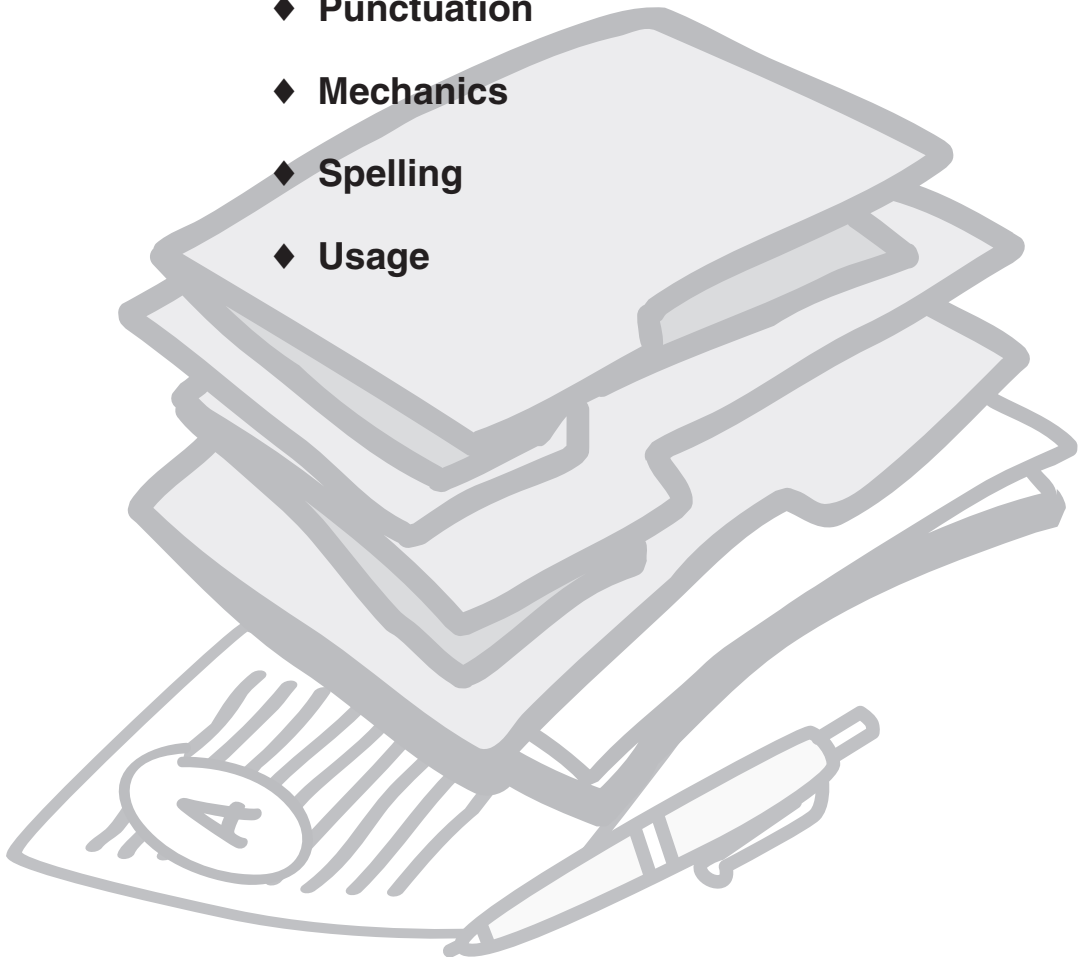


# Criteria for Judging Good Writing

- ◆ Organization
- ◆ Unity
- ◆ Coherence
- ◆ Conciseness
- ◆ Clarity
- ◆ Grammar
- ◆ Punctuation
- ◆ Mechanics
- ◆ Spelling
- ◆ Usage



## **Criteria for Judging Good Writing**

There is nothing mysterious about good writing. As with any skill, writing requires practice and the mastery of certain basic elements. To write well, students must master ten basic elements and demonstrate their abilities to use them in all papers they write. Just as a cake would not taste good if several key ingredients were omitted from the batter, student writing would not be considered good if several key components were omitted from the paper. Instructors, therefore, should judge student writing by the following ten criteria or standards:

- Organization
- Unity
- Coherence
- Conciseness
- Clarity
- Grammar
- Usage
- Mechanics (capitalization, italics, abbreviations)
- Punctuation
- Spelling

## **Organization**

A good paper is well organized. It should contain three distinct parts: (1) Introduction, (2) Body, (3) Conclusion. Each part should contain certain elements that are critical to the effectiveness of each respective part.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the introduction is to introduce the topic the student has chosen. Because first impressions are very important, the introduction should be designed to capture the reader's attention and interest. Students can accomplish this in many ways. Students can open with an arresting statement, give background information, tell a story, describe a topic, use a pertinent quotation, or use a variety of other "tactics" designed to stimulate the reader's interest.

The introduction should contain a thesis statement. The thesis is the main point that students wish to make in the paper. It provides the focus for the entire paper. It is the central idea to which everything else in the paper will relate. It is stated in one or two sentences and usually appears at the end of the introduction. Very often, the thesis has three parts: (1) it expresses the subject of the paper, (2) it expresses the writer's position on that subject, and (3) it includes the main point or points that the writer will make in the paper.

**Thesis:** Parents should insist that seat belts be installed in all school buses because they will help prevent serious injury in the event of an accident.

**Subject:** Seat belts on school buses.

**Writer's Position:** Parents should insist that seat belts be installed in all school buses.

**Point To Be Made:** Seat belts will help prevent serious injury in the event of an accident.

The introduction should also contain a statement of purpose. This statement should be very specific and should state the objective (purpose) of the paper.

## Body

The body of a paper is the main element of the project. It is in this section that students accomplish what was stated in the thesis. A critical part of the body of any paper is the *supporting details*. These are all the points the students must make to prove or explain the thesis. All too often, students write in vague generalities without providing proper support to prove or explain the points they make. Students cannot expect readers to accept what they say just because they say it; rather, the students must prove or explain their generalizations. The supporting details in the body of a paper are so important that the paper's success or failure rests on them.

The following are some of the common ways in which students can provide support for their statements:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Use Description:</b>                  | They can show what something looks, sounds, tastes, feels, or smells like.         |
| <b>Use Narration:</b>                    | They can tell a story to prove or explain their points.                            |
| <b>Use Illustration:</b>                 | They can give examples to support their statements.                                |
| <b>Use Process Analysis:</b>             | They can explain the way something is done or made.                                |
| <b>Use Comparison and/or Contrast:</b>   | They can show the way things are alike and/or different.                           |
| <b>Use Definition:</b>                   | They can explain the meaning of something.   |
| <b>Use Cause and/or Effect Analysis:</b> | They can explain the causes and/or the effects of an event.                        |
| <b>Use Classification:</b>               | They can group things into categories to show similarities or differences.         |
| <b>Use Statistics:</b>                   | They can use numerical facts to support their statements.                          |
| <b>Use Testimony:</b>                    | They can use direct quotations, summaries, or paraphrases to back up their points. |

**Body Paragraphs**

The supporting details of a paper are arranged in paragraphs called “body paragraphs.” Each body paragraph usually focuses on one aspect of the thesis. An aspect of the thesis that requires considerable explanation can be the focus of more than one body paragraph.

**Topic Sentences**

The topic sentence of a paragraph states the central idea that the rest of the paragraph clarifies, exemplifies or supports. A good topic sentence guides the development of the rest of the paragraph. It can come at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of each body paragraph.

**IMPORTANT:** Each topic sentence must be relevant to the thesis of the paper. Similarly, the supporting detail in each body paragraph must be relevant to the topic sentence of that paragraph.

