodicals (newspapers, magazines, and academic and professional journals), websites, long musical works, works of visual art, computer software, TV or radio programs and series, and pamphlets.

Four Fish: The Future of the Last Wild Food (book)

The New Yorker (periodical)

The Los Angeles Times (newspaper)

American Idiot (album)

Parasite (film)

Saturday Night Live (TV program)

Quotation Marks for Titles of Shorter Works

Put quotation marks around the titles and subtitles of individual shorter works or those that are published or released within larger works. These include articles in periodicals (newspapers, magazines, and academic and professional journals), pages or works on a website, short stories, short poems, essays, songs, episodes of TV or radio programs and series, book chapters, and unpublished speeches.

“Living with a Visionary” (article in a magazine)

“A World of Fields and Fences” (work on a website)

“New York Day Women” (short story)

“Corson’s Inlet” (short poem)

“Return from ISIS” (TV episode)

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Quotations

A quotation reproduces the exact written or spoken words of a person or an author, which may include a group. (See *Editing Focus: Quotations* for a related discussion of direct quotations and *Editing Focus: Integrating Sources and Quotations* for help with integrating quotations from sources.)

Quotations from Written or Spoken Sources

Put quotation marks around quotations from a written or spoken source.

Quoting a Source

When quoting the words of a source, introduce quoted material with a signal phrase so that readers know the source and purpose of the quotation. Place the quotation inside double quotation marks. When using parenthetical citations, note that the sentence period comes *after* the parentheses. If you include the author’s name in your signal phrase, give only the page number in parentheses (first example). If you do not give the author’s name in your signal phrase, give the name in parentheses (second example):

In *Walden*, Thoreau sets forth one individual’s antidote against the “lives of quiet desperation” led by the working class in mid-nineteenth-century America (5).

Walden sets forth one individual’s antidote against the “lives of quiet desperation” led by the working class in mid-nineteenth-century America (Thoreau 5).

Abraham Lincoln wrote “that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” in his Gettysburg Address.

Quoting or Writing Dialogue

When quoting or writing dialogue between speakers, including characters in a fictional work, place their words in double quotation marks, and start a new paragraph for each speaker:

“It’s good to see you—I guess,” Brayden said, as Christopher walked up to the door. “I thought you were gone for good.”

“I missed you too much,” Christopher said, looking down at his feet.

Single and Double Quotation Marks

Put single quotation marks around a quotation within a quotation, using double quotation marks around the full quotation:

Kennedy writes that after a year of teambuilding work, including improvements in communication, evaluation, and small-group quarterly meetings, morale among staff members “improved from ‘average’ to ‘excellent’” (17).

Long Quotations

Introduce a long quotation (four typed lines in MLA style; 40 or more words in APA style) with a signal phrase that names the author and ends with a colon. Indent this entire block quotation one-half inch. If you quote more than one paragraph, indent the first line of each subsequent paragraph one-half inch. Do not use quotation marks. Note that the sentence period comes *before* the parenthetical citation:

In her memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, reformer Jane Addams recounts vivid stories of child labor:

The visits we made in the neighborhood constantly discovered women sewing upon sweatshop work, and often they were assisted by incredibly small children. I remember a little girl of four who pulled out basting threads hour after hour, sitting on a stool at the feet of her Bohemian mother, a little bunch of human misery. For even for that there was no legal redress, for the only child labor law in Illinois, with any provision for enforcement, had been secured by the coal miners’ unions, and was confined to the children employed in the mines. (199)

Poetry Quotations

When you quote one, two, or three lines from a poem, use the following format, putting quotation marks around the line or group of lines and separating the lines with a slash:

The 17th-century writer Aphra Behn (1640–1689) wrote humorous poems about love and heart-break, including “Love’s Power,” which opens with “Love when he Shoots abroad his Darts / Regards not where they light” (1-2).

When you quote more than three lines from a poem, set them off from your text. Indent the quotation one-half inch, and do not use quotation marks. Note that the sentence period comes *before* the parenthetical citation.

In the poem “The Character,” Aphra Behn (1640–1689) uses the familiar alternate rhyme scheme, also known as ABAB:

Such Charms of Youth, such Ravishment
Through all her Form appear’d,
As if in her Creation Nature meant,
She shou’d a-lone be ador’d and fear’d. (1-4)

Altering Quotations

When you alter a quotation to fit into your sentence, you must indicate the change you made.

Ellipses

An ellipsis [. . .] indicates that you have omitted words from a quotation. In the example below, the writer omitted words from the middle of the sentence.

In her memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, reformer Jane Addams explains that there were no enforceable laws against small children helping their mothers with sweatshop sewing work, and that “the only child labor law in Illinois . . . had been secured by the coal miners’ unions, and was confined to the children employed in the mines” (199).

If you omit the end of a sentence or a complete sentence, include the sentence period:

The author explains as follows: “Damage to the Broca’s area of the brain can affect a person’s ability to comprehend spoken language. . . . A person may understand speech relatively well when the sentence grammar is simple and the content familiar but may struggle when the grammar and content are more complex” (Hollar-Zwick 45).

Brackets

Use brackets [] to indicate a change you have made to a quotation:

Abruzzi cited the study, noting that “[t]he results provide hope to patients [with muscular dystrophy].”

Punctuating Quotations

Periods

Place the period inside quotation marks if no source is cited:

The meteorologist said, “Today’s weather will be sunny and mild.”

If you are citing a source in parentheses, place the quotation marks at the end of the quotation, followed by the citation and the sentence period:

In *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, Jane Addams recalls vivid images of child labor: “I remember a little girl of four who pulled out basting threads hour after hour, sitting on a stool at the feet of her Bohemian mother, a little bunch of human misery” (199).

(See **Long Quotations** and **Poetry Quotations** above for exceptions to this rule.)

Commas

Commas go *inside* quotation marks:

“Tomorrow’s weather will be cool and rainy,” the meteorologist said.

Colons and Semicolons

Colons and semicolons go *outside* quotation marks:

The sign read “Closed”: No more films would be shown at the theater. (Note: Use a capital letter if a complete sentence follows the colon.)

Question Marks and Exclamation Points

Question marks and exclamation points go *inside* quotation marks if they are part of the quotation:

“Would you like a sandwich?” asked Adelaide.

Question marks and exclamation points go *outside* quotation marks if they are not part of the quotation:

“I can’t believe you haven’t read “The Lottery”!”

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Index and Guide to Documentation

Although formal differences exist among the conventions for documenting sources, the underlying principle of all documentation systems is the same: When borrowing words, facts, or ideas from someone else, writers must indicate that the material is borrowed. They do this by providing a citation in the text of their paper that points readers to detailed publication information about the source of the material, usually at the end of the paper but sometimes in footnotes. The following examples are in MLA style:

Citation in the Text

Describing Martin Luther King, Jr.’s visit to India, Isabel Wilkerson notes that King was taken aback by the suggestion that Black Americans were the equivalent of the Dalits in the Indian caste system (22).

Works-Cited Entry

Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. Penguin, 2020.

Documentation Styles by Discipline

Each discipline has its own authority or authorities that provide rules about issues such as spelling of technical terms, preferred punctuation, and editing mechanics, as well as documentation style. In addition, if you write for publication in a magazine, professional journal, book, or website, the publisher will have a “house” style, which may vary in some details from the conventions listed in the authoritative guidelines for the discipline in which you are writing. Below are the sources of style manuals for various disciplines. Always check with your instructor about which style to use in a class.

Discipline	Documentation Style
languages, literature, philosophy, and some arts	Modern Language Association (MLA)
social sciences, education, and some other sciences	American Psychological Association (APA)
history, religion, fine arts, and business	Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)
life sciences	Council of Science Editors (CSE)
chemistry	American Chemical Society (ACS)
physics	American Institute of Physics (AIP)
journalism	Associated Press (AP)
medicine	American Medical Association (AMA)
law	Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation

Table H6

Index to APA Documentation Models

The models, listed numerically, provide examples of in-text citations and reference entries (APA). The models themselves are located in Handbook Section 14 (H14).

In-Text Citation Models (APA)

One author

Two authors

Three or more authors

Authors with the same last name

Organization, government, corporation, or association as author

Unknown author

Two or more works in the same citation

Work with no page numbers

Source quoted in another source (indirect quotation)

Entire work

Personal communication

Format of the References List (APA)

Authors (APA)

One author

Two authors

Three to twenty authors

Work by an organization, a government, a corporation, or an association

Unknown author

Two or more works by the same author

Articles in Journals, Magazines, and Newspapers (APA)

Basic format for an article in an academic journal

Article in an academic journal

With DOI

With URL

Without DOI or URL

Article in a magazine

Database

Print

Online

Article in a newspaper

Database or print

Online

Blog post

Published interview

Editorial or letter to the editor

Review

Books and Parts of Books (APA)

Basic entry for a book

Print book or e-book

Book, anthology, or collection with an editor

Article in an edited book, anthology, or collection

Translated or reprinted book
 Revised edition
 One volume of a multivolume work
 Report or publication by a government agency or other organization
 Conference paper

Web Sources (APA)

Basic format for a page or work on a website
 Page or work on a website
 Wiki

Social Media (APA)

Social media post
 Online forum post

Video, Audio, and Other Media Sources (APA)

Film

Online video
 Television programs
 TV series
 TV episode
 Music recording
 Radio
 Podcast
 Painting or other visual artwork
 Map, photograph, or other visual
 Video game, software, or app
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APA Documentation and Format

Disciplines in the social sciences—psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, social work, and often education—use the APA name-and-date system of documentation. APA style highlights authors and dates of publication because timeliness of published material is of primary importance in these disciplines. The following are general features of APA style:

All material borrowed from sources is cited in the text of a paper by the author's name, date of publication, and page numbers (if available).

