

### Grammar / Usage Tip of the Week

Remember that the intent of the Tip of the Week is to give some brief answers and explanations about various grammar/usage/punctuation situations that sometimes cause problems or that you might wonder about. In general, we can be freer in our verbal conversations and in less formal situations, and friends may pass over our occasional use of “irregardless.” But in more formal/permanent situations (such as business letters), weigh those freedoms against the costs of social handicaps or the dangers of unemployment.

#### Tip #27 **Words You Might Be Misusing.**

“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.” Inigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride*.

Let me begin by agreeing that English is a living, changing language. As we have shown elsewhere in these Tips, rules are constantly shifting, and definitions can also change. However, using a word to mean what **we** want it to mean may sometimes result in less clarity or even leave a vacancy when we no longer have any single word that has a particular meaning. Even when an idea or practice becomes accepted, it's not always beneficial!

Here is a list of some words that may not mean what you think they mean. Consider using them for their original meanings.

#### **Literally**

*Literally* means “in the exact meaning of the word(s)” but has come to be used for the opposite purpose, to exaggerate or to make a hyperbole. If you say, “He literally blew up when I told him” you should mean he swallowed some TNT before your confession. *Literally* should be used to distinguish between a figurative and a literal meaning. Using it to mean *really* or *actually* is one of those potential losses I mention above. What other (singular) word has the same connotation?

#### **Unique**

*Unique* is another words whose special use I will mourn if its usage continues off target. The word means “being the only one of its kind; single; solitary in type or characteristics.” So something is unique (or it isn't). It's not *kind of unique* or *very unique*. If you want one of these latter meanings, use the perfectly fine words *unusual* or *rare*.

#### **Penultimate**

*Ultimate* means the last or the final. It can also mean the best, greatest or best example of something. Probably because of these latter meanings, some people use *penultimate* to mean “greater than ultimate” or the “absolute best.” Actually *penultimate* means “next to the last,” as in “This was the *penultimate* episode of that TV show.”

#### **Irony**

*Irony* signals a difference between reality and the appearance of things. In situations that are ironic, the actual result is different (the opposite?) from the normal or expected result: “The procrastinators' meeting was convened early since all members were present.” In verbal ironic statements, the meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning of the words: “Sure, I'd love to try your broiled maggots and spiders for lunch.”

So something is not ironic simply because it's *coincidental* or *improbable* or a *funny turn of events*. Unless there is a sense of the **reverse** or the **opposite**, it's not ironic.

#### **Peruse**

*Peruse* means “to read with great thoroughness or care” or “to examine in detail.” It does not mean “to scan, skim, or look over in a casual manner.”

### Tip #26      The Singular “They”

OK, I’ll admit this is one that still makes me a bit crazy. I was taught that a pronoun should always agree with its antecedent (the noun that it replaces) in person, gender and number.

If John wants to succeed, he will have to study hard. (Both are third person, masculine, singular.)

And I was taught that, when the gender of the noun was unknown, the masculine pronoun should be used.

If a student wants to succeed, he will have to study hard.

Nowadays, with our efforts to use gender-neutral language, it has become common – accepted even -- to use *they* to refer to a single person of unknown gender.

If a *student* wants to succeed, *they* will have to study hard.

A *person’s* basic needs must be met before *they* can put energy into environmental issues.

There are many websites that have investigated this usage and found evidence that it was common until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when grammarians began a backlash against it. These sites also point out the frequent usage of the *singular they* by writers ranging from Jane Austen to Louis Carroll to Walt Whitman.

So this usage was once quite common, became objectionable, and has recently lost its outlaw status. However, as with many other rules we’ve covered, you must be prepared to still have some individuals or style guides state that substituting *they* or *their* for *he* or *her* is not acceptable in formal situations.

If you want to play it safe, there are some solutions:

- Make the antecedent plural. (If *students* want to succeed, *they* will have to study hard.)
- Rewrite the sentence so that no agreement problem exists. (It is my belief that a *person’s* basic needs must be met before energy is put into environmental issues.)

### Tip #25      Does the Subjunctive Put You in a Bad Mood? If I were a rich man....

Have you ever heard someone say, “I wish I were...” and wondered why they said that instead of “I wish I was....” The person speaking was using the **subjunctive** mood which is something I remember learning when I studied a foreign language and not when I studied English. Nevertheless, there is a subjunctive mood in our native tongue and it should be used to

- express a wish
- stipulate a command
- make a statement that is contrary to fact

In English, the subjunctive form of a verb (except the verb to be) is the same as the bare infinitive without the “to,” instead of its normal tense form, with a few exceptions:

- The subjunctive for the present tense third person singular drops the **-s** or **-es** so that it looks and sounds like the present tense for everything else.
- The subjunctive mood of the verb **to be** is **be** in the present tense and **were** in the past tense, regardless of what the subject is.

Wish

I wish I *were* king.

He wishes he *were* a better basketball player.

#### Command

She requires that each student *recite* a poem.  
She requires that everyone *be* computer literate.  
The doctor ordered that he *give* up smoking.  
The professor demanded I be there on time.

#### Contrary to fact

If Jack Benny *were* alive, he'd play his violin.  
If I *were* you, I'd run! (If I was you...is **always** contrary to fact and therefore incorrect. You can't be me!)  
If I *was* rude, I apologize. (You suspect there is a good chance you did not behave well...This is NOT contrary to fact)

### Tip #24                      ME Talking or MY talking

This particular rule may be difficult to fathom. Have you ever heard someone say, "I didn't appreciate **him** returning the car with the gas tank empty" while someone else said "I didn't appreciate **his** returning the car with the gas tank empty"?

*Gerunds* are verb forms that end in -ing and function as nouns. And since these gerunds work as nouns, if they are preceded by a noun or a pronoun, those words should be possessive.

John's coming was a complete surprise to everyone. (You could replace "John's coming" with another noun phrase such as "The explosion."  
My coming was a complete surprise to everyone.

Now here's where it gets difficult. The *present participle* is also an -ing form of a verb but it can be used as an adjective. For example, *breaking* story: *losing* score, *telling* gesture. And sometimes these adjective-present participles come after the noun or pronoun they modify. In **these** situations, a noun stays the same but the pronoun takes the objective form.

I saw Jim swimming.  
I saw him swimming.

This last sentence seems pretty obvious but how do you decide when you have a more complex sentence like our original one ("I didn't appreciate **hi**\* returning the car with the gas tank empty")? As I said, this can get very confusing. The best way to decide is to think about what your emphasis is on. In this case, was it the person you didn't appreciate? No. It was the returning with an empty tank. So "returning" is the object of the verb (a noun, in other words) and is not an adjective that modifies your thoughtless friend. Since "returning" is functioning as a noun (gerund), it should take **his**.

Please excuse us interrupting this afternoon's training session.  
Please excuse our interrupting this afternoon's training session.  
The disturbance (noun) is what needs to be excused.

Lois loves him singing in the shower.  
Lois loves his singing in the shower.  
Doubtless Lois likes lots of things about her beau, but this sentence is specific about her enjoyment of his morning vocal exercises.

I could hear them arguing in the parlor.

I could hear their arguing all the way in the kitchen.  
The first sentence identifies who can be heard.  
The second stresses that, despite the distance, it's the arguing that is what is on my mind.  
Both sentences are/can be correct, depending on the emphasis.

