Comparative adjectives

The comparative forms of <u>adjectives</u> compare whatever is described with one other thing. Comparatives are formed by adding the suffix "er" or the words "more" or "less."

Use the suffix "er" when the <u>adjective</u> has one <u>syllable:</u>   "quicker," "darker," "louder."

Precede the <u>adjective</u>   by "more" or "less" when it has two or more <u>syllables:</u>   "more lucky," "more handsome," "less harmonious."

Mixing the two forms is redundant (and incorrect). Use "quicker" instead of "more quicker," for example.

Some comparative adjectives have irregular forms:
    worse
    inner

See also:

<u>Adjectives</u>

Good vs. well

Many writers are unsure of the distinction between "good" and "well."

"Good" is an <u>adjective,</u>   so it normally modifies a <u>noun.</u>   "Well" is an <u>adverb,</u> so it normally modifies a <u>verb</u>   or an <u>adjective.</u>

✗   My car is running good.
   -- "Running" is a <u>verb.</u>

✓   My car is running well.
✗   The new product has sold good in the first quarter.
   -- "Sold" is a <u>verb.</u>

✓   The new product has sold well in the first quarter.
✓   The new product has had good sales in the first quarter.
   -- "Sales" is a <u>noun.</u>

These guidelines also apply to the <u>adjective</u> "bad" and the <u>adverb</u>   "badly."

✗   We did bad in the product-evaluation tests.
   -- "Did" is a <u>verb.</u>

✓   We did badly in the product-evaluation tests.

See also:

<u>Adjectives and Adverbs</u>

Superlative adjectives

The superlative forms of <u>adjectives</u> compare whatever is described with at least two other things. Superlative <u>adjectives</u> state which thing in a collection of things possesses the least or most of some characteristic.

Form superlatives by adding the suffix "est" or the words "most" or "least."

Use the suffix "est" when the <u>adjective</u> has one <u>syllable:</u> "quickest," "darkest," "loudest."

Precede the <u>adjective</u> by "most" or "least" when it has two or more <u>syllables:</u> "most lucky," "most handsome," "least harmonious."

Mixing the two forms is redundant (and incorrect). Use "quickest" instead of "most quickest," for example.

Some superlative adjectives have irregular forms:
    worst
    innermost

See also:

<u>Adjectives</u>

Comparative adverbs

Use "more" or "less" when the modifier is an <u>adverb:</u> "more quickly," "more darkly," "less loudly."

See also:

<u>Adverbs</u>

Superlative adverbs

Use "most" or "least" when the modifier is an <u>adverb:</u> "most quickly," "most darkly," "least loudly."

See also:

<u>Adverbs</u>

Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a short form for one or more words.

Acronyms

An acronym is a word formed from the first letters of a group of words -- for example, "DOS" (Disk Operating System). An acronym is a kind of abbreviation.

Active verbs

An active verb is a word that expresses action, such as "run," "writing," and "flew."

Active voice

The active voice is a style of writing that uses explicit subjects and active verbs.

Adjectives

An adjective is a word that describes a noun. Example adjectives include "red," "happy," and "broken."

Adverbs

An adverb is a word that describes a verb or an adjective. Example adverbs include "quickly," "dark," and "thoroughly."

Ambiguity

Ambiguity in writing is a statement that can be interpreted with more than one meaning. An example of an ambiguous sentence is:

Yesterday, I wrote to the person asking for help.

_____

Apostrophes

 The apostrophe (') is a kind of punctuation. The apostrophe is used to mark the place where letters were omitted in a contraction (e.g., "can't") and indicate possession (e.g., "Beth's").

Articles

An article is a kind of adjective that serves to identify which noun is being referred to. Common articles include "a," "an," and "the."

Capitals

A capital is a large (upper-case) alphabetic letter.

Clauses

A clause is a structural part of a sentence. A clause contains a subject and a predicate.

Collective subjects

A collective subject is a noun forming a group or collection. Example collective subjects include "crowd," "team," and "staff."

Colons

A colon (:) is a punctuating mark used to introduce lists and elaborations. It is also used to separate the parts of a time reference.

Commas

The comma (,) is a punctuating mark used for many purposes in English grammar. Its chief role is as a separator.

Comparisons

A comparison is statement showing the similarities and differences between two or more things.

Comparative modifiers

A comparative modifier is an adjective or adverb that describes by showing the relationship between two or more things. Example comparative modifiers include "most," "best," and "less."

Complimentary closings

The complimentary closing is the "Yours truly" part of a letter.

Compound adjectives

A compound adjective is two or more adjectives applied to one noun.

Compound nouns

Compound nouns are words formed from two or more nouns, such as "father-in-law" and "has-been."

Compound pronouns

A compound pronoun is a phrase that stands for more than one noun. A compound pronoun usually consists of two pronouns or a pronoun and a noun. Example compound pronouns include "she and I" and "Jim and me."

Compound subjects

Compound subjects have two or more parts joined by a conjunction (e.g., "x and y") or expressed in a list (e.g., "x, y, and z").

Conjunctions

A conjunction is a word that forms a relationship between two other ideas. Example conjunctions include "and," "or," and "but."

Conjunctive adverbs

A conjunctive adverb that both forms a relation and qualifies two other ideas. Example conjunctive adverbs include "therefore," "however," and "moreover."

Consonants

A consonant is a letter which isn't a vowel. The following letters are consonants:
    B, C, D, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N,
    P, Q, R, S, T, V, W, X, Y, Z

Contractions

A contraction is a kind of abbreviation formed by eliminating some of the letters in a word. The omitted letters are denoted using an apostrophe. Example contractions include "it's," "wasn't," and "she'd."

Dashes

A dash (--) is a kind of punctuation used to both separate and emphasize the separated material.

Defining clauses

A defining clause makes the noun to which it refers more specific.   A defining clause may also limit or alter the noun in some way:

She wore the dress that she wore last week.

-- "That she wore last week" is a defining clause which specifies which dress.

All cars parked in the loading zone must be moved immediately.

-- "[That are] parked in the loading zone" is a defining clause that limits "cars."

Defining clauses can be introduced with either "that" or "which":

She wore the dress which she wore last week.

All cars that are parked in the loading zone must be moved immediately.

Dependent clauses

A dependent clause is an optional part of a sentence that supports the independent clause. The role of the dependent clause is to elaborate on the subject in the independent clause.

Descriptive clauses

A descriptive clause describes and provides information about the noun to which it refers. Descriptive clauses are isolated from the rest of the sentence with commas. Descriptive clauses are always introduced by "which":

GEM, which runs on both the Atari ST and IBM PC, provides a graphical interface.

The reference section, which is located in an appendix, lists several books you may consult for further information.

The shipment, which arrived only yesterday, was incomplete.

_____

Direct objects

The direct object is the thing directly acted on by the subject.

Ellipses

The ellipsis (...) is a kind of punctuation used to mark the omission of words or ideas.

Exclamation marks

 The exclamation mark (!) is a kind of punctuation used to add emphasis to a sentence or part of a sentence.

Future tense

Future tense is a verb form that describes an action yet to take place -- i.e., an action that will take place in the future. Example future-tense verbs include "will run," "will be," and "will know."

Gender

Gender refers to the sex -- male or female -- of a person referred to in a sentence. Gender is especially important with pronouns, such as "his," "her," "he," and "she."

Hyphens

A hyphen (-) is a kind of punctuation used to separate words and parts of words. Examples of hyphenation include "semi-professional," "bright-red," and "brother-in-law."

Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns stand for nonspecific nouns:
    everybody
    anyone
    none

Indefinite subjects

 An indefinite subject is a subject formed from a nonspecific pronoun, such as "everybody" and "anyone."

Infinitive verb

An infinitive verb is a phrase formed from the preposition "to" and a verb. Example infinitive verbs include "to walk," "to be," and "to have."

Independent clauses

An independent clause is a clause that can stand on its own as a complete sentence. In the following sentence,

Everyone wanted to leave, but I didn't.

"Everyone wanted to leave" is the independent clause.

Indirect objects

The indirect object is referred to by the subject but not directly acted on by the subject. In the following sentence:

I told you I wanted a strawberry milkshake.

"You" is the indirect object.

Initialisms

An initialism is a kind of abbreviation formed from the first letter of a group of words. Example initialisms include "RCMP," "USA," and "CIA."

Interdependent clauses

Interdependent clauses are two or more dependent clauses that rely on each other to form a complete thought.

Introductory phrases

An introductory phrase introduces the main part of a sentence.

In spite of this, he amassed a considerable fortune.

-- "In spite of this" is the introductory phrase

Italics

 Italics are a typographical mark used to emphasize or set off words. The are also used to denote titles of major works.

Letter salutations

The salutation is the "Dear …" part of a letter.

Lists

A list is an enumeration of a set of things:

> Three people attended: Mary, John, and Leslie.

Modifiers

A modifier is a word that changes or qualifies another word. Adjectives and adverbs are modifiers.

Nominative case

The nominative case is a form of pronoun used to refer to the person speaking.

I wanted to see you.

-- "I" is the nominative-case pronoun.

Nouns

A noun is a word for a person, place, or thing. Example nouns include "car," "Sam," and "neighborhood."

Objects

The object is the thing acted on by the subject:

Jill sent me the report.
-- "Me" is the object.

Organized writing

Organized writing is the method of presenting ideas to the reader in a logical, consistent, and expected way.

Paragraphs

A paragraph is a collection of one or more sentences all devoted to the presentation of a single idea.

Parentheses

Parentheses -- ( ) -- are a form of punctuation used to isolate some words from the surrounding words:

>The letter (which I received only yesterday) contained her resignation.

Passive verbs

 A passive verb is a word that describes a condition or state of being. Example passive verbs include "is," "are," and "be."

Passive voice

The passive voice is a style of writing that uses indirect subjects and passive verbs.

Past tense

The past tense is a form of verb that describes action occurring in a previous time. Example past-tense verbs include "ran," "had," and "did."

Periods

 The period (.) is a kind of punctuation used to end sentences and mark some kinds of abbreviation.

Phrases

A phrase is a collection of words that modifies or connects. A phrase contains neither a subject nor a verb.

Plurals

Plural: more than one.

Plural Nouns

A plural noun represents two or more things:
    cars
    people
    feet

Plural pronouns

A plural pronoun stands for a plural noun:

    they
    them
    us

Possessives

A possessive is word describing possession or ownership.

Possessive nouns

A possessive noun is a word that refers to a thing that possesses or owns something. Example possessive nouns include "Vicki's," "dog's," and "Canada's."

Possessive pronouns

A possessive pronoun is a word that stands for a noun which owns or possesses. Example possessive pronouns include "my," "hers," and "its."

Predicates

A predicate expresses action about or the condition of the subject of a sentence or clause. The predicate is the verb or verb phrase which connects the subject to the object.

Prefix

A prefix is a small set of letters joined to the front of a word. Example prefixes include "pre," "semi," and "un."

Prepositions

Prepositions link the object of a sentence or clause to the noun or verb named before it. The preposition defines the relationship between a noun or verb and an object.

Common prepositions include "to," "for," and "on."

Present tense

 The present tense is a form of verb that describes an action occurring now. Example present-tense verbs include "run," "is," and "have."

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that stands for a noun. Example pronouns include "I," "her," and "it."

Pronoun case

Pronoun case refers to the different forms a pronoun can take based on its role. There are three pronoun cases: nominative, objective, and possessive. The nominative case is used for the person speaking. The objective case is used for the person spoken about. The possessive case is used for the person spoken to.

Proper nouns

A proper noun is the name of a person, place, or thing. Example proper nouns include "Sally," "Vancouver," and "Ford Fairlane."

Punctuation

Punctuation is the set of marks used to both separate and join the structural parts of a sentence.

Question marks

The question mark (?) is a kind of punctuation used to denote a sentence as a question.

Quotation Marks

The quotation mark (") is a kind of punctuation used to indicate words that were written or spoken by someone.

Quotes

A quote or quotation is a collection of words written or spoken by someone. Quotes are surrounded by quotation marks.

Semicolons

The semicolon (;) is a kind of punctuation used to separate two independent clauses in a sentence. The semicolon acts like a weak period.

Sentences

A sentence is a collection of words containing a subject, predicate, and object. A sentence expresses a single idea.

Singular

Singular: one, single.

Slashes

A slash (/) is a kind of punctuation used to indicate alternatives, as in "and/or."

Subjects

The subject is the thing about which a sentence or clause is written.

Suffix

A suffix is a collection of characters joined to the end of a word. Example suffixes include "ment," "ing," and "ful."

Superlative modifiers

A superlative modifier indicates which of several things exhibits the greatest degree of some characteristic. Example superlative modifiers include "most," "least," and "best."

Syllables

A syllable is a part of a word. A syllable forms one step in the rhythm of pronunciation.

Titles

A title is the name given to a person (e.g., Dr. Smith) or a work (e.g., The Grapes of Wrath.

Verbs

A verb is a word that describes an action or a condition. Example verbs include "run," "is," and "saw."

