

Advertising

Use this checking style for advertising text or other documents containing short sentences and paragraphs in an informal, persuasive tone.

The **Advertising Checking Style** checks at the **Informal** level.

Does Not Flag

- ◆ one-sentence paragraphs
- ◆ some irregular grammar, like incomplete sentences and comma splices
- ◆ the use of "you"

Flags

- ◆ the passive voice
- ◆ spelling, mechanical, and basic grammar errors
- ◆ cliches, jargon, and weak or wordy language

Formal Memo or Letter

Use this checking style for formal business correspondence and other writing which should obey most grammar and punctuation rules.

The **Formal Memo or Letter Checking Style** checks at the **Formal** level.

Does Not Flag

- ◆ one-sentence paragraphs
- ◆ the use of "you"

Flags

- ◆ all other problems found by Grammatik

Documentation or Speech

Use this checking style for manuals, instruction booklets, speeches, and other documents addressing a general audience.

The **Documentation or Speech Checking Style** checks at the **Standard** level.

Does Not Flag

- ◆ one-sentence paragraphs
- ◆ the use of "you"
- ◆ trademarks, jargon, and end-of-sentence prepositions

Flags

- ◆ the passive voice
- ◆ spelling, mechanical, and grammar errors
- ◆ cliches and wordy, weak, or redundant language

Fiction

Use this checking style for fiction and other writing that contains dialogue, is very free in style, and does not need to obey all grammar rules.

The **Fiction Checking Style** checks at the **Informal** level.

Does Not Flag

- ◆ one-sentence paragraphs
- ◆ the use of "you"
- ◆ the passive voice
- ◆ offensive, weak, wordy, cliche, jargon, and foreign expressions
- ◆ some irregular grammar, like incomplete sentences and comma splices

Flags

- ◆ spelling, mechanical, and most grammar errors

Spelling Plus

Use this checking style for a quick pass on a final draft, or whenever grammar and style errors are not an issue. The **Spelling Plus Checking Style** checks at the **Standard** level.

Does Not Flag

✦ grammar or style problems

Flags

✦ all spelling and mechanical errors found by Grammatik

Quick Check

Use this checking style when you are concerned about spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar, but not about style problems.

The **Quick Check Style** checks at the **Standard** level.

Does Not Flag

- ◆ style problems (for example, cliches, jargon, or wordy phrases)
- ◆ split infinitives
- ◆ the passive voice

Flags

- ◆ spelling, mechanical, and basic grammar errors

Informal Memo or Letter

Use this checking style for proofreading personal correspondence, casual memos, and other informal documents.

The **Informal Memo or Letter Checking Style** checks at the **Informal** level.

Does Not Flag

- ◆ one-sentence paragraphs
- ◆ the use of "you"
- ◆ the passive voice
- ◆ colloquial expressions and cliches

Flags

- ◆ spelling, mechanical, and grammar errors
- ◆ style problems like jargon, redundancy, and foreign phrases

Student Composition

Use this checking style for term papers, homework, college compositions, and any other writing which should conform to the grammar and punctuation rules of strict academic style.

The **Student Composition Checking Style** checks at the **Standard** level.

Flags

- ◆ one-sentence paragraphs
- ◆ the use of "you"
- ◆ the passive voice
- ◆ all split infinitives
- ◆ most style problems
- ◆ spelling, mechanical, and grammar errors

Very Strict

Use this checking style when you want to turn on all the rule classes in Grammatik. This is the most demanding checking style.

The **Very Strict Checking Style** checks at the **Formal** level.

Flags

- ◆ all split infinitives
- ◆ all problems (spelling, mechanics, grammar, and style) found by all rule classes

Technical or Scientific

Use this checking style for technical reports and proposals, scientific papers, and other technical documents.

The **Technical or Scientific Checking Style** checks at the **Formal** level

Does Not Flag

- ◆ very long sentences
- ◆ many consecutive nouns
- ◆ the passive voice
- ◆ one-sentence paragraphs

Flags

- ◆ split infinitives
- ◆ spelling, mechanical, and grammar errors

abbreviation

A short form of another word.

Examples

Dr. for "Doctor"

U.S. for "United States"

vol. for "volume"

An abbreviation that you can pronounce, containing initials without periods, is called an acronym:

NATO for "North Atlantic Treaty Organization"

active verb

A single-word action verb.

Examples

I want to **meet** her.

meet = active verb

The opposite of an active verb is an inactive verb, often a form of **be**, **become**, **have**, or **do**:

I want to **become acquainted with** her.

become = inactive verb

I want to **make her acquaintance**.

make someone's acquaintance = inactive, wordy phrase

Active verbs create a strong style. Using them also often helps to reduce wordiness.

active voice

The form that a verb takes when the subject performs the action:

Examples

Charles **threw** the ball.

Charles = subject

threw = active voice

This is the opposite of a verb in the passive voice, which tells what was done to the subject by someone or something else:

The ball **was thrown** by Charles.

the ball = the subject

was thrown = passive voice.

Using the active voice helps make writing forceful and direct.

adjective

A word that describes (modifies) a noun or a noun word group.

Examples

this **old** house

old = adjective describing "house"

sixteen silly jokes

sixteen, silly = adjectives describing "jokes"

a very **careful** truck driver

careful = adjective describing "truck driver"

Adjectives and adverbs are the only parts of speech in English that describe other words.

adjective clause

A type of dependent clause that acts like an adjective. An adjective clause often begins with a relative pronoun, but not always:

Examples

a woman **whom I know**

whom I know = adjective clause describing "woman"

("whom" = relative pronoun)

a woman **I know**

I know = adjective clause describing "woman"

(no relative pronoun)

Another name for "adjective clause" is "relative clause."

adverb

A word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb, usually by telling "how," "how much," "when," or "where":

Examples

walked **slowly**

slowly = adverb describing the verb "walked," telling **how**

arrived **yesterday**

yesterday = adverb describing the verb "arrived," telling **when**

was **there**

there = adverb describing the verb "was," telling **where**

much too big

too = adverb describing the adjective "big"

much = adverb describing the adverb "too"

Many adverbs end in "-ly" (**rarely, quickly, happily**), but many do not (**often, quite, too, not, there, never**).

Adverbs and adjectives are the only parts of speech in English that describe other words.

adverb clause

A type of dependent clause that begins with a subordinating conjunction like **because, if, after,** or **although** and acts like an adverb:

Examples

We will eat lunch **after the firemen leave**.

after the firemen leave = adverb clause, telling when the verb "eat" will occur

Because she had lost her wallet, Melissa borrowed some money from a friend.

because she had lost her wallet = adverb clause, telling why the verb "borrowed" occurred

antecedent

The noun, noun phrase, or pronoun to which a pronoun refers:

Examples

Tim gave me **the book** yesterday, and I've already read **it**.

the book = antecedent of "it"

it = pronoun referring to the antecedent "book"

Pronouns and antecedents must agree in number. (You could not use the plural pronoun **them** instead of **it** in the sentence above, because the antecedent **book** is singular.)

appositive

A word or phrase that identifies or explains a noun just before it:

Examples

Joe Smith, **our insurance agent**, lives there.

our insurance agent = appositive identifying "Joe Smith"

We accepted the new proposal, actually **a revision of their earlier one**.

a revision of their earlier one = appositive explaining "the new proposal"

article

A type of determiner. There are three articles in English: the definite article **the**, and the indefinite articles **a** and **an**.

✦ **A** comes before words that begin with a consonant sound:

a boy

a house

✦ **An** comes before words that begin with a vowel sound:

an umbrella

an honest person

.

NOTE: When an **h** at the beginning of a word is silent, as in **honest**, the word starts with a vowel sound.

auxiliary verb

A form of **be**, **do**, or **have**, or a modal (**can**, **could**, **will**, **would**, **shall**, **should**, **may**, **might**, **must**).

An auxiliary verb combines with a main verb to form a verb phrase:

We **could have been driving** to work by now.

could, **have**, **been** = auxiliary verbs

driving = main verb

could have been driving = verb phrase

Another name for "auxiliary verb" is "helping verb."

base verb

The form of a verb that comes after **to** in an infinitive, or after a modal like **would**:

Examples

to **tickle**, would **tickle**

tickle = base verb

Other names for "base verb" are "stem," "simple form," and "dictionary form."

clause

A word group which contains both a subject and a verb. An independent clause can stand alone as a complete sentence, while a dependent clause cannot.

our guests arrived = independent clause

(could be a complete sentence)

when we arrived = dependent clause

(could not be a complete sentence)

A dependent clause must be connected to an independent clause to make a complete sentence:

Our guests arrived when we arrived. = complete sentence

The opposite of a clause is a phrase, a group of related words that does not contain both a subject and a verb.

colloquial

Informal. Colloquial language is appropriate only in conversation or informal writing.