**Transitions**

Transitions are words and phrases that act as glue to join or connect the parts of a paper and show relationships between these parts. Transitions provide coherence for the paper; they make the discussion in the paper easy to follow. Words and phrases such as, “furthermore,” “in addition,” “next,” “likewise,” “in contrast,” “as a result,” and “therefore” act as transition devices.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion of a paper is as important as the introduction. In this section, students should leave readers with a firm sense that the information provided in the body of the paper has made the point introduced in the thesis. The conclusion should satisfy the reader that students have said all that is reasonably necessary to follow through with what was established in the thesis.

Effective conclusions can be as short as a sentence or two or they can be as long as several paragraphs. If the paper was long, with many ideas, students could summarize their main points as a way of reminding the readers of those points. However, if the paper was short and the points easily remembered, summarizing is not a good tactic to use because it might bore the reader.

The following are other approaches students can use in writing conclusions:

- Repeat the thesis and elaborate on it.
- Draw a conclusion from the information in the paper.
- Look to the future. Comment on future implications of the thesis.
- Present the final most important point.
- Offer a solution to a problem mentioned in the paper.
- Present some action for readers to follow (recommendation).
- Leave the reader with a final impression.

**Two Don'ts In The Conclusion:**

1. Students should not begin a new topic or idea that requires more development.
2. Students should not begin the conclusion with the words, "In conclusion" or its equivalent.

## ***Unity***

Unity refers to the harmony among the various parts of a paper. All the parts should work together to produce an effective final product. A unified paper has a clearly stated thesis in the introductory paragraph. All the supporting paragraphs (body paragraphs) work together to back up the thesis. Each body paragraph has a topic sentence that supports the thesis, and all the details in the body paragraph support and develop the topic sentence. (A detailed discussion of the various elements of unity appears in Organization on page 12.)

Students have a tendency to digress from the subject about which they are writing. Meaningless digressions from the subject at hand also detract from the unity of a paper. If, for example, a student was writing a paper about psychoanalysis as developed by Sigmund Freud, a paragraph that discusses psychoanalysis as a popular therapy during the 1960s would detract from the unity of the paper.

## **Coherence**

Coherence refers to how well the writer has linked the various parts of a paper to make them fit together. A coherent paper is one that hangs together well. All the points flow smoothly from one to the other.

Each paragraph should lead the reader from the beginning of the paper to the end in some logical order (explained below). When students move from one paragraph to another, they should include transitions to show the relationship between the two.

The sentences within each paragraph should interlock so that the first idea leads to the second, the second to the third, and so on.

To achieve this logical movement from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph, students must use ORDER to arrange the details in the paper. Generally, there are three types of ordering that students can use:

1. **Chronological Order** - details are arranged across time. This is a good technique to use when telling a story.
2. **Spacial Order** - details are arranged as they appear across space, such as top to bottom, front to back, left to right, or near to far. This is a good technique to use to describe a scene or a place.
3. **Progressive Order** - details are arranged from the least to the most important, interesting, compelling, surprising, etc. This is a good technique to use when presenting an argument or persuading the reader to do something because the most significant detail comes at the end.

To further achieve coherence in writing, students should:

1. Repeat important words and phrases.
2. Maintain a consistent attitude or stance towards their subjects throughout their papers. They should not change positions within the paper.
3. Integrate or join quotes, summaries and other information drawn from sources so that the writing flows. If students simply place sources one after another, the paper will seem choppy and unconnected.

## **Conciseness**

Conciseness refers to the expression of ideas in as few words as possible. It is writing that is free of needless repetition and useless words. Students should eliminate words, phrases, and clauses that do not further the purpose they established in the paper.

- Students should make every word count.

**Wordy**            Several actresses tried out in the audition for the role of Juliet.

**Concise**         Several actresses auditioned for the role of Juliet.

- Students should remove unnecessary expletives. (An expletive is the word “it” or “there” followed by a form of the verb “to be.”)

**Wordy**            There were three hairdressers that accompanied Madonna on her recent tour.

**Concise**         Three hairdressers accompanied Madonna on her recent tour.

- Students should combine sentences to eliminate unnecessary words.

**Wordy**            The river was muddy brown. It twisted like a snake to the bay. The surface of the river was turbulent and swift.

**Concise**         The muddy brown river, turbulent and swift, twisted like a snake to the bay.

- Students should repeat words and phrases carefully for conciseness and also for clarity.

**Wordy**            John knew that Susan felt that the divorce between John and Susan was not what John wanted.

**Concise**         John knew that Susan felt that their divorce was not what he wanted.

## ***Clarity***

Students sometimes try to pack too much information into one sentence. When they do this, they usually create a confusing or unclear sentence. Lack of clarity can also result from faulty grammar or punctuation. Errors in grammar and punctuation are discussed in another section of this booklet.

***Confusing*** Last week while I was visiting historical New Castle on a guided tour, our class went to the Old Dutch House, where we had been for about an hour and a half when the rest of the class was ready to move on to the Amstel House Museum and I told a friend in the class that I wanted to stay in the Old Dutch House a little longer and I would rejoin the class a little later, but I never did, even though I moved more quickly than I wanted from room to room, not having seen after about two more hours all that I wanted to see.

***Better*** While I was visiting the Old Dutch House in New Castle with my class last week, I decided to stay longer when the class left after about an hour and a half. So I told a friend that I would rejoin the class at the Amstel House Museum a little later. I moved from room to room much more quickly than I wanted to, but after two more hours I had not seen all I wanted to see. I never did rejoin the class that day.

***Best*** While visiting the Old Dutch House in New Castle with my class last week, I stayed after the group left. Even then, I didn't see all that I wanted to.

**Conciseness** and **Clarity** go hand-in-hand. Concise writing is clear writing.

## Grammar

You may believe that students make many different types of grammatical mistakes in writings submitted to you. But if you inspect their papers carefully, you will find that they don't make a large number of different errors so much as they repeat the same type of error many times.

There are twelve common grammatical errors that appear most frequently in student papers. I call them "*The Dirty Dozen.*"

**Sentence Fragment** A complete sentence contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. If one or more of these elements is missing, the result is a sentence fragment.

- Word group without a subject:

**Fragment** The student always wears a tie to school.  
Then takes it off by noon.

**Corrected** The student always wears a tie to school.  
He then takes it off by noon.

- Word group without a verb:

**Fragment** Arriving before the dance began, we enjoyed the excitement in the air. The band tuning up before their opening song.

**Corrected** Arriving before the dance began, we enjoyed the excitement in the air. The band was tuning up before their opening song.

- Word group without a subject and verb and does not express a complete thought:

**Fragment** Some people are learning dangerous sports. Such as sky diving and bungee jumping.

**Corrected** Some people are learning dangerous sports, such as sky diving and bungee jumping.

## Run-on Sentence

A run-on sentence is a sentence that is made up of two complete thoughts that have no clear break between them. There are two kinds of run-on sentences: fused sentences and comma splices.

### Fused Sentence

This is a sentence where there is no punctuation at all separating two complete statements:

The water was warm the bathers were happy.

### Comma Splice

This is a sentence where a *comma alone* separates two complete thoughts. A comma alone is not sufficient punctuation to mark a break between complete statements. A stronger punctuation mark is needed:

The water was warm, the bathers were happy.

There are several ways to correct run-on sentences:

**1. Divide the run-on into two sentences.**

The water was warm. The bathers were happy.

**2. Connect the two complete thoughts with a comma and a joining word.**

The water was warm, and the bathers were happy.

**3. Add a dependent word to one of the complete thoughts.**

Because the water was warm, the bathers were happy.

**4. Use a stronger punctuation mark between the two complete thoughts.**

The water was warm; the bathers were happy.

**HINT:** The semicolon (;) could be used to mean the word “therefore.”

## Pronoun Agreement

A pronoun must agree in number with the word it refers to (called the pronoun's antecedent). A singular word requires a singular pronoun, and a plural word requires a plural pronoun.