Verb tense

Verb tense describes the changes made to a verb to indicate an action occurring over time. There are three basic tenses in English:

Past tense (e.g., ran, was, had)

Present tense (e.g., run, am, have)

Future tense (e.g., will run, will be, will have)

_____

Verb "to be"

The verb "to be" assigns a condition to the subject. Forms of the verb "to be" are: "is," "are," "was," "were," "being," and "been."

Vowel

A vowel is a letter which isn't a consonant. The following letters are vowels:
A, E, I, O, U

'Y' is sometimes treated as a vowel in words like "quickly" and "rhythm."

Wordiness

Wordiness is the overuse of words -- using two words where one will do, for example.

Grammar Expert

Online Help for the English Language

Version 1.02

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Grammar Expert -- Table of Contents

Grammar Expert contains information on the following topics:

<u>Sentences</u>   -- collections of words used to express ideas.

<u>Parts of speech</u>   -- the role each word plays in a <u>sentence.</u>

<u>Punctuation</u>   -- a set of marks placed in <u>sentences</u>   to separate or clarify intent or meaning:
   . , ; ! ? "

<u>Mechanics of writing</u>   -- the correct ways to express things like <u>abbreviations,</u>   numbers,
   and dates.

<u>Writing style</u>   -- the application of grammatical rules to express ideas effectively.

See also:

<u>Detailed table of contents</u>

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Detailed Table of Contents

Mechanics of writing

The "mechanics of writing" refers to the presentation of facts in writing. A related topic is <u>writing style.</u>

<u>Capitalization:</u> The use of capital letters over small letters. Correct usage is often confusing, particularly when capital letters are used within a <u>sentence.</u>

<u>Abbreviations:</u> Shortened forms of words or word groups. Examples: "e.g.," "Mr.,", "FBI."

<u>Dates and times:</u> The correct ways to express dates and times.

<u>Numbers:</u> Should you write "10" or "ten?" What about numbers that appear at the beginning of a <u>sentence?</u>

<u>Titles:</u> Names of works, such as books, articles, films, and songs.

<u>Lists:</u> Expressing lists or series of items.

<u>Hyphenation:</u> How to join words with <u>hyphens,</u> and how to split a long word at the end of a line.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are convenient shortcuts. Abbreviations are appropriate where brevity is desirable, such as classified advertising, tables and charts, and informal letters. Use abbreviations sparingly, since they may obscure the meaning.

Abbreviations can be used for

<u>Degrees and titles:</u>   Mr., Dr.

<u>Units of measure:</u>   ft, C

<u>Names of organizations:</u>   NBC, ABL

<u>Time and date references:</u>   a.m., B.C.

<u>Common Latin phrases:</u>   vs., e.g.

Abbreviations can be <u>plural</u>   (Drs., ICBMs) and <u>possessive</u>   (FBI's, VP's).

Abbreviations: Acronyms

Acronyms are <u>abbreviations</u> formed from the first letter (or few letters) of a collection of words. Unlike <u>initialisms,</u> acronyms are pronounced as words:

SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
MADD	Mothers Against Drunk Driving
DOS	Disk Operating System
GEM	Graphical Environment Manager

The letters in acronyms are not normally separated by <u>periods.</u>

In some cases, more than one letter may be extracted from a word to form an acronym. Some words may not be included in the acronym:

RADAR	RAdio Detection And Ranging
GREP	Globally search for Regular Expressions and Print

See also:

<u>Abbreviations</u>

<u>Initialisms</u>

<u>Contractions</u>

Abbreviations: Contractions

Contractions are a kind of <u>abbreviation.</u> Contractions are words shortened by omitting letters. An <u>apostrophe</u>   is used to show that some of the letters are omitted. Common contractions include:

cannot	can't
would not	wouldn't
will not	won't
of the clock	o'clock
let us	let's
I have	I've
she would	she'd
he will	he'll
she is	she's
it is	it's

Contractions are appropriate only in informal writing.

See also:

<u>It's vs. its</u>

<u>Abbreviations</u>

<u>Acronyms</u>

<u>Initialisms</u>

Abbreviating time and date references

The <u>abbreviations</u> for morning and afternoon can be written "A.M." and "P.M." or "a.m." and "p.m." Note the placement of <u>periods:</u>

    9:45 A.M.
    7:15 p.m.
    three thirty P.M.

The <u>abbreviation</u> B.C. (Before Christ) always follows a year or century to which it refers:

    400 B.C.
    the fifth century B.C.

The <u>abbreviation</u> A.D. (Anno Domini, the year of our Lord) precedes specific years but follows centuries:

    A.D. 1976
    the 20th century A.D.

See also:

<u>Abbreviations</u>

<u>Dates and times</u>

Abbreviations: Initialisms

Initialisms are <u>abbreviations</u> formed from the first letters of a collection of words. Unlike <u>acronyms,</u> initialisms are pronounced by reciting each letter individually:

ICBM	Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
CPU	Central Processing Unit

The letters in commonly used initialisms are normally not separated by <u>periods.</u> However, initialisms introduced in a written work usually are separated by <u>periods:</u>

They are under investigation by the FBI.

Last month, our cost to complete was fifty thousand dollars. This month, our C.T.C. is sixty thousand.

See also:

<u>Abbreviations</u>

<u>Acronyms</u>

Abbreviations of Latin phrases

 Several Latin words and <u>phrases</u> are commonly <u>abbreviated.</u>   These are shown in the following chart. Note the placement of <u>periods:</u>

c.	-- about (in reference to dates)
ca.	-- about (in reference to dates)
cf.	-- compare, compare with
e.g.	-- for example
et al	-- and others (people)
etc.	-- and so on
ibid.	-- in the same place as the preceding reference
i.e.	-- that is, in other words
loc. cit.	-- in the place cited
N.B.	-- note well
op. cit.	-- in the work cited
q.v.	-- see also
viz.	-- that is
vs.	-- versus, opposed to, against, compared with

See also:

<u>Abbreviations</u>

Abbreviations for measures

 Abbreviations   for units of measure are written in small letters and are terminated with a period.

 Abbreviations for measures are usually written the same way for singular   and plural units. The abbreviation for "pound" is the only exception:

    feet: 1 ft.   20 ft.
    gallons: 1 gal. 20 gal.
    hours: 1 hr.   20 hr.
    inches: 1 in.   20 in.
    kilometers: 1 km.   20 km.
    litres: 1 l.   20 l.
    miles: 1 mi.   20 mi.
    minutes: 1 min. 20 min.
    months: 1 mo.   20 mo.
    pounds: 1 lb.   20 lbs.
    seconds: 1 sec. 20 sec.
    years: 1 yr.   20 yr.

A shorthand notation exists for inches and feet:

    inches: 1"   20"
    feet: 1'   20'

A similar notation is sometimes used for minutes and seconds:

    minutes: 1'   20'
    seconds: 1"   20"

See also:

Abbreviations

Abbreviating organization names

Abbreviations   for organizations, companies, and institutions are usually initialisms. They are normally written without periods:

    NBC
    NFL
    RCMP
    UN
    UNESCO

See also:

Abbreviations

Initialisms

Acronyms

Plural abbreviations

The plural   forms of abbreviations can be written in two ways: followed by "s" or followed by "'s." Using the "s" form may avoid confusion, since the "'s" form is also used for possessive abbreviations:

ICBMs	or	ICBM's
IOUs	or	IOU's
CPUs	or	CPU's
D.A.s	or	D.A.'s

Personal titles have special plural abbreviations:

Dr.	Drs.
Mr.	Messrs.
Mrs.	Mmes.
Ms.	Ms.
Rev.	Revs.

See also:

Abbreviations

Possessive abbreviations

Abbreviating degrees and titles

Possessive abbreviations

The <u>possessive</u> forms of <u>abbreviations</u> are normally written like other <u>possessive nouns:</u> they are followed by "'s":

    NFL's rules
    NATO's policies
    FBI's most-wanted list

See also:

<u>Abbreviations</u>

<u>Initialisms</u>

<u>Acronyms</u>

<u>Possessive nouns</u>

Abbreviating degrees and titles

Titles are always <u>abbreviated</u>   when they precede a person's name:
    Mr. Jones
    Mrs. Jones
    Ms. Jones
    Dr. Jones
    Rev. Jones

 Degrees are always <u>abbreviated</u> when they follow a person's name. The degree is separated from the name by a <u>comma.</u>   Other titles, such as "Mr." and "Mrs.," are omitted when a degree is written:
    Fred Jones, Ph.D.
    Katherine Jones, M.D.
    Jasper Jones, B.A.

 Degrees and titles not associated with a named person are spelled out:

    I called the doctor, but she was out.

    He asked me to refer to him as "mister."

    I received my Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1967.

See also:

<u>Abbreviations</u>

<u>Plural abbreviations</u>

Capitalization

Always capitalize the first word of a <u>sentence.</u>

Always capitalize the first word of a <u>quoted</u> <u>sentence,</u>   but only if the <u>sentence</u>   is <u>quoted</u> in its entirety:

    The announcement proclaimed, "We have revolutionized photography."

    The company announced they had "revolutionized" photography.

    She said, "If John doesn't go, I won't go."

    She said she wouldn't go if John doesn't go.

The word following a <u>colon</u> is normally not capitalized. It is capitalized, however, if it begins a complete <u>sentence:</u>

    His meal was simple: rice, bread, and water.

    Three people are coming: Norm, Beth, and Harold.
    -- Capitalized only because the word following the <u>colon</u>   is a <u>proper noun</u>

    Restoring files: Enter the "restore" command to retrieve saved files.

    Restoring files: "restore" command.

Capitalize the first letter of each item in an enumerated <u>list:</u>

    To recover from serious errors
     1. Insert the backup floppy disk in drive A:
     2. Reboot

Capitalize the first letter of <u>proper nouns:</u>

John Smith	Tuesday	General Motors
California	North Pole	Honda Accord
Republican Party	Geiger counter	Microsoft

Capitalize the first letter of an adjective formed from a <u>proper noun:</u>
American
Napoleonic
English

Capitalize letters used as words:

C-sharp	U-bolt	T-bar
X-ray	G-string	A-bomb

Capitalize titles of works:
Poltergeist

Capitalize words that are substitutes for the names of specific individuals. Don't capitalize words that are terms for relationships:

    This is the spot where Father and I went fishing.

    This is the spot where my father and I went fishing.

    I'll have to check with Skipper first.

    I was given the shirt by Aunt Karen.

My aunt gave me the shirt.

See also:

Lists

Titles of works

Dates and times

The preferred way to write a date is "25 July 1991." The month separates the two sets of numbers, making commas   unnecessary.

The year may be omitted when it is obvious from the context or is the current year: 25 July.

Alternatively, dates may be written "July 25, 1991."

Times are usually written with the "hour:minute" notation, as in "10:30." The time can be followed by the abbreviation "A.M." or "P.M." (or "a.m." or "p.m.") to remove ambiguity where necessary:

> The call was placed at 10:30 p.m.
>
> Our next meeting will be held on 10 September 1991 at 2:30.
> -- "P.M." is implied by the context.

Times on the hour or half-hour can be spelled out. In this case, don't use A.M. or P.M. -- indicate morning or evening explicitly:

    ten thirty in the evening
    nine o'clock in the morning
    4:57 p.m.

Decades can be written as figures or spelled out, optionally with an apostrophe   to show the omission of the century:

    the 60s
    the sixties
    the 1960s
    the 60's
    the '60s

Centuries can also be written as figures or spelled out:

    the early 1900s
    the late 20th century
    the late twentieth century

Don't precede month names with "the month of," unless there is ambiguity between a month name and another word in the sentence:

> Wanda's birthday is in April.
>
> April's birthday is in the month of April.

See also:

Abbreviating dates and times

Hyphenating words

A <u>hyphen</u>   is used to separate words and parts of words.   Related topics:

<u>Hyphenating compound adjectives:</u> How to tell whether to write "the bright red firetruck" or "the bright-red firetruck."

<u>Hyphenating adverbs and adjectives:</u> How to tell whether to write "a brightly colored dress" or "a brightly-colored dress."

<u>Hyphenating compound nouns:</u> How to tell whether to write "brother in law" or "brother-in-law."

<u>Hyphenating numbers:</u> How to tell whether to write "twenty two" or "twenty-two."

<u>Hyphenating prefixes:</u> How to tell whether to write "self indulgent" or "self-indulgent."

<u>Breaking long words</u> at the end of a line: How to tell whether to write "mec-hanics" or "mech-anics."

Hyphenating adverbs and adjectives

Don't hyphenate adverbs that modify adjectives.

Incorrect:
    a fast-moving train
    a brightly-colored dress
    a hastily-prepared memo

Correct:
    a fast moving train
    a brightly colored dress
    a hastily prepared memo

See also:

Hyphenation

Hyphenating compound adjectives

Adverbs

Adjectives

Hyphenating compound adjectives

The first <u>adjective</u>   in a <u>compound adjective</u>   modifies the second.