### **Tip #23          Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda**

Despite the lyrics of the song, these words do not belong in formal speaking and writing. Nor do “could of” or “would of” or “should of.” What is happening is that the actual words meant (“could have,” “would have” and “should have”) are being contracted (e.g., “could’ve”) and the pronunciation has gotten corrupted.

What is really meant is something like  
I *should have* gone to the store earlier today.  
I *would have* gone if I *could have* borrowed Dad's car.

### **Tip #22          “Abandon Hopefully All Ye Who Enter Here”**

There is a legend (<http://throwgrammarfromthetrain.blogspot.com/2010/09/mystery-of-edwin-newman.html>) that TV newsman Edwin Newman had this quote in his office because he objected to what he considered the non-adverbial use of the word “hopefully.” Many people continue to object to its use in such sentences as “Hopefully, it won't rain on the parade.”

But this is just one example of something called a *sentence adverb*. Unlike the regular adverb, this modifies or qualifies a sentence as a whole (or a clause within a sentence) and conveys the mood, attitude or sentiments of the speaker. For some reason, *hopefully* has earned the ire of many people unlike other sentence adverbs. No one, surely, would object to any of these uses:

*Actually*, we arrived early.                      *Clearly* he didn't pay attention to the instructions.  
*Curiously*, everyone at the table ordered ham and cheese on rye.  
*Unfortunately*, no refunds were given.      *Ultimately*, the voters will decide.  
*Surely* goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

So if someone objects when you use *hopefully* in this way, you have a perfect riposte in using another familiar one: *Frankly*, my dear, I don't give a damn. [Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*]

### **Tip #21          Hyphens Can Make You Crazy**

Basically hyphens are used to break single words into parts or to join words that are ordinarily separate into single words. That being said, there are a few general rules that may help you understand their uses—and probably just as many exceptions to those rules!

Breaking words at the right-hand end of lines. This use, in and of itself, has many rules, so the best practice is to turn off the automatic hyphenation off in your word processor. If you must do it, make sure you do it after a complete syllable. But if a word is already hyphenated (see other uses below), for line breaks, divide it only at the hyphen; don't add another.

Writing numbers between twenty-one and ninety-nine

Writing out fractions (one-third, two fifths, etc.).

Adding certain prefixes to words. The current trend is to do away with “unnecessary” hyphens and add prefixes onto the root word with a hyphen.

Use a hyphen with the prefixes ex- (meaning former), self-, all-; with the suffix -elect; between a prefix and a capitalized word; and with figures or letters:

ex-husband      self-assured      mid-September      all-inclusive      mayor-elect  
anti-American      T-shirt      pre-Civil War      mid-1980s

Hyphenate prefixes ending in an **a** or **i** only when the root word begins with the same letter. Usually prefixed words that result in double vowels are not hyphenated, but there are exceptions.

**preemployment      coordinate      de-emphasize      co-owner**

**Most words that begin with anti-, non- and neo- are hyphenated. But, again, there are exceptions.**

**anti-aircraft      non-violent      neo-conservative**  
**antibiotic      nonstop      neolithic**

Use the hyphen with the prefix **re** only when the **re** means **again** AND omitting the hyphen would cause confusion with another word.

**Will she recover from her illness?**

**Re** does not mean **again**.

**I have re-covered the sofa twice.**

**Re** does mean **again** AND omitting the hyphen would have caused confusion with another word.

**The stamps have been reissued.**

**Re** means **again** but would not cause confusion with another word.

**I must re-press the shirt.**

**Re** means **again** AND omitting the hyphen would have caused confusion with another word.

### Creating compound words

The classic reason for using hyphens with compounds is to avoid ambiguity. Note how significant they are in these examples:

several more-famous plays      forty-odd employees  
several more famous plays      forty odd employees  
250-year-old trees      250 year old trees

**Compound Nouns – a noun that consists of two noun parts. They are sometimes written as one word or two separate words, or hyphenated. If you’re not sure, look it up in the dictionary. If you can’t find the word in the dictionary (as a single word or a hyphenated one), treat it as separate words.**

**eyewitness      eye shadow      eye-opener**  
**vice-president      attorney general**

**Compound Verbs – a verb that consists of two or more words. It can be hyphenated or appear as one word. If you can’t find the word in the dictionary (as a single word or a hyphenated one), treat it as separate words.**

**To air-condition the entire house is beyond our budget.**

**Because of budget constraints, our department will downsize next year.**

**Compound Adjectives – multiple words that act as a single adjective. They can be made up of a**

**noun and an adjective, a noun and a particle, or an adjective and a particle. Many compound adjectives are hyphenated.**

**camera-ready**  
**sugar-free**

**computer-aided**  
**power-driven**

**quick-thinking**  
**bad-tempered**

Generally, hyphenate between two or more adjectives when they come before a noun and act as a single idea.

**quick-thinking man** ((compound adjective in front of a noun)

**quick little girl** ((not a compound adjective since it doesn't act as one word)

Use a hyphen to join two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun:

a one-way street

chocolate-covered peanuts

well-known

but not when the compound comes after the noun:

The peanuts were chocolate covered.

The author is well known.

**Adverbs that are used to form compound adjectives sometimes do not need a hyphen; sometimes they do to avoid confusion.**

**We need more *qualified-workers*.**

**We need more *qualified workers*.**

## **Tip #20      When Should You Capitalize?**

In modern English, there are a number of purposes for capital letters. Sometimes, there is more than one "right" approach so, as with many other issues of grammar and usage, your main concern should be consistency.

Capitalize the first word of a sentence.

We will leave when the last car is packed.

Capitalize the first word of a quoted sentence.

He directed, "Go six blocks past the mall, then turn left at the light."

Capitalize a proper noun (**the names of specific people, places, organizations, events, and sometimes things**).

My favorite photo from that trip is of the Eiffel Tower.

The Supreme Court convenes on the first Monday in October.

Thomas Jefferson is a well-known figure from the Age of Reason.

Capitalize a title preceding a name but not titles that follow names (i.e., that act as descriptions).

Chairperson Petrov opened the meeting.

Ms. Petrov, the chairperson of the company, will address us at noon.

Capitalize the person's title when it follows the name on the address or signature line.

Sincerely,

Ms. Haines, Chairperson

Capitalize the titles of high-ranking government officials when used before their names. Do not capitalize the civil title if it is used instead of the name.

The president will address Congress. President Obama addressed the nation.  
All senators are expected to attend. Senator Casey attended the grand opening.  
The governors, lieutenant governors, and attorneys general called for a special task force.  
Governor Corbett, Lieutenant Governor Cawley, and Attorney General Kelly will attend.

Capitalize any title (including family relationships) when used as a direct address.

Will you take my temperature, Doctor?  
It's your turn now, Grandad.

Capitalize points of the compass only when they refer to specific regions.

The South was struck by three tropical storms this year.  
Head south on toward the new stadium.  
We live in the northeast part of the U.S.  
The Northeast is a heavily-populated area.

Always capitalize the first and other main words of titles of publications (books, plays, newspapers, magazines, films, songs, etc.) regardless of their parts of speech. Do not capitalize little words within titles such as *a, an, the, but, as, if, and, or, nor*, or prepositions, regardless of their length.

*The Last of the Mohicans*  
*The New York Times*  
*A Tale of Two Cities*  
*What Color Is Your Parachute?*

Capitalize *federal* or *state* when used as part of an official agency name or in government documents where these terms represent an official name. If they are being used as general terms, you may use lowercase letters.