**Incorrect**     Each of my sisters has their own car.

**Correct**     Each of my sisters has her own car.

Some pronouns are always singular, some are always plural, and some are both singular and plural.

### *Singular Pronouns:*

each	anyone	anybody	anything
either	everyone	everybody	everything
neither	someone	somebody	something
one	no one	nobody	nothing

### *Plural Pronouns:*

both	many	several
few	other	

### *Pronouns that can be singular or plural depending on their context:*

all	more	none
any	most	some

## Pronoun Shift in Person

Pronouns must be consistent in person. Students must not shift from one person to another person.

**Incorrect**     Though we get along with most of our neighbors, there are a few that you just can't tolerate.

**Correct**     Though we get along with most of our neighbors, there are a few that we just can't tolerate.

## Unclear Pronoun Reference

A pronoun must clearly refer to the word for which it stands (antecedent). Students make this error when they create sentences with pronouns that have two possible antecedents or when they create sentences with pronouns that have no antecedents.

**Incorrect** John told his brother that he received a letter from Germany. (Who received the letter, John or his brother?)

**Correct** John told his brother, "I received a letter from Germany."

**Incorrect** For years Bill carried heavy bags of cement, and it strained his back. ("It" does not refer to anything in this sentence.)

**Correct** For years Bill carried heavy bags of cement, and this work strained his back.

## Misplaced Modifier

A modifier is one or more words that describe another word or word group in a sentence. A ***misplaced modifier*** is a modifier that is incorrectly separated from the word or words it describes. When modifiers are misplaced, readers may misunderstand the sentence. Misplaced modifiers tend to create very unusual sentences.

**Incorrect** Jim bought a used car from a local dealer with rear end trouble.

**Correct** Jim bought a used car with rear end trouble from a local dealer.

**HINT:** To eliminate this error, students should place the modifier as close as possible to the word or words it describes.

## Dangling Modifier

A ***dangling modifier*** is a modifier that has no word in the sentence to describe; therefore, it just dangles in the sentence by itself. Dangling modifiers usually occur at the beginning of sentences.

**Incorrect** At the age of 10, my family moved to Delaware.

**Correct** At the age of 10, I moved to Delaware with my family.

## Faulty Parallelism

Sentences that are not parallel are awkward to read. Parallelism helps words flow smoothly and clearly. *Parallel structure* means that two or more equal ideas should be expressed in *matching* form. For example:

*Not Parallel* My favorite dinner consists of mashed potatoes, steak that is broiled and creamed corn.

*Parallel* My favorite dinner consists of mashed potatoes, broiled steak, and creamed corn.

*Not Parallel* My boyfriend is tall, dark, and has handsome features.

*Parallel* My boyfriend is tall, dark, and handsome.

*Not Parallel* I love to hunt, fishing, and camping.

*Parallel* I love hunting, fishing, and camping.

President John F. Kennedy's speech would not have been as memorable if he had said:

*Not Parallel* "Don't ask what your country can do for you. Instead you should be asking what you can do for your country."

**instead of**

*Parallel* "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

## Subject-Verb Agreement

In a well written sentence, the subject and verb must agree in number. Singular subjects must have singular verbs and plural subjects must have plural verbs. In very simple sentences, students usually have no trouble making the subject and verb agree. Our son walks five miles every day.

We would like, however, to have our students write longer and more complex sentences. Students will make a mistake in agreement more readily when they write these types of sentences.

There are two types of writing situations that can cause a student to make an error in subject-verb agreement:

**1. When words are placed between the subject and the verb.**

In these longer sentences, students match up the wrong subject with the verb.

*Incorrect* The colored boxes in the closet belongs to my sister.

In this example, the student incorrectly matched the singular verb “belongs” with the object of the prepositional phrase “closet” which is also singular.

*Correct* The colored boxes in the closet belong to my sister.

In this sentence, the subject “boxes” which is plural is correctly matched with the verb “belong” which is also plural.

*Prepositional phrases* account for most subject-verb agreement mistakes. A prepositional phrase is a group of words that begins with a preposition (to, in, for, on, from, by, etc.) and ends with a noun or pronoun called the object of the preposition. When students make a subject-verb agreement mistake, they incorrectly match the verb of the sentence with the object in the prepositional phrase.

*Incorrect* His secretary, in addition to his staff, prefer the new office location.

*Correct* His secretary, in addition to his staff, prefers the new office location.

**HINT:** A writer can *NEVER* use the object of a prepositional phrase as the subject of a sentence.

**2. When verbs come before the subject.**

In most sentences the verb follows the subject.

A ship sailed up the Delaware River.

However, in some sentences, the verb comes *before* the subject. In sentences that are *questions*, the verb comes before the subject.

What was your accumulated grade for the final exams?

The verb “was” is singular. It agrees with the singular subject “grade.” “For the final exams” is a prepositional phrase. **REMEMBER**, the subject of a sentence is **NEVER** in a prepositional phrase.

### **Active-Passive Voice Shift**

When the subject of a sentence does the action, the sentence is in the *active voice*:

Jill sewed the curtains.

When the subject of a sentence receives the action, the sentence is in the *passive voice*:

The curtains were sewn by Jill.

Students should write their sentences in the *active voice*. Sentences in the active voice are more effective and are livelier to read. An essay written in *passive voice* will eventually bore the reader.

In some instances, the passive voice is necessary because the subject of the sentence is unknown or unimportant:

The store was robbed last week.

Much of scientific and technical writing is written in the passive voice because scientists and technicians want to appear objective in their writing:

The experiment was conducted under controlled conditions.

Shifting from one voice to another in an essay can be very distracting and can confuse the reader:

Jane bought the pizza, and the sodas were bought by Robert.

## Shifts In Tense

Students should not shift verb tenses unnecessarily in their writing. Shifts in verb tense will confuse the reader about the time the action took place in the sentence. It is also very distracting:

*Incorrect*      Shortly after we arrived at the campsite, it started to rain. So we quickly gather up the children and rush to the tents.

*Correct*        Shortly after we arrived at the campsite, it started to rain. So we quickly gathered up the children and rushed to the tents.

Students must be consistent with the verb tense they use in their writing. They should stay in the same tense throughout their writing that they used in the beginning of their writing.

In research papers where students must include a literature review, or in papers where they cite studies or use quotations, summaries, or paraphrases, they often commit a common error by using the present tense. Since the research or the studies have already been completed, or the quotations, summaries or paraphrases have already been said, students should refer to them in the *past tense*:

*Incorrect*      General Barnes says, "War is hell."

*Correct*        General Barnes said, "War is hell."

*Incorrect*      Miles (1992) suggests that children with special needs must be placed in special schools.

*Correct*        Miles (1992) suggested that children with special needs must be placed in special schools.

**Table 1.** A list of the twelve verb tenses that represent various times of action.

<b>Tense</b>	<b>Time of Action</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Present</b>	Action happens now or happens habitually	Susan always <u>runs</u> well.
<b>Past</b>	Action that has already happened.	Jack <u>knocked</u> on the kitchen window.
<b>Future</b>	Action that is going to happen.	The teachers <u>will attend</u> the convention in Atlanta.
<b>Present Perfect</b>	Action that began in the past but has recently been finished or is continuing at the present time.	My roommate <u>has lived</u> in four different apartments.
<b>Past Perfect</b>	Action that has happened before another past action.	Myra <u>had asked</u> two friends to dinner before inviting Tony.
<b>Future Perfect</b>	Action that will be completed before some time in the future.	By graduation day, I <u>will have interviewed</u> for three jobs.
<b>Present Progressive</b>	Action that is in progress now.	Ron <u>is studying</u> for his exam now.
<b>Past Progressive</b>	Action that was in progress at a certain time in the past.	Joan <u>was sailing</u> yesterday.
<b>Future Progressive</b>	Action that will be in progress at a certain time in the future.	John <u>will be hunting</u> next month.
<b>Present Perfect Progressive</b>	Action that was in progress in the past and still is.	David <u>has been studying</u> for his test for the last two hours.
<b>Past Perfect Progressive</b>	Action that was in progress in the past, but stopped recently.	Dora <u>had been looking</u> at her study notes.
<b>Future Perfect Progressive</b>	Action that will be in progress until a set time in the future.	Unless Kyle returns to work, he <u>will have been looking</u> at television until dinnertime.