Examples

It was **a cinch**.

a cinch = colloquial language

It was **simple**.

simple = standard language

"Slang" is the most extreme form of colloquial language. It is not appropriate in writing other than fiction and private correspondence.

common noun

A noun that refers to a person, place, or thing in general:

Examples

children, city, building, people, books = common nouns

A common noun is not capitalized. The opposite is a proper noun, which names a specific person, place, or thing and is capitalized:

Tom, London, the Eiffel Tower, Italians, Pride and Prejudice = proper nouns

comparative

An adjective or adverb that compares two things:

- ◆ Comparative adjectives either end in "-er" or come after "more" (never both):

livelier

more attractive

- ◆ Comparative adverbs almost always come after "more":

more happily

more often

- ◆ Some comparatives can act as both adjectives and adverbs:

I found a **better** restaurant.

better = comparative adjective describing "restaurant"

No one writes ad copy **better** than Fred.

better = comparative adverb describing "writes"

complement

A word that comes after a linking verb like **be** or **seem** and describes or names the subject:

Examples

He seemed **serious** about it.

serious = complement of "seemed"

Both of them are **teachers**.

teachers = complement of "are"

If the complement is an adjective ("serious"), it is called a "predicate adjective." If the complement is a noun ("teachers"), it is called a "predicate noun."

compound subject

Two or more nouns, pronouns, or noun phrases that are all subjects of the same verb:

Examples

My former boss, his sister-in-law, John's brother, and I plan to go fishing tomorrow.

my former boss, his sister-in-law, John's brother, and I = compound subject

For help on the agreement of compound subjects with their verbs, see Rule Class help on Subject-Verb Agreement.

conditional clause

A dependent clause referring to a situation that may not exist. A conditional clause tells the condition that would cause or allow the action in the main clause to happen.

Conditional clauses usually begin with the subordinating conjunction "if" or "unless":

Examples

If it had rained, we would have stayed home.

if it had rained = conditional clause

if = subordinating conjunction

George will take a week off next month **unless his boss objects**.

unless his boss objects = conditional clause

unless = subordinating conjunction

conjunction

A word that connects words, phrases, or clauses. There are three types of conjunctions:

- ◆ **coordinating conjunctions**
connect similar structures and can begin independent clauses
(for example, **and, but, or**)
- ◆ **subordinating conjunctions**
begin dependent clauses
(for example, **although, if, because**)
- ◆ **correlative conjunctions**
come in pairs
(for example, either . . . or, not only . . . but also)

coordinating conjunction

A type of conjunction that connects word groups with the same grammatical structure.

Examples

simple **and** elegant

and = coordinating conjunction

may register **but** may not vote

but = coordinating conjunction

a school bus **or** a truck

or = coordinating conjunction

There are seven coordinating conjunctions: **and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet.**

A coordinating conjunction can begin an independent clause (unlike a subordinating conjunction):

But it happened just that way.

correlative conjunction

One of a pair of words connecting phrases with the same grammatical structure.

Examples

both beautiful **and** brilliant

both . . . and = correlative conjunctions

neither the best solution **nor** the simplest one

neither . . . nor = correlative conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions include **both...and**, **neither...nor**, and **not only...but also**.

countable noun

A noun that needs a modifier like **a**, **the**, or **my** before it when it is singular:

Examples

a **toy**

the **penguin**

my **hand**

A countable noun can be singular ("this book") or plural ("books," "seven books"). Another name for "countable noun" is "count noun."

The opposite of a countable noun is an "uncountable noun," also called "mass noun" or "noncount noun."

Examples: "platinum," "laughter," "honesty"

dependent clause

A group of words containing a subject and verb but unable to stand on its own as a complete sentence. A dependent clause usually begins with a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun.

Examples

because they were grateful = dependent clause

because = subordinating conjunction

when she comes = dependent clause

when = subordinating conjunction

whom he likes = dependent clause

whom = relative pronoun

Another name for "dependent clause" is "subordinate clause."

determiner

A type of adjective that includes numbers (**two, fourth**), articles (**a, the**), possessives (**your, his**), demonstratives (**this, those**), and certain indefinite adjectives (**each, many, all**):

Examples

each of **his** latest ideas

each, his = determiners

these twelve gold wedding rings

these, twelve = determiners

direct object

A noun, pronoun, or noun phrase that directly receives the action of a verb, answering the question "what" or "whom".

Examples

He lost the **ball**.

ball = direct object of "lost," telling "what" he lost

We like **her**.

her = direct object of "like," telling "whom" we like

Verbs like "lose" and "like," that can take an object, are called transitive verbs.

double negative

Using two negative words in the same clause.

Examples

I **never** have **no** money.

never, no = negatives

In English, using a double negative is considered incorrect.

generic

General. Generic can mean "applying to an entire group."

Examples

blonds used for both men and women (instead of **blonds** for men, **blondes** for women)

or it can refer to products without a specified brand name:

photocopy (generic) instead of **Xerox** (trademark)

generic reference

Using an adjective as a noun to refer to a group (for example, **the poor**). This kind of phrase needs a plural verb.

Examples

the poor **are** often hungry

the talented **succeed**

gerund

The "-ing" form of a verb without auxiliaries, when it acts as a noun.

Examples

Swimming is fun.

swimming = gerund

We believe in **taking** chances.

taking = gerund

When the "-ing" form acts not as a noun but as a verb, adjective, or adverb, it is called a present participle.

homonym

A word that sounds like another word, but has a different meaning and sometimes a different spelling.

Examples

well meaning "healthy"

well meaning "fountain"

to meaning "toward"

two meaning "the number after one"

too meaning "excessively"

Confusion about homonyms with different spellings often leads to writing errors.

idiom

An expression whose meaning is not predictable from the meaning of the separate words that it contains.

Examples

It's **raining cats and dogs** out today.

rain cats and dogs = idiom meaning "rain very heavily"

Idioms and phrasal verbs are two kinds of idiomatic expressions.

idiomatic

Accepted not because of regular rules, but because of convention and usage in a particular language. Idiomatic usage is not predictable.

Examples

She is **married to** him.

married to = the right idiomatic expression in English

She is **married with** him. (incorrect)

married with = wrong in English, though correct in other languages

Idiomatic expressions include

✦ phrasal verbs:

We **looked for** the keys.

look for = phrasal verb

✦ idioms:

They can respond **at the drop of a hat**.

at the drop of a hat = idiom meaning "immediately"

✦ adjective and preposition combinations:

Hers are **different from** mine.

different from = combination sometimes incorrectly written as "different than"

✦ verbs that can take only a gerund or only an infinitive:

Robert **enjoyed skiing**.

enjoy takes only a gerund (not *"enjoy to ski")

Everyone **decided to buy** a gift for them.

decide takes only an infinitive (not *"decide buying")

inactive verb

A form of **do**, **have**, or a linking verb like **be** when used as the main verb.

Examples

John **is of the opinion that** he deserves a raise.

is = inactive verb

To strengthen your writing, try replacing phrases containing inactive verbs with single-word active verbs:

John **thinks** he deserves a raise.

thinks = active verb

indefinite pronoun

A pronoun that does not refer to a particular person, thing, or idea.

Examples

Anyone can come.

anyone = indefinite pronoun

We had **nothing** to write with.

nothing = indefinite pronoun

They asked for **more**.

more = indefinite pronoun

independent clause

A group of words, containing a subject and verb, that could stand on its own as a complete sentence. An independent clause cannot begin with a subordinator.

Examples

they were grateful = independent clause

(could stand alone as a complete sentence)

if they were grateful = dependent clause

(begins with the subordinator "if," so it cannot stand alone)

Another name for "independent clause" is "main clause."

indirect object

A noun, pronoun, or noun phrase that answers the question "for whom or what" or "whom or what."

Examples

She bought **him** a gift.

Meaning: She bought a gift for him.

him = indirect object of "bought" (the direct object is "gift")

They are giving **the dog** a bath now.

Meaning: They are giving a bath to the dog now.

the dog = indirect object of "are giving" (the direct object is "a bath")

infinitive

The form of a verb that includes "to" plus the base verb.

Examples

to go

to imagine

to get ahead

Some grammar texts use "infinitive" to mean the base verb alone. They may use the term "infinitive phrase" to mean "to" plus the base verb. In Grammatik, the term "infinitive" always includes "to."

interjection

An exclamation which shows surprise, horror, relief, or some other emotion.

Examples

Aha!

No!

Whew!

Most interjections show strong feeling, but some do not:

Well,

Hey,

Oh,

intransitive verb

A verb that does not take an object after it.

Examples**come****fall****coincide****lie****rise**

Some verbs, like the examples above, are always intransitive (never have an object). Other verbs can be either intransitive (have no object) or transitive (have an object), depending on the sentence:

She **read** for an hour.

read = intransitive (has no object)

She **read a book** for an hour.

read = transitive (has the object "book")

linking verb

A verb that links a subject to words that name or describe it.

Examples

These boys **are** roommates.

are links "boys" to "roommates"

The cat **became** restless.

became links "cat" to "restless"

This **feels** like a dream.

feels links "this" to "like a dream"

The most common linking verbs are **be, become, seem, appear, look,** and **feel.**

Another name for "linking verb" is "copulative verb."

main clause

A group of words, containing a subject and verb, that could stand on its own as a complete sentence. A main clause cannot begin with a subordinator.

Examples

they were grateful = main clause

(could stand alone as a complete sentence)

because they were grateful = dependent clause

(begins with the subordinator "because," so it cannot stand alone)

Another name for "main clause" is "independent clause."

main verb

The verb that shows the action in a verb phrase. The main verb carries the meaning.

Examples

Whales would never have been hunted if not for their blubber.

would never have been hunted = verb phrase

would, have, been = auxiliary verbs

hunted = main verb

modal

A type of auxiliary verb (helping verb). These are the modals:

can	could
will	would
shall	should
may	might
must	

Unlike other verbs, modal auxiliaries never change form. They never take endings like **-s**, **-ed**, or **-ing**. The verb after a modal is always a base verb

would be

be = base verb

can correspond

correspond = base verb

Certain groups of words also act like modals (for example, **ought to**, **have to**, **used to**, **had better**).

modifier

A word or word group that describes another word, phrase, or clause. Modifiers act as adjectives or adverbs.