A list of references at the end of a paper provides full publication data for each source cited in the text of the paper.

The instruction in this section follows the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th edition (2020). For more information on APA style, visit this site. For examples of student papers in the text-book using APA documentation style, see Section 4 in Chapters 6, 8, and 15.

In-Text Citation Models (APA)

In-text citations feature author names, dates of publication, and page numbers, depending on what information is available. The Index located in H12 provides a listing of the models that are included below.

75. One author

When you quote, paraphrase, or summarize a source, include the last name of the source's author, if known, in a signal phrase or in parentheses at the end of your sentence. Give the publication date after the author's name. Provide the page or pages on which the original material appeared preceded by *p.* or *pp.* See Spotlight on ... Citation.

According to Thomas (1974), many bacteria become dangerous only if they manufacture exotoxins (p. 76).

Many bacteria become dangerous only if they manufacture exotoxins (Thomas, 1974, p. 76).

If you cite two or more works by the same author, published in the same year, use letters after the year to distinguish them: (Gallivan, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

76. Two authors

Smith and Hawkins (1990) confirmed that bacteria producing exotoxins are harmful to humans (p. 17).

The study confirmed that bacteria producing exotoxins are harmful to humans (Smith & Hawkins, 1990, p. 17).

77. Three or more authors

For works with more than two authors, give the last name of the first author followed by "et al.":

The results indicate that alcohol use rose during the period of the study (Dominic et al., 2021, p. 16).

78. Authors with the same last name

When authors of different sources have the same last name, include their initials:

Since the legalization of marijuana for recreational use, frequent use among adults has risen (J. T. Greene, 2019, p. 21; M. Greene, 2020, p. 30).

When authors of the same source have the same name, do not include their initials: (Kim & Kim, 2018, p. 47).

79. Organization, government, corporation, or association as author

When citing a well-known organization, government agency, corporation, or association, introduce an abbreviation of the name in the first reference and use it in subsequent references:

On multiple occasions, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA, 2018) reported that formal efforts to reintegrate combat veterans into civilian life were beneficial.

80. Unknown author

When the author of a work is unknown, use the work's title in a signal phrase, or put the title in parentheses. Put quotation marks around article titles, and put book or journal titles in italics:

In a pointed editorial, *The New York Times* argued that college athletic departments should support

public health by canceling sports seasons until athletes and the public were vaccinated (“Don’t Let the Games Begin,” 2020).

In its pointed editorial, “Don’t Let the Games Begin” (2020), *The New York Times* argued that college athletic departments should support public health by canceling sports seasons until athletes and the public were vaccinated.

81. Two or more works in the same citation

When you cite more than one work in parentheses, put the works in the same order that they appear in your list of references, and use a semicolon between them:

Americans who resisted or ignored civil defense were later cast as heroic people who chose not to build fallout shelters or as marginalized people who could not afford them (Garrison, 2006; Mechling & Mechling, 1991).

82. Work with no page numbers

If the work you are citing has no page numbers, help readers find the quotation by providing a heading, a section name, and/or a paragraph number (using the abbreviation *para.* or *paras.*):

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2019), research on PTSD includes gene research and brain imaging technologies (Next Steps for PTSD Research section, para. 6).

For audio or visual works, give the time stamp of the beginning of the source: (Wong, 2020, 34:16).

83. Source quoted in another source (indirect quotation)

When a quotation or any information in your source is originally from another source, try to track down the original source. If you cannot find the original, use the words “as cited in”:

The research collective, which has studied global health including access to food, sounded the alarm about a potential “worldwide food crisis” in the early 2000s (as cited in Sing, 2018, p. 32).

84. Entire work

When you cite an entire work, you do not need to give a page number. See Models 79 and 80. When you mention an entire website, link to the website directly or give the URL. You do not need to include the website in the references list:

The Department of Veterans Affairs maintains a website for PTSD, which contains resources and help for families and healthcare providers as well as veterans (<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>).

85. Personal communication

Because personal communications such as emails, letters, personal interviews, and the like cannot be found by other researchers, cite them in the text only:

During our interview, Morales explained that she had quit her job to help her children with their schooling (personal communication, January 4, 2021).

APA References

Each source cited in the text of your paper refers readers to the list of references, a complete list of all the sources you quoted, paraphrased, or summarized. Every source cited in the text of your paper must be included in the references list, and every source in the references list must be cited in the text of your paper.

Format of the References List (APA)

After the last page of your paper, start a new page with the centered, boldfaced title **References** at the top. Create an entry for each source using the following guidelines and examples.

Begin each entry at the left margin, and indent subsequent lines one-half inch. (In Microsoft Word, you can also highlight the entire page when you are finished and select “Hanging” from the Special options on the Indentation section of the Paragraph menu.)

Alphabetize the entries according to authors’ last names. If two or more authors have the same last name, alphabetize by the initials of their first and middle names. Alphabetize sources with unknown authors by the first word of the title, excluding *a*, *an*, or *the*.

Double-space the entire page.

Core Elements (APA)

Each entry in the list of references consists of core elements:

Author. *Who is responsible for the work?*

Date of publication. *When was the work published?*

Title. *What is the work called?*

Publication information. *Where can the work be found so that others can consult it?*

Sometimes core elements are unknown or missing. In such cases, the entry in the reference list entry must be adapted:

No author? If the source has no known author, cite it by the title. See Models 90 and 98.

No date of publication? If the source has no publication date, write *n.d.* instead of the publication date. See Model 110.

No title? If the work has no title, put a brief description in square brackets.

No publication information? If the source is a personal communication that only you have a record of, cite the source in your text, not in the references, because it cannot be retrieved by other readers. See “Personal communication” above.

A note on retrieval dates: APA recommends adding a retrieval date for sources that are not archived or are likely to change over time, such as a developing news story. If you add a retrieval date, place it at the end of the references entry in this format: “Retrieved April 4, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com>.” Ask your instructors if they require retrieval dates.

Authors (APA)

Give the author’s last name, comma, and first and middle initials if available. For works with more than one author, put a comma and an ampersand (&) before the final author’s name, even when there are two authors.

86. One author

Milanovic, B. (2016). *Global inequality: A new approach for the age of globalization*. Harvard UP.

87. Two authors

Kristoff, N. D., & WuDunn, S. (2009). *Half the sky: Turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide*. Alfred A. Knopf.

88. Three to twenty authors

Provide last names and initials for up to and including 20 authors.

Barlow, D. H., Durand, V. M., & Hofmann, S. G. (2017). *Abnormal psychology: An integrative approach*. Cengage Learning.

For more than 20 authors, include the first 19 authors' names, insert an ellipsis, and then add the final author's name.

89. Work by an organization, a government, a corporation, or an association

Works published by organizations often have the same author and publisher, which is frequently the title of a website. When the author and publisher are *not* the same, give the author and the title of the website:

National Institute of Mental Health. (2020). *Post-traumatic stress disorder*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>.

When the author and the publisher or title of the website *are* the same, omit the latter:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, February 17). Variants of the virus. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/index.html>.

90. Unknown author

If no author is given, start with the title:

The most beautiful battalion in the army. (1968). *Grunt magazine*, 12-15.

91. Two or more works by the same author

List two or more works by the same author (or the same author team listed in the same order) chronologically by year in the reference list, with the earliest first. Arrange works published in the same year alphabetically by title, placing lowercase letters after the publication dates:

Bandura, A. (1969). *Principles of behavior modification*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Bandura, A. (1977a). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84, 191-215.

Bandura, A. (1977b). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.

Articles in Journals, Magazines, and Newspapers (APA)

Articles, reviews, editorials, and other short works are published in journals, newspapers, and magazines, and they appear in print, on databases, and on websites (though often through a paywall). As a student, you are likely to access many articles and other short research sources primarily through databases available through your library.

92. Basic format for an article in an academic journal

Author's Last Name, Initials. (Date of Publication). Title of article. *Title of Journal*, Volume (number), Pages. DOI or URL.

Author. Give the last name, a comma, and the initials of the first name and middle name (if available). Do not list an author's professional title, such as *Dr.* or *PhD.* End with a period.

Date of Publication. In parentheses, give the year of publication, a comma, and the month or season of publication. End with a period outside the closing parentheses.

Title of the article. Give the full title and any subtitle, separating them with a colon. For articles and book

chapters, do not use quotation marks or italicize the title. Capitalize only the first word of the title and the first word of a subtitle and any proper nouns.

Title of the journal. Put the journal title in italics. Capitalize all significant words in the title. End the title with a comma.

Volume and issue numbers. Italicize the volume number, and follow it with the issue number in parentheses (not italicized). End with a comma.

Page numbers. Give inclusive page numbers without *p.* or *pp.* End with a period.

DOI or URL. Provide a DOI (if available) or a URL. Include “http://,” and do not add a period at the end. The preferred format for a DOI is “https://doi.org/” followed by the number. You may encounter older formats for DOI; if so, change them to this format. If the article is online and does not have a DOI, give the URL instead.

93. Article in an academic journal

With DOI

Gawande, A. A. (2017, April). It’s time to adopt electronic prescriptions for opioids. *Annals of Surgery*, 265(4), 693-94. <https://doi.org/10.1097/SLA.0000000000002133>

With URL

Squires, S. (2019). Do generations differ when it comes to green values and products? *Electronic Green Journal*, 42. <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6f91213q>

The online journal in the example numbers issues only, so no volume number or page numbers are given.

Without DOI or URL

Lowther, M. A. (1977, Winter). Career change in mid-life: Its impact on education. *Innovator*, 8(7), 9-11.

An older journal article you consult in print may not have a DOI. In that case, end with the page numbers.

94. Article in a magazine

For a magazine article you read on a database or online, give the DOI if the article has one; otherwise give the URL. For a magazine article you consulted in print, end the entry after the page number unless a DOI is provided.