Hillary Clinton has been the Secretary of State since 2008.  
The state has evidence to the contrary.  
Mail fraud is a federal offense.  
The State Board of Pharmacy grants licensure for pharmacists.  
We will visit three states during our summer vacation.  
You must be between the ages of 23 and 37 to apply to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.  
Your business must comply with all county, state, and federal laws.

Capitalize the days of the week, the months of the year, and holidays (but do not capitalize the seasons used generally).

This year Halloween falls on a Sunday.  
In 2011 Ramadan fell in August.  
I love autumn colors and spring flowers.  
I am going to give all of you the low down on **Spring Cotillion!**

Capitalize the first word of the salutation in a letter and the first word of the complimentary close.

Dear Ms. Mohamed:  
My dear Mr. Sanchez:  
Very truly yours,

Capitalize words derived from proper nouns. Capitalize the names of specific course titles.

I must take English and math.  
English is capitalized because it comes from the proper noun England, but math does not come from Mathland.  
I must take history and Algebra 105.

After a sentence ending with a colon, do not capitalize the first word if it begins a list.

These are my favorite foods: chocolate, raspberries, asparagus, and almonds.

If only one sentence follows the colon, do not capitalize the first word of the new sentence. If two or more sentences follow the colon, capitalize the first word of each sentence following.

Time was ticking away: he had to make a decision soon.

Time was ticking away: He had to make a decision soon: The deadline was two o'clock.

Capitalize names of God, specific deities, religious figures, and holy books

God the Father

the Virgin Mary

the Bible

Shiva

Buddha

Zeus

*the Bhagavad Gita*

*the Koran*

Do not capitalize the nonspecific use of the word "god."

The Olympians are a group of 12 **gods** who ruled after the overthrow of the Titans.

Some adjectives that are derived from proper nouns are still capitalized; others are not. Check a dictionary.

Canadian whisky

Shakespearean sonnet

quixotic mission

italic letters

Acronyms and initialisms are usually capitalized, although there are exceptions.

RAM capacity

NBC programming

UV light

scuba

mph

## **Tip #19      The Serial Comma (American usage)**

Most of us have been taught to use a comma to separate the items in a list of three or more (e.g., *She went to school with James, John, Peter, and Luke.*). Most of us have also been taught that a comma before the final item in such a list, the one before the conjunctions (e.g., *and* or *or*) is optional. Different style guides vary on whether or not to use it, but most contemporary American authorities come down on the "use it" side when it would assist in the meaning of the sentence or help resolve uncertainty.

The most common example for such ambiguity is a legendary book dedication: "To my parents, Ayn Rand and God." Adding a serial comma clears up questions about any divine parentage of the author: "To my parents, Ayn Rand, and God."

Another amusing example is the caption on a photo in a newspaper review of a documentary on singer Merle Haggard: "The documentary was filmed over three years. Among those interviewed were his two ex-wives, Kris Kristofferson and Robert Duvall." Kristofferson and Duvall were not, in fact, Haggard's ex-wives.

So the last comma is not always necessary but it can help to avoid ambiguity and add clarity. If your goal is communication and, if the comma helps to avoid confusion, why not make a consistent practice of using it?

## Tip #18      **Dos and Don'ts (or Do's and Don't's??) about Apostrophes**

In English, the apostrophe has two functions: to show possession and to show that some letters are missing (e.g., to make a contraction).

The placement of the apostrophe for possessive forms is different for singular and plural nouns. (For this reason, you must know the correct singular and possessive nouns before you can make them possessive.)

### **Possessives**

For a singular noun, add an apostrophe and an –s. This rule applies for all singular nouns, even those that already end in –s (or an “s” sound, such as x,z,ch or sh).

*The student's exam was left on the desk.      The witness's voice was shaking.*

**However**, for singular nouns that end in s, x, z, ch or sh that are followed by a word that begins with an -s, add only an apostrophe: *The witness' story changed every time she told it.*

**And** if a singular noun has two sibilant sounds, add only an apostrophe: *Moses' staff turned into a snake.*

For a common OR proper plural noun (i.e., one that is formed by adding an –s), add an apostrophe.

*The girls' team won the game 20-7.      I am going fishing on the Johnsons' boat.*

For a plural noun that does not end in an -s, add apostrophe and an –s.

*The men's voices filled the church.      The geese's honking woke me early in the morning.*

If a plural noun ends in –s (or an “s” sound, such as x,z,ch or sh), be careful to make it plural first and then add the apostrophe.

*The passes' expiration date is July 30.  
While we were in Florida, I spent almost every day on the Williamses' boat.*

For joint possessions, (i.e., if two or more nouns own the same thing), add an apostrophe plus -s to the last noun listed:

*Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia is my favorite ice cream.*

If two or more nouns own things separately, add an apostrophe plus -s to each.

*Sara's and Jane's grade point averages were very similar.*

**Never** use an apostrophe with possessive pronouns (**his, hers, its, theirs, ours, yours, whose**) since they already show possession.

### **Omitted Letters**

The apostrophe is used when leaving out a letter or number in a contraction.

*I can't get my assignment done on time.      It's time for children to be in bed.*

(Note: **Be aware of the its/it's trap.** Use an apostrophe with the word "it" only when you want to indicate a contraction for "it is" or "it has." *It* is a pronoun, and pronouns have their own possessive form that does not use an apostrophe—its.)

Use the apostrophe for omitted letters in certain common phrases or number combinations.

*I love rock 'n' roll.      The class of '72 held its reunion last night.*

**In general, do NOT use an apostrophe to form a plural.**

The plurals for initialisms, acronymns, and numbers used as nouns are not formed with apostrophes. Simply add an –s.

*Judy has a large collection of CDs.[not CD's] Spandex was popular in the 1980s.[not 1980's]*  
However, use an apostrophe and an –s when an acronym is separated with periods.  
The PhDs on the faculty voted against the measure. The Ph.D.'s on the faculty voted for it..

And sometimes, to avoid confusion, you may use an apostrophe to indicate the plural forms of certain letters and words, especially if they are written in the lower case.

*Mind your Ps and Qs.*

*Mind your p's and q's.*

*She listed the PROs and CONs.*

*List the Pro's and Con's for your argument.*

### **Tip #17           Voila, Voila, Washington??**

English has borrowed a lot of words from other languages (e.g., chutzpah, ad hoc, tchotchke, igloo). One good word that is used often has recently been corrupted by American English speakers: *voilà*, which comes from the French expression for “Look there!” or “There it is.” English speakers use it to mean something akin to “There you have it” or to express success or satisfaction (“Eat a balanced, healthy diet and, voilà, you aren't obese.”).

In the original French, the word is spelled with an accent over the A, as *voilà*, but when it was adopted into English, it lost its accent. As a result, misspellings and mis-pronunciations have resulted, probably because English speakers find it hard to believe that the sound “wah” can be represented by OI. The correct way to pronounce the word is **vwah-LAH**, with an initial V-sound and the accent on the second syllable.

So next time you are performing your magic act and whip off the cloth over the top hat, remember how the word should be pronounced! Wallah is a Hindi word for a worker, and Walla the first half of the name of the capital city of Washington state.

### **Tip #16           You SHOULD feel *badly*, if you put it that way.**

We tend to think of verbs as words that describe action, but not all verbs perform that function. Linking verbs do not show action but, instead, re-name or describe the subject or *link* it to a noun or an adjective that *completes* it.