Examples

a very large red chair

a, large, red = adjectives modifying "chair"

very = adverb modifying "large"

drive **more carefully**

carefully = adverb modifying "drive"

more = adverb modifying "carefully"

the coat rack **in the hall**

in the hall = prepositional phrase acting as an adjective, modifying "coat rack"

nonstandard

Not considered acceptable in writing.

Examples

ain't

without nobody noticing

noun

A word that names a person, place, thing, creature, emotion, quality, measurement, or idea.

Examples

- Jim** = uncountable singular proper noun
- platinum** = uncountable singular common noun
- teachers** = countable plural noun
- honesty** = uncountable singular noun
- Paris** = uncountable singular proper noun
- feet** = countable plural noun
- mirror** = countable singular noun
- relativity** = uncountable singular noun
- salamander** = countable plural noun
- s**

noun phrase

A noun with its modifiers. A noun phrase can be a subject, object, or complement.

Examples

My old blue blanket lay on the chair.

my old blue blanket = noun phrase, acting as subject

We gave tickets to **five excited children**.

five excited children = noun phrase, acting as object of the preposition "to"

Ellen is **an excellent math teacher**.

an excellent math teacher = noun phrase, complement of "is"

number

The grammar term "number" refers to whether a word is singular or plural. Subjects and verbs must agree in number. For example, if one is singular, the other must be also.

Examples

This window rattles.

this window = singular subject

rattles = singular verb

The same is true for determiners and the nouns they describe, and also for pronouns and their antecedents.

Several people saw it.

several = plural determiner

people = plural noun

Give **John** the reports **he** needs.

John = singular noun, antecedent of "he"

he = singular pronoun referring to John

object

A noun or pronoun that

✦ receives the action of an action verb:

The dog bit Timothy.

Timothy = direct object **of "bit"**

OR

✦ tells to whom or for whom an action was done:

I sent **my aunt** a gift.

my aunt = **indirect object** of "sent"

OR

✦ ends a prepositional phrase:

Please come with **us**.

us = **object of the preposition** "with"

object pronoun

A pronoun acting as

✦ **a direct object**

We liked **it**.

it = direct object of "liked"

OR

✦ **an indirect object**

His mother gave **him** a hug.

him = indirect object of "gave"

OR

✦ **the object of a preposition**

You should talk with **her** about **that**.

her = object of the preposition "with"

that = object of the preposition "about"

Some pronouns can only act as objects. Others, like **you**, **this**, **it**, and **everything**, can also be subjects

participle

There are two kinds of participles:

- ✦ The form of a verb ending in "-ing" is the present participle.

laughing

intending

being

sinking

- ✦ The form of a verb used after the auxiliary "have" is the past participle.

laughed

intended

been

sunk

Most, though not all, past participles end in "-ed."

Participles can act as several parts of speech:

- ✦ When a participle comes after an auxiliary, it acts as a verb:

The tape had **stopped** and was **rewinding**.

stopped, rewinding = participles acting as verbs

had stopped, was rewinding = verb phrases

- ✦ When there is no auxiliary, a participle can act as an adjective or a noun:

One **irritated** parent scolded her **whining** child for **taking** candy off the shelf.

irritated, whining = participles acting as adjectives

taking = present participle acting as a noun (also called a gerund)

parts of speech

Classes into which we group words to identify how they act grammatically in a sentence. There are eight traditional parts of speech:

noun

pronoun

verb

adverb

adjective

preposition

conjunction

interjection

Many words have more than one part of speech. To decide a word's part of speech in a specific context, see how it acts in the sentence:

I had my **back** to the wind.

back = noun

Please move **back**.

back = adverb

We will **back** you all the way.

back = verb

passive voice

The form of a verb that shows something being done to the subject by someone or something else:

The ball **was thrown** by Charles.

the ball = subject

was thrown = passive voice

This is the opposite of a verb in the active voice, used when the subject performs the action:

Charles **threw** the ball.

Charles = subject

threw = active voice

Using the passive voice too much in writing can lead to a weak, vague, indirect style.

past participle

The form of a verb used after the auxiliary "have."

laughed

intended

been

sunk

taken

Many past participles end in "-ed" and therefore look just like the past tense form.

A past participle can act as a verb or an adjective:

Someone has **woven** a rug for me.

woven = verb, part of verb phrase "has woven"

The rug was **woven** by Sarah.

woven = verb, part of verb phrase "was woven"

I enjoy looking at **woven** rugs.

woven = adjective describing "rugs"

phrase

A group of words not having both a subject and a verb:

not only bright but warm

has neither subject nor verb

the glass on the table in the kitchen

has no verb

is running like a gazelle

has no subject

The opposite of a phrase is a clause, which has both a subject and a verb.

phrasal verb

A verb combined with a preposition or adverb. Phrasal verbs usually have a different meaning from the verb by itself:

After the knockout, he **came to** slowly.

came to = phrasal verb, meaning "regained consciousness"

He **came** to dinner early.

came = verb ("to dinner" = prepositional phrase)

Attendance often **falls off** in the summer.

falls off = phrasal verb, meaning "decrease"

Every time he walks on the roof, he **falls off**.

fall = verb ("off" = adverb)

Phrasal verbs are part of a group of expressions called idioms. The meaning or form of idioms comes from common usage in a particular language, rather than from predictable rules.

plural

The grammar term "plural," meaning "more than one," can apply to nouns (plural nouns in English usually end in **s**, but not always)

✦ **pencils**

brushes

children

mice

fish

✦ **people**

pronouns

you

we

they

ourselves

✦ determiners

these

those

all

many

✦ verbs

A singular subject requires a singular verb. A plural subject requires a plural verb.

In English, only verbs in the present tense look different in the singular and the plural. The singular verb ends in **s**, while the plural verb looks like the base verb form:

My **friend** often **talks** about her family.

friend = singular subject

talks = singular verb

Friends talk often.

friends = plural subject

talk = plural verb

NOTE: The only exception to these remarks about the form of singular and plural verbs is **be**:

I **am** here, and Phil **is** here, but the other managers **are** out today.

am, is = singular present forms of **be**

are = plural present form of **be**

Our yard **was** green, but the other yards **were** even greener.

was = singular past form of **be**

were = plural past form of **be**

possessive

Grammatik uses this term to refer to a possessive noun. This is a noun with ' or 's at the end, meaning "belonging to":

John's book

= the book belonging to John

Carlos' book

= the book belonging to Carlos

my **sister's** husband

= the husband of my sister

my **sisters'** husbands

= the husbands of my sisters

A possessive can act as an adjective before a noun ("This is John's book"), or as a pronoun standing alone ("This is John's").

possessive adjective

A type of pronoun that acts as an adjective. A possessive adjective comes before a noun or noun phrase and means "belonging to":

my laundry = laundry belonging to me

their strength and beauty = strength and beauty belonging to them

Some possessive adjectives have the same form as possessive pronouns, while others do not:

His opinions are **his**.

the first **his** = adjective describing "opinions"

the second **his** = pronoun, taking the place of "his opinions."

That is **my** umbrella, but the scarf is not **mine**.

my = adjective describing "umbrella"

mine = pronoun, taking the place of "my scarf"

possessive pronoun

A type of pronoun that shows ownership:

Marie says that the umbrella is **hers**.

hers = possessive pronoun, taking the place of "Marie's umbrella"

Your keys are on the counter, but **theirs** are missing.

theirs = possessive pronoun, taking the place of "their keys"

Some possessive pronouns have the same form as possessive adjectives, while others do not:

His opinions are **his**.

the first **his** = adjective describing "opinions"

the second **his** = pronoun, taking the place of "his opinions."

The scarf is not **mine**, but this is **my** coat.

mine = pronoun, taking the place of "my scarf"

my = adjective describing "coat"

preposition

A word showing the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence.

in	of
with	at
from	by
to	toward
beside	for

A preposition takes a noun, a pronoun, or a noun phrase as its object:

We ran **down** the street laughing.

"the street" = object of **down**

He went along **despite** his doubts.

"his doubts" = object of **despite**

In Africa, many tribes coexist.

"Africa" = object of **in**

prepositional phrase

The combination of a preposition and its object (a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase):

from Minneapolis

from = preposition

Minneapolis = object (noun)

without us

without = preposition

us = object (pronoun)

after the final inning

after = preposition

the final inning = object (noun phrase)

present participle

The "-ing" form of a verb, when it acts as a verb, adjective, or adverb:

The baby was **humming**.

humming = verb, part of verb phrase "was humming"

The **humming** baby became quiet.

humming = adjective describing "baby"

She left **humming** a tune.

humming = adverb describing "left"

When the "-ing" form acts as a noun, it is called a gerund:

Humming helped to pass the time.

humming = gerund, acting as subject

progressive

Any verb tense made by a form of "be" plus a present participle ("-ing" verb form):

I **am enjoying** this concert.

am enjoying = present progressive

The boys **were running**.

were running = past progressive

We **will be returning** Friday.

will be returning = future progressive

Progressive tenses often show continuing action. Another name for "progressive tense" is "continuous tense." For a complete list of English verb tenses, see tense.

pronoun

A word that takes the place of a noun or noun phrase.