Database

Sneed, A. (2017, September 19). Giant shape-shifters. *Scientific American*, 317(4), 20. <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1017-20>

Print

Sneed, A. (2017, September 19). Giant shape-shifters. *Scientific American*, 317(4), 20.

Online

Myszkowski, S. (2018, October 10). On the trail of missing American Indian women. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/10/trail-missing-american-indian-women/571657/>

95. Article in a newspaper

For a newspaper article that you read on a database or in print, end the entry after the page numbers. For a newspaper article that you read online, give the URL instead of page numbers.

Database or print

Krueger, A. (2019, November 27). When mom knows best, on Instagram. *The New York Times*, B1-B4.

Online

Healy, J. (2021, January 12). Tribal elders are dying from the pandemic, causing a cultural crisis for American Indians. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/12/us/tribal-elders-native-americans-coronavirus.html>

96. Blog post

Blazich, F. A. (2021, February 5). The cold morning of the day after. *Smithsonian Voices*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-history/2021/02/05/cold-morning-day-after/>

97. Published interview

Beard, A. (2013, May). Life's work: An interview with Maya Angelou. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2013/05/maya-angelou>

98. Editorial or letter to the editor

An editorial may or may not have an author's name attached to it. If it does, give the author's name first. If it does not, start with the title. In both situations, add *Editorial* or *Letter to the Editor* in square brackets after the title.

For better elections, copy the neighbors [Editorial]. (2021, February 16). *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/for-better-elections-copy-the-neighbors-11613518448>

99. Review

To cite a review of a book, film, television show, or other work, begin with the reviewer's last name, followed by the first and middle (if any) initials. In parentheses, add the year, followed by the title, month, and day of the review. Then in square brackets, add *Review of the* and the type of work being reviewed, followed by the title and the name of the author, director, or creator and their role. Then give the publication in which the review appeared, ending with a period, and the URL:

Girish, D. (2021, February 18). Refocusing the lens on race and gender [Review of the film *Test Pattern*, by S. M. Ford, Dir.]. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/18/movies/test-pattern-review.html>

Books and Parts of Books (APA)

Use the following guidelines for books and parts of books, such as a selection from an anthology, a chapter in a collection, a published conference paper, and so on.

100. Basic entry for a book

Author's Last Name, Initials. (Year of Publication). *Title of book*. Publisher.

Author. Give the last name, a comma, and the initials of the first name and middle name (if available). Do not list an author's professional title, such as *Dr.* or *PhD.* End with a period.

Year of publication. In parentheses, give the year of publication, ending with a period outside the closing parentheses.

Title of the book. Put the book's title in italics. Give the full title and any subtitle, separating them with a colon. Capitalize only the first word of the title and the first word of a subtitle and any proper nouns.

Publisher. Give the publisher's name as shown on the work, omitting words such as *Inc.* or *Company*.

101. Print book or e-book

Aronson, L. (2019). *Elderhood: Redefining aging, transforming medicine, reimagining life*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Use the same format for an e-book when the content is the same. If you consult a book that has a DOI,

provide it after the publisher, using the format “https://doi.org/” followed by the number. (If you encounter older formats for DOI, change them to this format.) If you read a book online, give the URL.

102. Book, anthology, or collection with an editor

Schaefer, C. E., & Reid, S. E. (Eds.). (2001). *Game play: Therapeutic use of childhood games* (2nd ed.). Wiley.

103. Article or chapter in an edited book, an anthology, or a collection

Burks, H. F. (2001). Using the imagine game as a projective technique. In C. E. Schaefer & S. E. Reid (Eds.), *Game play: Therapeutic use of childhood games* (2nd ed., pp. 39-66). Wiley.

104. Translated or reprinted book

Freud, S. (1950). *The interpretation of dreams* (A. A. Brill, Trans.). Modern Library. (Original work published 1900)

105. Revised edition

Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (2019). *The elements of style* (4th ed.). Pearson.

106. One volume of a multivolume work

Waldrep, T. (Ed.). (1988). *Writers on writing* (Vol. 2). Random House.

107. Report or publication by a government agency or other organization

National Institute of Mental Health. (2020). *Post-traumatic stress disorder*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, National Institutes of Health.

If you consulted the publication online, include the URL after the publisher. See Model 89.

108. Conference paper

Killi, S., & Morrison, A. (2021). Could the food market pull 3D printing appetites further? In J.D. da Silva Bartolo, F. M. da Silva, S. Jaradat, & H. Bartolo (Eds.), *Industry 4.0—shaping the future of the digital world: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Sustainable & Smart Manufacturing* (pp. 197-203). CRC Press.

Web Sources (APA)

Use the following guidelines for works published *only* online that do not have an overarching publication, such as a journal, newspaper, or magazine.

109. Basic format for a page or work on a website

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Publication Date). Title of work. *Title of website*. URL.

Author. Give the last name, a comma, and the initials of the first name and middle name (if available). Do not list an author's professional title, such as *Dr.* or *PhD.* End with a period.

Date of publication. In parentheses, give the year of publication and a comma, followed by the month and the day. End with a period outside the closing parentheses.

Title of the work. Put the title of the work in italics. Give the full title and any subtitle, separating them with a colon. Capitalize only the first word of the title and the first word of a subtitle and any proper nouns.

Title of the website. Give the title of the website and end with a period. If the author and the website title are the same, you can omit the title of the site.

URL. Copy and paste the URL from your browser window.

110. Page or work on a website

Shetterly, M. L. (2020, February 24). *Katherine Johnson biography*. NASA. <https://www.nasa.gov/content/katherine-johnson-biography>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.). *What is PTSD?* National Center for PTSD. <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/what/index.asp>

If the source you are citing has no author listed, start with the title. See Model 90.

111. Wiki

Coronavirus. (2021, February 22). In *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus>

Social Media (APA)

When you cite a social media post as a source, use labels in square brackets to indicate the type of post and whether images were attached to it.

112. Social media post

Holler, J. [@holleratcha]. (2020, November 2). *Everyone get out and vote tomorrow!* [Tweet]. Twitter. <http://twitter.com/holleratcha/status/1270432672544784384>

Death Valley National Park. (2021, February 23). *What does it mean to protect something you love?* [Images attached] [Status update]. Facebook. www.facebook.com/DeathValleyNPS/posts/4108808255810092.

113. Online forum post

National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA]. (2020, November 14). *We're engineers, astronaut trainers, and other specialists working to launch humans on commercial spacecraft from U.S. soil! Ask us anything about the NASA SpaceX Crew-1 mission!* [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/space/comments/jsx91g/were_engineers_astronaut_trainers_and_other/

Video, Audio, and Other Media Sources (APA)

When you cite nonprint sources, such as visual and multimedia sources, use labels in square brackets to indicate the type of source, such as a film, a TV episode, a song, a painting, a photograph, and so on.

114. Film

When you cite a film that you saw in a theater or streamed, you do not need to specify how you watched it.
Jenkins, B. (Director). (2016). *Moonlight* [Film]. A24.

115. Online video

For an online video, give the name of the person or organization that uploaded it as the author:
TED. (2017, February 27). *Sue Klebold: My son was a Columbine shooter. This is my story* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXlnrFpCu0c>

116. Television program

TV series

Schur, M., Miner, D., Sackett, M., & Goddard, D. (Executive Producers). (2016-20). *The good place* [TV series]. Fremulon; 3 Arts Entertainment; Universal Television; NBC.

TV episode

Mande, J. (Writer), & Benz, P. (Director). (2016, September 29). Jason Mendoza (Season 1, Episode 4) [TV series episode]. In M Schur, D. Miner, M. Sackett, & D. Goddard (Executive Producers), *The good place*. Fremulon; 3 Arts Entertainment; Universal Television; NBC.

117. Music recording

For an artist whose music is available only through a website, include the URL. If the artist's music is available on multiple platforms, you do not need to specify how you accessed it.

Album

Prince. (1984). *Purple rain* [Album]. Warner Brothers.

Song

The Supremes. (1964). Baby love [Song]. On *Where did our love go*. Motown.

118. Radio

Overby, J. (Host). (2021, January 9). *The road to higher ground: World music with African roots and more*. WPR.

119. Podcast

McEvers, K. (Host). (2019, November 7). This is not a joke (Season 9, Episode 9) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Embedded*. NPR.

120. Painting or other visual artwork

For a work of visual art, give the location of the museum or gallery. If you saw the work online, add the URL after the location:

Rivera, D. (1932-33). *Detroit industry murals* [Painting]. Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI, United States.

Basquiat, J.-M. (1983). *Untitled* [Painting]. *Museum of Modern Art*, New York, NY, United States.
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/63997?artist_id=370&page=1&sov_referrer=artist

121. Map, photograph, infographic, or other visual

If the work you consulted names an author, start with the author. If there is no author, start with the title and a description of the work in square brackets, such as [Map], [Photograph], [Infographic], [Diagram], or another appropriate descriptor:

Expedition of Lewis and Clark [Map]. (2018). *National Park Service*. <http://nps.gov/subjects/travellewisandclark/map.htm>

122. Video game, software, or app

Benzies, L., & Sarwar, I. (2017). *Grand theft auto V* [Video game]. Rockstar Games. <https://www.rockstargames.com/games/V>

APA Paper Format

Follow your instructor's formatting guidelines or those indicated here. For sample papers showing APA paper format, see this site.

Title page. Give the title of the paper in bold, centered. Then, on separate lines and not boldfaced, give your name, academic department, name of your college or university, course number and name, instructor's name, and the due date, all centered. Repeat only the title on the first page of the text of your paper.

Margins. Use one-inch margins on all sides.

Spacing. Double-space throughout the paper, including the references page.

Paragraph format. Indent paragraphs one-half inch.