## Shift in Person or Number

Students who create the mistake of shifting persons in their writing usually do so because they are not certain from what point of view to write, or because they move from one point of view to another without being conscious of the change. This mistake is a pronoun error and is made when students shift between first person pronouns (I, my, mine, me, we, our, us), second person pronouns (you, yours), and third person pronouns (he, his, him, she, her, it, its, they, their, them). When writing a paper, students must be consistent in the use of these pronouns. If, for example, they begin the paper in the first person (I), they should not jump suddenly to the second person (you).

***Incorrect*** One of the best benefits of my new job is that you get to use a company car.

***Correct*** One of the best benefits of my new job is that I get to use a company car.

One of the most common person shift mistakes students make is to let a “you” (second person) slip into their writing after they start with another person as in the incorrect example above.

A shift in number is very similar to a shift in person. This type of shift is also a pronoun error. It occurs when students start to write from one perspective and switch to another:

***Incorrect*** If someone in the class wishes to leave, they may do so.

From our discussion of pronouns, we discovered that the pronoun “someone” is always singular. In the example above, the student shifted, from singular (someone) to plural (they) in the same sentence.

***Correct*** If someone in the class wishes to leave, that person may do so.

***or*** If someone in the class wishes to leave, he/she may do so.

### **One Final Grammar Hint to Pass on to Students:**

Students must be careful to avoid sexist language. Nouns such as “spokesman,” “chairman” and “policeman” are out, and nouns such as “spokesperson,” “chairperson,” and “police officer” are in. Also, students should no longer assume “he” is an acceptable pronoun for all nouns:

*Incorrect*      If the clerk promised to give a refund, he should do so.

In an effort to correct sexist language, students often overuse the “he/she” or “his/her” construction:

*Incorrect*      When a student enters school, he/she must learn to participate in groups. By doing this, he/she will learn leadership skills. These skills will particularly benefit him/her in his/her high school years.

This construction overuse can easily be corrected if students use a plural instead of a singular noun.

*Correct*          When students enter school, they must learn to participate in groups. By doing this, they will learn leadership skills. These skills will particularly benefit them in their high school years.

# ***Punctuation***

Punctuation errors in term papers affect the clarity of the paper; they distort the meaning of sentences for the reader. To be skilled writers, students must learn to punctuate correctly.

## **The Comma**

There are ten main uses of a comma:

### **1. Between items in a series**

John bought lumber, nails, and tools for the renovation project.

**NOTE:** Commas are not used when the series contains only two items.

He turned the key and started the car.

### **2. After introductory material**

In the heat of the summer, deer seek the cool shade of evergreen trees.

**NOTE:** Commas need not be used after short introductory material.

Upon my return I found the apartment completely painted.

### **3. Around words that interrupt the flow of a sentence**

My brother, who is very thin, complains that I eat too much. His wife, though, eats as much as I do.

### **4. Between complete thoughts connected by a joining word**

The river rose rapidly, so the residents moved to higher ground.

**NOTE:** The commonly used joining words are “and,” “but,” “so,” “or,” “nor,” “for,” and “yet”.

**NOTE:** Students should not use a comma just because a sentence contains a joining word. They should use a comma *only* when the joining word comes between two complete thoughts.

*No comma* Jim finished his homework and then went to the party.

**5. With direct quotations**

Commas are used to separate directly quoted material from the rest of the sentence.

Andrea screamed, "There's smoke in the kitchen."

"To receive your hunting license," the game warden told the teenager, "you must take a hunter safety course."

**NOTE:** When a comma occurs at the end of a quotation, the writer includes it inside the quotation marks.

**6. To set off short expressions at the beginnings or ends of sentences**

No, you may not buy a dog.

Would you turn the music down, please?

**7. To set off the name of a person spoken to**

How much sugar do I use in this recipe, Amy?  
Hey, Mister, your car lights are on.

**8. After the opening and closing of an informal letter**

Dear Uncle Joe, With love always,

**9. Between two descriptive words when they are interchangeable**

**NOTE:** Descriptive words are interchangeable when reversing their order in a sentence would make sense. Another way to tell if two descriptive words need a comma is to see if the word “*and*” can be placed between them and the sentence still makes sense.

I never could resist a soft, cuddly kitten.

My fantasy vacation spot is the island of St. Lucia.

**10. Within a date or an address**

Thursday, June 22, 1998, was the last day to cash in lottery tickets.

Please send your resume to Wilmington College, 320 DuPont Highway, New Castle, Delaware 19720.

**NOTE:** Do not place a comma between the state and the ZIP code.

## The Apostrophe

The apostrophe serves two main purposes: to show a contraction and to show possession. It is also used to show the plural of letters, numbers and words used as words.

**1. Contractions**

Here are a few common contractions:

I'm = I am	I've = I have
they're = they are	there's = there is
let's = let us	she'll = she will
it's = it is	you've = you have
you'd = you would	shouldn't = should not
hasn't = has not	won't = will not
don't = do not	didn't = did not
doesn't = does not	

**HINT:** Contractions are considered informal English and should not be used in formal pieces of writing.

Students often make mistakes by confusing the following words:

they're (they are)	their (belonging to)
it's (it is)	its (belonging to)
you're (you are)	your (belonging to)
who's (who is)	whose (belonging to)

## 2. Possession

The basic rule to make a possessive is to add an apostrophe plus an "s" to the word:

Joe's hat	the father's car
the children's books	the building's roof

The apostrophe plus "s" rule is used even with a *singular* word that already ends in "s."

the boss's phone	the princess's castle
Morris's bank account	the hostess's dress

An apostrophe alone is used to show possession with a *plural* word that ends in "s".

the students' books	the pilots' association
the teachers' cars	parents' responsibilities

## 3. Plurals of letters, numbers, symbols, and words used in a special way

**Letters** William received "A's" in all his subjects this semester.

**Numbers** There are four "5's" in my license plate number.

**Words used in a special way** There were too many "and's" in Jerry's essay.

## Quotation Marks

There are four main uses for quotation marks:

### 1. **To set off the exact words of a writer or speaker**

The primary use of quotation marks is to enclose the exact words of another writer or speaker.

The newspaper stated, "War in the Gulf is inevitable."

**NOTE:** Quotation marks are not used with indirect quotations usually introduced by the word "that."

The newspaper stated that war in the Gulf is inevitable.

**A NOTE ON PUNCTUATION:** Quoted material is set off from the rest of the sentence by a comma. When the comma comes at the end of the quoted material, it is placed inside the quotation mark. Periods that end quoted material are also placed inside the quotation mark.

"This money," he stated, "will be used to feed the hungry."

Semicolons and colons always go outside closing quotation marks.

Mr. Jackson said, "Your paper has no errors"; this really surprised me.

He has two favorite "sports": eating and more eating.

The rule for question marks and exclamation points is that if the punctuation is part of the material quoted, it goes inside the quotation marks; if the punctuation is not part of the material quoted, it goes outside the quotation marks.

Jacob asked, "Is it time to eat?"

Did Barbara say, "We should not go unless we are invited"?

**ALSO NOTE:** A quoted sentence begins with a capital letter even when it is preceded by other words.

*Incorrect* Jane said, "it's time to leave."