✦ **personal** pronouns stand for people:

I, you, he, she, it, we, they = subject personal pronouns

me, you, him, her, it, us, them = object personal pronouns

✦ **possessive** pronouns show ownership:

mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs, whose

✦ **relative** pronouns point back to a prior noun:

that, which, who, whom, whose

✦ **indefinite** pronouns stand for a nonspecific person or thing:

anyone, nobody, something, anything

✦ **reflexive** pronouns end in a form of **-self**:

myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, oneself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves

✦ **demonstrative** pronouns point to specific persons or things:

this, that, these, those

✦ **interrogative** pronouns begin questions:

what, which, whose

As you can see from **whose**, certain pronouns fit into more than one category.

proper noun

A noun that names a specific person, place, or thing:

Amanda, New York, the Eiffel Tower, Syrians, Pride and Prejudice = proper nouns

A proper noun is capitalized. The opposite is a common noun, which refers to a person, place, or thing in general and is not capitalized:

children, city, building, people, books = common nouns

relative clause

A type of dependent clause that describes a noun before it in the sentence. Relative clauses act like adjectives. A relative clause often begins with a relative pronoun, but not always:

a woman **whom I know**

whom I know = relative clause describing "woman"

("whom" = relative pronoun)

a woman **I know**

I know = relative clause describing "woman"

(no relative pronoun)

Another name for "relative clause" is "adjective clause."

relative pronoun

A type of pronoun that points back to a noun before it and begins a relative clause (also called an "adjective clause") describing that noun:

A friend **who had heard the news** told me about it.

who had heard the news = relative clause describing "friend"

who = relative pronoun, pointing back to "friend"

Several of the buildings **that we saw there** had balconies.

that we saw there = relative clause describing "buildings"

that = relative pronoun, pointing back to "buildings"

The man **whose car I hit** wrote down his address.

whose car I hit = relative clause telling which "man"

whose = relative pronoun pointing back to "man," meaning "belonging to the man"

(In the last example, **whose** is also a possessive adjective describing "car.")

reflexive pronoun

A pronoun that ends in **-self** (singular) or **-selves** (plural). These are the reflexive pronouns:

myself

yourself

himself

herself

itself

oneself

ourselves

yourselves

themselves

singular

The grammar term "singular," meaning "only one," can apply to

✦ nouns

pencil

brush

child

mouse

fish

person

✦ pronouns

you

he

she

it

myself

✦ determiners

a

this

that

✦ verbs

A singular subject requires a singular verb. A plural subject requires a plural verb.

In English, only verbs in the present tense look different in the singular and the plural. The singular verb ends in **s**, while the plural verb looks like the base verb form:

A child needs more sleep than an adult.

a child = singular subject

needs = singular verb

Children need time to play and exercise.

children = plural noun

need = plural verb

NOTE: The only exception to these remarks about the form of singular and plural verbs is **be**:

I **am** here, and Phil **is** here, but the other managers **are** out today.

am, is = singular present forms of **be**

are = plural present form of **be**

Our yard **was** green, but the other yards **were** even greener.

was = singular past form of **be**

were = plural past form of **be**

subject

The noun, pronoun, or word group of a sentence or clause that tells the reader who or what the sentence is about. The subject often performs the action, or verb, in the sentence, but not always:

All three bicyclists sped down the hill.

all three bicyclists = subject

sped = verb, showing action

(Here, the subject performs an action.)

A large pot of stew was on the stove.

a large pot of stew = subject

was = verb, showing existence (linking verb)

(Here, the subject just exists.)

It seemed small.

it = subject

seemed = verb, showing state (linking verb)

(Here, the subject has the state of being "small.")

Jill has been chosen by the class to lead the parade.

Jill = subject

has been chosen = verb, in the passive voice

(Here, someone or something else performs the action upon the subject.)

subject pronoun

A pronoun acting as

✦ **the subject of an independent clause**

We liked all the presents that our aunt brought.

we = subject of the clause "we liked all the presents"

(Here, **we** is also the subject of the sentence.)

OR

✦ **the subject of a dependent clause**

The smell made us suspect that **something** was burning.

something = subject of the clause "that something was burning"

Whoever finds the necklace can keep it.

whoever = subject of the clause "whoever finds the necklace"

Some pronouns can only act as subjects. Others, like **you**, **this**, **it**, and **something**, can also be objects.

subjunctive

The form a verb sometimes takes when the writer is expressing a recommendation, a wish, or a condition that is imaginary or contrary to fact. The subjunctive can occur in two forms:

- ✦ The **present subjunctive** looks just like the base verb form:

She suggested that he **be** there an hour early.

be = present subjunctive

The committee might insist that your report **arrive** before Monday.

arrive = present subjunctive

The present subjunctive often occurs in a "that" clause after verbs like **suggest, insist, recommend, demand, request, and urge**, especially in formal writing.

- ✦ The **past subjunctive** looks just like the past form of the verb. The past subjunctive of "be" is always **were**:

If I **were** rich, I would move to Tahiti.

were = past subjunctive of "be" (condition contrary to fact: I am not rich.)

We could have a barbecue if we **brought** charcoal.

brought = past subjunctive of "bring" (imaginary condition: We have not brought charcoal yet.)

I wish she **came** more often.

came = past subjunctive of "come" (expressing a wish)

NOTE: The subjunctive is one of three "moods" in English grammar. The **mood** of the verb form shows the writer's purpose:

- ✦ to make a statement or ask a question

(indicative mood)

- ✦ to make a command or request

(imperative mood)

- ✦ to make a suggestion, hypothesis, or statement contrary to fact

(subjunctive mood)

subordinating conjunction

A type of conjunction that begins a dependent clause:

The snow began to melt **because the sun was shining**.

because = subordinating conjunction

because the sun was shining = dependent clause

While her children slept, Susan worked on her latest sketches.

while = subordinating conjunction

while her children slept = dependent clause

We will attend the meeting, **although we may need to leave early**.

although = subordinating conjunction

although we may need to leave early = dependent clause

Subordinating conjunctions act as adverbs, so the clauses they begin are adverb clauses.

subordinator

A word that begins a dependent clause. Two types of subordinators are subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns:

Although it was cold, we stayed outside.

although it was cold = dependent clause

although = subordinating conjunction

I visited the plant **where** her brother works.

where her brother works = dependent clause

where = subordinating conjunction

He asked about the person **who** had applied for the job.

who had applied for the job = dependent clause

who = relative pronoun

The buildings **which** we saw all had balconies.

which we saw = dependent clause

which = relative pronoun

A clause that starts with a subordinator cannot stand alone as a complete sentence:

the train arrived

(does not start with a subordinator, so it can be a complete sentence)

when the train arrived

(starts with the subordinator **when**, so it cannot be a complete sentence)

superlative

An adjective or adverb that compares three or more things:

- ◆ Superlative adjectives either end in "-est" or come after "most" (never both):

best

happiest

most beautiful

- ◆ Superlative adverbs almost always come after "most":

most happily

most often

- ◆ Some superlatives can act as both adjectives and adverbs:

The cheetah is the fastest of all land animals.

fastest = superlative adjective describing "cheetah"

They had a contest to see who could run fastest.

fastest = superlative adverb describing "run"

synonym

A word whose meaning is similar to the meaning of another word.

glad, happy, delighted, overjoyed = synonyms

family, relatives, kinfolk = synonyms

incredibly, unbelievably, amazingly = synonyms

tense

The form that a verb takes to indicate time. There are twelve tenses in English:

EXAMPLE:

He takes trips often.

He took a trip last month.

He will take a trip next month.

He has taken many trips.

He had taken two trips the year before.

He will have taken four trips by May.

He is taking a trip this week.

He was taking a trip when they called.

He will be taking a trip to Africa soon.

He has been taking trips there for years.

He had been taking trips to Spain as well.

He will have been taking trips for a decade.

TENSE:

simple present

simple past

simple future

present perfect

past perfect

future perfect

present progressive

past progressive

future progressive

present perfect progressive

past perfect progressive

future perfect progressive

transitive verb

A verb that takes an object after it.

admire

rob

outdo

raise

solve

Some verbs, like the examples above, are always transitive (always need an object). Other verbs can be either transitive (have an object) or intransitive (have no object), depending on the sentence:

They **eat** green **apples** twice a day.

eat = transitive (has the object "apples")

They **eat** twice a day.

eat = intransitive (has no object)

uncountable noun

A noun that does not take the modifier **a** before it.

selfishness

platinum

duration

news

An uncountable noun (also called "noncount noun" or "mass noun") cannot be plural or have a number in front of it.

Some nouns are always uncountable (can never take "a"), like the examples above. Others can be either uncountable or countable, depending on the sentence:

It snows here in **winter**.

winter = uncountable

That was **a** very cold **winter**.

winter = countable

verb

A word that shows action, relation, state, or existence. A verb can be a single word or a phrase:

The biplanes **were swooping** down from the sky.

were = auxiliary verb

swooping = main verb

were swooping = verb phrase, showing the action of "the biplanes"

Two bridges **connected** the cities.

connected = verb, showing the relation between "two bridges" and "the cities"

Her hair **is** auburn.

is = verb, showing the state of "her hair"

Several problems **have appeared**.

have = auxiliary verb

appeared = main verb

have appeared = verb phrase, showing the existence of "several problems"

A sentence must have both a subject and a verb to be complete.

verb phrase

A main verb and any auxiliary verbs that go with it:

The boys **ate**.

ate = main verb

ate = entire verb phrase

Are the boys **eating** now?

are = auxiliary verb

eating = main verb

are eating = entire verb phrase

The boys **should not already have eaten**.

should, have = auxiliary verbs

not, already = adverbs in the middle of the verb phrase

may not yet have eaten = entire verb phrase

A verb phrase can contain a single word, as in the first example, or several words, including adverbs that occur in the middle of it.