Headings. Give headings for the major sections of your paper, such as *Method*, *Results* or *Findings*, and *Discussion*. Put the headings in bold and center them on the page. Put the next level of headings in bold and place them flush left.

Page numbers. Start numbering on the title page of your paper and continue to the end of the references page. Place page numbers in the upper-right corner.

Long quotations. See Quotations for how to cite long quotations.

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Further Reading

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th ed., American Psychological Association, 2020.

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Works Cited

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Behn, Aphra. "The Character." *The Works of Aphra Behn*. Edited by Montague Summers, vol. 6, *Project Gutenberg*, 2014, www.gutenberg.org/files/45777/45777-h/45777-h.htm#Page_113.

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Da 5 Bloods. Directed by Spike Lee. Netflix, 2020.

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Garrison, Dee. *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never Worked*. Oxford UP, 2006.

Hollar-Zwick, Carol. *Me, Hemorrhage: Recovery from a Ruptured Arteriovenous Malformation*. Amazon, 2020.

The King James Bible. Project Gutenberg, 1989, www.gutenberg.org/files/10/10-h/10-h.htm#The_Gospel_According_to_Saint_Matthew.

Konish, Lorie. "Some Retirees Get by on Just Social Security. Experts Disagree on How Many." *CNBC*, 10 Feb. 2020, www.cnbc.com/2020/02/10/some-retirees-live-on-social-security-experts-disagree-on-how-many.html.

Kristoff, Nicholas D., and Sheryl WuDunn. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Mechling, Elizabeth Walker, and Jay Mechling. "The Campaign for Civil Defense and the Struggle to Naturalize the Bomb." *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, vol. 55, no. 2, Spring 1991, pp. 105-33.

Myers, David. "The Funds, Friends, and Faith of Happy People." *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 1, Jan. 2000, pp. 56-67.

"This Is Who We Are." *U.S. Forest Service*, United States Department of Agriculture, Mar. 2019, <http://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/This-is-Who-We-Are.pdf>.

Thomas, Lewis. *Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher*. Penguin Books, 1978.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden. Project Gutenberg*, 1995, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/205/205-h/205-h.htm>.

University of Agder. "Sorry (not sorry)." *YouTube*, 6 Feb. 2021, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt3JQa1ynDw>.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. Random House, 2020.

2

WORKING WITH WORDS: WHICH WORD IS RIGHT?

Jenifer Kurtz

Just as a mason uses bricks to build sturdy homes, writers use words to build successful documents. Consider the construction of a building. Builders need to use tough, reliable materials to build a solid and structurally sound skyscraper. From the foundation to the roof and every floor in between, every part is necessary. Writers need to use strong, meaningful words from the first sentence to the last and in every sentence in between.

You already know many words that you use every day as part of your writing and speaking vocabulary. You probably also know that certain words fit better in certain situations. Letters, e-mails, and even quickly jotted grocery lists require the proper selection of vocabulary. Imagine you are writing a grocery list to purchase the ingredients for a recipe but accidentally write down cilantro when the recipe calls for parsley. Even though cilantro and parsley look remarkably alike, each produces a very different effect in food. This seemingly small error could radically alter the flavor of your dish!

Having a solid everyday vocabulary will help you while writing, but learning new words and avoiding common word errors will make a real impression on your readers. Experienced writers know that deliberate, careful word selection and usage can lead to more polished, more meaningful work. This chapter covers word choice and vocabulary-building strategies that will improve your writing.

1. **Commonly confused words**
2. **Spelling**
3. **Word choice**
4. **Prefixes and suffixes**
5. **Synonyms and antonyms**
6. **Using context clues**

1. Commonly confused words

Some words in English cause trouble for speakers and writers because these words share a similar pronunciation, meaning, or spelling with another word. These words are called commonly confused words.

For example, read aloud the following sentences containing the commonly confused words *new* and *knew*:

I liked her *new* sweater.

I *knew* she would wear that sweater today.

These words may sound alike when spoken, but they carry entirely different usages and meanings. *New* is an adjective that describes the sweater, and *knew* is the past tense of the verb *to know*.

Recognizing Commonly Confused Words

New and *knew* are just two of the words that can be confusing because of their similarities. Familiarize yourself with the following list of commonly confused words. Recognizing these words in your own writing and in other pieces of writing can help you choose the correct word.

Commonly Confused Words

A, An, And

- *A* (article). Used before a word that begins with a consonant.
- **a** key, **a** mouse, **a** screen
- *An* (article). Used before a word that begins with a vowel.
- **an** airplane, **an** ocean, **an** igloo
- *And* (conjunction). Connects two or more words together.
- peanut butter **and** jelly, pen **and** pencil, jump **and** shout

Accept, Except

- *Accept* (verb). Means to take or agree to something offered.
- They **accepted** our proposal for the conference.
- *Except* (conjunction). Means only or but.
- We could fly there **except** the tickets cost too much.

Affect, Effect

- *Affect* (verb). Means to create a change.
- Hurricane winds **affect** the amount of rainfall.
- *Effect* (noun). Means an outcome or result.
- The heavy rains will have an **effect** on the crop growth.

Are, Our

- *Are* (verb). A conjugated form of the verb *be*.
- My cousins **are** all tall and blonde.
- *Our* (pronoun). Indicates possession, usually follows the pronoun *we*.
- We will bring **our** cameras to take pictures.

By, Buy

- *By* (preposition). Means next to.
- My glasses are **by** the bed.
- *Buy* (verb). Means to purchase.
- I will **buy** new glasses after the doctor's appointment.

Its, It's

- *Its* (pronoun). A form of *it* that shows possession.
- The butterfly flapped **its** wings.
- *It's* (contraction). Joins the words *it* and *is*.
- **It's** the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

Know, No

- *Know* (verb). Means to understand or possess knowledge.
- I **know** the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.
- *No*. Used to make a negative.

- I have **no** time to visit the zoo this weekend.

Loose, Lose

- *Loose* (adjective). Describes something that is not tight or is detached.
- Without a belt, her pants are **loose** on her waist.
- *Lose* (verb). Means to forget, to give up, or to fail to earn something.
- She will **lose** even more weight after finishing the marathon training.

Of, Have

- *Of* (preposition). Means *from* or *about*.
- I studied maps **of** the city to know where to rent a new apartment.
- *Have* (verb). Means to possess something.
- I **have** many friends to help me move.
- *Have* (linking verb). Used to connect verbs.
- I should **have** helped her with that heavy box.

Quite, Quiet, Quit

- *Quite* (adverb). Means *really* or *truly*.
- My work will require **quite** a lot of concentration.
- *Quiet* (adjective). Means not loud.
- I need a **quiet** room to complete the assignments.
- *Quit* (verb). Means to stop or to end.
- I will **quit** when I am hungry for dinner.

Right, Write

- *Right* (adjective). Means proper or correct.
- When bowling, she practices the **right** form.
- *Right* (adjective). Also means the opposite of left.
- Begin the dance with your **right** foot.
- *Write* (verb). Means to communicate on paper.
- After the team members bowl, I will **write** down their scores.

Set, Sit

- *Set* (verb). Means to put an item down.
- She **set** the mug on the saucer.
- *Set* (noun). Means a group of similar objects.
- All the mugs and saucers belonged in a **set**.
- *Sit* (verb). Means to lower oneself down on a chair or another place.
- I'll **sit** on the sofa while she brews the tea.

Suppose, Supposed

- *Suppose* (verb). Means to think or to consider.
- I **suppose** I will bake the bread because no one else has the recipe.
- *Suppose* (verb). Means to suggest.
- **Suppose** we all split the cost of the dinner.
- *Supposed* (verb). The past tense form of the verb suppose, meaning required or allowed.
- She was **supposed** to create the menu.

Than, Then

- *Than* (conjunction). Used to connect two or more items when comparing.
- Registered nurses require less schooling **than** doctors.

- *Then* (adverb). Means next or at a specific time.
- Doctors first complete medical school and **then** obtain a residency.

Their, They're, There

- *Their* (pronoun). A form of *they* that shows possession.
- The dog walkers feeds **their** dogs every day at two o'clock.
- *They're* (contraction). Joins the words *they* and *are*.
- **They're** the sweetest dogs in the neighborhood.
- *There* (adverb). Indicates a particular place.
- The dogs' bowls are over **there**, next to the pantry.
- *There* (expletive used to delay the subject). Indicates the presence of something
- **There** are more treats if the dogs behave.

To, Two, Too

- *To* (preposition). Indicates movement.
- Let's go **to** the circus.
- *To*. A word that completes an infinitive verb.
- **to** play, **to** ride, **to** watch.
- *Two*. The number after one. It describes how many.
- **Two** clowns squirted the elephants with water.
- *Too* (adverb). Means *also* or *very*.
- The tents were **too** loud, and we left.

Use, Used

- *Use* (verb). Means to apply for some purpose.
- We **use** a weed whacker to trim the hedges.
- *Used*. The past tense form of the verb *to use*
- He **used** the lawnmower last night before it rained.
- *Used to*. Indicates something done in the past but not in the present
- He **used to** hire a team to landscape, but now he landscapes alone.

Who's, Whose

- *Who's* (contraction). Joins the words *who* and either *is* or *has*.
- Who's the new student? Who's met him?
- *Whose* (pronoun). A form of *who* that shows possession.
- Whose schedule allows them to take the new student on a campus tour?

Your, You're

- *Your* (pronoun). A form of *you* that shows possession.
- **Your** book bag is unzipped.
- *You're* (contraction). Joins the words *you* and *are*.
- **You're** the girl with the unzipped book bag.

Figure 10.1 "Camera Sign"



The English language contains so many words; no one can say for certain how many words exist. In fact, many words in English are borrowed from other languages. Many words have multiple meanings and forms, further expanding the immeasurable number of English words. Although the list of commonly confused words serves as a helpful guide, even these words may have more meanings than shown here. When in doubt, consult an expert: the dictionary!