*Correct* Jane said, "It's time to leave."

**2. To show titles of short works**

Quotation marks are used to show titles of short works or parts of works such as short stories, newspaper or magazine articles, song titles, poems, individual TV shows, essays, and book chapters.

Did you see the article "Families At Risk" in the last Sunday's newspaper?

**NOTE:** Titles of longer works such as books, magazines, newspapers, movies, plays, TV series, and record albums are italicized or underlined.

"The Fine Art of Stupidity" was the title of an article that appeared in last week's Sunday News Journal.

**3. To set off words used in a special way**

Quotation marks are also used to show words used in a special or ironic sense or words used as words. (Using underlining/italics is also correct.)

It is no longer appropriate to use "chairman" in written text.

**4. Quotation within a quotation**

Students should use a single quotation mark ( ' ' ) to show a quotation within a quotation.

John said, "One of my favorite sayings is 'Don't go away angry; just go away.'"

## The Period

The period has four main uses:

### 1. To end a statement, mild command, or indirect question

There are certain fish that walk on dry land.

Go close the door.

I wonder if there will be a full moon tonight.

### 2. In abbreviations

Dr. Skinner  
Mr. and Mrs. Fox  
Ms. Ashley  
M. A. Degree  
W. T. Grant  
3:30 p.m.

**NOTE:** If an abbreviation that ends with a period comes at the end of a sentence, students should not add another period.

We will leave at 4:30 a.m.

### 3. To number lists and outlines

James lives by three basic rules:

1. He never lies.
2. He respects other opinions.
3. He gives others the benefit of doubt.

### 4. To indicate omitted words in quoted material

When students omit words in quoted material, they must indicate the omission by using a series of three spaced periods (...) called ellipsis points.

"As part of their mission to provide service to the needy, the Franciscans maintain three shelters..., of which Mission Casa is the largest."

## The Question Mark

The question mark follows a direct question.  
What vegetable did you use in your soup?

**NOTE:** Indirect questions are those that tell the reader about a question rather than ask it directly. These sentences end with periods not question marks.

Please ask the usher if we are allowed to bring soft drinks into the theater.

## The Exclamation Point

The exclamation point follows words or statements that express strong feeling or excitement.

Watch your step!

Wow!

I can't believe I ate the whole cake!

## The Colon

In essence, the colon tells the reader to keep reading; something important is about to be said. There are seven primary uses of the colon:

### 1. To introduce a list

The interviews were held in three locations:  
Philadelphia, New York, and Atlanta.

### 2. To introduce a long or literary quotation

Margaret Mitchell begins her classic novel Gone With The Wind with these words: "Scarlet O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm as the Tarleton Twins were."

### 3. To introduce a final fact or explanation

We had to keep writing for one reason: the paper was due the next day.

### 4. To separate the title and subtitle of a book or article

Usage: A Guide to Correct Speaking

### 5. To separate numbers in time references and biblical citations

10:05 a.m.  
Genesis 10:16 (Chapter 10, verse 16)

**6. To express proportions or ratios**

The cement for this form was mixed with sand and water at 4:2:1. (The colon is read as the word "to.")

**7. Following the salutation in business letters**

Dear Mr. Briggs:  
Dear Marketing Director:  
Dear Edward:

**The Semicolon**

The semicolon, in essence, says "Pause here." There are three main uses for this punctuation mark:

**1. To join two complete thoughts not connected by a joining word (conjunction)**

James cooked the dinner; John washed the dishes.

**2. To join two complete thoughts with a transitional word**

My father always liked fishing; therefore, he bought a boat.

**NOTE:** Students should only use semicolons when joining complete sentences of equal weight with a transitional word. They *should not* use a semicolon to set off words that interrupt the flow of a single sentence.

*Incorrect*      Father finished his work early and; therefore, went fishing.

*Correct*        Father finished his work early and, therefore, went fishing.

**3. To set off items in a series when the items themselves contain commas**

Our guest list for the wedding included Jim Neal, who is a mayor of a large city; Brenda Holmes, who is a commissioner of education; and Robert Parks, who is a prominent radio personality.

## The Hyphen

There are five main uses for the hyphen:

- 1. To join two or more words (compound words) that act together to describe a noun**

fast-talking salesman  
able-bodied seamen  
self-contained classroom

**NOTE:** Students should check a dictionary if they are unsure whether or where to hyphenate a word.

- 2. To hyphenate compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine and fractions when they are written**

sixty-two  
eighty-eight  
one-sixteenth

- 3. After a prefix if the root word is a proper noun**

post-Jacksonian  
pre-Sputnik

- 4. After the prefixes “all-,” “ex-,” and “self-”**

all-knowing  
ex-husband  
self-educated

- 5. To divide a word at the end of a line of writing**

**NOTE:** Students should divide words between syllables. They should never divide a word of only one syllable. They should check a dictionary to find where syllable divisions occur.

## The Dash

There are four main uses for a dash:

- 1. To indicate a sharp turn in thought, a dramatic pause, or an interjection that interrupts a sentence**

I start vacation on October 1st—unless my boss decides against it.

A massage sometimes—but not always—relieves a headache.

A sudden heatwave—in October!—upset our skiing plans.

**2. Before a summarizing statement or a repetition of something in a sentence**

The dress she wore to the party was short—very short.

**3. To set off an explanatory series in a sentence**

Three of the contestants—Miss Delaware, Miss Nevada, and Miss Arizona—have the best chance of winning the beauty contest.

**4. To signal the end of a list of items**

Two eggs, three pancakes, and four strips of bacon—that's what Jim has for breakfast.

## Parentheses

Parentheses are used in two ways:

**1. To enclose information that may help readers better understand something in a sentence, but is not essential for meaning**

Dr. Erickson (one of my favorite instructors) has accepted a teaching position at Yale University.

**2. To enclose letters or numbers that introduce items in a list**

This course in speech will cover (1) interviews, (2) demonstration speeches, (3) persuasive speakers, and (4) impromptu speaking.

## Brackets

Brackets have two primary uses:

**1. To enclose explanatory words inserted in quotations**

"Old Blood and Guts [General George S. Patton] felt in 1945 that the enemy of the future would be Russia."

**2. To serve as parentheses inside parentheses**

Credit should be given to George Patton (and Omar Bradley [another general]) for stopping the German advance during the Battle of the Bulge.

**Underlining  
(Italics)**

Italics are indicated on the typewriter by underlining. Students using a computer can italicize material.

There are five primary reasons to underline (italicize):

**1. To show words that are defined or require special emphasis in a sentence**

By plagiarism I mean not giving credit to the original author for using his/her work in a student paper.

You must take a position for gun control or against it.

**2. Titles of long works**

Books

Magazines and newspapers

Films and television and radio programs

Long musical works and albums

Paintings and sculptures

Computer software

**3. Names of ships, trains, spacecraft, and aircraft**

**4. Foreign words or phrases that have not been assimilated into the English language**

Students should consult a dictionary when in doubt.

**5. Words, letters, and figures mentioned as such**

(Using quotation marks is also correct.)

The word grammar is often misspelled.  
I received all A's on my report card.

## ***Mechanics***

Mechanics refers to capital letters, numbers, and abbreviations.