Whether it contains one word or several, the whole verb phrase acts as one verb.

voice

The form of a verb that shows whether or not the subject is performing the action. If the subject is performing the action, the verb is in the active voice. If the subject is not acting but being acted upon, the verb is in the passive voice:

The pitcher **threw** the ball.

the pitcher = subject, performing the action

threw = verb in the **active voice**

The ball **was thrown** by the pitcher.

the ball = subject, acted upon by the pitcher

was thrown = verb in the **passive voice**

Abbreviation

Grammatik flags abbreviations containing errors in form (for example, a missing period). It also suggests spelling out certain abbreviations.

Examples

Change: I saw Mr Smith yesterday.

To: I saw **Mr.** Smith yesterday.

In American English, the abbreviation Mr. requires a period. (Since this abbreviation does not require a period in British English, the British version of Grammatik does not flag this sentence.)

Change: He wrote some **nos.** on a scrap of paper.

To: He wrote some **numbers** on a scrap of paper.

Some abbreviations, like **Mrs.** and **Ave.**, are so common that we use them even in the body of a document. However, try to avoid most abbreviations in text. Spell them out for greater clarity.

Explanation

It is better to avoid abbreviations in formal and business writing. However, there are occasions when abbreviations are acceptable:

✦ for times and dates:

a.m., p.m., B.C., A.D.

✦ for names and places usually abbreviated:

St. Louis, Maple Ave.

✦ for professional references, especially if repeating the full name would be awkward:

NICU instead of **Newborn Intensive Care Unit**

In a case like the last example, however, always let your reader know what the abbreviation stands for the first time you refer to it:

The **Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU)** is the most heavily staffed unit in the hospital.

References

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," p. 2

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 122-40

Strunk and White, "Elements of Style," p. 81

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 568-71



Related Concepts

Adjective

Grammatik flags adverbs that should be adjectives instead. It also flags some cases where adjectives need a comma between them.

Example 1

Change: Jim felt **badly** when he heard the news.

To: Jim felt **bad** when he heard the news.

Use the adjective **bad** to describe "Jim" and his feelings, not the adverb **badly**. You would not say, for example, **I feel happily**. You would say **I feel happy**.

Example 2

Change: The friendly bouncy puppies were eager to play.

To: The **friendly, bouncy** puppies were eager to play.

Explanation 1

When verbs like "feel," "taste," "look," and "smell" act as linking verbs, they usually come before an adjective that describes the subject:

Mary **looked terrific** at the party.

looked = linking verb, connecting "she" and "terrific"

terrific = adjective, describing "Mary"

(It would be incorrect to say "Mary looked terrifically at the party" to describe her appearance.)

Verbs like "feel," "taste," "look," and "smell" can show action instead of behaving as linking verbs. When they behave like action verbs, they take adverbs, not adjectives. Only an adverb can describe when, where, or how a subject does something:

Mary **looked curiously** at the signature.

looked = action verb, meaning "stared"

curiously = adverb, describing "looked" (the action of looking at something)

Explanation 2

When adjectives right next to each other describe the same noun, a comma should usually separate them:

a **charming, beautiful** woman

this **long, boring, tiresome** convention

However, there are exceptions to this rule:

several **little old** men

Try these tests to see if you need a comma:

- ◆ switch the order of the adjectives
- ◆ put "and" between the adjectives

If the phrase you get with each test still sounds right and has the same meaning, then add a comma to your original phrase.

Examples

a **beautiful charming** woman = sounds fine

a **charming and beautiful** woman = sounds fine

Add a comma to the original phrase: a **charming, beautiful** woman

several **old little** men = sounds wrong

several **little and old** men = sounds wrong

Don't add a comma to the original phrase.

References

Gordon, "The Transitive Vampire," pp. 49-58

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 36-37, 240

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 185-87, 293-96



Related Concepts

Adverb

Grammarly flags adjectives that should really be adverbs. It also catches other problems involving adverbs, like ambiguous wording.

Example 1

Change: She sings beautiful.

To: She sings beautifully.

Use the adverb **beautifully** to describe the verb "sings," not the adjective **beautiful**.

You could also rephrase, using the adjective **beautiful** to describe a noun:

She has a **beautiful** voice.

Example 2

Change: Their steak is **real** good.

To: Their steak is **really** good.

Use the adverb **really** to describe the adjective "good," not the adjective **real**.

Example 3

Change: The last applicant did not do too **good** on the test.

To: The last applicant did not do too **well** on the test.

Use the adverb **well** to describe the verb "do," not the adjective **good**.

Note that **well** is also an adjective, but only when it means "in good health":

He is not a **well** man. (He is not in good health.)

She feels **well**. (She feels healthy.)

Example 4

Change: We learned **more quicker** than ever before.

To: We learned **more quickly** than ever before.

Or: We learned **more, even quicker** than before.

Putting **more** right next to **quicker** is confusing. It looks like an incorrect comparative form for **more quickly**.

Separating these words with a comma, or a word like **even**, clears up the confusion.

Explanation

Only an adverb can describe an action (verb), adjective, or other adverb:

Wordy writing often has too many adverbs and adverb phrases. To make your writing more forceful, try omitting them where possible. Here are some good candidates for trimming:

very, really, fairly, somewhat, considerably, substantially

kind of, sort of ("kind of long," "sort of interesting")

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 239-243

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 184-85

Gordon, "The Transitive Vampire," pp. 49-58



Related Concepts

Archaic

Grammatik flags archaic words and expressions, that is, terms that are now rare or no longer in use.

Examples

Change: **whilst**

To: **while**

Change: **not a whit**

To: **not at all**

Explanation

Archaic expressions can confuse your reader. It is generally best to avoid them.

References

Greenbaum and Whitcut, "Longman Guide to English Usage," pp. 54-55



[Related Concepts](#)

Article

Grammatik flags an article that does not match the noun it modifies.

Example 1

Change: **A important** project like this could make our reputation.

To: **An important** project like this could make our reputation.

Use **an** before a vowel sound, like the sound of **i** in **important**. (Notice that if you try to say "a idea" or "a elephant," you get an awkward, hiccupping sound.)

Example 2

Change: After **a hour** of conversation, I decided he was **a honest** man.

To: After **an hour** of conversation, I decided he was **an honest** man.

Use **an** before a silent **h**, like the **h** in **hour** and **honest**.

Example 3

Change: The clerk handed her **an notebook** and **an hard** eraser.

To: The clerk handed her **a notebook** and **a hard** eraser.

Use **a** before a consonant sound, like the sound of **n** in **notebook** and the sound of **h** in **hard**.

Example 4

Change: I bought **an UNESCO** greeting card.

To: I bought **a UNESCO** greeting card.

Use **a** before a consonant sound, like the **y** sound in the name of the letter **U**.

Explanation

Choose between **a** or **an** depending on the sound, not the spelling, of the next word. Use **a** before a consonant sound. Use **an** before a vowel sound.

"A" and "an" are called **indefinite articles** because they refer to general, nonspecific people, places, things, etc. ("a car," "an idea"). "The" is called the **definite article** because it refers to a specific person, place, thing, etc. ("the car," "the idea").

You can use **the** if

- ♦ the noun it modifies is the only one of its kind (for example, **the sun**), or
- ♦ the noun was already mentioned before in the text, or
- ♦ the text clearly identifies which noun you mean

Examples

At the beginning of a story about one of several bridges in Sarajevo,

Change: **The Sarajevo bridge** opened today for the first time in 23 months.

(The reader wonders "which bridge?")

To: **A Sarajevo bridge** opened today for the first time in 23 months.

Or: **The main bridge in Sarajevo** opened today for the first time in 23 months.

(The word "main" tells exactly which one you mean.)

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 252-253

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 178-79



[Related Concepts](#)

Capitalization

Grammatik flags lowercase words which should begin with a capital letter.

Example 1

Change: **the** new copier works well.

To: **The** new copier works well.

Always capitalize the first word of a sentence.

Example 2

Change: Then **sarah** asked if **i** wanted some coffee.

To: Then **Sarah** asked if **I** wanted some coffee.

Always capitalize proper nouns and the pronoun "I."

Explanation

Do not capitalize a common noun like "horse" or "house" unless it begins a sentence.

Here is a list with more examples of capitalization:

CAPITALIZE:

- ✦ **Names of people**
(Groucho Marx, Jim Thorpe, Toni Morrison, Batman)
- ✦ **Names of one-of-a-kind places**
(St. Louis, Niagara Falls, but not "downtown")
- ✦ **Names of countries, nationalities, races, and religions**
(Mexico, American, Negro, Jewish, Buddhist)
- ✦ **Names of languages**
(French, Russian)
- ✦ **Names of days and months**
(Saturday, December)
- ✦ **Names of particular buildings and landmarks**
(Empire State Building, Mount Rushmore)
- ✦ **Names of companies and organizations**
(The New York Times, WordPerfect Corporation, Greenpeace)
- ✦ **Titles of works**
("Hamlet," "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," "Carmen," "Mary Had a Little Lamb," "Wuthering Heights," "It's a Wonderful Life," "Paradise Lost")
- ✦ **Titles of people**
(King James, Senator Smith, Mr. Brown, Professor Carroll)
- ✦ **Acronyms**
(WPA, NATO, NBA, CEO, UNESCO)
- ✦ **The salutation and closing of a letter**
(Dear Ms. Jones, Sincerely)

References

Brusaw, et al., "Handbook of Technical Writing," pp. 2-7

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 80-100

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 556-63

Cliché

Grammatik flags clichés because they can make your document sound trite, boring, or even silly. Clichés are also often wordy.