The verb to be and its various forms (such as *am, is, are, was, were*, etc.) are linking verbs. So these verbs are followed by a noun or an adjective:

*I am good. Thanks for asking.*

*We were eager to go.*

*He is sick.*

Some other words that are similar to forms of the verb to be (they express states of being) are also linking verbs: *seem, grow, appear, remain, turn, stay*, etc. They, too, are followed by a noun or an adjective.

*The dog appeared sad.*

*She stays happy, no matter what happens.*

*That purse seems expensive.*

Verbs that refer to the senses (look, feel, taste, smell, sound) can also be linking verbs—if they are *equating* the subject with what follows. If sense verbs are being used in this linking way, they need a noun or an adjective to be complete—NOT an adverb. So, you should say/write

*I feel bad that you didn't get the job.*

NOT *I feed badly that you didn't get the job.*

If you say you “feel badly,” you're talking about your sense of touch as might be the case if you had burned your hand or injected your fingers with Novocain!

*The band sounds loud.* NOT *The band sounds loudly.*

*Cynthia smells good.* vs. *Cynthia smells well, so she has a job for a perfume company.*

*The pie tasted good.* vs. *Luke tasted tentatively since he doesn't like spicy food.*

To be sure whether such a verb is being used as an action or a linking verb, try substituting a form of the verb *to be*, and see if the sentence still makes sense. If it does, then it's a linking verb and you'll need a noun or an adjective, not an adverb.

*The screen grew bright.* (*The screen was bright*)

*The customer feels the fabric carefully.* (~~*The customer is the fabric carefully.*~~)

If you can replace a verb with a form of the verb *to be* (e.g., *is* or *was*) without dramatically changing the meaning, the verb is a linking verb.

#### **Tip #15      One space or two? What to do?**

For those of us who learned typing (i.e., using a typewriter) before the days of keyboarding (i.e., using a computer keyboard), the rule was to insert two spaces after a period. It was thought that two spaces made it easier to see where one sentence ended and the next began because typewriters used "monospaced" typefaces. That is, every character took up the same amount of space on the page. An "m" used the same amount of space as an "i."

Now days, "proportional" fonts are the norm and the reasoning no longer hold. Modern style manuals (*Modern Language Association Style Manual*, *Chicago Manual of Style*, etc.) say to use a single space after a period, and professionals such as typographers who study and design the typewritten word agree. Journal editors have come to expect the single space.

We two-spacers may want to hold onto our double hits, but I have to agree that one space looks just fine with proportional fonts:

Courier. Monospaced

Times New Roman. Proportional

If we examine the text we read on a daily basis, we'd discover that we've never noticed that most of it uses only one space.

Two-spacing is a hard habit to break. But maybe if we consider that it reveals how old we are, it will be easier!

#### **Tip #14      The Which Hunt (American usage)**

The confusion surrounding *which* vs. *that* is based on two different types of clauses:

**Restrictive clauses:** part of a sentence that restricts some other part of the sentence. You **can't eliminate it without changing the meaning** of the sentence. These clauses **identify** the noun they are modifying.

*Dogs **that bark all the time** drive me crazy.*

(Not all dogs make you crazy, just the ones that bark.)

**Non-restrictive clauses:** part of a sentence that **can be left off** without changing the meaning. It's additional information and is set off by commas.

*My new car, **which is my first in ten years**, is a hybrid.*

You can leave out how long you had your last car; it doesn't change the fact that the new one runs on gas and electricity.

Older grammar guides used to clearly dictate the pronoun that can be used with each type of clause. But modern usage tolerates **which** with restrictive clauses **as long as no commas are used**.

The newspapers which are on the table should be saved. (Here you are not just pointing out the location of the papers; you are identifying the ones to be saved.)

**That**, however, **can only be used** with a restrictive clause.

*The grass that has grown tall is in need of mowing.* (The only grass that needs mowing is the grass that has grown tall.)

As a side note, some folks object to using **that** when the reference is to people, insisting on **who** for these clauses.

*Here is the man **who** came to my rescue.* vs. *Here is the man **that** came to my rescue.*

However the terms are commonly interchanged and it is acceptable to write either, especially where the person is not named.

*The person that hacked the DOD database will be charged with espionage.* (acceptable)

*The John Doe who hacked the DOD database will be charged with espionage.* (better)

### Tip #13      To boldly go...

Many folks have been taught that there is a rule against splitting infinitives; that is, against inserting a word or words between "to" and a verb. Probably the most famous (infamous?) split infinitive comes from the stated mission of the Starship Enterprise

*"**To boldly go** where no man has gone before..."*

Purists would have reworded this as

*"To go boldly where no man has gone before..."*

However, most contemporary English usage guides have abandoned the rule and, indeed, it is recognized that the practice is often used to create emphasis or to avoid confusion. This sentence makes sense and accurately conveys the intended meaning

*The curriculum was revised **to better meet** the needs of today's practitioners.*

Try to reword it and you end up with sentences that mean something else and/or are confusing:

*The curriculum was revised to meet better the needs of today's practitioners.*

*The curriculum was revised better to meet the needs of today's practitioners.*

Nevertheless, the supposed rule about split infinitives is very pervasive, and you might want to avoid using one in situations in where it might be a black mark against you, as in a cover letter for a job application.

### Tip #12      Writing Numbers and Numerals (American rules)

As with many kinds of writing, the rules for writing numbers vary among different disciplines. The rules noted below are general rules for **academic prose** but you should consult the style manual (e.g., *APA*, *Chicago*, etc.) dictated by the authority for whom you are writing.

The one standard rule almost everyone agrees on is to spell out single-digit whole numbers (i.e., 1-9).

*He picked 3 apples and 5 peaches.*

But be consistent about related numbers within a sentence.

*The hen laid 3 eggs today but 12 eggs the same day last week.*

Write out a number at the beginning of a sentence, even if it is a single-digit number.

*Four score and seven years ago...*

Hyphenate all compound numbers from *twenty-one through ninety-nine*.

Write out fractions if they stand alone and use a hyphen.

*I gave him one-half of the candy bar.*

Use figures if it is a number plus a fraction.

*The cost of living increase was 2 2/3 percent.*

Use figures for decimals. Put a zero in front of a decimal unless the decimal itself begins with a zero.

*The forgery measured 12.6 inches in height which was 0.6 inches longer than the original.*

*The manuscript was .099 inches thick.*

To make large numbers easier to read, use numerals, and use commas to separate millions and thousands.

*Light travels approximately 186,000 miles per second.*

Experts disagree on whether to begin using the comma with 4-digit or 5-digit numbers.

You have some choices for expressing decades and centuries. You may spell them out and lowercase them.

*I grew up during the sixties. His writings were popular during the nineteenth century.*

You may also express decades using numerals. If you do this using incomplete numbers, put an apostrophe before the numeral but **not** between the year and the **s**.

*The Roaring '20s were famous for jazz music.*

To express decades using a complete number, don't use an apostrophe between the year and the **s**.

*The 1950s were a time of innocence in the U.S.*

Spell out any time of day that lands on the hour, half or quarter hour.

*five forty-five seven o'clock three thirty*

For an exact time, use figures. A variety of styles are acceptable but be consistent.

*8:10 A.M. 6:38AM 4:22 PM*

For clarity, use a combination of numerals and words when two numbers occur next to each other.

*My niece invited six 5-year olds to her birthday party. (not 6 5-year olds)*

If a number is rounded or estimated, spell it out.