 <u>Hyphenate</u>   two or more <u>adjectives</u>   that precede a <u>noun.</u>   Don't <u>hyphenate</u> <u>adjectives</u> that follow a <u>noun:</u>
    the bright-red firetruck
    the firetruck that is bright red
    a forward-looking study
    a study that is forward looking
    a two-month-old baby
    a baby that is two months old
    a forty-hour week
    a week forty hours long

 The last part of a compound <u>adjective</u> common to two or more compound <u>adjectives</u>   that modify the same <u>noun</u>   can be suspended with a <u>hyphen:</u>
    the late- to middle-Renaissance period
    middle- and senior-level management
    red- and green-colored paper

See also:

<u>Hyphenation</u>

<u>Hyphenating adverbs and adjectives</u>

Hyphenating compound nouns

Hyphens   are used to separate compound nouns. Because the English language is evolving, new compounds are being formed constantly. Consult a dictionary to determine the correct form.

See also:

Hyphenation

Hyphenation: Breaking long words

 When a word must be broken at the end of a line, use a <u>hyphen</u>   to show the word is continued. Words are always broken at <u>syllable</u> boundaries, so single-syllable words are never broken. Use a dictionary to determine where the <u>syllables</u>   occur.

 See also:

<u>Hyphenation</u>

Hyphenating numbers

Use a <u>hyphen</u> to separate fractions and two-word spelled-out numbers under one hundred:
   five hundred forty-seven
   one-half
   twenty-two
   one and three-fifths

See also:

<u>Numbers</u>

Hyphenating prefixes

The prefixes "self," "quasi," and "ex" are usually separated from the stem word with hyphens:
    self-indulgent
    quasi-intelligent
    ex-wife

Use a hyphen   when a prefix precedes a capitalized   word:
    pro-Communist
    anti-Leftist
    trans-Atlantic

Use a hyphen   when a prefix precedes a number:
    pre-1970s
    post-60s

Use a hyphen   when a prefix results in a doubled vowel:
    co-operate
    cohabitate
    pre-empt
    precooked
    anti-inflationary
    antidepressant

See also:

Capitalization

Numbers

Lists

<u>Lists</u>   can take several forms. The simplest <u>list</u>   is a series of items, separated by <u>commas:</u>

  We have three animals in our little "zoo": a dog, a cat, and a mouse.

This type of <u>list</u>   is usually introduced by a <u>colon</u>   or <u>dash.</u>

Vertical <u>lists</u>   indicate each item with a number or mark:

  We have three animals in our little "zoo":
    1. a dog;
    2. a cat;
    3. a mouse.

  We have three animals in our little "zoo" --
    - a dog;
    - a cat;
    - a mouse.

If the <u>list</u>   items are complete <u>sentences, punctuate</u>   the introduction as a <u>sentence</u>   as well:

  We have three animals in our little "zoo."
    1. Rover, the dog, loves to play catch outside.
    2. Fluffy, the cat, sleeps most of the time.
    3. Squeaky, the mouse, loves to eat cheese.

For <u>lists</u>   of people including a <u>pronoun,</u>   place the <u>pronoun</u>   at the end of the list:

  Frank, Linda, and I went to school together.

Numbers

In general writing, spell out numbers with fewer than two words. Write other numbers as figures:

    five
    nineteen
    123
    twenty-six
    three million

Numbers expressed as figures should not start a <u>sentence.</u> Rewrite the <u>sentence</u> or spell the number out.

  ❌ 1,200 pencil sharpeners have been sold in the past two days.

  ✓ In the past two days, 1,200 pencil sharpeners have been sold.

  ✓ Twelve hundred pencil sharpeners have been sold in the past two days.

Use a <u>hyphen</u> to separate spelled-out two-word numbers under 100, even when they are part of a larger number:

    twenty-eight
    thirty-four thousand
    four thousand ninety-two

Don't use "and" in spelled-out numbers unless the smallest part of the number is less than ten:

    one hundred twenty-five

    one hundred and six

    four thousand three hundred thirty one

    four thousand three hundred and five

Use "one" instead of "a" in spelled-out numbers:

    one hundred boats

    one million hamburgers

See also:

<u>Hyphenating numbers</u>

Titles

Capitalize   the titles of works using the following rules:

1. Capitalize   the first letter of the first word.

2. Capitalize   all other words in the title except articles , conjunctions, and prepositions.

Examples:

A Boy and a Dream

The Tale of the Lonesome Moose

Platinum and other Precious Metals

Italicize   or underline the names of books (but not chapters), magazines (but not magazine articles), newspapers, comic strips, films, plays, paintings, statues, record albums (but not songs), large musical works such as operas and symphonies, television shows, and names of ships and other craft.

Place in quotation marks   the names of book chapters, magazine articles, poems, essays, unpublished manuscripts, songs, and episodes of television shows.

Treat the names of man-made objects such as buildings and parks as proper nouns.

See also:

Capitalization

Plurals

<u>Plural</u> <u>nouns</u>   refer to more than one thing.

A <u>noun</u>   is <u>plural</u>   even if it is only fractionally greater than one:
   one-and-a-half pies

The <u>plural</u>   of most <u>nouns</u> is formed by adding the <u>suffix</u>   "s." <u>Nouns</u> ending in "s," "z," "x," "ch," or "sh" are made <u>plural</u>   by adding the <u>suffix</u>   "es":
   dog   dogs
   horse   horses
   thought   thoughts
   pickle   pickles
   waltz   waltzes
   match   matches

Make <u>nouns</u>   ending in "y" <u>plural</u>   by changing the "y" to "ies," unless the "y" was preceded by a <u>vowel,</u>   in which case use just the <u>suffix</u>   "s":
   duty   duties
   frailty   frailties
   key   keys
   quality   qualities
   play   plays

<u>Nouns</u>   ending in "o" are often made <u>plural</u>   by adding the <u>suffix</u>   "es" (there are exceptions, though -- check the dictionary to be sure):
   echo   echoes
   tomato   tomatoes
   potato   potatoes
   zero   zeroes or zeros
   radio   radios

Certain <u>nouns</u>   are made <u>plural</u>   by adding the <u>suffix</u>   "en":
   ox   oxen
   brother   bretheren
   child   children

Some <u>nouns</u>   are made <u>plural</u> by changing their <u>vowels:</u>
   foot   feet
   goose   geese
   louse   lice
   man   men
   tooth   teeth
   woman   women

The names of hunted animals have the same forms in the <u>singular</u>   and <u>plural:</u>
   quail
   deer
   moose
   fish
   trout
   salmon

<u>Nouns</u>   of foreign origin have various exceptional <u>plural</u>   forms:
   antenna   antennae
   bacterium   bacteria
   cactus   cacti

cello	celli
concerto	concerti
criterion	criteria
curriculum	curricula
datum	data
focus	foci
formula	formulae
larva	larvae
medium	media
memorandum	memoranda
phenomenon	phenomena
referendum	referenda
syllabus	syllabi
vertebra	vertebrae
virtuoso	virtuosi

 To make <u>compound nouns</u> <u>plural,</u>   make the most significant part <u>plural</u>   using the rules listed above (the most significant part is the part described by the rest of the compound):

    arm-chairs
    foot-stools
    attorneys-general
    major-generals
    brothers-in-law
    hangers-on
    maids-of-honor

See also:

<u>Nouns</u>

<u>Hyphenating compound nouns</u>

Possessives

Possessive nouns own or possess. What they possess can be other nouns ("the car's windshield") or qualities ("the mind's eye," "a moment's notice").

The quality of possession is usually assigned to a noun using the apostrophe.

For singular nouns, form the possessive by adding the suffix "'s." This applies whether the singular noun ends in "s" or not:
    Jerry's truck
    at year's end
    Gus's clothing
    the business's concerns
    the cat's pyjamas

There are some exceptions to this rule:
    Achilles' heel
    Jesus' word
    goodness' sake

The suffix "'s" can be used even if the noun is an inanimate object.
    the car's radiator
    the house's roof
    my computer's keyboard

Some people prefer to denote possession of inanimate objects using "of":
    the radiator of the car
    the roof of the house
    the keyboard of my computer

For plural nouns, form the possessive by adding a single apostrophe as a suffix:
    the girls' picnic
    secretaries' day
    the boys' coats
    the people's choice
    the men's room

When two or more nouns jointly possess something, apply the possessive form to the last noun only:
    John and Mary's house
    Barnes and Noble's products
    Thomas and Son's Hardware

When two or more nouns individually possess something similar, apply the possessive form to all nouns:
    John's and Mary's birth certificates

When a compound noun possesses, place the "'s" at the end:
    my mother-in-law's house
    the attorney-general's office

Use "of" to denote possession when the name of the possessor is long or awkward.

Awkward:
    the First National Bank of New York's assets
    Joe's brother's doctor's cousin
    the maids-of-honor's dresses
    my brothers-in-law's homes

Better:
  the assets of the First National Bank of New York
  the cousin of the doctor of Joe's brother
  the dresses of the maids-of-honor
  the homes of my brothers-in-law

See also:

<u>Nouns</u>

<u>Possessive pronouns</u>

Proper nouns

Proper nouns are the names of specific people, places, and things. Proper nouns are normally capitalized:

    John Smith
    The United States of America
    the Empire State Building
    Florida
    SupraModem 2400

See also:

Nouns

Capitalization

Parts of speech

Each word in a sentence plays a role.

<u>Adjectives</u> -- descriptive words that enhance the meanings of <u>nouns:</u> quick, tall, red, happy.

<u>Adverbs</u> -- descriptive words that enhance the meanings of <u>verbs</u> and <u>adjectives:</u> happily, quickly, brightly, fast.

<u>Articles</u> -- Simple <u>adjectives</u> that describe "which one": the, a, an.

<u>Conjunctions</u> -- words that join one part of a <u>sentence</u> to another: and, but.

<u>Interjections</u> -- words that express emotions: ouch, damn, oh.

<u>Nouns</u> -- words for people, places, and things: tree, Denver, idea, John.

<u>Prepositions</u> -- words that form relationships between other words and the rest of a sentence: to, for, with, in.

<u>Pronouns</u> -- words that stand for <u>nouns:</u> she, it, his, I.

<u>Verbs</u> -- words that describe actions or conditions: run, build, sleep, is.

Adjectives

Adjectives are descriptive words. They can make <u>sentences</u> more interesting by adding color and detail. They can make <u>sentences</u>   more exact by qualifying things and actions.

Adjectives always modify <u>nouns.</u> .

<u>Comparative adjectives</u>   describe by comparing with something else. Example <u>comparative adjectives</u> include "warmer," "more quickly," and "less difficult."

<u>Superlative adjectives</u>   describe by comparing with two or more other things. <u>Superlative adjectives</u> state which thing possesses the most or least of some characteristic. Example <u>superlative adjectives</u> are "warmest," "most quickly," and "least difficult."

Adverbs

Adverbs modify <u>verbs,</u> <u>adjectives,</u> or other adverbs.

Related topics:

<u>Comparative adverbs</u>   form part of a comparison with one other thing:
    more quickly
    less loudly

<u>Superlative adverbs</u>   form part of a comparison with two or more other things:
    most quickly
    least loudly

<u>Split infinitives:</u>   Adverbs inserted between "to" and an <u>infinitive verb</u> .

Articles

Articles are simple <u>adjectives</u> .

Articles always precede <u>nouns,</u> and identify which <u>noun</u> is referred to.

"A" or "an" are indefinite articles. They refer to any <u>noun</u> :
    a house
    an apple
    a possibility

"The" is a definite article. It refers to one specific <u>noun</u> :
    the house
    the apple
    the possibility

 "A" precedes <u>nouns</u> that begin with a <u>consonant</u> sound. "An" precedes <u>nouns</u> that begin with a <u>vowel</u> sound. Note that the first letter of a <u>noun</u> need not be a <u>vowel</u> or <u>consonant</u> for these rules to apply:
    a box
    a unit
    a university
    a union
    an item
    an hour
    an heir
    an honor

See also:

<u>Adjectives</u>

Conjunctions

A conjunction is a joining word that links related words, <u>phrases,</u> and <u>clauses.</u>

Common conjunctions:

and	after	although	as
because	before	but	how
if	nor	once	or
since	so	that	though
till		unless until	what
when	where	whether	while
why			

Do not use "and who," "and which," or "and that" in a <u>sentence</u> unless there is a preceding "who," "which," or "that":

✗ The man I met yesterday and who gave me his theater tickets called this morning.

✓ The man who I met yesterday and who gave me his theater tickets called this morning.

Don't follow "come," "go," or "try" with "and." Use the <u>preposition</u> "to" instead:

✗ I'll try and call you next week.

✓ I'll try to call you next week.

Always use "or" after "either":

Either Elaine or Carol will meet you at the airport.

Always use "nor" after "neither":

Neither Elaine nor Carol are ready, so I will pick you up at the airport.

Generally, use "or" after "not." If the items are closely related, substitute "nor" for "or":

This weather is not fit for skating or swimming.

This weather is not fit for man nor beast.

The tornado had not damaged the house or the car.

He could not rely on friend nor relative.

Interjections

Interjections express strong emotions or exclamations:
    oh
    whew
    damn

Nouns

Nouns represent objects, such as people, places, and things. Nouns can also represent ideas, such as hunger, emotions, or laws. Nouns for classes of people, places and things are called common nouns. Nouns that are the specific names of people, places, and things are proper nouns.

Nouns have the quality of number. A noun representing one object (or less than one, in the case of a part) is singular, while a noun representing more than one is plural.