Examples

Change: That answer made him **mad as a hornet**.

To: That answer made him **furious**.

Change: **Be that as it may**, they must finish the report by Friday.

To: **Even so**, they must finish the report by Friday.

Change: The cowboys **were lost to view** beyond the horizon.

To: The cowboys **disappeared** beyond the horizon.

Revising with an active verb, in this case **disappeared**, is one way to eliminate wordy clichés.

Explanation

A cliché is an overused expression. Readers have seen "as clear as mud," "face the music," and "Achilles' heel" so often that these phrases have lost their freshness and original power.

In some cases, even the cliché's meaning has become lost through overuse. Many people, for example, confuse "toe the line" with "tow the line" though their meanings, as the images suggest, are quite different.

Avoid clichés in your writing. They can be tempting, but the reader has seen them before, and their appearance suggests a lack of original thought.

References

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," pp. 274-75

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," pp.116-17

Jordan, "The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage," p.41

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 444-45



Related Concepts

Colloquial

Grammatik flags colloquial words and expressions in certain checking styles.

Examples

Change: It was a cinch.

To: It was **simple**.

Change: **Try and** make him understand.

To: **Try to** make him understand.

Change: Only a **bonehead** would do that.

To: Only a **fool** would do that.

Explanation

Colloquial language, which includes slang and informal diction, is fine in speech but inappropriate for most nonfiction writing. Using it may make your reader wonder if you know how to express yourself formally.

References

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 437-38



Related Concepts

Comma Splice or Fused Sentence

Grammarly flags sentences in which the connections between clauses are incorrect or missing.

Example 1

Change: Ann heard fire **engines nearby, she** rushed home.

To: Ann heard fire **engines nearby. She** rushed home.

Or: Ann heard fire **engines nearby, so she** rushed home.

Or: **When** Ann heard fire **engines nearby, she** rushed home.

Or: Ann heard fire **engines nearby; she** rushed home.

You cannot make one sentence from two independent clauses like **Ann heard fire engines nearby** and **she rushed home** by putting them together with just a comma between them. An error sentence of that kind is called a "comma splice."

Example 2

Change: We gave the dog a **bath we** ate dinner.

To: We gave the dog a **bath. We** ate dinner.

Or: We gave the dog a **bath, and we** ate dinner.

Or: **After** we gave the dog a **bath, we** ate dinner.

Or: We gave the dog a **bath; we** ate dinner.

You cannot make one sentence from two independent clauses like **we gave the dog a bath** and **we ate dinner** by putting them together with nothing between them. An error sentence of that kind is called a "fused sentence."

Explanation

Comma splices and fused sentences join two complete thoughts incorrectly.

The comma splice tries to join the two thoughts with only a comma:

Everyone disagreed with him, he did not care.

The fused sentence does the same thing but without any punctuation:

Everyone disagreed with him he did not care.

Both errors can be very confusing to your reader. You can correct comma splices and fused sentences by any of the following methods:

- ◆ Put a period between the two thoughts and make two sentences.

Everyone disagreed with him. He did not care.

- ◆ Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, so, for, yet) between the two thoughts.

Everyone disagreed with him, but he did not care.

- ◆ Subordinate one of the complete thoughts by placing a subordinator (although, because, since, when, etc.) in front of it.

Although everyone disagreed with him, he did not care.

- ◆ Put a semicolon between the two thoughts.

Everyone disagreed with him; he did not care.

- ◆ Combine the two independent clauses by rewording.

He was indifferent to everyone's opinions.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 17-23, 39-42

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 318-32

Gordon, "The Transitive Vampire," pp. 111-16



Related Concepts

Commonly Confused

Grammatik flags words that can confuse a writer because their sounds, spellings, or meanings are similar: The three rule classes that do this are Commonly Confused, Homonym, and Similar Words.

The Commonly Confused rule class flags a confusing word when Grammatik cannot tell if its counterpart would be a better choice or not. Usually, this is because the two words have the same part of speech (for example, "acid" and "acid"). The Advice gives you the meanings of both words. You decide which one is right for the text.

Examples

Change: The **boarders** of the country are changing.

To: The **borders** of the country are changing.

Boarders are "lodgers whose rent includes regular meals." In the sentence above, the replacement **borders** would be the correct choice.

Do Not

Change: The **boarders** all sat down to eat dinner.

For this sentence, the replacement **borders** would be the wrong choice.

You can ignore further flags for any specific word in Commonly Confused by selecting the option "Ignore Phrase." If you want to ignore all error flags for Commonly Confused, simply turn off the rule class.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," p. 164-75, 251-272

Strunk and White, "Elements of Style," pp. 39-65



Related Concepts

Comparative or Superlative

Grammatik flags errors involving the usage and form of comparatives and superlatives.

Example 1

Change: Which is the **youngest of the two**?

To: Which is the **younger of the two**?

Use a comparative like **younger** to compare two people or things.

Use a superlative like **youngest** to compare three or more people or things.

Example 2

Change: Getting a credit card seems **more easier** now than it used to be.

To: Getting a credit card seems **easier** now than it used to be.

Use either **more** or an **-er** ending to form a comparative (see Explanation below), but never both.

Example 3

Change: He got a **more bad** grade on the exam than she did.

To: He got a **worse** grade on the exam than she did.

Some adjectives, like **bad** and **good**, have irregular comparative forms (shown in the Explanation below).

Explanation

There are three forms of adjectives and adverbs:

Name of the Form	What Does it Look Like?	Examples: Adjectives	Adverbs
positive	dictionary entry	big happy difficult	slowly fast
comparative	has more before it, or has -er at the end (never both)	bigger happier more difficult	more slowly faster
superlative	has most before it, or has -est at the end (never both)	biggest happiest most difficult	most slowly fastest

For adjectives, whether to use **more** or **-er** depends on the number of syllables in the word:

one syllable	Add -er or -r	smaller, lighter, freer, closer
two syllables ending in -le	Add -r	simpler, littler, gentler
two syllables ending in -y	Change the -y to -ier	prettier, fancier, friendlier
three or more syllables	Use more	more outlandish, more interesting

Similar rules apply for using **most** or **-est** to form the superlative of adjectives:

- smallest**
- simplest**
- prettiest**
- most outlandish**

Adverbs that end in **-ly** cannot take **-er** or **-est**. Always use **more** and **most** to make their comparative and superlative forms:

- easily**
- more easily**
- most easily**

Use **less** and **least** to make negative comparisons:

free	awkwardly
less free	less awkwardly
least free	least awkwardly

These irregular adjectives and adverbs do not follow the standard pattern:

- good (adjective), well (adverb)**
- better**
- best**

bad (adjective), badly (adverb)

worse

worst

some (adjective)

more

most

many (adjective)

more

most

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 241-42

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 297-99



Related Concepts

Conditional Clause

Grammatik flags "if" and "wish" clauses when their verbs are not in the correct form.

Examples

Change: They could have watched the parade **if** they **would have come** earlier.

To: They could have watched the parade **if** they **had come** earlier.

In an "if" clause, use **had** instead of **would have**.

The clause **if they had come earlier** expresses something contrary to fact (they did not come earlier).

Change: I **wish** his secretary **would have told** me he would be away for a week.

To: I **wish** his secretary **had told** me he would be away for a week.

In a clause after "wish," use **had** instead of **would have**.

Explanation

When an independent clause contains a modal auxiliary phrase like "would have," always use "had" (not "would have") in the accompanying "if" clause.

Examples

"If I would have noticed that your hand was stuck in the jelly jar, I would have helped you." **[incorrect]**

"If I had noticed that your hand was stuck in the jelly jar, I would have helped you." **[correct]**

"I would have told you if I would have known." **[incorrect]**

"I would have told you if I had known." **[correct]**

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 225

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," p. 236



Related Concepts

Conjunction

Grammatik flags conjunctions that are incorrect or too informal for your checking style.

Example 1

Change: She was **neither** right **or** wrong.

To: She was **neither** right **nor** wrong.

Use **either** with **or**. Use **neither** with **nor**.

Example 2

Change: Our director had to choose **between** the new office **or** his old one.

To: Our director had to choose **between** the new office **and** his old one.

Use **between** with **and** ("between X and Y").

Example 3

Change: **Plus** you should ask him for a raise.

To: **Also**, you should ask him for a raise.

Using **plus** is too informal for most writing. (Grammatik does not flag this case in checking styles set at the informal level.)

Explanation

Conjunctions connect words, phrases, and clauses to each other. There are two major types of conjunctions: coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions.

Coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet) always connect the same parts of speech:

"salt **and** pepper" (noun **and** noun)

"win **or** lose" (verb **or** verb)

"merciless **but** just" (adjective **but** adjective).

"So" and "for" can only connect independent clauses to each other, not words or phrases.

Coordinating conjunctions can also operate in pairs with other words. When they do this, they are called "**correlative conjunctions**":

"**NEITHER** blackmail **NOR** whining could change his mind."