*Approximately ten thousand fans came to the game.*

Rounded numbers over a million are written as a numeral plus a word.

*About 400 million people speak Spanish natively.*

In some technical contexts the % symbol may be used but, generally, write out *percent* (Note: It's one word, not two). Use numerals for the percentage but spell out the word percent.

*The blood glucose levels were approximately 20% lower with treatment. (technical writing)*

*Less than 25 percent of women voted for the Republican candidate.*

Use the word cents with monetary amounts of less than a dollar; use the dollar sign and numerals for amounts of a dollar or more.

*Back then you could send a letter for 4 cents. The fee amounts to about \$25.50 per student.*

Do not use zeros with even dollar amounts, except for consistency within a series.

*She paid \$27.50, \$18.00, and \$16.95 for the three shirts.*

For monetary amounts of more than a million dollars, use the dollar sign and spell out million, billion, etc.

*The university took out a \$35 million bond to fund the new construction.*

### **Tip #11 Those Interfering Prepositional Phrases**

Subjects and verbs are supposed to “agree.” That is, a singular subject must have a singular verb and a plural subject must have a plural verb. This agreement can sometimes be confusing, especially when a prepositional phrase separates the subject from the verb.

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition (you may remember that these show relationships—in time, place, orientation, direction) and its object (a noun or pronoun). The phrase may also include articles (a, an, the) and/or adjectives (word that describe the object).

- at that time
- to her
- for twenty years
- on the dilapidated table
- into the theater

So, while we would probably not have a problem making our subjects and verbs agree in the following sentences...

- Each pronounces the word differently.
- A group was studying for the test.
- The flock is visible from the deck of the boat.
- The cars make a lot of noise.

...intervening prepositional phrase may mislead us to cause agreement problems. Would you choose the same verb as above?

- Each of the foreign dignitaries pronounce the word differently.
- Each of the foreign dignitaries pronounces the word differently.
  
- A group of students was studying for the test.
- A group of students were studying for the test.
  
- The flock of flamingoes is visible from the deck of the boat.
- The flock of flamingoes are visible from the deck of the boat.
  
- The cars in my neighborhood make a lot of noise.
- The cars in my neighborhood makes a lot of noise.

Regardless of the prepositional phrase, the subject remains the same. So no matter how tempting it may sound to have the verb agree with the object of the preposition, remember which one is the real subject.

A technique that help to determine whether the subject is singular or plural is one we've seen before: ignore the phrase.

### Tip #10 *Less* and *Fewer*

Both of these words mean the same—the opposite of more—but they are used in different situations. Use **less** when you are referring to *grammatically singular* nouns or *mass* nouns (i.e., things that are not counted individually).

I wish the trip took less time.

This recipe calls for less butter than my mom's.

We had less snow this winter than in any other year on record.

Use **fewer** when you are referring to *grammatically plural*, discretely quantifiable *count* nouns (i.e., things that can be counted).

This sign should say, "Ten items or fewer."

Fewer students are majoring in pharmacy than did just 5 years ago.

I hope there will be fewer children who bully after they see the movie.

### Tip #9 Commonly mixed up pairs (Or is it pears?)

There are a lot of word pairs (and sometimes triplets) in English that regularly cause people problems. Often it's because they look or sound alike, but sometimes it's because the difference in meanings is not clearly understood.

Here is a list of common tricky pairs/triplets. Remember your spellcheckers won't catch misuses of these. Most of the sets include mnemonics or other word tricks to help you remember the differences. Granted, remembering these tricks may be as much work as remembering the differences themselves! Still, if you're troubled by only a few of these sets, you may find the relevant ones useful.

#### **accept, except**

accept: to receive

except: to take or leave out; other than

I accept what he said as the truth.

Answer all questions except the first one.

Memory Trick: **A**cccept has an **A** and, if you get an A in each of your courses, you'll be accepted into college. **EX**cept begins with **EX** because everyone except your ex will be partying with you.

#### **affect, effect**

affect: to influence

effect: a result; to accomplish

Her political leaning will affect the way she views the speaker.

The effect of the lighting was to make her look younger. In order to effect that change, the vote would have to be unanimous.

**Memory Trick:** Most of the time, **affect** is a verb and **effect** is a noun. Remember this by thinking "th**E** **E**ffect," sliding the **Es** together.

#### **adverse, averse**

adverse: inauspicious, hostile

averse: opposed to, disinclined

They set out in adverse weather conditions.

I'm averse to including Heather on the list of guests.

Memory trick: The difference here is subtle. Adverse describes a person's attitude or feelings against something. Try to remember the beginning **AV** and think "I **AV**oid things I'm **AV**erse to."

### **advice, advise**

advice: guidance, recommendation

advise: instruct, warn

His advice was wise.

We should advise them to take macroeconomics.

Memory Trick: **Advice** ends in *-ice*, and **Advice** and **ICE** are both nouns. OR You could remember that **AdviCe** is when you give your “two cents” to someone and **Cents** begins with a **C**.

### **anxious, eager**

anxious: uneasy, apprehensive

eager: enthusiastic

I’m anxious about the upcoming layoffs.

The children are eager to go to Disney World.

Memory Trick: The phrase “eager beaver” is used to describe someone who is enthusiastically looking forward to something.

### **appraise, apprise**

appraise: to assess or evaluate

apprise: to tell or inform

I will appraise the situation when I get there.

Please apprise me of any changes that need to be made.

Memory Trick: You can think “When they *ap***PRAISE** my performance, I might get **PRAISE** or maybe even a **RAISE**. OR You could think about the *i-ai* spelling difference to remember that the one with just the *I* means *Inform*.

### **assure, ensure, insure**

assure: to convince, promise, swear; You assure other people.

ensure: to guarantee, certify, warrant; You ensure that things occur or that events take place.

insure: to protect against loss or damage, indemnify, underwrite

I assure you there’s no call for alarm.

To ensure you find parking, please leave 20 minutes early.

You should insure your new car with my company.

Memory Trick: Most of us don’t have trouble with *insure* because we think of its use in a commercial sense (insurance). Here is a sentence with all three words to help define the difference between them. *I assure you that we have insured the arena to ensure that we will be protected in case of a lawsuit stemming from an accident. (When you try to recall the sentence, remember that assure and ensure occur in alphabetical order in the sentence.)*

### **baited, bated**

baited: enticed, lured (usually referring to traps or snares)

bated: diminished, restrained

He baited the hook with a big, fat worm.

After waiting in line for over 2 hours, we entered the exhibit with bated enthusiasm.

Memory Trick: This mix-up probably occurs most often in the expression “to wait with bated/baited breath.” Bated is related to abate which means to stop; so bated breath means you’ve stopped breathing so, obviously, the correct word is bated. Think about waiting with *baited breath* as having breath that smells like bait—not nice in manners or in grammar!

### **bring, take**

GENERALLY, which one to use depends on the speaker’s point of reference for the action.

bring: a motion toward the speaker or doer.

take: a motion away from the speaker or doer.

Bring the cookies with you. (Someone is coming to join you where you currently are.)

Take the cookies with you. (The destination is away from you and the person speaking.)

Memory Trick: Before using bring or take, you first need to know where the action is directed. If the action is towards you, use **bring**; if the action is away from you, use **take**. You *bring* things *here* and **Take** them **There**. (Most of the time!) You **bring** home the bacon, fry it up in the pan, and then **you take** out the trash when you're done.

### **cite, site**

cite: to quote or document

site: a position or location

I will cite you as an expert in my paper.