For example, "the tree" refers to a single tree, so "tree" is singular. "The top of the tree" refers to part of a single tree, so "top of the tree" is singular. "The trees" refers to two or more trees, so "trees" is plural.

Nouns also have the quality of ownership. Nouns having this quality are called possessives. For example, the noun "John" is possessive in the sentence, "We wrapped John's shirt."

See also:

Proper nouns

Plural nouns

Possessive nouns

Prepositions

Prepositions link the <u>object</u> of a <u>sentence</u> or <u>clause</u> to the <u>noun</u> or <u>verb</u> named before it.

A preposition defines the relationship between a <u>noun</u> or <u>verb</u> and an <u>object</u>. Prepositions normally appear before the <u>object</u>:

I gave the book to Joan.
-- Preposition "to" links <u>object</u> "Joan" to <u>noun</u> "book"

We were surprised by the storm.
-- Preposition "by" links <u>object</u> "storm" to <u>verb</u> "surprised"

Common prepositions include

above	about	across	after	
against	along	among		around
at	before	behind		below
beneath	beside		between	beyond
by	down		during	except
for	from		in	inside
into	like	near	of	
off	on		since	to
toward	through		under	until
up	upon		with	within

Usually, the <u>object</u> follows the preposition. A preposition appearing at the end of a <u>sentence</u> sometimes sounds awkward because we expect to find an <u>object:</u>

✗ This is the present we bought the wrapping paper for.
✓ We bought the wrapping paper for this present.

Another danger in placing the preposition at the end of a <u>sentence</u> lies in separating the preposition from the <u>object</u> with too many words:

✗ She gave me the newspaper she had walked over two miles to the store for.
✓ She gave me the newspaper for which she had walked over two miles to the store.

Choose the preposition appropriate for the <u>verb</u> and <u>object:</u>
accompanied **by** a person
accompanied **with** a thing
accused **of** a wrong
accused **by** a person
in accordance **to** a rule
in accordance **with** a person
agree **to** (or **about** an idea)
agree **with** a person
correspond **to** an object
correspond **with** a person
differ **from** a person or thing
differ **with** a person
part **from** a person
part **with** a thing

Be careful of suspended prepositions separated by <u>conjunctions</u>. The suspended preposition must be appropriate for each <u>verb</u>:

✖ I am proud and pleased for you.
-- Preposition "for" is incorrect with "proud"

✓ I am proud of and pleased for you.

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that stand for and take the place of <u>nouns.</u>

Related topics:

<u>Compound pronouns:</u>   How to tell whether to write "he and I" or "he and me."

<u>Who or whom:</u>   How to tell whether to write "to who I was speaking" or "to whom I was speaking."

<u>That or which:</u>   How to tell whether to write "the sweater that I wore" or "the sweater which I wore."

<u>Whose or of-which:</u>   How to tell whether to write "the car whose tires are bald" or "the car of which the tires are bald."

<u>It's or its:</u>   How to tell whether to write "the cat ate its dinner" or "the cat ate it's dinner."

<u>You or yourself:</u>   How to tell whether to write "a person like you" or "a person like yourself."

<u>Pronouns in comparisons:</u>   How to tell whether to write "she likes him as much as I" or "she likes him as much as me."

<u>Pronouns following 'to be':</u>   How to tell whether to write "It was I who called" or "It was me who called."

<u>Plural pronouns:</u>   Pronouns that stand for multiple things.

<u>Pronoun gender:</u>   Pronouns that stand for male or female people.

Verbs

Verbs describe actions or states of being. Example verbs are "run," "be," and "look."

Topics related to verbs:

<u>Verb tense:</u> Time distinctions between verbs. Examples: "ran," "run," and "will run."

<u>Subject and verb agreement:</u>   How to tell whether to write "Snowstorms is the leading cause of employee lateness" or "Snowstorms are the leading cause of employee lateness."

<u>Active and passive verbs:</u> The distinction between verbs that describe action and verbs that describe states of being.

<u>Split infinitive:</u>   An <u>adverb</u>   inserted between "to" and an <u>infinitive verb</u>   ("to boldly go...")

<u>Participles:</u>   The "ed" and "ing" verb forms: "walked," "walking," "looked," "looking," "heard," "hearing."

Pronoun case

 Pronouns   have different forms based on their function within a sentence.   Pronoun case refers to the different forms a pronoun   can take.

 There are three pronoun cases: nominative, objective, and possessive. The nominative case is used for the person speaking. The objective case is used for the person spoken about. The possessive case is used for the person spoken to.

Nominative	Objective	Possessive
he	him	his
I	me	mine, my
it	it	its
she	her	hers
they	them	their, theirs
we	us	our, ours
who	whom	whose
whoever	whomever	whosever
you	you	your, yours

 Use the nominative case when the pronoun   is the subject   of a sentence   or a clause:

    I wrote the letter.
    -- "I" is the subject pronoun.

Use the possessive case to modify a preceding or following noun:

    My car is in the shop.
    -- "My" is the pronoun

    That car of mine is in the shop.
    -- "Mine" is the pronoun

 Use the objective case when the pronoun   is a direct object, indirect object, or the object of a preposition:

    Yesterday she told me.
    -- "Me" is the object.

    She told me about what happened.
    -- "Me" is the object.

    It was told to me by her.
    -- "Me" is the object   of the preposition   "to."

 See also:

Pronouns

Objects

Pronouns following comparisons

 Sentences involving comparisons   often contain implied verbs.   The missing verbs sometimes make it difficult to tell which pronoun case is correct. For example, which of the following sentences   is correct?

    He can't type as quickly as I.

    He can't type as quickly as me.

To determine which is correct, fill in the implied verbs:

✔️ He can't type as quickly as I can.

❌ He can't type as quickly as me can.

The first sentence   is clearly correct. More examples follow.

❌ She is taller than him.

✔️ She is taller than he (is).

❌ We have a smaller yard than them.

✔️ We have a smaller yard than they (do).

❌ I want a hat like him.

✔️ I want a hat like his.

 Sometimes leaving the verb   implied makes a sentence   ambiguous, as in the following example:

❌ She likes him better than me.

This sentence   can be interpreted in two ways:

    She likes him better than I do.

    She likes him more than she likes me.

See also:

Pronouns

Pronoun case

Compound pronouns

Compound pronouns involve a <u>pronoun</u> and a <u>noun</u> or another <u>pronoun.</u>

Unlike <u>nouns,</u> the <u>case of pronouns</u> changes based on their function. This is especially confusing with compound pronouns. For example, in the following <u>sentences,</u> the <u>case of the pronoun</u> "I" changes to "me":

Jim and I sat with her.

Jim and me sat with her.

She sat with Jim and I.

She sat with Jim and me.

To determine which is correct, remove all parts of the compound except the <u>pronoun</u> in question, then read back the <u>sentence</u> to make sure it is still correct. Let's try this on the first pair of example <u>sentences:</u>

✔ I sat with her.

✘ Me sat with her.

"Me sat with her" is clearly wrong, and "I sat with her" is correct. Now let's check the second pair of <u>sentences:</u>

✘ She sat with I.

✔ She sat with me.

The correct case is "me," not "I."

See also:

<u>Pronouns</u>

<u>Pronoun case</u>

It's or its

One of the most confusing aspects of English for many people is the distinction between "its" and "it's."

"It's" (*with* the apostrophe) is a contraction for "it is":

> It's a beautiful day.

> It's hard to tell what you're thinking.

> I looked in the cupboard but it's not there.

"Its" (*without* the apostrophe) is the possessive form of the pronoun "it":

> The dog had chewed through its leash.

> We admired both the finish of the piano and its rich tone.

> The award was presented to the club and its president.

One way to remember the distinction is to associate "its" with other possessive pronouns ending in "s": his, hers, and theirs.

See also:

Pronouns

Possessive pronouns

Contractions

Plural pronouns

Pronouns, like nouns, have singular and plural forms. Plural pronouns take the place of plural nouns. Singular pronouns take the place of singular nouns.

❌   The mob of customers shouted their objections.

    -- The plural pronoun "their" refers to the singular collective noun "mob."

✓   The mob of customers shouted its objections.

✓   The customers shouted their objections.

Pronoun agreement is especially confusing when indefinite pronouns such as "everyone," "everybody," "anyone," and "anybody" are used.

Treat "everyone" and "everybody" as plural pronouns:

    Does everyone have their tickets ready?

    I told everybody to stay in their seats.

Singular indefinite pronouns, such as "anyone," "anybody," "a person," "someone," and "somebody" present problems because there are no singular gender-indefinite personal pronouns in English.

See also:

Pronoun gender

Possessive pronouns

Like <u>possessive nouns,</u> a possessive pronoun owns or possesses. The manner in which possession is indicated varies with the type of <u>pronoun:</u> personal or indefinite.

Personal pronouns (e.g., I, he, and her) change <u>case</u> to show possession:
    I: my or mine
    us: our or ours
    you: your or yours
    he: his
    she: hers
    it: its
    them: their

The possessive form of the pronoun "it" (its) is often mistakenly written "it's." It's" is a <u>contraction</u> for "it is."

<u>Indefinite pronouns</u> are made possessive by adding "'s":

    To everyone's surprise, he arrived on time.

    Please let me know if anyone's schedule changes.

When an <u>indefinite pronoun</u> followed by "else" is made possessive, apply the "'s" to the "else":

    He hasn't sold anyone else's products in his store for ten years.

    Margaret's clothes are unpacked, but everyone else's are still in the suitcases.

See also:

<u>Pronouns</u>

<u>It's or its</u>

You or yourself

Use <u>pronouns</u>   ending in "self" only when the <u>pronoun</u>   refers to the <u>subject:</u>

He brings shame on himself.
-- "He" is the <u>subject;</u>   "himself" refers to "he."

His deeds bring shame on him.
-- "Deeds" is the <u>subject.</u>

His generosity speaks for itself.
-- "Generosity" is the <u>subject;</u> "itself" refers to "generosity."

Don't use the "self" form of <u>pronouns</u>   after a comparison.

❌   A good worker like yourself is an inspiration to all employees.

✓   A good worker like you is an inspiration to all employees.

See also:

<u>Pronouns</u>

That or which

Use "which" with either the <u>defining clause</u> or the <u>descriptive clause.</u>

Use "that" only with a <u>defining clause.</u>

Examples:

The movie that I saw last night was enjoyable.
-- "That I saw last night" is a <u>defining clause;</u> "which I saw last night" could also be used here.

The movie, which I saw last night, was enjoyable.
-- "Which I saw last night" is a <u>descriptive clause.</u>

She ate the apple which was in the bowl.
-- "Which was in the bowl" is a <u>defining clause;</u> it defines which specific apple.

She ate the apple, which was in the bowl.
-- "Which was in the bowl" is a <u>descriptive clause;</u> it describes the location of the apple but doesn't specify which apple. Note the use of the <u>comma.</u>

See also:

<u>Pronouns</u>

<u>Clauses</u>

Pronouns following "to be"

When a <u>pronoun</u>   follows a form of the <u>verb</u> "to be," use the <u>nominative case</u> ("I," "you," "she," "he," "it," "we," "they," and "who").

❌   It was me who called yesterday.

✓   It was I who called yesterday.

❌   This is her.

✓   This is she.

See also:

<u>Pronouns</u>

<u>Active and passive verbs</u>

<u>Pronoun case</u>

Whose or "of which"

"Whose" can be used to avoid awkward "of which" references:

Our club, of which the membership is 350, is devoted to dog breeding.

Better:

Our club, whose membership is 350, is devoted to dog breeding.

"Whose" can also be used in reference to inanimate objects:

The dandelion, whose cheerful yellow flower brightens many lawns in spring, is considered a weed.

Who or whom

Use "who" when the pronoun is the <u>subject</u> of a <u>verb:</u>

People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
-- "Who" is the <u>subject</u> of the <u>verb</u> "live."

Use "whom" when the pronoun is the <u>object</u> of a <u>verb</u> or the <u>object</u> of a <u>preposition:</u>

She asked to whom I was referring.
-- "Whom" is the <u>object</u> of the <u>preposition</u>   "to."

See also:

<u>Pronouns</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

<u>Objects</u>

Pronoun gender

Pronouns in English are distinguished based on the gender   of the person to which the pronoun   refers:

Bill sprained his ankle.
-- "His" is the male pronoun

Mary lost her book.
-- "Her" is the female pronoun

English does not have a singular gender -independent personal pronoun. Traditionally, the singular pronoun "he" has been used to refer to both sexes, but this is now regarded as sexist:

✗   Anyone who wants lunch must present his ticket at the counter.

This problem can be removed in two ways.

The first method is to use "he or she" or "he/she" in place of "he":

✓   Anyone who wants lunch must present his or her ticket at the counter.

The second method is to use a plural indefinite pronoun in place of the singular:

✓   All people who want lunch must present their tickets at the counter.

The third method is to rewrite the sentence to eliminate indefinite pronouns   entirely:

✓   If you want lunch, present your ticket at the counter.

Note that the following sentence is incorrect, because the plural pronoun   "their" is inconsistent with the singular indefinite pronoun "everyone":

✗   Everyone who wants lunch must present their tickets at the counter.