### **Capital Letters**

Students should capitalize:

1. The first word in a sentence or a direct quotation
2. Personal names and nicknames
3. The pronoun "I"
4. Names of particular places and geographical regions, e.g., Delaware, New Castle County, Europe, the Azores
5. Names of ethnic groups and nationalities and their languages, e.g., African American, Greek, Russian, Latino
6. Personal, professional, and job titles, e.g., Mrs. Newton, Dr. Cavander, Superintendent Smith
7. Names of institutions, organizations, religious and political groups, associations, companies, unions, and clubs, e.g., United Methodist Church, House Judiciary Committee, DuPont Company, Red Cross, Postal Clerks' Union, Democratic Party, Faculty Senate
8. Trade names, e.g., Nissan, Reebok, Buck knives
9. Historical events and documents, e.g., the Gulf War, Middle Ages, the Constitution, the American Revolution, Magna Carta
10. Religious terms, e.g., Christianity, Catholic, Jew, the Bible, Easter, Koran
11. The name God and the names of other deities, e.g., Allah, Lord

12. Days of the week, months, holidays, e.g., *Wednesday, October, Thanksgiving, Chanukah*
13. Scientific names of orders, classes, families and genera, e.g., *Mobulidae (manta ray), Elephantidae (elephant)*
14. Stars, constellations, and planets, e.g., *Venus, Earth, the Big Dipper*
15. Titles of books, magazines, newspapers, articles, poems, stories, films, television shows, and songs

Students *should not capitalize*:

1. Seasons of the year
2. Geographic features unless they are part of a proper name, e.g., *northern part of Delaware, southern region*
3. The words “**north,**” “**south,**” “**east,**” and “**west**” when they refer to directions. They *are* capitalized when they refer to sections of the country.  

I will travel north to avoid the hot weather.  
The North won the Civil War.

## Numbers

The following are guidelines students should follow when writing numbers:

- Numbers that can be written in one or two words should be spelled out. All others should be written in numerals.  

The new Wal-Mart store has two general managers, twenty-one department managers, and one hundred employees.  
Chrysler had 20,296 leftover Dodge Ram pickup trucks in 1997.
- Any number that begins a sentence should be spelled out.

- Students should be consistent when writing a series of numbers. If one or more numbers in the series need to be written as numerals, then all of the numbers need to be written as numerals.

Mr. Collard bought 220 feet of fencing, 5 gallons of paint, and 12 boxes of nails.

- Students should use numerals to write:

*addresses* ..... 101 Bayard Avenue

*percentages* ..... 15%

*dates* ..... June 22, 1941

*times* ..... 7:45 a.m.

*portions of a book* . Chapter 2, pages 10–15

*exact amounts of money that include change* \$20.95

## Abbreviations

Students should avoid, as much as possible, using abbreviations when writing papers. The following are several abbreviations that are acceptable:

- **Initials in a person’s name**

W. T. Grant                  Robert E. Lee

- **Titles used with proper names**

Dr. Elliott    Mr. Blith    Prof. Lewis    John Polk, Jr.

- **References to time**

12 a.m.                  200 B.C.

- **Organizations, technical words, trade names, and other acronyms commonly referred to by their initials**  
(written in all capital letters and without periods)

CIA    FBI    NATO    CPR    NAACP    YWCA    AIDS

- **Postal abbreviations for state names and that of the District of Columbia**

DC    DE    MD    PA    UT

## **Spelling**

Spelling in the English language is very difficult because the English spelling system is based primarily on meaning rather than on sound. To make matters worse, the spelling rules used in English are complicated, and most of them have several exceptions. Nevertheless, students must strengthen their spelling skills.

Studies show that students whose writing has many spelling errors (and punctuation and capitalization errors) are thought to be less educated and less intelligent than people who can write without these errors. As potential college graduates, students must, therefore, learn to spell correctly.

As instructors, we must strongly urge students to proofread their work; and if they don't, we must penalize them for their errors. They should use computer spell checkers or pocket-size spell checkers to assist them, but they should also learn ways to improve their own spelling abilities without these devices.

There are a variety of techniques students can use to improve their spelling skills. The following seven tactics are among the best:

**1. Use the dictionary.**

When writing papers, students should get into the habit of looking up the spelling of any word about which they are unsure.

**2. Keep a spelling log.**

Students should write down every word that they misspell and then the correct spelling for that word. This list can be kept in the back of a notebook or on a separate sheet of paper. They should study this list regularly. New words can be added to this list at any time.

**3. Learn basic spelling rules.**

Learning some of the basic spelling rules can help eliminate a percentage of spelling errors. Most grammar books contain a discussion of spelling rules.

**4. Study a list of commonly confused words.**

Students should study the spelling and meaning of words that are commonly confused. Words such as *“break” - “brake,” “knew” - “new,” “passed” - “past,”* and *“than” - “then”* are often mistakenly used. Again, most grammar books list these types of words.

**5. Study a list of basic words.**

A grammar book is, again, a source for these words. Most books contain lists of most frequently used words in the English language. Students should study twenty to twenty-five words at a time and have someone quiz them.

**6. Do crossword puzzles.**

Crossword puzzles and other word games require students to match the meaning and spelling of words. The more students have exposure to these types of exercises, the better spellers they will become.

**7. Read.**

Recent research shows that the more students read, the more words they learn, and the better their spelling becomes.

## **Usage**

The English language is really composed of two languages: formal or Edited American English and informal or Nonstandard English.

Formal English is the type used for academic writing and speaking. It is also the type of English required in the world of work. It has strict rules for grammar, spelling, punctuation, mechanics, and usage. This type of English is marked by correct and appropriate vocabulary, and does not allow the use of slang, colloquialisms (informal or casual speech or writing), and contractions.

Informal English refers to any version of our language that deviates from the rules for formal English. This is the type of language used in everyday speech. It is characterized by a more informal and ordinary vocabulary in which slang, colloquialisms, and contractions are often used.

Most students spend much of their time engaged in conversations in which informal English is the predominant language used. To make matters worse, some students reduce this level of language to an even lower level which is characterized by grammatical mistakes and the predominant use of slang. Because of this, many students find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to “switch channels” and begin to use formal English in their written assignments, their oral presentations, and their conversations and discussions in class.

As instructors, we are perpetuating the problem by not “forcing” students to use formal English in written assignments and oral discussions in class and on campus. Only by making the use of formal English a course requirement will we give students the language competencies required of college graduates.

Usage refers to the various words and word constructions that students choose to use in their writing. The difference between formal and informal English is a matter of usage. Not only must students use words acceptable in formal writing and speaking, they must also choose correct words to express the meaning they wish to convey. This ability to choose correct words is made difficult by the fact that we have many words in our language that are pronounced the same (or almost the same), but are spelled differently and have different meanings. These words are called homonyms. Because of their similarity, homonyms often confuse students into picking an incorrect word for what they want to say.

The following directory contains an alphabetized list of the most commonly confused homonyms. It also contains slang, colloquialisms, and other word constructions that are unacceptable in formal writing and speaking:

<b>accept/except</b>	<b>Accept</b> means “to receive something.” <b>Except</b> means “other than.”
<b>ad, doc, prof</b>	Shortened versions of words are consider informal. Formal writing requires the long version ( <b>advertisement, doctor, professor</b> ).
<b>adapt/adopt-</b>	<b>Adapt</b> means “to adjust” or “to change something.” <b>Adopt</b> means “to take as one’s own.”
<b>addition/edition</b>	<b>Addition</b> means “joining two things together,” or “something that is added to something else.” <b>Edition</b> means “one of a series of printings of a publication.”
<b>advise/advice</b>	<b>Advise</b> means “to give guidance.” <b>Advice</b> means “guidance.”
<b>aggravate</b>	In formal English it means “to make more severe.” Walking on the blister will aggravate the hurt. In informal English it means “to annoy,” “to irritate.” Her temper tantrums annoy [not aggravate] me.
<b>affect/effect</b>	<b>Affect</b> means “to have an influence on” <b>Effect</b> means “a result.”
<b>all ready/already</b>	<b>All ready</b> means “completely prepared.” <b>Already</b> means “previously” or “before.”
<b>all right</b>	In formal English, the preferred word is “ <b>very well</b> ” or “ <b>satisfactory</b> .” Very well [not all right], you may leave the room.
<b>all the farther/ all the faster</b>	These constructions are colloquial. The correct version is “ <b>as</b> ” or “ <b>as fast as</b> .” This is as far as [not all the farther] I care to go.
<b>allowed/aloud</b>	<b>Allowed</b> means “permitted.” <b>Aloud</b> means “in an audible voice.”
<b>among/between</b>	<b>Among</b> means “in the middle of a group of three or more.” <b>Between</b> means “in the middle of two” or “one of two choices.”