The site of the new science building is next to the Stark Learning Center.

Memory trick: You can connect *site* with the word *situation* - a *site* is where something is situated. You can connect *cite* with the word *citation* - to *cite* a source is to create a citation for it. OR **Cite** = **Call** attention to and **Site** - **Scene**

### **compliment, complement**

compliment: praise or congratulations

complement: to supplement or balance

He paid me a great compliment in saying my painting reminded him of Georgia O'Keefe's work.

Yellow mustard is the best complement for hotdogs.

Memory Trick: Think "*I* like to receive *compliments* - the type of compliments that have an *I* in them. And the first five letters of **complement** and **complete** are the same, and a complement completes something.

### **continual, continuous**

continual: something that happens again and again with breaks between the incidents

continuous: something that happens without stops or break

Continual interruptions from advertisements destroys TV viewing pleasure.

The continuous noise of traffic prevented me from falling asleep.

Memory Trick: The suffix **-ous** begins with an **O**, which is a circle, which is something that never ends.

### **discreet, discrete**

discreet: respectful, inconspicuous, unnoticeable

discrete: separate, detached

I was discreet about how we had met to avoid embarrassing her.

The necklace was made of six discrete gold flowers.

Memory Trick: In *discr**E**tE* the **Es** are separated and the definition itself is "separate/distinct."

### **elicit, illicit**

elicit: to extract or draw out

illicit: not legal

Dr. Strong always seems able to elicit the correct responses from students.

He was arrested for illicit duplication of popular movies.

Memory Trick: The first three letters of **ILLicit** usually mean something bad and *illicit* is something bad.

### **eminent, immanent, imminent**

eminent: famous, respected

immanent: indwelling, inherent

imminent: ready to take place

The eminent poet, Maya Angelou, will speak at our graduation.

The "Namaste" gesture represents the belief that god is wholly immanent in each of us.

It appears that her death is imminent.

Memory Trick: Think **IMM**ediate for **IMM**inent (about to happen). Think **EminEnt** when describing someone who is **EstEE**med (All those *Es!*). **ImmAnent** is often used in reference to an indwelling deity, so remember that this word, with the *A* in the middle, describes the **Almighty One**.

### farther, further

farther: used for physical distance

further: for non-physical/abstract distinctions; to a more advanced point or extent

The farther we walked, the more tired I became.

I promised to give the plan further thought.

Memory Trick: Remember the difference between these two by thinking **fArther** is **Actual**, while **fUrther** is **figUrative**.

### fewer, less

fewer: use with things you count individually

less: use with things you measure

The Easter bunny gave me fewer jelly beans than my brother.

There is less water in the lake than is normal for this time of year.

Memory Trick: If the noun in question is plural, use *few*; if not, use *less*. Another way to put it: Ends in **S—don't** use *leSS*.

### jive, jibe

jive: swing music or early jazz; meaningless talk

jibe: agree, correspond or tally with ; be compatible or consistent

He always adds a little gibe about the fact that she's a Republican.

The bands played a colorful mix of African township jive, reggae, salsa, Latin and funk. I don't believe all that jive.

My figures don't jibe with those in the committee report.

Memory Trick: If two things **jIBE**, they must **BE** the same.

### here, hear

here: refers to a location

hear: perceive through the ears

Mom says to come here right now!

I can't hear you through the closed door.

Memory Trick: This one's easy. The word **hear** has the word **ear** inside it.

### infer, imply

infer: reach a conclusion from what someone says, writes or does

imply: suggest or hint

She inferred that the gift of the watch was a signal to be more punctual.

His winking implied that he really didn't mean what he was saying.

Memory Trick: Think in terms of a communication situation. The sender comes before the receiver. The two actions occur in *alphabetical as well as time order*. The sender can *imply*, but the receiver can *infer*.

### irregardless, regardless

Irregardless is erroneous/nonstandard. The correct word is **regardless**

### its, it's

its: possessive for the pronoun *it*

It's: contraction of *it is*

The tree has lost all of its leaves.

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

Memory Trick: Think of the apostrophe as an *l* printed a little above the line, so you'll look at *it's* and think "it is."

### lay, lie

lay: to put or place in a position (hint: *lāy* and *plāce* have long "a" sounds)

lie: rest or recline (hint: *līe* and *reclīne* have long "i" sounds)

Our hens lay eggs every day. Lay the gun on the table, mam'm.

I have a headache and need to lie down.

Memory Trick: In the **present** tense, use the LONG vowel sound (that is, the sound as if you were naming the letter itself) in each of these words....But then everything gets crazy, because the [past tense](#) of **lie is lay**. Trying to develop a memory hint for the past tense and past participle (*lie/lay/lain* and *lay/laid/laid*) would probably be just as involved as memorizing the words themselves so you pretty much just have to learn these!

### lose, loose

lose: mislay, not be able to locate something

loose: slack, not tight; free

I feel as if I'm going to lose my mind. Did she lose her keys again??

His pants are so loose because they're really his dad's.

Memory Trick: Remember *If your noose is loose, you win; otherwise you lose.*

### peek, pique, peak

peek: look or glance quickly or furtively, peep

pique: to excite or irritate

peak: highest point or top

She took a peek around the corner to see if the "birthday" boy was coming.

"No, I'm not ready," she replied in a fit of pique. The description of the book piqued her interest.

Oil prices may not yet have reached their peak.

Memory Trick: A **pEE**ping Tom **pEE**ks at people. You have to **rEA**ch to gain a **pEA**k. If you're **piQU**ed about something, there's usually a **QU**estion in your mind about it.

### precede, proceed

**precede: to come before**

**proceed: to go forward**

**Faculty members precede students when marching into the auditorium.**

**I will proceed to return the exams after everyone is seated.**

Memory Trick: *Precede* means come before and that word comes before *proceed* alphabetically.

### principal, principle

principal: main, chief, most important; person who has authority

principle: fundamental doctrine or tenet; ideal

The principal ingredient is chocolate.

The principal of the elementary school made the announcement.

The experiment defied every principle of modern physics!

Memory Trick: Here's one you may remember from school: A princip**LE** is a ru**LE**, but a princi**PAL** is your **PAL**.

### respectfully, respectfully

respectfully: politely

respectively: in the order stated

All students in the dojo bowed respectfully to the instructor.

The boxes stood in a row and were numbered 1, 3, 2 and 4 respectively.

Memory Trick: Both of these are adverbs; drop the -ly and try a substitution of the adjective to figure out which is correct for your sentence. "He spoke to the teacher with respect" or He spoke to the teacher with

respective"? "The mailman put each letter in its respectful slot" or "The mailman put each letter in its respective slot"?

### **role, roll**

role: a part in a play or film

roll: something that is cylindrical in shape; to make something into a cylindrical shape or to run or spin

Tatiana is my favorite role in Shakespeare's comedies.

He had a roll of twenty dollar bills in his hand. Will you roll that barrel into the corner?

Memory Trick: The word roll usually has a circular, spherical or cylindrical connotation. (For example: roll of film, roll away, roll around). Let the last two letters of "ba**LL**" remind you of "ro**LL**."

### **stationary, stationery**

stationary: standing still

stationery: writing paper supplies

My mother rides a stationary bicycle every morning while watching *The Today Show*.

I try to use stationery made from recycled paper.

Memory Trick: remember the difference by associating the **E** in stationery with **EnvElopEs** and **pEnS**, both writing supplies

### **there, their, they're**

there: a location

their: possessive of the pronoun *they*

they're: contraction of *they are*

Put it over there.