Exercise 1

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct word.

1. My little cousin turns _____(to, too, two) years old tomorrow.
2. The next-door neighbor's dog is _____(quite, quiet, quit) loud. He barks constantly throughout the night.
3. _____(Your, You're) mother called this morning to talk about the party.
4. I would rather eat a slice of chocolate cake _____(than, then) eat a chocolate muffin.
5. Before the meeting, he drank a cup of coffee and _____(than, then) brushed his teeth.
6. Do you have any _____(loose, lose) change to pay the parking meter?
7. Father must _____(have, of) left his briefcase at the office.
8. Before playing ice hockey, I was _____(suppose, supposed) to read the contract, but I only skimmed it and signed my name quickly, which may _____(affect, effect) my understanding of the rules.
9. Tonight she will _____(set, sit) down and _____(right, write) a cover letter to accompany her résumé and job application.
10. It must be fall, because the leaves _____(are, our) changing, and _____(it's, its) getting darker earlier.

Strategies to Avoid Commonly Confused Words

When writing, you need to choose the correct word according to its spelling and meaning in the context. Not only does selecting the correct word improve your vocabulary and your writing, but it also makes a good impression on your readers. It also helps reduce confusion and improve clarity. The following strategies can help you avoid misusing confusing words.

1. **Use a dictionary.** Keep a dictionary at your desk while you write. Look up words when you are uncer-

tain of their meanings or spellings. Many dictionaries are also available online, and the Internet's easy access will not slow you down. Check out your cell phone or smartphone to see if a dictionary app is available.

2. **Keep a list of words you commonly confuse.** Be aware of the words that often confuse you. When you notice a pattern of confusing words, keep a list nearby, and consult the list as you write. Check the list again before you submit an assignment to your instructor.

3. **Study the list of commonly confused words.** You may not yet know which words confuse you, but before you sit down to write, study the words on the list. Prepare your mind for working with words by reviewing the commonly confused words identified in this chapter.

Figure 10.2 "A Commonly Misused Word on a Public Sign"



Tip

Commonly confused words appear in many locations, not just at work or at school. Be on the lookout for misused words wherever you find yourself throughout the day. Make a mental note of the error and remember its correction for your own pieces of writing.

Exercise 2

The following paragraph contains eleven errors. Find each misused word and correct it by adding the proper word.

The original United States Declaration of Independence sets in a case at the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom as part of the National Archives in Washington, DC. Since 1952, over one million visitors each year of passed through the Rotunda too snap a photograph to capture they're experience. Although signs state, "No Flash Photography," forgetful tourists leave the flash on, an a bright light flickers for just a millisecond. This millisecond of light may not seem like enough to effect the precious document, but supposed how much light could be generated when all those milliseconds are added up. According to the National Archives administrators, its enough to significantly damage the historic document. So, now, the signs display quit a different message: "No Photography." Visitors continue to travel to see the Declaration that began are country, but know longer can personal pictures serve as mementos. The administrators' compromise, they say, is a visit to the gift shop for a preprinted photograph.

Key Takeaways

- In order to write accurately, it is important for writers to be aware of commonly confused words.
- Although commonly confused words may look alike or sound alike, their meanings are very different.
- Consulting the dictionary is one way to make sure you are using the correct word in your writing. You may also keep a list of commonly confused words nearby when you write or study the chart in this book.
- Choosing the proper words leaves a positive impression on your readers.

Writing Application

Review the latest assignment you completed for school or for work. Does it contain any commonly confused words? Circle each example and use the circled words to begin your own checklist of commonly confused words. Continue to add to your checklist each time you complete an assignment and find a misused word.

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2. Spelling

One essential aspect of good writing is accurate spelling. With computer spell checkers, spelling may seem simple, but these programs fail to catch every error. Spell checkers identify some errors, but writers still have to consider the flagged words and suggested replacements. Writers are still responsible for the errors that remain.

For example, if the spell checker highlights a word that is misspelled and gives you a list of alternative words, you may choose a word that you never intended even though it is spelled correctly. This can change the meaning of your sentence. It can also confuse readers, making them lose interest. Computer spell checkers are useful editing tools, but they can never replace human knowledge of spelling rules, homonyms, and commonly misspelled words. Also, autocorrect can sometimes make the wrong correction, changing the meaning of your statement.

Common Spelling Rules

The best way to master new words is to understand the key spelling rules. Keep in mind, however, that some spelling rules carry exceptions. A spell checker may catch these exceptions, but knowing them yourself will prepare you to spell accurately on the first try. You may want to try memorizing each rule and its exception like you would memorize a rhyme or lyrics to a song.

Write *i* before *e* except after *c*, or when pronounced *ay* like “neighbor” or “weigh.”

- achieve, niece, alien
- receive, deceive

When words end in a consonant plus *y*, drop the *y* and add an *i* before adding another ending.

- happy + er = happier
- cry + ed = cried

When words end in a vowel plus *y*, keep the *y* and add the ending.

- delay + ed = delayed

Memorize the following exceptions to this rule: *day, lay, say, pay = daily, laid, said, paid*

When adding an ending that begins with a vowel, such as *-able, -ence, -ing, or -ity*, drop the last *e* in a word.

- write + ing = writing

- pure + ity = purity

When adding an ending that begins with a consonant, such as *-less*, *-ment*, or *-ly*, keep the last *e* in a word.

- hope + less = hopeless
- advertise + ment = advertisement

For many words ending in a consonant and an *o*, add *-s* when using the plural form.

- photo + s = photos
- soprano + s = sopranos

Add *-es* to words that end in *s*, *ch*, *sh*, and *x*.

- church + es = churches
- fax + es = faxes

Exercise 3

Identify and correct the nine misspelled words in the following paragraph.

Sherman J. Alexie Jr. was born in October 1966. He is a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian and an American writer, poet, and filmmaker. Alexie was born with hydrocephalus, or water on the brain. This condition led doctors to predict that he would likely suffer long-term brain damage and possibly mental retardation. Although Alexie survived with no mental disabilities, he did suffer other serious side effects from his condition that plagud him throughout his childhood. Amazingly, Alexie learned to read by the age of three, and by age five he had read novels such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Reared on an Indian reservation, Alexie often felt aleinated from his peers because of his avid love for reading and also from the long-term effects of his illness, which often kept him from socializeing with his peers on the reservation. The reading skills he displaid at such a young age foreshadowed what he would later become. Today Alexie is a prolific and successful writer with several story anthologeis to his credit, notably *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *The Toughest Indian in the World*. Most of his fiction is about contemporary Native Americans who are influenced by pop culture and pow wows and everything in between. His work is sometimes funny but always thoughtful and full of richness and depth. Alexie also writes poetry, novels, and screenplays. His latest collection of storys is called *War Dances*, which came out in 2009.

Tip

Eight Tips to Improve Spelling Skills

1. **Read the words in your assignment carefully, and avoid skimming over the page.** Focusing on your written assignment word by word will help you pay close attention to each word's spelling. Skimming quickly, you may overlook misspelled words.
2. **Use mnemonic devices to remember the correct spelling of words.** Mnemonic devices, or memory techniques and learning aids, include inventive sayings or practices that help you remember. For example, the saying "It is important to be a beautiful person inside and out" may help you remember that *beautiful* begins with "be a." The practice of pronouncing the word *Wednesday* Wed-nes-day may help you remember how to spell the word correctly.
3. **Use a dictionary.** Many professional writers rely on the dictionary—either in print or online. If you find it difficult to use a regular dictionary, ask your instructor to help you find a "poor speller's dictionary."
4. **Use your computer's spell checker.** The spell checker will not solve all your spelling problems, but it is a useful tool. See the introduction to this section for cautions about spell checkers.
5. **Keep a list of frequently misspelled words.** You will often misspell the same words again and again, but do not let this discourage you. All writers struggle with the spellings of certain words; they become aware of their spelling weaknesses and work to improve. Be aware of which words you commonly misspell, and you can add them to a list to learn to spell them correctly.
6. **Look over corrected papers for misspelled words.** Add these words to your list and practice writing each word four to five times each. Writing teachers will especially notice which words you frequently misspell, and it will help you excel in your classes if they see your spelling improve.

7. **Test yourself with flashcards.** Sometimes the old-fashioned methods are best, and for spelling, this tried-and-true technique has worked for many students. You can work with a peer or alone.

8. **Review the common spelling rules explained in this chapter.** Take the necessary time to master the material; you may return to the rules in this chapter again and again, as needed.

Tip

Remember to focus on spelling during the editing and revising step of the writing process. Start with the big ideas such as organizing your piece of writing and developing effective paragraphs, and then work your way down toward the smaller—but equally important—details like spelling and punctuation. To read more about the writing process and editing and revising, see **Chapter 4, “The Writing Process.”**

Homonyms

Homonyms are words that sound like one another but have different meanings.

Commonly Misused Homonyms

Principle, Principal

- **Principle (noun).** A fundamental concept that is accepted as true.
- The **principle** of human equality is an important foundation for all nations.
- **Principal (noun).** The original amount of debt on which interest is calculated.
- The payment plan allows me to pay back only the **principal** amount, not any compounded interest.
- **Principal (noun).** A person who is the main authority of a school.
- The **principal** held a conference for both parents and teachers.

Where, Wear, Ware

- **Where (adverb).** The place in which something happens.
- **Where** is the restaurant?
- **Wear (verb).** To carry or have on the body.
- I will **wear** my hiking shoes I when go on a climb tomorrow morning.
- **Ware (noun).** Articles of merchandise or manufacture (usually, *wares*).
- When I return from shopping, I will show you my **wares**.