When using pronouns   to stand for compound subjects   whose individual parts are of mixed gender,   use at least one pronoun   of each gender:

Either Jim or Helen will bring his car or her car.

Either Jim will bring his car or Helen will bring hers.

See also:

Pronouns

Punctuation

Punctuation is the set of marks and symbols we use to group and separate ideas and change meaning in a <u>sentence:</u>

, --   The <u>comma</u>

. --   The <u>period</u>

; --   The <u>semicolon</u>

' --   The <u>apostrophe</u>

" --   The <u>quotation mark</u>

? --   The <u>question mark</u>

! --   The <u>exclamation mark</u>

: --   The <u>colon</u>

-- --   The <u>dash</u>

( ) -- <u>Parentheses</u>

... -- The <u>Ellipsis</u>

/ --   The <u>slash</u>

Apostrophes

The apostrophe has two main uses: forming <u>possessive nouns,</u> and taking the place of omitted letters in <u>contractions.</u>

One use of the apostrophe that often causes confusion is the distinction between it's and its.

See also:

<u>Possessive nouns</u>

<u>Contractions</u>

<u>It's vs. its</u>

Colons

The colon introduces <u>lists,</u>   elaborations of ideas, and <u>quotations.</u>   It is also used in expressing times and in <u>letter salutations.</u>

The colon is always preceded by an <u>independent clause</u>   and never by a <u>dependent clause.</u>

❌   You will need to bring**:** a toothbrush, a bathrobe, and slippers.
✔   You will need to bring a toothbrush, a bathrobe, and slippers.
✔   You will need to bring several things**:** a toothbrush, a bathrobe, and slippers.
✔   A first-aid kit is essential in**:** the home, car, and office.
✔   A first-aid kit is essential in the home, car, and office.
✔   A first-aid kit is essential in many places**:** the home, car, and office.
✔   My boss likes to say that**:** "When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."
✔   My boss likes to say**:** "When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."
✔   My boss likes to say that "When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

Colons can be used to elaborate on a thought. Examples:

Our choice is clear: We must sell the division.

She handed me the letter from Jim: It was postmarked Tuesday.

One word describes how I feel: sorry.

The word following a colon may or may not be <u>capitalized.</u>

Typically, the word is <u>capitalized</u> if it is the beginning of an <u>independent clause,</u> and otherwise is not <u>capitalized</u> (see the preceding examples).

See also:

<u>Lists</u>

<u>Expressing times</u>

<u>Quotation marks</u>

Commas

Use commas

to separate items in a series (e.g., "one, two, and three");

to separate series of adjectives (e.g., "the bright, red ruby");

to separate independent clauses joined by conjunctions (e.g., "I wrote the letter, but I'm not proud of it");

to separate dependent clauses from independent clauses (e.g., "Although I asked her several times, she refused to reply");

to isolate introductory phrases (e.g., "The battle lost, he resigned");

to isolate descriptive clauses (e.g., "The concert, which was sold out, was excellent");

to isolate conjunctive adverbs (e.g., "Thus, the contract was renegotiated");

to isolate parenthetical phrases (e.g., "He tried, but not very hard, to raise the funds");

to join interdependent clauses (e.g., "The faster the printer, the higher the cost");

to substitute for omitted words (e.g., "Bill ate seven cobs; John, six");

to prevent confusion and ambiguity (e.g., "If you want to, go to Jane's house")

See also:

Quotation marks

Comma: Separating adjectives

Use commas to separate two or more <u>adjectives</u> that would otherwise be ambiguous or confusing. If the <u>adjectives</u> can be joined with "and" without altering the meaning or seeming awkward, separate them with commas:

He lifted the heavy, black hammer.

He doesn't get along with her quick, ambitious nature.

I still prefer my old manual typewriter.

-- No comma needed

<u>Compound adjectives</u>   must be joined by <u>hyphens</u>   to prevent ambiguity.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Adjectives</u>

<u>Hyphenating compound adjectives</u>

Comma: Preventing ambiguity

Use a comma wherever necessary to avoid <u>ambiguity,</u>   even if this means breaking other rules.

✓   Whatever you do do it well.

✓   Whatever you do, do it well.
✓   He introduced me to a woman with a pronounced chin named Janet.
✓   He introduced me to a woman with a pronounced chin, named Janet.
✓   To John David was a legend.
✓   To John, David was a legend.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

Comma: Isolating conjunctive adverbs

Use commas to isolate <u>conjunctive adverbs</u> :

I am forced, therefore, to resign.

Moreover, the quality of the goods has been steadily degrading.

He did try to make amends, however.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

Comma: Separating dependent and independent clauses

Use commas to separate <u>dependent clauses</u> from <u>independent clauses:</u>

 If I work overtime, I will have the document ready.

 Because the nail was lost, the kingdom was lost.

 I will call the airline, if you will pick up the tickets.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Dependent clauses</u>

<u>Independent clauses</u>

Comma: Isolating descriptive clauses

Use commas to separate <u>descriptive clauses</u> from the rest of the <u>sentence:</u>

The meal, which was excellent, was eaten in silence.

The memo, addressed to all staff, announced the bad news.

The memo written by John Smith, vice-president of marketing, was distributed to all employees.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Descriptive clauses</u>

Comma: Separating independent clauses

Use commas to separate two or more <u>independent clauses</u>   which are joined by <u>conjunctions:</u>

Three houses have been sold, and one is still for sale.

The memo was written in Fred's usual style, but I understood it anyway.

If the <u>conjunction</u>   is omitted, a comma-splice error will result, unless the <u>independent clause</u> is short and parallel. Examples of acceptable usage:

I came, I saw, I conquered.

I have asked you to improve your quality, I have asked you to show up on time, I have asked you not to take long lunches.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Conjunctions</u>

<u>Comma-splice errors</u>

<u>Independent clauses</u>

Comma: Joining interdependent clauses

Interdependent clauses are two <u>clauses</u> that rely on each other to complete a thought. Each interdependent clause is usually a <u>dependent clause.</u>

Use a comma to join two interdependent clauses:

> The longer he stayed, the more angry he got.

> The harder I try, the less I accomplish.

> The sharper the grape, the sweeter the wine.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Clauses</u>

Comma: Isolating introductory phrases

Use a comma to separate introductory <u>phrases</u> from the main part of a <u>sentence:</u>

> For example, the penguin lives in Antarctica.
>
> Having thought the matter over, I have decided to accept your offer.
>
> In December, the company's assets were frozen.
>
> In this case, insert a new floppy diskette in the drive.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Phrases</u>

Comma: Separating items in a series

Use commas to separate three or more items in a series. Place the comma after each item, even after the item that precedes the final <u>conjunction:</u>

Three people came: Terry, Tad, and Todd.

Computers are widely used for desktop publishing, word processing, and spreadsheet applications.

Two people came: Terry and Todd.
-- Note that no comma is used.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Conjunctions</u>

Comma: Substituting for omitted words

Use commas in place of omitted words. This is frequently done to eliminate repetition:

Jim sold three boxes; Sandy, twelve; Lucy, eight; and Kim, five.

The first report was mediocre, the second, good, and the third, excellent.

In my day, literature was considered essential, mathematics, compulsory, and athletics, a mere pastime.

See also:

Commas

Comma: Isolating parenthetical phrases

Use commas to separate parenthetical <u>phrases,</u> or asides, from the main part of a <u>sentence:</u>

The most important, and yet the least interesting, evidence was presented first.

The penguin, one of my favorite birds, lives in Antarctica.

Last, but not least, is the award for "best of show."

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

Comma: Splice error

A comma-splice error results from joining two or more <u>independent clauses</u> with a comma.

✓ I wrote the memo yesterday, I wanted you to see it before you left.

✓ I had lunch with him today, he seemed tense.

✓ He tried to cut the grass, the lawnmower was broken.

Comma-splice errors can be corrected in three ways: by adding a <u>conjunction,</u> by making each <u>independent clause</u> a separate <u>sentence,</u> or by changing the commas to semicolons.

✓ I wrote the memo yesterday, because I wanted you to see it before you left.
    -- <u>Conjunction</u> "because" added

✓ I had lunch with him today. He seemed tense.
    -- Each <u>independent clause</u> changed to a <u>sentence.</u>

✓ He tried to cut the grass; the lawnmower was broken.
    -- Comma changed to semicolon.

See also:

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Semicolons</u>

<u>Conjunctions</u>

<u>Independent clauses</u>

Dashes

The dash isolates parenthetical words and phrases. It is sometimes used in place of parentheses or commas. Dashes are normally used to call attention to the parenthetical idea. Compare the emphasis in the following examples:

The project (which had been behind schedule) was cancelled.

The project, which had been behind schedule, was cancelled.

The project -- which had been behind schedule -- was cancelled.

Dashes are more emphatic than commas and parentheses. The dash can sometimes be used in place of a comma to add emphasis:

I told her I wanted the summary today -- not tomorrow.

Investing in my venture offers short-term tax advantages today -- and long-term benefits tomorrow.

Dashes can also be used in place of colons, usually with greater emphasis:

Several items were missing -- money, jewelery, and credit cards.

I expect three things from employees -- commitment, sincerity, and quality.

We left the room in silence -- none of us could bear to watch her.

See also:

Commas

Parentheses

Colons

Ellipses

Use the ellipsis (...) to mark omitted words, breaks in thought, and pauses:

The report described our marketing strategy as "old fashioned and...obsolete."

My wagon was packed with my favorite toys, my teddy bear was secured under my arm, and I was heading out the door when... my mother announced the cookies were ready.

"Hmm..." he thought. "Something's not right about this place...."

The ellipsis is not normally used when the omitted words appear at the beginning or end of the quoted material. When the ellipsis is used at the end of a <u>sentence,</u> it is followed by a period:

The last thing he remembered was a sharp pain at the back of his head....

See also:

<u>Periods</u>

Exclamations

The exclamation mark or point expresses strong emotions:

He told me the show ended tomorrow!

When I got there, the building was completely deserted!

Do not destroy your original diskette!

_____

Parentheses

Use parentheses to isolate nonessential or incidental words and phrases. Unlike commas and dashes, parentheses distract attention from the enclosed material, making it less important:

Press the "enter" key (located on the keyboard) to execute the command.

Ottawa (population 300,000) is the capital of Canada.

My supervisor (Ellen) told me to do it this way.

When a <u>sentence</u> is entirely enclosed in parentheses, the punctuation which ends the <u>sentence</u> appears inside the parentheses. If any part of the <u>sentence</u> appears outside the parentheses, place the ending punctuation outside the parentheses:

One denizen of Antarctica is the penguin. (The penguin is my favorite bird.)

One denizen of Antarctica is the penguin (my favorite bird).

Always place parentheses before commas or other punctuation:

One denizen of Antarctica is the penguin (my favorite bird), known for its distinctive black and white "tuxedo."

Enter the following command (without the quotes): "logout"

See also:

<u>Punctuation</u>

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Dashes</u>

Periods

The period marks the end of a <u>sentence.</u> The period is also used to indicate certain kinds of <u>abbreviations:</u>

The fiscal summary is included at the end of the report.

Company president John F. Smith has been a member of this organization for over twenty years.

The meeting started at 8:00 a.m. and lasted until noon.

When the last word of a <u>sentence</u>   is an <u>abbreviation</u>   requiring periods, use one period to end both the <u>abbreviation</u> and the <u>sentence:</u>

The meeting started at 8:00 a.m.

See also:

<u>Abbreviations</u>

<u>Sentences</u>

<u>Quotation marks</u>

Questions

Question marks terminate <u>sentences</u>   that are direct questions:

>   Why did you return the merchandise?

>   When will you pay this invoice?

Don't use question marks with indirect questions:

>   I asked her why she returned the merchandise.

>   I asked when will the invoice be paid.

See also:

<u>Quotation marks</u>

Quotes

Quotation marks indicate direct quotations, which are words written or spoken by someone. Material contained in quotation marks must be the exact words spoken or written. If a complete <u>sentence</u> is quoted, the first word is <u>capitalized;</u> otherwise, it is not:

> Richard told me he had "never been to university or any other jail."

> Anne was fond of saying, "If it's not broken, break it first."

> "Love" was a word we never spoke aloud.

Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks. Colons and semicolons always go outside:

> "I've had enough," he said.

> She asked how I had enjoyed my "vacation."

> Gwen told me to bring "just a couple of things": food enough for six, a record player, and all my records.

Question marks go inside quotation marks if the question is part of the quotation. If the quotation is part of the question, place the question mark outside the quotation marks:

> He asked, "When will supper be ready?"
> -- Question is part of the quotation

> Did he tell you about his "little adventure"?
> -- Quotation is part of the question

When a quotation itself contains a quotation, surround the inner quotation with single quotation marks:

> Helen said, "Remember what Dad told us: 'Be kind to dumb animals.'"

Quotation marks are also used with the titles of short works.

See also:

<u>Periods</u>

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Colons</u>

<u>Semicolons</u>

<u>Question marks</u>

<u>Titles</u>

Semicolons

Use the semicolon to separate <u>independent clauses.</u>   The semicolon acts like a weak period:

   Herbert joined the company as a clerk in 1935; three years later, he was president.