Their coats are made from cashmere.

They're going to miss seeing him because he's leaving for Europe tomorrow.

Use *there* is to tell *where*. **THEIR** is possessive and denotes ownership and an *heir* will eventually own something. They're is short for "they are," and the apostrophe shows the missing letter a.

### **to, too, two**

to: a preposition meaning towards, on/against, before/until

too: also; excessively

two: a number

I went to the bus stop. Apply it to the wound. It runs from 4 to 8.

I want some too. He drank too much to safely drive.

There are two more stops to make on this route.

Memory Trick: Many other words in English which reflect the number **Two** are spelled with **tw**: *TWin*, *TWice*. The trick to remember when to use "too" is the extra "o" in the word because the word "too" is used when you're referring to an extra or excessive amount of something.

### **through, threw, thru**

through: a preposition meaning in and out of

threw: past tense of the verb throw

thru: slang for through (don't use in formal situations such as a school paper or job application)

He ran through the opposing team.

He threw a forward pass to save the game.

They ran hand-in-hand thru the daisies.

Memory Trick: **THR**eW is the past tense of **THR**oW, with the vowel changing the tense. He walked thru**GH** the wall like a **GH**ost.

## weather, whether

weather: atmospheric/meteorological conditions; climate

whether: a conjunction used to introduce alternatives; either; even if

This winter didn't produce much snowy weather.

Whether we go or not, the result will be the same.

Memory Trick: You need to **WEA**r certain clothes depending on the **WEA**ther.

## whose, who's

whose: possessive of pronoun *who*

who's: contraction of *who is* (or *who has*, as in *Who's eaten my lunch?*)

Jeffrey is the one whose job is at stake.

Who's the person on the other end of the line?

Memory Trick: If you cannot substitute the **who's** in your sentence with either **who is** or **who has**, then it is wrong.

## your, you're

your: possessive of pronoun *you*

you're: contraction of *you are*

I'm looking forward to hearing your speech.

I'm going swimming even if you're not in the mood.

Memory Trick: Check whether 'you are' fits in place of the word you are using in your sentence. If it does, *you're* is the version of the word you need, and if not, *your* is the one you need. **YOUR** is a possessive pronoun, as is **OUR**.

## Tip #8 Using Quotation Marks for Emphasis??

How embarrassing is this? A reader of last week's tip pointed out to me that I had misused quotation marks in that piece. You (and I) should not use quotation marks around a word simply to emphasize it as I did. Instead, use *italics*, **bolding** or an underline to make the word stand out. (If you re-look at that tip, I've made the correction.)

So for my own sake, as well as for others who may fall into a similar trap, let's review the rules on when to use (double) quotation marks.

### 1. Setting off (short) quotations and speech

Their primary role is to set off material that exactly repeats someone else's spoken or written words.

Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death."

The author of the epistle identifies himself as "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ."

In a similar manner, speech/dialogue in fiction is set off by quotation marks.

"Tomorrow, I'll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day." (Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*)

### 2. Referring to words as words or phrases as phrases

Many people confuse "affect" and "effect."

Where did the saying "skeleton in the closet" come from?

3. Introducing a new word or phrase that needs explanation, but only on the first use  
The “social security offset,” based on base salary, housing allowance and utilities allowance, was paid by the pastor’s employer.
4. Expressing skepticism, disapproval, irony, mockery, etc.  
Sometimes quotation marks are used around a word or phrase to indicate that the ordinary meaning is **not** what the writer means. (These are called *Scare Quotes* and are like the *Air Quotes* we may use in speaking.) Writers are advised to use them sparingly.  
Oh, yes, our representative definitely “cares” for his constituents.  
She’s a big fan of rap “music.”  
The “humane” society put over a hundred dogs to death this year.
5. Giving titles of short or minor works of writing, music, etc.
  - Songs (She was humming John Denver’s “Take Me Home, Country Roads.”)
  - Short Stories (My favorite short story is “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” by Hemingway.)
  - Essays (In “A Brother of St. Francis” Grace Rhys compares humans and pigs.)
  - Short Poems (Celia recited Frost’s “Fire and Ice.”)
  - One Act Plays (Pinter’s “The Dumb Waiter” premiered in 1957.)
  - Articles in newspapers, magazines, or journals (In what paper was the editorial “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus” published?)
  - Episodes of television and radio series (“The Trouble with Tribbles” is a classic episode from the original *Star Trek* series)

**Tip #7            "Hello, Joe" takes a comma.**

Style guides say to use a comma with any *direct address* -- that is, calling someone by his proper name or by any name or title, including terms like "sir" and "buddy."

If the name comes first, it is followed by a comma.

If the name comes last, it is preceded by a comma.

If the name comes in the middle, it is set off by commas.

Examples:

Joe, I need you now!

What were you thinking, bro?

Go, Giants!

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome.

On, Dasher! On, Dancer! On, Comet and Vixen!

Think this is being nitpicky—that we don’t need to be concerned about a simple comma?

Look at these pairs of sentences. What a difference a comma makes!

He liked your painting Brian.

He liked your painting, Brian.

(In the first, someone was pleased that you had painted Brian. In the second, you’re telling Brian that someone admired his painting.)

Let’s eat, Grandpa.

Let’s eat Grandpa.

## Tip #6 What were you thinking of? You can't end a sentence with a preposition!

The truth is that, as long as the sentence sounds natural and its meaning is clear, the practice is a perfectly acceptable practice in modern English. Some folks would suggest that you re-word a sentence to avoid the terminal preposition.

- That was a problem of which I had not thought. Vs. That was a problem I had not thought of.
- For what [reason] did you put that there? Vs. What did you put that there for?
- Into what have you gotten yourself? Vs. What have you gotten yourself into?

How awkward are these first sentences?! Remember that the point of **communication** is to convey information and forcing tortured and mangled word placements certainly doesn't help convey any message.

There is a legend about Winston Churchill who responded to someone who criticized him for ending a sentence with a preposition. His comeback: "This is the kind of tedious nonsense up with which I will not put." [Actually Churchill's riposte used something else (*put up with*) called a "phrasal verb." A "phrasal verb" is composed of a verb and a preposition (Duh!), like *back off* or *hold up*, and may not necessarily make sense of the words in the phrase—*hold up* doesn't really have anything to do with holding. It's not important that you remember what these are called, but remembering this amusing hypercorrection may help you remember that a final preposition **is** acceptable.]

While ending a sentence with a preposition is not a real taboo, remember that there are plenty of people who have been drilled that this is bad grammar and you may want to reduce your chances of its being viewed as an error in "formal" situations such as in a cover letter for a job application. If you want to play it safe in such cases, see if you can re-word the sentence without making it too twisted.

There are situations, though, where we shouldn't end sentences with prepositions. **What?! You just said I could.** Well, sometimes it's not that the preposition is in the wrong place; it's that it's unnecessary to begin with. Take, for example, "Where are you at?" To make sense, this sentence doesn't need the preposition *at*. Do we need the final preposition in "I can't wait for this to be over with"? If you can leave an ending preposition off and it wouldn't change the meaning, you **should** leave it off.

## Tip #5 And God saw that it was good...Starting a sentence with a conjunction.

Many of us have been taught that it is wrong to start a sentence with a conjunction (like **and** or **but**) despite the fact that style manuals do not support such a rule.