Lead, Led

- **Lead (noun).** A type of metal used in pipes and batteries.
- The **lead** pipes in my homes are old and need to be replaced.
- **Led (verb).** The past tense of the verb *lead*.
- After the garden, she **led** the patrons through the museum.

Which, Witch

- **Which (pronoun).** Replaces one out of a group.
- **Which** apartment is yours?
- **Witch (noun).** A person who practices sorcery or who has supernatural powers.
- She thinks she is a **witch**, but she does not seem to have any powers.

Peace, Piece

- **Peace (noun).** A state of tranquility or quiet.
- For once, there was **peace** between the argumentative brothers.
- **Piece (noun).** A part of a whole.
- I would like a large **piece** of cake, thank you.

Passed, Past

- **Passed (verb).** To go away or move.
- He **passed** the slower cars on the road using the left lane.
- **Past (noun).** Having existed or taken place in a period before the present.
- The argument happened in the **past**, so there is no use in dwelling on it.

Lessen, Lesson

- **Lessen (verb).** To reduce in number, size, or degree.
- My dentist gave me medicine to **lessen** the pain of my aching tooth.
- **Lesson (noun).** A reading or exercise to be studied by a student.
- Today's **lesson** was about mortgage interest rates.

Patience, Patients

- **Patience (noun).** The capacity of being patient (waiting for a period of time or enduring pains and trials calmly).
- The novice teacher's **patience** with the unruly class was astounding.
- **Patients (plural noun).** Individuals under medical care.
- The **patients** were tired of eating the hospital food, and they could not wait for a home-cooked meal.

Sees, Seas, Seize

- **Sees (verb).** To perceive with the eye.
- He **sees** a whale through his binoculars.
- **Seas (plural noun).** The plural of sea, a great body of salt water.
- The tidal fluctuation of the oceans and **seas** are influenced by the moon.
- **Seize (verb).** To possess or take by force.
- The king plans to **seize** all the peasants' land.

Threw, Through

- **Threw (verb).** The past tense of *throw*.
- She **threw** the football with perfect form.
- **Through (preposition).** A word that indicates movement.
- She walked **through** the door and out of his life.

Exercise 4

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct homonym.

1. Do you agree with the underlying _____(principle, principal) that ensures copyrights are protected in the digital age?
2. I like to _____(where, wear, ware) unique clothing from thrift stores that do not have company logos on them.
3. Marjorie felt like she was being _____(led, lead) on a wild goose chase, and she did not like it one bit.
4. Serina described _____(witch, which) house was hers, but now that I am here, they all look the same.
5. Seeing his friend without a lunch, Miguel gave her a _____(peace, piece) of his apple.
6. Do you think that it is healthy for mother to talk about the _____(passed, past) all the time?
7. Eating healthier foods will _____(lessen, lesson) the risk of heart disease.
8. I know it sounds cliché, but my father had the _____(patients, patience) of a saint.
9. Daniela _____(sees, seas, seize) possibilities in the bleakest situations, and that it is why she is successful.
10. Everyone goes _____(through, threw) hardships in life regardless of who they are.

Commonly Misspelled Words

Below is a list of commonly misspelled words. You probably use these words every day in either speaking or writing. Each word has a segment in bold type, which indicates the problem area of the word that is often spelled incorrectly. If you can, use this list as a guide before, during, and after you write.

Tip

Use the following two tricks to help you master these troublesome words:

1. Copy each word a few times and underline the problem area.
2. Copy the words onto flash cards and have the friend test you.

Figure 10.3 “Commonly Misspelled Words”

across	dis app oint	int egr ation	partic ular	separ ate
add ress	dis app rove	int ellig ent	per form	simil ar
ans wer	do esn 't	int er est	per haps	sin ce
argu ment	eigh th	int er fere	pers onn el	spe ech
ath lete	embarr ass	jew el ry	poss ess	streng th
begin ning	enviro nm ent	judg me nt	poss ible	succ ess
behav ior	exag ger ate	knowl edg e	pre fer	sur prise
calen dar	famil iar	maint ain	prejud ice	taugh t
care er	final ly	mathem atic s	privile ge	temper atur e
consc ie nce	govern me nt	meant	probab ly	thoroug h
crowd ed	gram mar	necess ary	psy chology	thought
def inite	heig ht	nerv ous	pur sue	tir ed
descri be	illeg al	occ as ion	refer ence	un til
desper ate	immedi ately	opin ion	rhy thm	weig ht
diff er ent	imp ort ant	optim ist	ridic ul ous	writ ten

Exercise 5

Identify and correct the ten commonly misspelled words in the following paragraph.

Brooklyn is one of the five boroughs that make up New York City. It is located on the eastern shore of Long Island directly across the East River from the island of Manhattan. Its beginnings stretch back to the sixteenth century when it was founded by the Dutch who originally called it “Breuckelen.” Immediately after the Dutch settled Brooklyn, it came under British rule. However, neither the Dutch nor the British were Brooklyn’s first inhabitants. When European settlers first arrived, Brooklyn was largely inhabited by the Lenapi, a collective name for several organized bands of Native American people who settled a large area of land that extended from upstate New York through the entire state of New Jersey. They are sometimes referred to as the Delaware Indians. Over time, the Lenapi succumbed to European diseases or conflicts between European settlers or other Native American enemies. Finalley they were pushed out of Brooklyn completely by the British. In 1776, Brooklyn was the site of the first important battle of the American Revolution known as the Battle of Brooklyn. The colonists lost this battle, which was led by George Washington, but over the next two years they would win the war, kicking the British out of the colonies once and for all. By the end of the nineteenth century, Brooklyn grew to be a city in its own right. The completion of the Brooklyn Bridge was an ocaasion for celebration; transportation and commerce between Brooklyn and Manhattan now became much easier. Eventually, in 1898, Brooklyn lost its seperate identity as an independent city and became one of five boroughs of New York City. However, in some people’s opinien, the intagrations into New York City should have never happened; they though Brooklyn should have remained an independent city.

Key Takeaways

- Accurate, error-free spelling enhances your credibility with the reader.
- Mastering the rules of spelling may help you become a better speller.
- Knowing the commonly misused homonyms may prevent spelling errors.
- Studying the list of commonly misspelled words in this chapter, or studying a list of your own, is one way to improve your spelling skills.

Writing Application

What is your definition of a successful person? Is it based on a person’s profession or is it based on his or her character? Perhaps success means a combination of both. In one paragraph, describe in detail what you think makes a person successful. When you are finished, proofread your work for spelling errors. Exchange papers with a partner and read each other’s work. See if you catch any spelling errors that your partner missed.

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3. Word choice

Effective writing involves making conscious choices with words. When you prepare to sit down to write your first draft, you likely have already completed some freewriting exercises, chosen your topic, developed your thesis statement, written an outline, and even selected your sources. When it is time to write your first draft, start to consider which words to use to best convey your ideas to the reader.

Some writers are picky about word choice as they start drafting. They may practice some specific strategies, such as using a dictionary and thesaurus, using words and phrases with proper connotations, and avoiding slang, clichés, and overly general words.

Once you understand these tricks of the trade, you can move ahead confidently in writing your assignment. Remember, the skill and accuracy of your word choice is a major factor in developing your writing style. Precise selection of your words will help you be more clearly understood—in both writing and speaking.

Using a Dictionary and Thesaurus

Even professional writers need help with the meanings, spellings, pronunciations, and uses of particular words. In fact, they rely on dictionaries to help them write better. No one knows every word in the English

language and its multiple uses and meanings, so all writers, from novices to professionals, can benefit from the use of dictionaries.

Most dictionaries provide the following information:

- **Spelling.** How the word and its different forms are spelled.
- **Pronunciation.** How to say the word.
- **Part of speech.** The function of the word.
- **Definition.** The meaning of the word.
- **Synonyms.** Words that have similar meanings.
- **Etymology.** The history of the word.

Look at the following sample dictionary entry to see which of the preceding information you can identify:

myth, *mith*, *n.* [Gr. *mythos*, a word, a fable, a legend.] A fable or legend embodying the convictions of a people as to their gods or other divine beings, their own beginnings and early history and the heroes connected with it, or the origin of the world; any invented story; something or someone having no existence in fact.—**myth • ic**, **myth • i • cal**

Like a dictionary, a thesaurus is another indispensable writing tool. A thesaurus gives you a list of synonyms, words that have the same (or very close to the same) meaning as another word. It also lists antonyms, words with the opposite meaning of the word. A thesaurus will help you when you are looking for the perfect word with just the right meaning to convey your ideas. It will also help you learn more words and use the ones you already know more correctly. However, be careful to avoid choosing words from the thesaurus that don't fit the tone of your writing or whose meaning might not be a perfect fit for what you are trying to say.

precocious *adj.* *She's such a precocious little girl!*: uncommonly smart, mature, advanced, smart, bright, brilliant, gifted, quick, clever, apt.

Ant. slow, backward, stupid.

Using Proper Connotations

A denotation is the dictionary definition of a word. A connotation, on the other hand, is the emotional or cultural meaning attached to a word. The connotation of a word can be positive, negative, or neutral. Keep in mind the connotative meaning when choosing a word.

Scrawny

- **Denotation:** Exceptionally thin and slight or meager in body or size.
- **Word used in a sentence:** Although he was a premature baby and a **scrawny** child, Martin has developed into a strong man.
- **Connotation:** (Negative) In this sentence the word *scrawny* may have a negative connotation in the readers' minds. They might find it to mean a weakness or a personal flaw; however, the word fits into the sentence appropriately.

Skinny

- **Denotation:** Lacking sufficient flesh, very thin.
- **Word used in a sentence:** **Skinny** jeans have become very fashionable in the past couple of years.
- **Connotation:** (Positive) Based on cultural and personal impressions of what it means to be skinny, the reader may have positive connotations of the word *skinny*.