"**BOTH** ducks **AND** geese are waterfowl."

Other correlative conjunctions are "either/or," "not only/but," and "whether/or."

Some of the most common **subordinating conjunctions** are "although," "because," "if," "since," "unless," "until," and "whenever." Subordinating conjunctions are a type of subordinator and always begin dependent clauses. They ensure that the dependent clause is incomplete. The thought following the subordinating conjunction would be complete if the subordinating conjunction were not there.

"**Although** the report was brief." (dependent clause - incomplete thought)

"The report was brief." (main clause - complete thought)

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 267

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 189-90



[Related Concepts](#)

Consecutive Elements

Grammatik flags consecutive nouns and consecutive prepositional phrases when they exceed the maximum allowed for your checking style.

Grammatik will only flag these consecutive elements if the Consecutive Elements rule class is turned on. You can specify how many consecutive nouns and consecutive prepositional phrases you want Grammatik to allow.

Example 1

Change: The most outspoken of the members **of the student committee for the improvement of relations between the faculty and the students** made a speech.

To: The most outspoken member **on the student committee** to improve faculty-student relations made a speech

The first sentence contains five prepositional phrases in a row. The revision contains only one prepositional phrase and is also much shorter.

Example 2

Change: We will be distributing **employee productivity increase bonus movie passes**.

To: We will be distributing **movie passes** to **employees** as a **bonus** for their increased **productivity**.

The first sentence contains six nouns in a row. The revision has no more than two nouns together. The gain in clarity is well worth the slight increase in length.



Related Concepts

Date and Time Format

Grammatik flags errors in the formation of dates and times.

Examples

Change: On **July 20 1969**, Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the moon.

To: On **July 20, 1969**, Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the moon.

Change: By **2:00 o'clock** we had all finished eating.

To: By **2:00** we had all finished eating.

Since the accepted forms for dates and times differ in the U.S. and Great Britain, there are different rules in Grammatik's American and British versions.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 33-34, 105-06

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 501-02



[Related Concepts](#)

Double Negative

Grammatik flags two negative words in the same clause.

Examples

Change: They had **not scarcely** begun when the bell rang.

To: They had **scarcely** begun when the bell rang.

Change: **None** of the guards had **no** problem entering the vault.

To: **None** of the guards had **any** problem entering the vault.

Explanation

Two negative words in the same thought makes a double negative. This is nonstandard in business and formal writing.

Grammatik will flag any two of these negative words in the same clause:

no, never, not, none, nothing, hardly, scarcely, barely

To correct a double negative, delete one of the negatives or change one to a positive counterpart:

any, ever, some, anything, something

Examples

Change: She does **not** have **no** money.

To: She does **not** have money.

Or: She has **no** money.

Or: She does **not** have **any** money.

Change: We thought **nothing** we could say would **never** change her mind.

To: We thought **nothing** we could say would change her mind.

Or: We thought **nothing** we could say would **ever** change her mind.

Or: We did **not** think **anything** we could say would change her mind.

References

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," p. 52

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 243-45

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," p. 295

Doubled Word or Punctuation

Grammatik flags a word or punctuation mark found twice or more in a row.

Examples

Change: We had a wonderful time at **her her** party.

To: We had a wonderful time at **her** party.

Change: After completing that revision,, they published the book.

To: After completing that revision, they published the book.

Explanation

Doubled words and punctuation marks are almost always errors. They are usually caused by typing mistakes, as in the following sentence:

"He went to the the store."

They can also be caused by incorrectly placing a period after an abbreviation like "etc.":

"He had already read Dickens, Balzac, Woolf, etc.."

In some instances, a doubled word is justified even if slightly awkward:

"I cannot believe that that is the reason he resigned."

"What it is is shameful."

However, doubled punctuation marks are always errors.



Related Concepts

Ellipsis

Grammatik flags three or four periods in a row that do not have spaces between them. (Since this rule class reflects U.S. usage, it is turned off in the British version.)

Because American usage of ellipses differs from British usage, this rule class is inactive in the British version of Grammatik.

Examples

Change: According to his letter, "the four directors...were all speechless."

To: According to his letter, "the four directors . . . were all speechless."

Explanation

When you quote, you must use the author's exact words. However, you may omit material from the middle of the quotation, as long as you let your reader know by using an ellipsis.

An ellipsis is three spaced periods (. . .). It tells the reader you have omitted one or more words from the material you are quoting.

Examples

(Original sentence: The committee's ideas, most of them useful, have less to do with overhauling management than improving attitude.)

As the report notes, "The committee's ideas . . . have less to do with overhauling management than improving attitude."

You usually do not need to use the ellipsis at the beginning or end of quotations (since there will almost always be material that comes before or after the quotation). However, when you are ending your sentence with a quotation that is clearly unfinished, an ellipsis makes your reader's job easier:

He saw "the pins, the balls of yarn, old spools"

(Notice that a fourth period is added to the ellipsis to close the sentence.)

Make sure you do not use punctuation from the quotation before or after the ellipsis, such as (, . . .) or (. . .,).

References

Jordan, "The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage," p. 205

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 70-71, 76

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 551-52



[Related Concepts](#)

End-of-Sentence Preposition

Grammatik flags a sentence if it ends with a preposition, sometimes offering an instant rewrite.

Examples

Change: I never met the man **you spoke to**.

To: I never met the man **to whom you spoke**.

Change: We want to know the name of the magazine **he writes articles for**.

To: We want to know the name of the magazine **for which he writes articles**.

Explanation

Writers, teachers, and critics once considered ending a sentence with a preposition a serious writing fault, but this is rarely the case nowadays. Ending with a preposition does, however, lend the sentence an informal tone. Consider rephrasing when using a formal writing style.

The traditional argument is that ending a sentence with a preposition is "un-Latinate" and clumsy. English, though, is a very different language from Latin, and the attempt to force it to follow Latin standards often produces unnecessary problems.

An end-of-sentence preposition can sometimes make a sentence flat and ugly:

"Home is where he was at."

(Compare "He was at home.")

But a sentence like the following would suffer if one tried to obey the rule and relocate the preposition:

"He asked the stranger where he was from."

Winston Churchill's remark that this rule "is nonsense up with which I will not put" wryly illustrates the awkwardness of straining too hard to follow the rule. Many writers think that the best advice is to aim for clarity and grace and let the prepositions fall where they may.

References

Brusaw, et al., "Handbook of Technical Writing," p. 516

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," pp. 482-83

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," p. 247



[Related Concepts](#)

End-of-Sentence Punctuation

Grammarly flags questionable punctuation at the end of a sentence.

Examples

Change: Our wallets were gone!.

To: Our wallets were gone!

Change: Is he there?.

To: Is he there?

Explanation

Only three punctuation marks can end a sentence: a question mark, an exclamation point, and a period.

"There is a moon out tonight?"

"There is a moon out tonight!"

"There is a moon out tonight."

If you end a sentence with a question mark or an exclamation point, never follow it with a period. If you end your sentence with a quotation, never punctuate inside and outside the second pair of quotation marks. In other words, do not write

"All the world's a stage.".

Periods belong inside the second pair of quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points belong inside the second pair of quotation marks:

◆ if they are part of the quotation:

She enjoyed reading "What Makes Sammy Run?"

Our theater company is staging "Oklahoma!"

◆ if they apply to the tone of your sentence:

Who wrote "What Makes Sammy Run?"

I just got the lead role in "Oklahoma!"

Question marks and exclamation points belong outside the second pair of quotation marks if they apply to your sentence but not to what you are quoting:

Who wrote "East of Eden"?

Have you read "Frankenstein"?

I was so scared when I read "Frankenstein"!

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 78-79

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 476-79



Related Concepts

Foreign

Grammatik flags many foreign expressions and suggests English replacements.

Examples

Change: Have they written you **vis-a-vis** your application yet?

To: Have they written you **about** your application yet?

Change: Her ex-husband was **persona non grata** at the wedding.

To: Her ex-husband was **unwelcome** at the wedding.

Explanation

You should omit foreign expressions from your writing unless your topic requires them. There are two reasons for this.

First, foreign words and phrases may be lost on your reader. Second, if they are not, their appearance suggests that you are using them merely to impress.

Always make clarity your first consideration. Your reader stands a better chance of understanding "accomplished fact" than "fait accompli." Other examples follow.

Change: He paints darkly, **a la** Rembrandt.

To: He paints darkly, **in the style of** Rembrandt.

Change: **Sotto voce**, she described the plan.

To: **In a whisper**, she described the plan.

If you decide to use a foreign expression, consider underlining or italicizing it, especially if it is uncommon. If you translate the foreign expression, enclose the translation in quotation marks:

At the party, our Turkish friends greeted us with merhaba ("hello").

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 59, 73-74



Related Concepts

Formalisms

Grammarly flags a variety of writing problems that may concern traditional editors.

Examples

Change: The package will **hopefully** arrive soon.

To: **We hope** the package will arrive soon.

Change: **Or** our customer service staff could take the calls for you.

To: Our customer service staff could **also** take the calls for you.

Explanation

Some of the rules in this class have more to do with purity of style than clarity of communication. Others pertain to content but are so often misused that correct usage has become questionable. While some writers see such "formalisms" as unnecessary, others see them as distinctions that protect the language from erosion.

Whether you choose to observe the following rules or not depends upon your audience and your own preferences. If you do choose to follow them, keep this rule class turned on.