<b>anyplace/anywheres</b>	These words are colloquial. The correct word is " <b>anywhere.</b> " Other colloquial words are " <b>no place</b> " or " <b>nowheres</b> " for " <b>nowhere,</b> " " <b>someplace</b> " or " <b>somewheres</b> " for " <b>somewhere,</b> " " <b>everyplace</b> " for " <b>everywhere,</b> " and " <b>anyways</b> " for " <b>any-how.</b> "
<b>assure/insure</b>	<b>Assure</b> means "to say something with certainty." <b>Insure</b> means "to protect against the loss of something."
<b>awful/awfully</b>	In formal English they mean " <b>terrifying</b> " or " <b>awe-inspiring.</b> " In informal English they mean " <b>very.</b> " The earthquake was an awful experience. <i>It was a very [not awfully] hot day.</i>
<b>brake/break</b>	<b>Brake</b> means "to show" or "to stop." <b>Break</b> means "to cause something to come apart."
<b>can/may</b>	<b>Can</b> means "the ability to do something." <b>May</b> is used to ask permission.
<b>can't hardly/ couldn't hardly</b>	These words are double negatives (two negative words used in the same expression). They are considered substandard English. The correct words are " <b>can hardly</b> " and " <b>could hardly.</b> " The rescuers could hardly [not couldn't hardly] hear her shout for help.
<b>canvas/canvass</b>	<b>Canvas</b> means "a course material used for oil painting." <b>Canvass</b> means "to solicit opinions, votes, etc. by visiting a place."
<b>capital/capitol</b>	<b>Capital</b> means "any source of profit" or "the city or town that is the official seat of government of a state or country." <b>Capitol</b> means "the building in which the state legislature meets."
<b>cite/site/sight</b>	<b>Cite</b> means "to quote or give credit to someone." <b>Site</b> means "a location." <b>Sight</b> means "the power of seeing."
<b>complected</b>	This word is colloquial. The correct word is " <b>complexioned.</b> " Light-complexioned [not light-complected] people must avoid long exposure to the sun.

<b>complement/compliment</b>	<p><b>Complement</b> means “to add something in order to complete the whole.”</p> <p><b>Compliment</b> means “to praise someone” or “an expression of approval.”</p>
<b>confidant/confident</b>	<p><b>Confidant</b> means “a person who is trusted with secrets.”</p> <p><b>Confident</b> means “self-assured.”</p>
<b>could of/would of</b>	<p>These words and others like them are substandard. The correct words are “<b>could have</b>” and “<b>would have</b>.”</p>
<b>council/counsel</b>	<p><b>Council</b> means “a group of people gathered together for a purpose.”</p> <p><b>Counsel</b> means “to advise.”</p>
<b>couple</b>	<p>This word is colloquial when used as an adjective. The formal English word is “<b>few</b>” or “<b>several</b>.”</p> <p>The student made several [not a couple] changes in his term paper.</p>
<b>device/devise</b>	<p><b>Device</b> means “a thing designed for a special purpose.”</p> <p><b>Devise</b> means “to make” or “to invent.”</p>
<b>different from/ different than</b>	<p>“<b>Different from</b>” is the correct usage even though “<b>different than</b>” is used quite often.</p> <p>Her style of writing is different from [not different than] mine.</p>
<b>disinterested/uninterested</b>	<p><b>Disinterested</b> means “not taking sides.”</p> <p><b>Uninterested</b> means “not interested.”</p>
<b>farther/further</b>	<p><b>Farther</b> is used for distances that can be measured.</p> <p><b>Further</b> is used for distances that cannot be measured.</p> <p>John can throw a baseball farther than I can.</p> <p>We must discuss this issue further.</p>
<b>fewer/less</b>	<p><b>Fewer</b> refers to numbers.</p> <p><b>Less</b> refers to quantity, extent, or degree.</p> <p>Fewer [not less] students are attending college this year.</p> <p>The cost of living is less, but we also have less money to spend.</p>

<b>figure</b>	This word is colloquial if used for the words “ <b>believe</b> ,” “ <b>suppose</b> ,” “ <b>consider</b> ,” or “ <b>think</b> .” She must have thought [not figured] that nobody would see her cheat.
<b>fine</b>	This word is colloquial for “ <b>well</b> ” or “ <b>very well</b> .” The children played well [not just fine].
<b>formally/formerly</b>	<b>Formally</b> means “in a proper way.” <b>Formerly</b> means “in the past.”
<b>hear/here</b>	<b>Hear</b> means “to take in by ear.” <b>Here</b> means “in this place.”
<b>hole/whole</b>	<b>Hole</b> means “a depression” or “a hollow spot.” <b>Whole</b> means “complete.”
<b>in regards to</b>	This word is improper. The correct forms are “ <b>in regard to</b> ” or “ <b>as regards</b> .”
<b>inside of</b>	This word is informal. The formal words to use are “ <b>inside</b> ” or “ <b>within</b> .” The boys played inside [not inside of] the house during the cold weather.
<b>its/it’s</b>	<b>Its</b> means “belonging to it.” <b>It’s</b> is the contraction for “it is.”
<b>kind/sort</b>	These words are singular and should, therefore, be modified by singular words. I cannot afford this kind [not these kind] of shoes.
<b>kind of/sort of</b>	These words are colloquial for “ <b>somewhat</b> ,” “ <b>almost</b> ,” or “ <b>rather</b> .” She felt somewhat [not sort of] relieved.
<b>kinda/sorta</b>	These words are completely undesirable. Other undesirable forms are “ <b>kind of a</b> ” and “ <b>sort of a</b> .”
<b>knew/new</b>	<b>Knew</b> is the past tense of “know.” <b>New</b> means “not old.”

<b>know/no</b>	<b>Know</b> means “to understand” or “be aware of.” <b>No</b> means the opposite of “yes.”
<b>lay/lie</b>	<b>Lay</b> means “to put or place something.” <b>Lie</b> means “to be in a resting position” or “to recline.” <i>present tense</i> .....lay.....lie <i>past tense</i> .....laid.....lay <i>past participle</i> ...laid.....lain  <b>NOTE:</b> The past participle always has a helping verb, e.g., <b>has laid</b> .
<b>leave</b>	This word is never to be used for the word “ <b>let</b> .” Let [not leave] me do the shopping.
<b>lend/loan/borrow</b>	<b>Lend</b> means “to let someone use something temporarily.” <b>Loan</b> means “a thing that is lent.” <b>Borrow</b> means “to use someone else’s property temporarily.”
<b>lessen/lesson</b>	<b>Lessen</b> means “to make less.” <b>Lesson</b> means “a unit of study” or “something learned.”
<b>liable/libel</b>	<b>Liable</b> means “legally responsible” or “prone to.” <b>Libel</b> is a written statement that damages a person’s reputation.
<b>like</b>	The word “ <b>like</b> ” if used as a conjunction is colloquial. The correct words to use are “ <b>as</b> ” or “ <b>as if</b> .” Do as [not like] I tell you.
<b>lose/loose</b>	<b>Lose</b> means “to misplace something” or “not to win.” <b>Loose</b> means “too large” or “not together.”
<b>lots of/a lot of</b>	These words are colloquial. The correct words to use are “ <b>many</b> ” or “ <b>much</b> .” Many [not lots of] families lost their homes during the flood.
<b>mad</b>	Colloquially, this word means “ <b>angry</b> .” In formal English it means “ <b>insane</b> .” She was angry [not mad] because I was late for the date.