The myth that this is a no-no probably started with teachers who were trying to help their students develop complex sentences and avoid sentence fragments such as the following:

- The new tennis pro was short. But handsome too.
- I went to my favorite Chinese restaurant with Hank. And Tom.

In point of fact, renowned writers have been starting sentences with conjunctions for centuries. So if someone tells you it shouldn't be done, cite some of the following:

- "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." (Luke 2:8, King James Version)
- "And now for something completely different." (Monty Python)
- "And they lived happily ever after." (standard fairy tale ending)



If you cringed when reading these examples (“No, no,” your inner voice cried. “It’s just between you and I!”), it’s most likely because you’ve proverbially had your fingers slapped over the “Me and Charlie want a cookie” kinds of things and tend to overcorrect. **Each of the bulleted examples immediately above is correct**, using an objective case pronoun as the object of the preposition or the verb.

To help yourself when you’re not sure, remember the technique from our ***Me, Myself and I*** hint: Try the sentence with just one pronoun. You’ll hear what the correct word should be.

- It’s a gift from me (not I).
- I sent the email to him (not he). OR I sent the email to her (not she).
- The article was written by me (not I).
- It’s just between me. (All right, I admit this doesn’t make sense...but try another preposition. It’s near me...or It’s beside me.)
- The president was looking for someone like him. OR The president was looking for someone like me.

And don’t fall into the trap we mentioned last time of using “myself” in these cases.

### Tip #3            **Me, Myself and I**

***Myself*** is what is called a reflexive pronoun. We don’t need to go into what that means, but if you think of seeing your reflection in a mirror, that may help you with the three appropriate uses for this pronoun:

- when the subject and the object of the verb (the *doer* and the *done to*) in a sentence are the same person. For example: ***I saw myself in the mirror.*** OR ***I gave myself a pat on the back.*** You are the object of your own action.
- as the object of a preposition when the subject and the object are the same. For example: ***I ended up talking to myself.*** You are the subject of the sentence and the object of the preposition “to.”
- when you want to place emphasis on the subject. For example: ***I myself was the only one visible in the mirror.*** OR ***I prepared the entire meal myself.***

Sometimes we run into problems with ***myself*** because, in a sense, we “overcorrect” and avoid using the objective pronoun ***me***. (As a child, we were corrected if we used a sentence like, “Me and Charlie want a cookie.”) Unfortunately, we’ve begun to think that ***me*** is always wrong. (Or some folks may think ***I*** is egotistical.) So, especially in compound subjects and objects, we end up saying things like,

“Send the completed form to Charles or ***myself*** no later than next Tuesday.” OR  
“Dean Spence, Dr. Hook and ***myself*** met with all applicants.”

We should be saying, “Send the completed form to Charles or ***me*** no later than next Tuesday.” The second sentence calls for “***me***” since the pronoun is the object of the preposition ***to***.

“Dean Spence, Dr. Hook and ***I*** met with all applicants.” The second sentence calls for “***I***” since the pronoun is part of the compound subject.

In both kinds of constructions, try saying the sentence as if you were the only person involved. You’ll quickly realize that the following are correct: “Send the completed form to ***me*** no later than next Tuesday.” You wouldn’t be tempted to say “Myself met with all applicants” so why would it be different if there were others present? “***I*** met with all applicants.”

Although we don’t seem to have the same problems with second and third person pronouns, the uses are the same for them:

- I – myself
- you (singular) — yourself
- he — himself / she — herself /            it — itself

## Tip #2            When to Put Punctuation Inside of Quotation Marks

It's often said that the US and England are two countries separated by a common language. Another thing that separates us is our practices around when to put punctuation inside of **non-dialogue** quotations marks.

### Commas and Periods

In the **American style**, periods and commas always go inside quotation marks regardless of logic.

He pressed the button marked "Talk."

My favorite poem by Robert Frost is "A Brook in the City."

The three signs read "Strawberries," "Peaches," and "Watermelons."

[This rule apparently came from early typesetters who worried about the fragility of tiny bits of metal.<sup>1</sup> To read an explanation, click [here](#).]

Well, as long as we're being illogical, there is an exception to this "always" rule: When that last item enclosed in quotation marks is just a single letter or a number, the period or comma will go *outside* the closing quotation marks.

The location of the party was marked on the map with a large "X".

The only grade my mom will accept is an "A".

On this scale, the highest ranking is a "1", not a "10".

Our **British** cousins, however, only put commas and periods (or *full stops*, as they call them) inside quotation marks if it's logical; that is, they require the writer to determine whether the period or comma belongs with the quotation or if it is part of the larger sentence.

My favorite poem by Robert Frost is "A Book in the City".

The questionnaire included the options "Don't know", "Undecided", and "No opinion".

The three signs read "Strawberries", "Peaches", and "Watermelons".

### Question Marks and Exclamation Points

In both American and British writing, question marks and exclamation points are placed inside or outside of the quotes depending on whether they apply to the whole sentence or just the quoted portion.

Several members cried, "Hear! Hear!" [Only the quoted part is exclamatory.]

It's no wonder he is "the king of pop"! [The whole sentence is exclamatory.]

Should we just "live and let live"?

I don't like his attitude of "what's in it for me?"

### Colons, Semicolons, Asterisks, Dashes

In both American and British writing, colons, semi colons, asterisks and dashes are always placed outside of the quotes.

A questionnaire may include the option of "No opinion"; however, it is preferable to force the respondent to make a choice.

How should I handle things if too many respondents answer "No opinion"; should I revise the question or not?

I love Seuss's story "Yertle the Turtle"—it's so funny!

He prefers "If I Ran the Zoo."\*

\*Supposedly the origin of the word *nerd*.

1. Wall CA. [Quotation Marks and Sentence-ending Punctuation](http://www.emdashprof.com/2011/03/quotation-marks-and-sentence-ending-punctuation/) [Internet]. [place unknown]: The MeDashProf; c2009-2011 [cited 2012 Sep 7]. Available from: <http://www.emdashprof.com/2011/03/quotation-marks-and-sentence-ending-punctuation/>

### Tip #1 *i.e.* Versus *e.g.*

Academic writing often makes use of the **abbreviations** *i.e.* and *e.g.*, which are Latin for *id est (that is)* and *exempli gratia (for example)*. **Once you know what they mean, it's not too hard to see how to use them.**

Since *i.e.* means ***that is*** or ***in other words***, use it to introduce a clarification or explanation.

- He ordered the blue plate special, *i.e.*, a roast beef sandwich with gravy.
- He knows the names of the stars closest to earth, *i.e.*, Proxima Centauri and Rigil Kentaurus.

Since *e.g.* means ***for example***, use it to provide an example.

- My favorite desserts include fruits, *e.g.*, apple and cherry pie, peach melba, or blueberry cobbler.
- I have visited a number of foreign countries, *e.g.*, Portugal, Belize, Switzerland and India.

**But how do you remember what they mean? There are a few mnemonics (memory tools) that can help:**

*i.e.* Remember that this means “in essence” or simply remember that it starts with “i” and means “in other words.”

*e.g.* Remember that this means “for example” and you use it to give EGGsamples.

**Follow these rules for both abbreviations:**

- Use a period after each letter
- Use a comma after the abbreviation
- Use a comma before the abbreviation unless it's the beginning of a sentence (in which case the first letter should be capitalized. For example: *On this line enter your pay in respect to this period of employment. I.e., subtract any contributions allowable for income tax purposes from your gross pay.*)