Lean

- **Denotation:** Lacking or deficient in flesh; containing little or no fat.
- **Word used in a sentence:** My brother has a **lean** figure, whereas I have a more muscular build.
- **Connotation:** (Neutral) In this sentence, *lean* has a neutral connotation. It does not call to mind an overly skinny person like the word *scrawny*, nor does imply the positive cultural impressions of the word *skinny*. It is merely a neutral descriptive word.

Notice that all the words have a very similar denotation; however, the connotations of each word differ.

Exercises 6

In each of the following items, you will find words with similar denotations. Identify the words' connotations as positive, negative, or neutral by writing the word in the appropriate box. Copy the chart onto your own piece of paper.

curious, nosy, interested

lazy, relaxed, slow

courageous, foolhardy, assured

new, newfangled, modern

mansion, shack, residence

spinster, unmarried woman, career woman

giggle, laugh, cackle

boring, routine, prosaic

noted, notorious, famous

assertive, confident, pushy

Positive	Negative	Neutral

Avoiding Slang

Slang describes informal words that are considered nonstandard English. Slang often changes with passing fads and may be used by or be familiar to only a specific group of people. Most people use slang when they speak and in personal correspondences, such as e-mails, text messages, and instant messages. Slang is appropriate between friends in an informal context but should be avoided in formal academic writing.

Exercise 7

Edit the following paragraph by replacing the slang words and phrases with more formal language. Rewrite the paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

I felt like such an airhead when I got up to give my speech. As I walked toward the podium, I banged my knee on a chair. Man, I felt like such a klutz. On top of that, I kept saying “like” and “um,” and I could not stop fidgeting. I was so stressed out about being up there. I feel like I’ve been practicing this speech 24/7, and I still bombed. It was ten minutes of me going off about how we sometimes have to do things we don’t enjoy doing. Wow, did I ever prove my point. My speech was so bad I’m surprised that people didn’t boo. My teacher said not to sweat it, though. Everyone gets nervous his or her first time speaking in public, and she said, with time, I would become a whiz at this speech giving stuff. I wonder if I have the guts to do it again.

Avoiding Clichés

Clichés are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused. Writing that uses clichés often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding clichés in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways.

- **Clichéd:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes my **blood boil**.
- **Plain:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me really angry.
- **Original:** Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me want to go to the gym and punch the bag for a few hours.

Tip

Think about all the cliché phrases that you hear in popular music or in everyday conversation. What would happen if these clichés were transformed into something unique?

Exercise 8

On your own sheet of paper, revise the following sentences by replacing the clichés with fresh, original descriptions.

1. She is writing a memoir in which she will air her family’s dirty laundry.
2. Fran had an ax to grind with Benny, and she planned to confront him that night at the party.
3. Mr. Muller was at his wit’s end with the rowdy class of seventh graders.
4. The bottom line is that Greg was fired because he missed too many days of work.
5. Sometimes it is hard to make ends meet with just one paycheck.
6. My brain is fried from pulling an all-nighter.
7. Maria left the dishes in the sink all week to give Jeff a taste of his own medicine.
8. While they were at the carnival Janice exclaimed, “Time sure does fly when you are having fun!”
9. Jeremy became tongue-tied after the interviewer asked him where he saw himself in five years.
10. Jordan was dressed to the nines that night.

Avoiding Overly General Words

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting to read. Whenever possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with particular nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring your words to life. Add words that provide color, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

- **General:** My new puppy is cute.
- **Specific:** My new puppy is a ball of white fuzz with the biggest black eyes I have ever seen.

- **General:** My teacher told us that plagiarism is bad.
- **Specific:** My teacher, Ms. Atwater, created a presentation detailing exactly how plagiarism is illegal and unethical.

Exercise 9

Revise the following sentences by replacing the overly general words with more precise and attractive language. Write the new sentences on your own sheet of paper.

1. Reilly got into her car and drove off.
2. I would like to travel to outer space because it would be amazing.
3. Jane came home after a bad day at the office.
4. I thought Milo's essay was fascinating.
5. The dog walked up the street.
6. The coal miners were tired after a long day.
7. The tropical fish are pretty.
8. I sweat a lot after running.
9. The goalie blocked the shot.
10. I enjoyed my Mexican meal.

Key Takeaways

- Using a dictionary and thesaurus as you write will improve your writing by improving your word choice.
- Connotations of words may be positive, neutral, or negative.
- Slang, clichés, and overly general words should be avoided in academic writing.

Writing Application

Review a piece of writing that you have completed for school. Circle any sentences with slang, clichés, or overly general words and rewrite them using stronger language.

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4. Prefixes and suffixes

The English language contains an enormous and ever-growing number of words. Enhancing your vocabulary by learning new words can seem overwhelming, but if you know the common prefixes and suffixes of English, you will understand many more words.

Mastering common prefixes and suffixes is like learning a code. Once you crack the code, you cannot only spell words more correctly but also recognize and perhaps even define unfamiliar words.

Prefixes

A prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word to create a new meaning. Study the common prefixes in the table below.

Tip

The main rule to remember when adding a prefix to a word is not to add letters or leave out any letters. See the table below for examples of this rule.

Figure 0.4 "Common Prefixes"

Prefix	Meaning	Example
dis	not, opposite of	dis + satisfied = dissatisfied
mis	wrongly	mis + spell = misspell
un	not	un + acceptable = unacceptable
re	again	re + election = reelection
inter	between	inter + related = interrelated
pre	before	pre + pay = prepay
non	not	non + sense = nonsense
super	above	super + script = superscript
sub	under	sub + merge = submerge
anti	against, opposing	anti + bacterial = antibacterial

Exercise 10

Identify the five words with prefixes in the following paragraph, and write their meanings on a separate sheet of paper.

At first, I thought one of my fuzzy, orange socks disappeared in the dryer, but I could not find it in there. Because it was my favorite pair, nothing was going to prevent me from finding that sock. I looked all around my bedroom, under the bed, on top of the bed, and in my closet, but I still could not find it. I did not know that I would discover the answer just as I gave up my search. As I sat down on the couch in the family room, my Dad was reclining on his chair. I laughed when I saw that one of his feet was orange and the other blue! I forgot that he was color-blind. Next time he does laundry I will have to supervise him while he folds the socks so that he does not accidentally take one of mine!

Exercise 11

Add the correct prefix to the word to complete each sentence. Write the word on your own sheet of paper.

1. I wanted to ease my stomach _____comfort, so I drank some ginger root tea.
2. Lenny looked funny in his _____matched shirt and pants.
3. Penelope felt _____glamorous at the party because she was the only one not wearing a dress.
4. My mother said those _____aging creams do not work, so I should not waste my money on them.
5. The child's _____standard performance on the test alarmed his parents.

6. When my sister first saw the meteor, she thought it was a _____natural phenomenon.
7. Even though she got an excellent job offer, Cherie did not want to _____locate to a different country.
8. With a small class size, the students get to _____act with the teacher more frequently.
9. I slipped on the ice because I did not heed the _____cautions about watching my step.
10. A _____combatant is another word for civilian.

Suffixes

A suffix is a word part added to the end of a word to create a new meaning. Study the suffix rules in the following boxes.

Rule 1

When adding the suffixes *-ness* and *-ly* to a word, the spelling of the word does not change.

Examples:

- dark + ness = darkness
- scholar + ly = scholarly

Exceptions to Rule 1

When the word ends in *y*, change the *y* to *i* before adding *-ness* and *-ly*.

Examples:

- ready + ly = readily
- happy + ness = happiness

Rule 2

When the suffix begins with a vowel, drop the silent *e* in the root word.

Examples:

- care + ing = caring
- use + able = usable

Exceptions to Rule 2

When the word ends in *ce* or *ge*, keep the silent *e* if the suffix begins with *a* or *o*.

Examples:

- replace + able = replaceable
- courage + ous = courageous

Rule 3

When the suffix begins with a consonant, keep the silent *e* in the original word.

Examples:

- care + ful = careful
- care + less = careless

Exceptions to Rule 3

Examples:

- true + ly = truly
- argue + ment = argument

Rule 4

When the word ends in a consonant plus *y*, change the *y* to *i* before any suffix not beginning with *i*.

Examples:

- sunny + er = sunnier
- hurry + ing = hurrying

Rule 5

When the suffix begins with a vowel, double the final consonant only if (1) the word has only one syllable or is accented on the last syllable and (2) the word ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.

Examples:

- tan + ing = tanning (one syllable word)
- regret + ing = regretting (The accent is on the last syllable; the word ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.)
- cancel + ed = canceled (The accent is not on the last syllable.)
- prefer + ed = preferred

Exercise 12

On your own sheet of paper, write correctly the forms of the words with their suffixes.

1. refer + ed
2. refer + ence
3. mope + ing
4. approve + al
5. green + ness
6. benefit + ed
7. resubmit + ing
8. use + age
9. greedy + ly
10. excite + ment

Key Takeaways

- A prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word that changes the word's meaning.
- A suffix is a word part added to the end of a word that changes the word's meaning.
- Learning the meanings of prefixes and suffixes will help expand your vocabulary, which will help improve your writing.

Writing Application

Write a paragraph describing one of your life goals. Include five words with prefixes and five words with suffixes. Exchange papers with a classmate and circle the prefixes and suffixes in your classmate's paper. Correct each prefix or suffix that is spelled incorrectly.

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5. Synonyms and antonyms

As you work with your draft, you will want to pay particular attention to the words you have chosen. Do they express exactly what you are trying to convey? Can you choose better, more effective words? Familiarity with synonyms and antonyms can be helpful in answering these questions.

Synonyms

Synonyms are words that have the same, or almost the same, meaning as another word. You can say an “easy task” or a “simple task” because *easy* and *simple* are synonyms. You can say Hong Kong is a “large city” or a “metropolis” because *city* and *metropolis* are synonyms.