<b>many/much</b>	<p><b>Many</b> means “a large number.” It should be used to refer to people, places, and things that can be counted individually. Joe has many different screwdrivers in his tool chest.</p> <p><b>Much</b> means “great in amount, extent, or importance.” It should be used to refer to things that cannot be counted individually. There is not much sand left on the beach.</p>
<b>most</b>	<p>This word is often used colloquially for “<b>almost</b>.” Almost all [not most] of my friends went to college.</p>
<b>off of</b>	<p>This word is used colloquially for “<b>off</b>.” His father told him to get off [not off of] the swing.</p>
<b>pair/pear</b>	<p><b>Pair</b> means “a set of two.” <b>Pear</b> is a fruit.</p>
<b>past/passed</b>	<p><b>Past</b> means “the time before the present.” <b>Passed</b> means “went by,” “succeeded in,” “handed in.”</p>
<b>peace/piece</b>	<p><b>Peace</b> means “calm” or “freedom from war.” <b>Piece</b> means “a part of something.”</p>
<b>personal/personnel</b>	<p><b>Personal</b> means “private” or “made in person.” <b>Personnel</b> are the people who work for an organization.</p>
<b>plain/plane</b>	<p><b>Plain</b> means “simple” or “obvious.” <b>Plane</b> is an aircraft.</p>
<b>plenty</b>	<p>This word is used colloquially for “<b>very</b>,” “<b>extremely</b>,” “<b>fully</b>” or “<b>enough</b>.” Jane’s grades for the first semester were very [not plenty] good.</p>
<b>precede/proceed</b>	<p><b>Precede</b> means “to go or happen before something.” <b>Proceed</b> means “to go forward.”</p>
<b>principal/principle</b>	<p><b>Principal</b> means “main” or “the person in charge of a school.” <b>Principle</b> means “a rule” or “a standard.”</p>

**quiet/quit/quite**

**Quiet** means “silent” or “still.”

**Quit** means “to stop doing something.”

**Quite** means “exactly” or “very.”

**real/really**

The word “**real**” is an adjective. It cannot be used to modify another adjective or an adverb. In formal English the words “**really**” or “**very**” should be used.

Jack had a really [not real] good time.

**reason is because/  
reason is due to/  
reason is on account of**

In formal writing, the words “**reason is**” are followed by the word “**that**” not by the words “**because,**” “**due to,**” or “**on account of.**”

The reason he stopped swimming is that [not be cause] the water was cold.

**respectfully/respectively**

**Respectfully** means “in a polite manner.”

**Respectively** means “in the order named.”

**right/write**

**Right** means “the opposite of left” or “correct.”

**Write** means “to form letters and words by hand.”

**rise/raise**

**Rise** means “to get up by one’s own power.”

**Raise** means “to lift something” or “to grow or increase.”

*present tense*.....rise.....raise

*past tense*.....rose.....raised

*past participle* ...risen.....raised

**NOTE:** The past participle always has a helping verb, e.g., “**has risen.**”

**sit/set**

**Sit** means “to seat oneself.”

**Set** means “to place” or “to put something down.”

*present tense*.....sit.....set

*past tense*.....sat.....set

*past participle* ...sat.....set

**NOTE:** The past participle always has a helping verb, eg. “**had set.**”

**stationary/stationery**

**Stationary** means “motionless.”

**Stationery** means “writing paper and envelopes.”

<b>suppose/supposed</b>	<p><b>Suppose</b> means “to assume” or “to guess.”</p> <p><b>Supposed</b> means “ought” or “should.” This word is always followed by the word “<b>to</b>.”</p>
<b>sure</b>	<p>In formal English this word is always used as an adjective. John made several sure investments.</p> <p>This word is colloquial if it is used to mean “<b>surely</b>,” “<b>certainly</b>,” “<b>very</b>,” “<b>extremely</b>,” “<b>indeed</b>,” “<b>very</b>,” or “<b>very much</b>.”</p> <p>This test was surely [not sure] difficult.</p>
<b>swell</b>	<p>This word should not be used to mean “<b>good</b>,” “<b>excellent</b>,” “<b>desirable</b>,” “<b>attractive</b>,” etc.</p> <p>This was an excellent [not swell] party.</p>
<b>than/then</b>	<p><b>Than</b> is used to make comparisons. Jack was taller than Jill.</p> <p><b>Then</b> means “at that time” or “next.”</p> <p>Billy threw the ball and then saw it go through the window.</p>
<b>that there/this here</b>	<p>These constructions are substandard English. The correct words are “<b>that</b>” and “<b>this</b>.”</p> <p>This [not this here] light switch is broken.</p>
<b>their/there/they’re</b>	<p><b>Their</b> means “belonging to them.”</p> <p><b>There</b> indicates a direction. It is also a word that introduces a thought.</p> <p><b>They’re</b> is a contraction that means “they are.”</p>
<b>them</b>	<p>This word is substandard English if it is used as an adjective. Don’t eat those [not them] berries.</p>
<b>threw/through</b>	<p><b>Threw</b> is the past tense of “throw” which means “to toss.”</p> <p><b>Through</b> means “into and out of” or “finished.”</p>
<b>to/too/two</b>	<p><b>To</b> means “toward.” It also combines with a verb to form an infinitive, e.g., “to swim.”</p> <p><b>Too</b> means “also” or “very.”</p> <p><b>Two</b> is the number 2.</p>

<b>try and/sure and</b>	<p>In formal writing, “<b>try to</b>” and “<b>sure to</b>” are the correct constructions to use.</p> <p>Try to [not try and] go to sleep.</p> <p>Be sure to [not sure and] eat your vegetables.</p>
<b>use/used</b>	<p><b>Use</b> means “to utilize.”</p> <p><b>Used</b> means “accustomed” or “in the habit of.” This word is followed by the word “to.”</p>
<b>want in/want off/want out</b>	<p>These constructions are colloquial. In formal English the correct constructions are “<b>want to come in</b>,” “<b>want to get off</b>,” and “<b>want to go out</b>.”</p> <p>The dog wants to come in [not wants in].</p>
<b>waive/wave</b>	<p><b>Waive</b> means “to give up willingly” or “postpone.”</p> <p><b>Wave</b> means “to move back and forth or up and down.”</p>
<b>ways</b>	<p>This word is colloquial for the word “<b>way</b>” or “<b>distance</b>.”</p> <p>The cabin is a short distance [not ways] up the mountain.</p>
<b>wear/were/where/we’re</b>	<p><b>Wear</b> means “to put on.”</p> <p><b>Were</b> is the past tense of “are.”</p> <p><b>Where</b> implies place or location.</p> <p><b>We’re</b> is the contraction for “we are.”</p>
<b>weather/whether</b>	<p><b>Weather</b> refers to atmospheric conditions.</p> <p><b>Whether</b> means “if.”</p>
<b>where at</b>	<p>In writing and speaking, the word “<b>at</b>” is unnecessary.</p> <p>Where is your mother? [not Where is your mother at?]</p>
<b>whose/who’s</b>	<p><b>Whose</b> means “belonging to whom.”</p> <p><b>Who’s</b> is the contraction for “who is” or “who has.”</p>
<b>worst way</b>	<p>This construction is not acceptable in formal English as a substitute for “<b>greatly</b>,” “<b>exceedingly</b>,” or “<b>very much</b>.”</p> <p>She wanted very much [not the worst way] to buy that car.</p>
<b>your/you’re</b>	<p><b>Your</b> means “belonging to you.”</p> <p><b>You’re</b> is the contraction for “you are.”</p>

Source for some of the definitions for this section:

Fawcett, S. & Sandberg, A. (1990). *Business English: Skills for success*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.