Use a semicolon in place of a period when the two <u>independent clauses</u>   are closely related.

When items in a series or <u>list</u>   contain commas, the semicolon can be used as a separator:

   The meeting was attended by Janice Clarkson, Accounting; Earl Thomas, Corporate Services; Ralph McBride, Engineering; and Margaret Thurlow, Payroll.

See also:

<u>Independent clauses</u>

<u>Periods</u>

<u>Lists</u>

Slashes

The slash is normally used in legal writing to indicate an alternative, such as "and/or." These constructions are not generally used in formal writing.

Sentences

 A sentence is a collection of words arranged to make a complete thought. Each sentence has a subject, which the sentence is about, and a predicate, which is an action or state relating to the subject. A sentence must express a complete thought. A sentence must make sense on its own:

✓   When he was in school.

✓   I knew him when he was in school.

✓   Christopher's father.

✓   The man who came to the door was Christopher's father.

 Sentences are constructed from clauses. A sentence may have exactly one clause, or it may consist of several.

 Sentences may be grouped to form paragraphs.

 See also:

 Subjects

 Predicates

 Clauses

 Paragraphs

Clauses

A clause is a major part of a <u>sentence.</u> A clause contains a <u>subject</u> and a <u>predicate.</u> There are two main types of clauses.

Independent clauses are complete thoughts and can stand alone as <u>sentences.</u>

Dependent clauses support independent clauses but cannot stand alone.

See also:

<u>Sentences</u>

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Predicates</u>

<u>Independent clauses</u>

<u>Dependent clauses</u>

Dependent clauses

A dependent <u>clause</u> cannot stand by itself. Dependent <u>clauses</u> are usually introduced by <u>conjunctions:</u>

> Because we were tired, we went to bed early.
>   -- "Because we were tired" is the dependent <u>clause.</u>

To be complete, a <u>sentence</u> must contain an <u>independent clause;</u> the dependent <u>clause</u> is optional.

A <u>sentence</u> may contain several dependent <u>clauses,</u> usually separated by commas:

> Because we were tired, and had nothing to do, we went to bed early.
>   -- Both "because we were tired" and "and had nothing to do" are dependent <u>clauses.</u>

In <u>sentences</u> containing more than one <u>clause,</u> , the <u>subject</u> of each <u>clause</u> should be the same or at least closely related:

✓ I met Sandra at the party and the music was very loud.

This problem can be corrected by rewriting to use two <u>sentences</u> or by rewriting so the same <u>subject</u> is used throughout:

✓ I met Sandra at the party. The music at the party was very loud.
    -- Two <u>sentences</u> are preferable since two distinct ideas are being expressed

✓ I met Sandra at the party and I thought the music was very loud.

See also:

<u>Clauses</u>

<u>Independent clauses</u>

<u>Sentences</u>

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Conjunctions</u>

<u>Commas</u>

Independent clauses

An independent <u>clause</u> can stand alone as a complete <u>sentence:</u>

   We went to bed early because we were tired.
  -- "We went to bed early" is the independent <u>clause.</u>

   I received your letter and opened it immediately.
  -- "I received your letter" is the independent <u>clause.</u>

A <u>sentence</u> may contain several independent <u>clauses,</u> joined by commas and <u>conjunctions</u> or semicolons:

   We went to bed early, yet we were not tired.

   I wanted to mow the lawn, but the lawnmower was broken.

   I called her yesterday; she was not at home.

A <u>sentence</u> may contain an independent <u>clause</u> and one or more <u>dependent clauses:</u>

   We went to bed early because it was dark.

   I received your letter, opened it, but didn't read it.

   The wind howled through a mouse-sized hole in the door on the night of the great flood.

See also:

<u>Sentences</u>

<u>Clauses</u>

<u>Dependent clauses</u>

<u>Commas</u>

<u>Semicolons</u>

<u>Conjunctions</u>

Objects

The object is the thing acted on by the <u>subject,</u> the thing on which the <u>subject</u> acts, or the condition of the <u>subject:</u>

John kicked the ball.

-- "Ball" is the object (the <u>subject</u> John acts on the object)

The ball hit John.

-- "Ball" is the object (the object acts on the <u>subject</u>   John)

John is happy.

-- "Happy" is the object (the object is the condition of the <u>subject</u>   John)

See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

Paragraphs

A paragraph is a collection of <u>sentences,</u> all of which contribute to a single theme. Each paragraph should have one -- and only one -- point to make.

See also:

<u>Sentences</u>

<u>Writing effective paragraphs.</u>

Phrases

A phrase is a collection of words that modifies or connects. A phrase does not contain both a subject   and a verb:

    by the time
    we will have
    he had not

See also:

Subjects

Clauses

Verbs

Predicates

 The predicate expresses action about or the condition of the <u>subject</u>   of a <u>sentence</u>   or <u>clause.</u>   The predicate contains a <u>verb,</u> <u>object,</u>   and <u>modifiers</u> such as <u>adjectives</u>   and <u>adverbs:</u>

  I read the report yesterday.
  -- The predicate is "read the report yesterday."

  The black bear reared up on its hind paws.
  -- The predicate is "reared up on its hind paws."

  Because we were tired, we went to bed.
  -- The predicate of the <u>independent clause</u> is "went to bed." The predicate of the <u>dependent clause</u>   is "were tired."

See also:

<u>Sentences</u>

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Clauses</u>

<u>Objects</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

<u>Adjectives</u>

<u>Adverbs</u>

Subject

The subject is the person, place, thing, or idea about which a <u>sentence</u> or <u>clause</u> is written:

We went to bed.
-- "We" is the subject.

She wore the dress that she wore last week.
-- "She" is the subject.

I don't like the new policies.
-- "I" is the subject.

The subject of a <u>sentence</u> is contained in the <u>sentence's</u> <u>independent clause.</u>

See also:

<u>Sentences</u>

<u>Clauses</u>

Active and passive verbs

Verbs   have an active and passive quality. Active verbs   "do":
    run
    write
    inspect
    prepare

Passive verbs   describe states of being and suggest no action:
    be
    am
    is
    are
    was
    were
    being
    been

Sentences   written with passive verbs become passive sentences.

See also:

Writing Style

Verbs

Lay vs. lie

 The distinction between "lay" and "lie" is subtle and sometimes confusing. "Lay" and "lie" are both <u>verbs,</u> but of different form.

 "Lay" is always used as an action applied to some object. "Lay" describes the action of placing something down.

 "Lie" describes the condition of being placed down.

 Examples:

> I lay the cards on the table.
> -- "Lay" is an action applied to "cards."

> The cards lie on the table.
> -- "Lie" describes the condition of "cards."

 The <u>past-tense</u> form of "lay" is "laid." The <u>past-tense</u> form of "lie" is "lay." This also causes confusion because of the similarity of spelling with the <u>present tense</u> "lay."

✓ I lie the cards on the table.

✓ The cards laid on the table.

✓ I laid the cards on the table.
> -- "Laid" is the <u>past-tense</u> form of "lay." "Laid" describes an action applied to "cards."

✓ The cards lay on the table.
> -- "Lay" is the <u>past-tense</u> form of "lie." "Lay" describes the condition of "cards."

See also:

<u>Verbs</u>

<u>Verb tense</u>

Subject and verb agreement

The <u>subject</u>   of a <u>sentence</u>   or <u>clause</u>   must agree in number with the <u>verb</u>   associated with it. For example, the following <u>sentence</u>   is incorrect:

✔   The shipment were delivered to your warehouse.

The <u>subject,</u>   "shipment," is a <u>singular</u> <u>noun,</u>   and the <u>verb,</u> "were," refers to a <u>plural noun.</u> The <u>singular</u> <u>verb</u> "was" must be substituted for "were" to correct the <u>sentence:</u>

✔   The shipment was delivered to your warehouse.

Most problems with <u>subject</u>   and <u>verb</u> agreement involve the choice between "is" or "are" and "was" or "were." Other <u>verbs</u>   may be incorrectly used as well. The rules for <u>subject</u> and <u>verb</u>   agreement are simple:

1. Use the <u>singular</u>   form of the <u>verb</u>   when the <u>subject</u>   is a <u>singular</u> <u>noun.</u> "Is" and "was" are <u>singular</u> <u>verbs.</u>

2. Use the <u>plural</u>   form of the <u>verb</u>   when the <u>subject</u>   is a <u>plural noun.</u> "Are" and "were" are <u>plural</u> <u>verbs.</u>

See also:

<u>Distinguishing the subject</u>

<u>Verb agreement with compound subjects</u>

<u>Verb agreement with collective subjects</u>

<u>Verb agreement with measured subjects</u>

<u>Verb agreement with words ending in 'ics'</u>

<u>Verb agreement with indefinite subjects</u>

<u>Verb agreement with problem subjects</u>

<u>Sentences</u>

<u>Clauses</u>

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

Subject and verb agreement: Collective subjects

When the <u>subject</u> of a <u>sentence</u> or <u>clause</u> is a collective <u>noun,</u> such as "crowd" or "group," the <u>subject</u> is in fact <u>singular,</u> since it refers to a single unit comprising several things. Use the <u>singular</u> form of the <u>verb</u> in this case.

√ A group of anxious reporters were blocking the exit.
   -- The collective <u>subject</u> "group" is <u>singular.</u>

√ A group of anxious reporters was blocking the exit.
√ Management are opposed to this approach.
   -- "Management" is the <u>singular</u> collective <u>subject.</u>

√ Management is opposed to this approach.
√ The box of trophies were reported stolen.
   -- "Box" is the <u>singular</u> collective <u>subject.</u>

√ The box of trophies was reported stolen.

When individual members of a collective <u>subject</u> are identified, treat the <u>subject</u> as <u>plural</u> :

   Several members of the audience were noisy.

   The audience was quiet.

See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

Subject and verb agreement: Compound subjects

Compound subjects   joined by "and" are normally treated like plural subjects,   even if the individual parts are singular:

Your ticket and itinerary are ready.

That behavior and attitude are no longer tolerated.

Both John and Mary are going.

When the conjunction   joining two parts of a compound subject   is "or" or "nor," the verb must agree with the part closest to it:

Either the chairman or the members cancel the motion.
-- The verb   "cancel" is closest to the plural   "members."

Either the members or the chairman cancels the motion.
-- The verb   "cancels" is closest to the singular   "chairman."

Neither the cow, the pig, nor the chickens have been fed today.
-- The verb   "have" is closest to the plural   "chickens."

Neither the chickens, the pig, nor the cow has been fed today.
-- The verb   "has" is closest to the singular   "cow."

Neither Fred nor Sam was here today.
-- The verb   "was" is associated with the singular   "Sam."

When the subject contains the word "either," use the singular form of the verb.

✔   Either Bill or Barb are going.
✔   Either Bill or Barb is going.
✔   Either of us are going.
✔   Either of us is going.
✔   Either person are capable.
✔   Either person is capable.

See also:

Subjects

Conjunctions

Verbs

Subject and verb agreement: Words ending in "ics"

Words ending in "ics," such as "statistics," "mathematics," "graphics," "physics," and "politics," are normally treated as singular   collective nouns. When the word is preceded by an article (e.g., "a," "an," or "the") or a preposition   (e.g., "of"), or modified by an adjective, treat it as a plural noun.

√   Mathematics are my best subject.

√   Mathematics is my best subject.

√   The graphics for your book design is ready.
    -- "The" is an article.

√   The graphics for your book design are ready.

√   The physics of planetary motion is beyond my grasp.

√   The physics of planetary motion are beyond my grasp.

See also:

Nouns

Articles

Prepositions

Adjectives

Verbs

Subject and verb agreement: Indefinite subjects

When the <u>subject</u> is an indefinite word such as "all," "most," or "some," the word referred to by the <u>subject</u> determines whether the <u>verb</u> is <u>singular</u> or <u>plural.</u> If the referenced word is <u>plural</u> use the <u>plural</u> <u>verb</u> form.

✓ Most of the cars is on sale.
    -- The <u>indefinite subject</u> "most" refers to the <u>plural</u> "cars."

✓ Most of the cars are on sale.
✓ Most of the car were damaged.
    -- "Most" refers to the <u>singular</u> "car."

✓ Most of the car was damaged.
✓ None of the cars was damaged.
✓ None of the cars were damaged.
✓ The majority of students has passed.
✓ The majority of students have passed.
✓ Thirty-three percent of our customers wants better service.
✓ Thirty-three percent of our customers want better service.

When the <u>subject</u> is "one" in a <u>phrase</u> like "one of the," the <u>noun</u> referred to by "one" is always <u>plural,</u> so the <u>verb</u> is <u>plural.</u>

✓ One of the toasters is broken.
✓ One of the toasters are broken.
✓ She is one of the people who works in my office.
✓ She is one of the people who work in my office.

See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

<u>Nouns</u>

Subject and verb agreement: Measured subjects

A <u>singular</u> <u>subject</u> quantified by a measurement is treated as a <u>singular,</u> so use the <u>singular</u> form of the <u>verb.</u>

✔ Eight feet of electrical cord are required.
   -- "Cord" is the <u>singular</u> <u>subject.</u>

✔ Eight feet of electrical cord is required.