However, it is important to remember that not all pairs of words in the English language are so easily interchangeable. The slight but important differences in meaning between synonyms can make a big difference in your writing. For example, the words *boring* and *insipid* may have similar meanings, but the subtle differences between the two will affect the message your writing conveys. The word *insipid* evokes a scholarly and perhaps more pretentious message than *boring*.

The English language is full of pairs of words that have subtle distinctions between them. All writers, professionals and beginners alike, face the challenge of choosing the most appropriate synonym to best convey their ideas. When you pay particular attention to synonyms in your writing, it comes across to your reader. The sentences become much more clear and rich in meaning.

Exercise 13

Replace the underlined words in the paragraph with appropriate synonyms. Write the new paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

When most people think of the Renaissance, they might think of artists like Michelangelo, Raphael, or Leonardo da Vinci, but they often overlook one of the very important figures of the Renaissance: Filippo Brunelleschi. Brunelleschi was born in Florence, Italy in 1377. He is considered the very best architect and engineer of the Renaissance. His impressive accomplishments are a testament to following one's dreams, persevering in the face of obstacles, and realizing one's vision.

The most difficult undertaking of Brunelleschi's career was the dome of Florence Cathedral, which took sixteen years to construct. A major blow to the progress of the construction happened in 1428. Brunelleschi had designed a special ship to carry the one hundred tons of marble needed for the dome. He felt this would be the most inexpensive way to transport the marble, but the unthinkable happened. The ship went down to the bottom of the water, taking all the marble with it to the bottom of the river. Brunelleschi was really sad. Nevertheless, he did not give up. He held true to his vision of the completed dome. Filippo Brunelleschi completed construction of the dome of Florence Cathedral in 1446. His influence on artists and architects alike was felt strongly during his lifetime and can still be felt in this day and age.

Exercise 14

On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence with each of the following words that illustrates the specific meaning of each synonym.

1. leave, abandon
2. mad, insane
3. outside, exterior
4. poor, destitute
5. quiet, peaceful

6. riot, revolt
7. rude, impolite
8. talk, conversation
9. hug, embrace
10. home, residence

Antonyms

Antonyms are words that have the opposite meaning of a given word. The study of antonyms will not only help you choose the most appropriate word as you write; it will also sharpen your overall sense of language. The table below lists common words and their antonyms.

Figure 0.5 "Common Antonyms"

Word	Antonym		Word	Antonym
absence	presence		frequent	seldom
accept	refuse		harmful	harmless
accurate	inaccurate		horizontal	vertical
advantage	disadvantage		imitation	genuine
ancient	modern		inhabited	uninhabited
abundant	scarce		inferior	superior
artificial	natural		intentional	accidental
attractive	repulsive		justice	injustice
borrow	lend		knowledge	ignorance
bravery	cowardice		landlord	tenant
create	destroy, demolish		likely	unlikely
bold	timid, meek		minority	majority
capable	incapable		miser	spendthrift
combine	separate		obedient	disobedient
conceal	reveal		optimist	pessimist
common	rare		permanent	temporary
decrease	increase		plentiful	scarce
definite	indefinite		private	public
despair	hope		prudent	imprudent
discourage	encourage		qualified	unqualified
employer	employee		satisfactory	unsatisfactory

expand	contract	tame	wild
forget	remember	vacant	occupied

Tip

Learning antonyms is an effective way to increase your vocabulary. Memorizing words in combination with or in relation to other words often helps us retain them.

Exercise 15

Correct the following sentences by replacing the underlined words with an antonym. Write the antonym on your own sheet of paper.

1. The pilot who landed the plane was a coward because no one was injured.
2. Even though the botany lecture was two hours long, Gerard found it incredibly dull.
3. My mother says it is impolite to say thank you like you really mean it.
4. Although I have learned a lot of information through textbooks, it is life experience that has given me ignorance.
5. When our instructor said the final paper was compulsory, it was music to my ears!
6. My only virtues are coffee, video games, and really loud music.
7. Elvin was so bold when he walked in the classroom that he sat in the back row and did not participate.
8. Maria thinks elephants who live in freedom have a sad look in their eyes.
9. The teacher filled her students' minds with gloomy thoughts about their futures.
10. The guest attended to every one of our needs.

Key Takeaways

- Synonyms are words that have the same, or almost the same, meaning as another word.
- Antonyms are words that have the opposite meaning of another word.
- Choosing the right synonym refines your writing.
- Learning common antonyms sharpens your sense of language and expands your vocabulary.

Writing Application

Write a paragraph that describes your favorite dish or food. Use as many synonyms as you can in the description, even if it seems too many. Be creative. Consult a thesaurus, and take this opportunity to use words you have never used before. Be prepared to share your paragraph.

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6. Using context clues

Context clues are bits of information within a text that will assist you in deciphering the meaning of unknown words. Since most of your knowledge of vocabulary comes from reading, it is important that you

recognize context clues. By becoming more aware of particular words and phrases surrounding a difficult word, you can make logical guesses about its meaning. The following are the different types of context clues:

- Brief definition or restatement
- Synonyms and antonyms
- Examples
- General sense of the passage

Brief Definition or Restatement

Sometimes a text directly states the definition or a restatement of the unknown word. The brief definition or restatement is signaled by a word or a punctuation mark.

Consider the following example:

If you visit Alaska, you will likely see many glaciers, or slow-moving masses of ice.

In this sentence, the word *glaciers* is defined by the phrase that follows the signal word *or*, which is *slow moving masses of ice*.

In other instances, the text may restate the meaning of the word in a different way, by using punctuation as a signal.

Look at the following example:

Marina was indignant—fuming mad—when she discovered her brother had left for the party without her.

Although *fuming mad* is not a formal definition of the word *indignant*, it does serve to define it. These two examples use signals—the word *or* and the punctuation dashes—to indicate the meaning of the unfamiliar word. Other signals to look for are the words *is*, *as*, *means*, *known as*, and *refers to*.

Synonyms and Antonyms

Sometimes a text gives a synonym of the unknown word to signal the meaning of the unfamiliar word:

When you interpret an image, you actively question and examine what the image connotes and suggests.

In this sentence the word *suggests* is a synonym of the word *connotes*. The word *and* sometimes signals synonyms.

Likewise, the word *but* may signal a contrast, which can help you define a word by its antonym.

I abhor clothes shopping, but I adore grocery shopping.

The word *abhor* is contrasted with its opposite: *adore*. From this context, the reader can guess that *abhor* means to dislike greatly.

Examples

Sometimes a text will give you an example of the word that sheds light on its meaning:

I knew Mark's ailurophobia was in full force because he began trembling and stuttering when he saw my cat, Ludwig, slink out from under the bed.

Although *ailurophobia* is an unknown word, the sentence gives an example of its effects. Based on this example, a reader could confidently surmise that the word means a fear of cats.

Tip

Look for signal words like *such as*, *for instance*, and *for example*. These words signal that a word's meaning may be revealed through an example.

General Sense of the Passage

Sometimes you will happen upon a new term in a passage that has no examples, synonyms or antonyms to help you decipher the word's meaning. However, by looking at the words and sentences surrounding the word and using your common sense, oftentimes you may make a fairly accurate guess at the meaning of the term. For example if you read the sentence, "The newlyweds were trying to be *frugal* in their shopping

because they wanted to save enough money to buy a home,” your common sense would tell you that the word *frugal* means saving money and being thrifty because they are trying to save to buy a house.

Exercise 16

Identify the context clue that helps define the underlined words in each of the following sentences. Write the context clue on your own sheet of paper.

1. Lucinda is very adroit on the balance beam, but Constance is rather clumsy.
2. I saw the entomologist, a scientist who studies insects, cradle the giant dung beetle in her palm.
3. Lance’s comments about politics were irrelevant and meaningless to the botanist’s lecture on plant reproduction.
4. Before I left for my trip to the Czech Republic, I listened to my mother’s sage advice and made a copy of my passport.
5. His rancor, or hatred, for socializing resulted in a life of loneliness and boredom.
6. Martin was mortified, way beyond embarrassment, when his friends teamed up to shove him into the pool.
7. The petulant four-year-old had a baby sister who was, on the contrary, not grouchy at all.
8. The philosophy teacher presented the students with several conundrums, or riddles, to solve.
9. Most Americans are omnivores, people that eat both plants and animals.
10. Elena is effervescent, as excited as a cheerleader, for example, when she meets someone for the first time.

Exercise 17

On your own sheet of paper, write the name of the context clue that helps to define the underlined words.

Maggie was a precocious child to say the least. She produced brilliant watercolor paintings by the age of three. At first, her parents were flabbergasted—utterly blown away—by their daughter’s ability, but soon they got used to their little painter. Her preschool teacher said that Maggie’s dexterity, or ease with which she used her hands, was something she had never before seen in such a young child. Little Maggie never gloated or took pride in her paintings; she just smiled contentedly when she finished one and requested her parents give it to someone as a gift. Whenever people met Maggie for the first time, they often watched her paint with their mouths agape, but her parents always kept their mouths closed and simply smiled over their “little Monet.”

Tip

In addition to context clues to help you figure out the meaning of a word, examine the following word parts: prefixes, roots, and suffixes.

Key Takeaways

- Context clues are words or phrases within a text that help clarify vocabulary that is unknown to you.
- There are several types of context clues including brief definition and restatement, synonyms and antonyms, and example.

Writing Application

Write a paragraph describing your first job. In the paragraph, use five words previously unknown to you. These words could be jargon words or you may consult a dictionary or thesaurus to find a new word. Make sure to provide a specific context clue for understanding each word. Exchange papers with a classmate and try to decipher the meaning of the words in each other’s paragraphs based on the context clues.

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