✔ The purchase price were three million dollars.
   -- "Price" is the <u>subject.</u>

✔ The purchase price was three million dollars.

If the <u>subject</u> is <u>plural,</u> and the measurement specifies the number or quantity, use the <u>plural</u> form of the <u>verb.</u>

✔ Forty boxes of popcorn was sold.
   -- "Boxes" is the <u>plural</u> <u>subject.</u>

✔ Forty boxes of popcorn were sold.

✔ Three million dollars was raised for the homeless.
   -- "Dollars" is the <u>plural</u> <u>subject.</u>

✔ Three million dollars were raised for the homeless.

Treat the fractional part of a <u>singular</u> <u>subject</u> as <u>singular:</u>

   Three-quarters of the pie is gone.

Treat the fractional part of a collection consisting of more than one as <u>plural</u> :

   Three-quarters of the pies are gone.

See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

Subject and verb agreement: Distinguishing subjects

The <u>subject</u> is the "who" or "what" about which the <u>sentence</u> or <u>clause</u> is written. Distinguishing the <u>subject</u> of a <u>sentence</u> or <u>clause</u> is important to knowing which form of <u>verb</u> to use.

✓ The main reason the report was delivered late are the people in the copy room.
     -- "Reason" is the <u>subject,</u> not "people."

✓ The main reason the report was delivered late is the people in the copy room.

✓ Snowstorms is the leading cause of employee lateness this month.
     -- "Snowstorms" is the <u>subject,</u> not "cause."

✓ Snowstorms are the leading cause of employee lateness this month.

✓ The interest we receive from our investments are a major source of income.
     -- "Interest" is the <u>subject,</u> not "investments."

✓ The interest we receive from our investments is a major source of income.

✓ Which one of the folders are being kept?
     -- "One" is the <u>subject,</u> not "folders."

✓ Which one of the folders is being kept?

✓ There was three men waiting to see me when I returned.
     -- "Men" is the <u>plural</u> <u>subject.</u>

✓ There were three men waiting to see me when I returned.

See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

Subject and verb agreement: Problem subjects

Certain <u>subjects</u>   cause confusion because they seem <u>singular</u>   but are really <u>plural,</u>   or vice versa.

<u>Nouns</u>   which denote pairs are always treated as <u>plural</u> , and so take <u>plural</u> <u>verbs</u> :

✓   The scissors is in the drawer.
✓   The scissors are in the drawer.
✓   My pants is in the wash.
✓   My pants are in the wash.

Similar words for pairs:
    reins   scales
    shears   spectacles
    tongs   trousers
    tweezers pliers

The <u>pronoun</u>   "you" is treated as <u>plural,</u>   even if it refers to a single person:

✓   You is sitting in my chair.
✓   You are sitting in my chair.

See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

<u>Pronouns</u>

Verb tense

Verb   tense indicates when an action or state occurs over time. Verbs   can be expressed in three tenses: past, present, and future:

> They agreed with the proposal.
> -- "Agreed" is the past-tense verb

> They agree with the proposal.
> -- Present tense

> They will agree with the proposal.
> -- Future tense

Sentences   containing more than one clause   sometimes present a problem, since each clause   contains its own verb. Normally, all verbs   in a sentence are in the same tense. Exceptions exist, however.

When the verb   in the independent clause   is in the past tense, the verb   in a dependent clause is also usually in the past tense:

> They said they agreed with the proposal.
> -- Both "said" and "agreed" are past-tense verbs

> He informed me he had written the letter weeks ago.
> -- Both "informed" and "had written" are past-tense verbs

When the verb   in the independent clause is in the future tense, the verb   in a dependent clause is usually in the present tense. This is true because the independent clause verb places the time of the remainder of the sentence in the future:

> They will say they agree with the proposal.
> -- "Will say" is in the future tense, but "agree" is in the present tense

When the verb   in the independent clause   is in the present tense, the verb   in a dependent clause can be in any tense, depending on the time ordering of actions:

> We need a new projector because the one was have was broken.
> -- "Need" is a present-tense verb, and "was" is past-tense

> We need a new projector because the one we have is broken.
> -- Both "need" and "is" are present-tense verbs

> We need a new projector because the one we have will break soon.
> -- "Will break" is a future-tense verb

See also:

Clauses

Verbs

Split infinitives

A split infinitive is an <u>adverb</u>   inserted between the word "to" and an <u>infinitive verb:</u>

I decided to quickly leave.

The split infinitive is considered weak by some people. The word "to" and the <u>infinitive verb</u> really form a single unit. Inserting an <u>adverb</u>   between them makes them separate, so they lose their association.   Moving the <u>adverb</u>   following the <u>infinitive verb</u>   may be preferable:

I decided to leave quickly.

Note that moving the <u>adverb</u>   ahead of the word "to" results in ambiguity:

√   I decided quickly to leave.
-- Does "quickly" apply to "decided" or to "leave"?

Don't substitute "and" for "to" when forming <u>infinitive verbs.</u>

√   I will try and come if I have time.
√   I will try to come if I have time.

See also:

<u>Adverbs</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

Participles

Participles are <u>verb</u> forms that usually end in "ed" (<u>past tense</u>) or "ing" (<u>present tense</u>).

A participle at the beginning of a <u>sentence</u> must have a <u>noun</u> or <u>pronoun</u> <u>subject</u> or a "dangling participle" results:

✔ Having opened the window, the room was noticeable cooler.
  -- The <u>subject</u> of the participle "having" is missing, so the participle "dangles"

✔ Noticing their poor performance, the stocks were sold.

✔ While skiing yesterday, my nose was frostbitten.

Correct these <u>sentences</u> by providing <u>subjects</u> for the participles:

✔ Peter having opened the window, the room was noticeably cooler.

✔ Noticing their poor performance, Wayne sold the stocks.

✔ While I was skiing yesterday, my nose was frostbitten.

The gerund also ends in "ing," but is really a <u>verb</u> transformed to a <u>noun:</u>

  Her skating is excellent.
  -- "Skating" is the gerund

See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

Writing style

"Writing style" refers to the qualities that distinguish interesting, effective, and clear writing from dull, ineffective writing. Topics:

Organized writing: Organizing what you want to say to get your point across to the reader.

Writing clearly and directly: Choosing words and organizing thoughts to communicate clearly to the reader.

Using the active voice: Choosing active verbs to make sentences interesting. Also, help on rewriting passive sentences to use the active voice.

Writing effective sentences: Organizing sentences   for maximum clarity.

Writing effective paragraphs: Organizing paragraphs to elaborate on a single, cohesive topic.

Writing letters: How to organize and write letters effectively. This topic includes sample letters for a variety of situations.

Active voice

In the active voice, the <u>subject</u> does the acting. In the passive voice, the <u>subject</u> is acted on.

Using the active voice means choosing active <u>verbs</u> over passive <u>verbs.</u> Passive <u>verbs</u> describe conditions and states of being. Active <u>verbs</u> describe actions. Passive <u>verbs</u> are flat, lifeless, and abstract. Active <u>verbs</u> suggest action -- things moving and doing. Active-voice writing grabs the reader's interest. Compare the following <u>sentences:</u>

Passive:

✓ The decision was made by the committee to ban smoking in public areas.
✓ This study report will be written by our firm in September.
✓ The game was won by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Active:

✓ The committee decided to ban smoking in public places.
✓ Our firm will write the study report in September.
✓ The Toronto Maple Leafs won the game.

To change passive <u>sentences</u> to active <u>sentences,</u> start by looking for passive <u>verbs:</u>

    be   is   was
    were   been   are
    am   isn't   wasn't
    weren't aren't

If the <u>sentence</u> <u>subject,</u> is implied, make it explicit:

Implicit:

    The invoice will be paid on the 30th.
     -- Who will pay the invoice?

Explicit:

    The invoice will be paid by our accounting department on the 30th.

Next, eliminate the passive <u>verbs</u> by reorganizing the <u>sentence.</u>

Move the <u>subject</u> to the beginning of the sentence:

    Our accounting department will pay the invoice on the 30th.

More passive examples:

✓ The meeting was chaired by Dr. Smith.
✓ It is desired that this topic be added to the meeting agenda.
✓ The discrepancy was reported on 15 July.

Rewritten in the active voice:

✓ Dr. Smith chaired the meeting.
✓ I would like you to add this topic to the meeting agenda.
✓ I reported the discrepancy on 15 July.

See also:

Clarity and directness

Effective writing is always clear and direct. Writing clearly and effectively takes practice and concentration. Remember that we write to communicate.

Following three guidelines will make your writing clearer and more direct:

<u>State the subject:</u>   Make sure every <u>sentence</u>   has an explicit <u>subject.</u>

<u>Use simple,direct words:</u> Choose the right words.

<u>Avoid ambiguities:</u> Watch out for words and <u>phrases</u> that can be interpreted in more than one way.

Avoiding ambiguity

Watch out for words and <u>phrases</u> that the reader can interpret in more than one way.

The word "only" can often be placed nearly anywhere in a <u>sentence,</u> and so is frequently misplaced:

> Only I wanted an ice-cream cone.
>
> I only wanted an ice-cream cone.
>
> I wanted only an ice-cream cone.

Each example <u>sentence</u> above has a different meaning, depending on the placement of "only." To avoid ambiguity, place "only" close to the word it modifies.

Generally, placing <u>modifiers</u> close to the words they modify avoids other kinds of ambiguity as well:

√ We sent a letter to the president requesting advice.
  -- What is requesting advice: the letter or the president?

√ He introduced me to a man with a large moustache named George.
  -- What is named George: the man or the moustache?

Reorganizing these <u>sentences</u> to place the <u>modifiers</u> close to the terms they modify removes the ambiguity:

√ We sent a letter requesting advice to the president.
√ He introduced me to a man named George with a large moustache.

Clarity and directness: Explicit subjects

Every <u>sentence</u> should contain a <u>subject,</u> represented as a <u>noun</u> or <u>pronoun.</u> Omitting the <u>subject</u> makes it difficult for the reader to tell who or what is involved. Business writing is especially vulnerable to this problem -- it is sometimes easier to omit the <u>subject</u> than to accept or delegate responsibility for an action:

> The report will be prepared before the next meeting.

The reader cannot tell who will write the report. The writer may be accepting responsibility, may be directing the reader to do it, or may be reporting that some third party is responsible. Here is the same <u>sentence</u> with <u>subjects</u> added:

> I will prepare the report before the next meeting.

> You will prepare the report before the next meeting.

> Sheila will prepare the report before the next meeting.

Notice that adding a <u>subject</u> changed the <u>sentence</u> to the active voice.

Sometimes writers omit the <u>subject</u> to make their writing more "tactful" by not pointing a finger of blame at a specific individual:

> This invoice must be paid by the 14th or legal action will be taken.

The <u>subjects</u> of both <u>clauses</u> are implied. The reader cannot tell who must pay the invoice, or who will take legal action. Rewriting makes the request courteous, clearer, and more direct:

> We have written you several times about this unpaid invoice, Mrs. Nelson. Please pay the invoice by the 14th. If we do not receive payment by the 14th, we will engage a collection agency to obtain payment.

See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Writing in the active voice</u>

Clarity and directness: Choosing words

Effective writing uses clear, plain, direct words. Remember that the goal of writing is to communicate, not to impress. Do not be lured into believing that only traditional, flowery words and phrases such as "notwithstanding," "at your earliest possible convenience," and "in compliance with your request" are necessary. Clear writing makes the best impression.

The table below lists some common overblown words and phrases and their simpler equivalents.

Come to the conclusion **-->** conclude
Do not hesitate **-->** please
Give consideration to **-->** consider
Earliest possible convenience **-->** soon
Give thought to **-->** think
Implement **-->** make
In compliance with your request **-->** as you requested
In a position to **-->** can
It would appear **-->** it appears
The reason is that **-->** because
The reason is because **-->** because
Make an adjustment **-->** adjust
Place an order **-->** order
Raise an objection **-->** object
Utilize **-->** use

There are hundreds of similar phrases and words.

Another key to writing clearly is this: Don't translate <u>verbs</u> into <u>nouns.</u> Watch out for words ending in "tion," "ment," and "ful":

✔️ Construction of the building lasted two years.

✔️ New funding is required for establishment of this service.

✔️ Several employees are resentful of the new supervisor.

Rewrite to change these <u>nouns</u> back to <u>verbs:</u>

✔️ We constructed the building in two years.

✔️ We require new funding to establish this service.

✔️ Several employees resent the new supervisor.

See also:

<u>Nouns</u>

<u>Verbs</u>

Effective sentences

Build effective sentences using these principles:

Begin the sentence with the subject.

Put the most important information at the end of the sentence.

Keep the sentence length moderate.

Effective sentences: Sentence beginnings

 Effective <u>sentences</u>   begin with the <u>subject.</u>   The reader learns immediately what the <u>sentence</u> is about. The writer also benefits, because stating the <u>subject</u>   forces you to keep your thoughts focused. <u>Sentences</u>   organized with the <u>subject</u> at the beginning tend to use the <u>active voice.</u>

 Avoid beginning a <u>sentence</u>   with "there is" or "it is." They immediately place the <u>sentence</u> in the <u>passive voice</u> and obscure the real <u>subject</u> .

 Weak:

✔   It is probable that the document will be deliverd by Friday.
✔   There is a job vacancy in our department.
✔   There are four stewards working on the shop floor.

 Better:

✔   We will probably deliver the document by Friday.
✔   Our department has a job vacancy.
✔   Four stewards work on the shop floor.

 See also:

<u>Subjects</u>

<u>Writing in the active voice</u>

Effective sentences: Sentence endings

Place the most important information at the end of a <u>sentence.</u>

This increases the reader's expectations and makes the information more memorable.

Effective sentences: Sentence length

Keep the <u>sentence</u> length moderate. The meaning of "moderate" varies with the intended audience:

    Primary school: 3 - 6 words
    Grade school: 5 - 10 words
    Casual writing: 10 - 20 words
    Technical or highly advanced writing: 20+ words

These numbers are averages. If you aim for "casual" writing, some of your <u>sentences</u>   may be seven words long, some may be 24 words long, but most will be ten to twenty words.

Varying the <u>sentence</u> length also makes the writing more interesting.

Writing letters

Like most written work, an effective letter has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

The introduction should briefly state the purpose of the letter. The introduction may be a single <u>sentence</u> or a short <u>paragraph:</u>

> I would like to know the status of my order.

> This letter is in reply to your letter of 14 April seeking employment with Acme Ball Bearings. Your resume has been forwarded to the manager of the quality control department.

The body elaborates on the introduction by providing facts. Use one <u>paragraph</u> per topic:

> I sent my order to you on 20 June 1991. I have not yet received the merchandise. Your ad advised me to "allow 6 weeks for delivery," and six weeks have now passed.

> Your qualifications meet the job requirements. Should we require an interview, we will contact you by telephone. In any event, we will retain your resume for six months.

The conclusion states what action is required of the recipient. In long letters, the conclusion may also summarize the facts presented in the body:

> Please let me know when I can expect to receive my merchandise.

> We will write you by 30 April to inform you of our decision.

See also:

<u>Letter format</u>

<u>Salutations</u>

<u>Complimentary closing</u>

You can also view some sample letters:

<u>Request for information</u>

<u>Accepting an offer</u>

<u>Declining an offer</u>

<u>Reminding of an obligation</u>

<u>Demanding an obligation</u>

<u>Congratulations</u>

<u>Sympathy</u>

Writing letters: Letter format

The specific format of a letter is not as important as its content. There are many styles of letter format; feel free to pick your own, provided it isn't too unusual.

A letter should contain the sender's name and address so the recipient knows how to return the letter. If you don't use letterhead or personal stationery, place your name and address on the letter like this:

    John Smith
    123 Main St.
    Anytown
    99999

A letter should also contain the recipient's name and address so the recipient can tell the letter was directed to the right person. Include the recipient's title:

    Mary Jones
    Manager
    Acme Ball Bearings
    456 Industry St.
    Anytown
    99999

A letter should contain the date so the recipient knows when it was written.

You should sign each letter. A signature is something like a written handshake: it conveys trust and sincerity.

See also:

<u>Writing letters</u>

<u>Dates and times</u>

<u>Salutations</u>

<u>Complimentary closing</u>

Writing letters: Complimentary closing

The complimentary closing introduces your signature. There are several complimentary closings in common use:

    Yours truly
    Yours very truly
    Sincerely
    Sincerely yours
    Respectfully yours

Notice that only the first word is <u>capitalized.</u>

In modern letter writing, the complimentary closing is sometimes omitted.

Writing letters: Salutations

Salutations are the "Dear ..." terms that usually begin letters. The salutation you choose will depend on how well you know the recipient, whether you know the recipient's <u>gender,</u> and whether you know a female recipient's marital status.

If you are on friendly terms with the recipient, address them by their first name:
    Dear John:
    Dear Mary:

If you know the recipient's name, but are on formal terms with them, address them by title and last name:
    Dear Mr. Jones:
    Dear Dr. Smith:

Addressing a letter to a female recipient with whom you are on formal terms can be problematical. If you know her marital status, and you know she prefers to be addressed as "Mrs." or "Miss," address her that way. Otherwise, the safest approach is "Ms.":
    Dear Mrs. Johnson:
    Dear Miss Brown:
    Dear Ms. Green:

Addressing a letter to an individual whose gender you don't know is also a problem. If you know their first name or initial, use it:
    Dear Pat White:
    Dear C. Kent:

If you know only their last name, use an ambiguous title:
    Dear Mr./Ms. Clark:

You can use several approaches in addressing letters to unknown people in companies and organizations:
    To whom it may concern:
    To the Manager of Accounts Payable:
    To the sweepstakes coordinator:
    Dear Nabisco:

Writing letters: Accepting an offer

This letter accepts an offer made previously.

Dear ...:

I am pleased to accept your offer for the quality-control supervisor position in your firm.

As you requested, I am enclosing the signed offer and conflict-of-interest agreement.

I would like to change my starting date to one week after the date on which we agreed. I have not taken a vacation this year, and plan to spend a week relaxing with my family after leaving my current position. Please let me know if this cannot be done.

Thank you for making the offer. I am looking forward to my new position. Please reply as soon as possible regarding the change to my starting date.

Sincerely,

. . .

Writing letters: Congratulations

This letter offers congratulations to the recipient.

Dear ...:

Congratulations on receiving the "Sales Professional of the Year" award! The award committee has made an excellent choice.

Over the past five years, I have become increasingly impressed with your enthusiasm for and commitment to your company and product line. Your dedication and effort have been a source of inspiration to me and the entire purchasing department.

Your award is well deserved. I wish you the best of luck in the coming sales year.

Yours truly,

. . .

Writing letters: Declining an offer

This letter declines an offer made previously.

Dear ...:

Thank you for offering me the position of quality-control supervisor with your firm. I must decline your offer, unfortunately.

At the time I sent my application to your firm, I also sent it to several other firms. Two other firms have also made an offer for employment, and I plan to accept one of them.

Thank you again for making the offer. Good luck in your search for someone to fill the position.

Yours truly,

. . .

Writing letters: Demanding an obligation

This letter demands that an unmet obligation be satisfied. Given its tone, this letter would probably be sent following several reminders and telephone calls.

Dear ...:

Please pay invoice 12345 immediately or we will take legal action against your firm.

We sent the invoice to your firm on 20 June -- 30 days ago. The invoice was clearly marked "Due on Receipt." I have written letters to you requesting payment on 2 July, 15 July, and 18 July. I telephoned you on 10 July and 18 July. We have not yet received payment.

This is the last time I will attempt to contact you. Unless you pay this invoice, further contact will be through our attorneys.

I remind you: Pay the invoice immediately or we will take legal action.

Yours,

. . .

Writing letters: Requesting information

This letter asks the recipient to provide information.

Dear ...:

Please provide me with a copy of your magazine's submission guidelines.

I am a freelance writer and have been previously published in several magazines. I have an idea for an article I think may be suitable for your magazine. I want to ensure it meets your guidelines before I submit it.

Thank you for taking the time to provide the guidelines.

Yours truly,

. . .

Writing letters: Reminder of an obligation

This letter reminds the recipient of an unmet obligation.

Dear …:

I am writing to remind you about invoice 12345, which has not yet been paid.

In our telephone conversation on 20 June, you said you would pay the invoice by 30 June. We have not received your cheque.

We have done business together for the past five years. I would like my firm to continue doing business with yours.

Please pay the invoice immediately.

Sincerely,

. . .

Writing letters: Sympathy

This letter offers sympathy to the recipient.

Dear ...:

I was saddened to hear of your father's death. Please allow me to offer my sincere condolences.

Although I did not know your father, I recall the several occasions when you had spoken of him warmly.

Again, my sympathy for your loss.

With condolences,

. . .

Organized writing

Effective writing presents ideas to the reader in a well-organized manner. Complex ideas are presented slowly and carefully, building from simple ideas the reader already knows. In many ways, effective writing "sells" ideas to the reader -- the reader must be convinced to accept your ideas or point of view.

There are two standard approaches to writing organization:

<u>Writing to inform:</u> Explaining to, describing for, or instructing the reader.

<u>Writing to persuade:</u> Convincing the reader of your point of view.

Organized writing: Writing to inform

When writing to inform, explain, or describe, organize your writing as follows:

1. Define your subject: State what you are writing about in the introduction. Give the reader an overview of your theme.

2. Divide your subject into parts, and discuss each part thoroughly. If necessary, further divide the parts into subparts. Keep dividing until you can cover each simple idea in one paragraph.

Describe the simple ideas first. Describe the complex ideas in terms of the simple ideas. Show the relationship between each part and the entire subject.

3. Provide examples to clarify generalizations.

4. Briefly summarize what you have said.

See also:

Paragraphs

Organized writing: Writing to persuade

When writing to convince the reader of something, there are two approaches: a logical appeal and an emotional appeal. The choice of approach depends on what you are trying to persuade the reader to do. Convincing the reader to donate to a charity may require an emotional appeal, while convincing the reader to purchase a product may require a logical appeal.

Both approaches can be used together. An appeal for a donation, for example, could describe the hunger of children to appeal to the reader's emotions, and explain how donated money will be used to build farms and schools to appeal to the reader's logic.

Organize your writing as follows when using a logical appeal:

1. Introduce your topic and state your position.

2. Consider the evidence that supports your view. Describe each point of evidence in a separate <u>paragraph.</u> At this point, just describe the evidence objectively.

3. Objectively consider the evidence contrary to your view. Describe each point of evidence in a separate <u>paragraph.</u>

4. Compare and contrast the evidence. Show how the evidence supports your point of view. Don't be afraid to concede some points in favor of the contrary view -- this adds credibility to your argument.

5. Conclude in favor of your view.

When writing an emotional appeal, use the following organization:

1. Introduce your topic and state your position.

2. Explain why accepting your view will make the reader feel better. Describe each benefit to the reader in a separate <u>paragraph.</u>

3. Conclude that the benefits you have described merit the reader's accepting your position.

See also:

<u>Paragraphs</u>

Writing effective paragraphs

A paragraph is a collection of <u>sentences</u> relating to a single topic.

Each topic should have its own paragraph. Each paragraph should describe one topic.

There are two effective approaches to organizing <u>sentences</u> within paragraphs. In the first approach, the first <u>sentence</u> states the paragraph's central idea, and the remaining <u>sentences</u> elaborate on it. This organization is appropriate in writing that explains or provides information:

> A logo is a symbol or stylized lettering that captures the essence of who you are and what you offer. The best logos are simple but powerful. Recall the Texaco star, the handwritten look of the word Kellog's on cereal boxes, or the spinning globe of AT&T.

In the second approach, the last <u>sentence</u> states the paragraph's central idea. The preceding <u>sentences</u> build up to the last <u>sentence,</u> possibly by justifying or explaining the last <u>sentence's</u> point of view. This approach is appropriate in writing that seeks to convince or justify:

> Of the thousands of visitors who attend a show, only a small number are ready buyers, the people who are ready to buy now or in the near future. One of the toughest problems facing you is to conserve your energy so you don't burn out before the end of the show. You must learn how to pick out from the crowds passing your booth those visitors who are potential buyers of your product and not just "lookers."

See also:

<u>Paragraphs</u>

<u>Sentences</u>

Reviewing

 Before releasing something you have written, review it critically to eliminate common errors and weaknesses. Effective, correct writing is not a guarantee of success, but weak, error-ridden writing is almost certainly a guarantee of failure.

 First, make sure your writing is well organized. Check your writing from the reader's point of view. Are complex ideas carefully presented? Are <u>paragraphs</u>   and <u>sentences</u> organized effectively? Are new terms explained before they are used? Does each <u>paragraph</u>   discuss only one topic?

 Next, ensure your writing is free from spelling errors and common <u>punctuation</u> errors. Use a spelling-checker program, even if your spelling is good. Look up in a dictionary each word the spelling checker reports -- don't rely on your memory, and don't assume the spelling checker has made a mistake. Consider all <u>punctuation,</u> especially commas, critically. Rewrite <u>sentences</u>   containing more than two or three <u>clauses</u>   separated by commas. It is better to use too few commas than too many -- when in doubt, leave it out.

 Check your writing for use of the passive voice. Reducing or eliminating the <u>passive verbs</u> in your writing will go a long toward improving your writing.

 Look for inconsistencies in your writing that may confuse the reader. Ensure that the same terms are used throughout your writing. Don't, for example, refer to "shareholders" in one place and "stockholders" in another. It is better to use a single term repeatedly than to continually introduce new terms. If your writing contains references to pages, chapters, sections, figures, or tables, make sure the references are correct. Finally, watch for wordy phrases that can be shortened or simplified. Say what you have to say in the fewest possible words. Watch for redundant phrases, such as "repeat again," "join together," and "final conclusion." Grammar-checking programs are helpful here.

 See also:

 <u>Paragraphs</u>

 <u>Sentences</u>

 <u>Punctuation</u>

 <u>Clauses</u>

 <u>Organizing your writing</u>

 <u>Writing in the active voice</u>

 <u>Choosing words</u>