What follows is a list of some of the most common "formalisms" and a brief discussion of their importance.

BEGINNING A SENTENCE WITH A CONJUNCTION.

Because conjunctions connect words, phrases, or clauses, some writers feel that a conjunction (like "and" or "but") should not begin a sentence since there is nothing yet to connect.

However, the conjunction at the beginning of a sentence still connects: it connects the thought from the previous sentence to the thought that follows the conjunction. Since sentences do not exist in isolated units but are dependent on each other, there is no reason why connections cannot cross sentence boundaries. As with any formalism, the only question worth asking is, "Do my content and clarity suffer if I break this rule?"

"BETWEEN" and "AMONG"

Use "between" when referring to two people or items, "among" when referring to more than two. Because this distinction relates to content, it is one you should observe.

DANGLING MODIFIERS

A dangling modifier is an error that occurs when the implied subject of one clause clashes with the stated subject of another. For instance, according to the following sentence

"Standing in front of the old house, the memories came flooding back," the "memories" were standing in front of the old house.

According to this sentence "Although only fifteen inches long, the nurse declared that the infant was in good health," the nurse was only fifteen inches long.

Though they often make for good comedy, dangling modifiers are real errors because they interfere with your content. Correct them by making sure that the implied subject of the first clause begins the next one. The above sentences would be corrected as follows:

"Standing in front of the old house, I felt the memories come flooding back."

"Although only fifteen inches long, the infant was in good health according to the nurse."

You can also correct such sentences by inserting a stated subject in the first clause or by general rewording.

"DISINTERESTED" and "UNINTERESTED"

"Disinterested" means "impartial"; "uninterested" means "not interested." These words obviously have very different meanings and should not be used interchangeably.

"HOPEFULLY"

Many people use "hopefully" to mean "I hope," but its correct meaning is "with hope." Thus, the sentence

"Hopefully, Martha will arrive on the next train,"

should mean that Martha will arrive, filled with hope, on the next train. Unfortunately, the correct use of "hopefully" is becoming rarer.

This is an important concern because it has to do with content, not merely style. As readers, we naturally hope that an author knows what he or she is saying. Avoid misusing "hopefully" except in informal circumstances.

LATIN SINGULARS AND PLURALS

Few people today are aware of words like "datum," but such distinctions are still recognized in more formal writing styles. A few of the most common examples of Latin singulars and plurals follow.

alumnus - singular (masculine)

alumni - plural (masculine, masculine and feminine)

alumna - singular (feminine)

alumnae - plural (feminine)

datum - singular

data - plural
medium - singular
media - plural
stratum - singular
strata - plural

"WHO" AND "WHOM"

"Who" is always a subject, "whom" an object. Thus, in the question "Who do you want it for?" the pronoun "Who" should be "whom" because the person in question is receiving, not doing. Many feel comfortable using "whom" only when it follows a preposition ("To whom it may concern," "someone for whom I have great affection"), but it is far more reliable to take a moment to understand whether the person represented by the pronoun is acting or receiving action.

This distinction should be preserved in formal use.

References

Williams, "Style," pp. 192-96

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," pp. 482-83



Related Concepts

Gender-Specific

Grammatik flags words that unnecessarily imply a specific gender, whether male or female.

Examples

Change: She is a **spinster**.

To: She is a **single woman**.

Change: Who is the **spokesman** for the agency?

To: Who is the **spokesperson** for the agency?

Explanation

Gender-specific language unnecessarily assigns a gender in situations when the reference could be to either gender. While such an assumption was once acceptable, writers today realize that gender-specific language is imprecise and serves only to alienate one half of humanity. Be especially careful of gender-specific language in the following areas.

JOB TERMINOLOGY

Avoid the temptation to make generic job titles masculine or feminine. The use of "policeman" to refer to a police officer would understandably offend the thousands of women who work in police departments. Similarly, it is no longer appropriate to assume that a "nurse" is always a woman, and a label like "male nurse" is as offensive as "woman doctor."

Never assume that a job title refers to a gender unless gender in some way determines the job (for instance, "wet nurse").

Instead of: "fireman"

Use: "firefighter"

Instead of: "poetess"

Use: "poet"

SEXIST GENERALIZATIONS

When you refer to a group or class of people, be careful not to apply an assumed gender to it. Such an assumption would lead one to believe that all farmers are male and all feminists are female. Until recently, it was the rare history book that avoided the trap of referring, for instance, to the "early American settlers and their wives." Such phrasing is not only offensive to the women who endured the same hardships as men; it is historically misleading.

PRONOUN USE AND AGREEMENT

A pronoun must agree in number and gender with its antecedent. If the antecedent is masculine, the pronoun must also be masculine for the sake of agreement. Things get complicated, however, when the antecedent's gender is not obvious. In a sentence like this:

"Each board member is responsible for [pronoun] own case files."

the writer must decide whether the pronoun should be masculine (his), feminine (her), both (his or her), or plural (their).

Since the antecedent is singular, the possessive pronoun should also be singular, which would disqualify "their." "His or her" is a logical but often awkward choice, especially if you have to repeat "his or her" throughout an entire document. Using masculine or feminine pronouns generically has rightfully been labeled sexist.

Clearly, no simple solution to this problem exists. However, consider these two alternatives:

✦ Make the pronoun and antecedent plural when you can. Thus, the sample sentence above would read, "All board members are responsible for their own case files."

✦ Rewrite to eliminate the need for pronouns. A sentence like

"A psychiatrist and his patients enjoy a unique relationship."

can be reworded in a way that sidesteps the need for a pronoun (and a sexist generalization) altogether:

"The psychiatrist-patient relationship is unique."

As Casey Miller and Kate Swift point out, "Sometimes the puzzle is not how to avoid using 'generic' pronouns, but how and why one ever crept into the sentence to start with."

References

Miller and Swift, "The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing," pp.51-64



[Related Concepts](#)

Homonym

Grammatik flags common homonyms when they appear misused.

Examples

Change: **Its** snowing outside right now.

To: **It's** snowing outside right now.

Change: The bear got **it's** leg caught in a trap.

To: The bear got **its** leg caught in a trap.

Change: If **your** thirsty, take some water.

To: If **you're** thirsty, take some water.

Explanation

A homonym is a word that sounds like another word with a different meaning and spelling. Some of the most frequently confused homonyms are

it's = contraction of "it is"

its = possessive form of "it"

their = possessive form of "they"

there = refers to a place

they're = contraction of "they are"

threw = past tense of "throw"

through = passing in and out of something; done with

to = preposition (to the store) or infinitive (to laugh)

too = means "also" or "overly"

two = the number "2"

who's = contraction of "who is" or "who has"

whose = possessive form of "who_"

If you are unsure about the distinction between other homonyms, consult your dictionary.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 164-75

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 458-63



[Related Concepts](#)

Hyphenation

Grammatik flags cases where hyphens are missing or misused.

Example 1

Change: Two **five-year olds** and their **three year-old** cousin found the valuable coin.

To: Two **five-year-olds** and their **three-year-old** cousin found the valuable coin.

Write a term like **ten-month-olds** or **one-week-old** as one hyphenated word.

Example 2

Change: My **great grandmother** just celebrated her 100th birthday.

To: My **great-grandmother** just celebrated her 100th birthday.

A term for a relative that starts with **great-** is always one hyphenated word.

Example 3

Change: We think **state funded** programs can have an impact.

To: We think **state-funded** programs can have an impact.

When a noun like **state** and a participle like **funded** act together as one adjective, write them as one hyphenated word.

Example 4

Change: Bach is a **very well-known** composer.

To: Bach is a **very well known** composer.

Don't hyphenate an adjective beginning with **well** when an adverb (for example, **very**) comes before it.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 186-98

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 458-63



[Related Concepts](#)

Idiomatic Usage

Grammatik flags phrases that do not agree with normal idiomatic usage. Most of these involve prepositions.

Example 1

Change: They must **comply to** the specifications.

To: They must **comply with** the specifications.

The usual preposition after **comply** is **with**.

Example 2

Change: He is **a genius for** selling cars.

To: He is **a genius at** selling cars.

The usual preposition after **be a genius** is **at**.

Example 3

Change: She **took it for granite** that her daughter would call her first.

To: She **took it for granted** that her daughter would call her first.

The word **granted** in the expression **take something or someone for granted** means "given," "agreed," or "a matter of course." It does not mean "stone."

Explanation

The correct choice of preposition is largely idiomatic. For example, since it is correct to say "according to," it might seem that it should also be correct to say "in accordance to." However, the correct preposition after "in accordance" is "with." In such a case, the only way to know the correct preposition is through repeated use.

Other examples follow:

Instead of: "authority about"

Use: "authority on"

Instead of: "comply to"

Use: "comply with"

Instead of: "desirous to"

Use: "desirous of"

Instead of: "prefer A over B"

Use: "prefer A to B"

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 245-46



Related Concepts

Incomplete Sentence

Grammatik flags sentences whose main clauses are missing a subject or a verb.

Example 1

Change: **Just in time for the conference.**

To: **We arrived just in time for the conference.**

The first "sentence" has neither a subject nor a verb. It is not a complete sentence.

Example 2

Change: **Several members of the club who were smoking cigars.**

To: **Several members of the club were smoking cigars.**

The only verb in the first sentence, **were smoking**, is in a dependent clause ("who were smoking cigars"). There is no verb for the subject "members."

Removing the relative pronoun **who** turns the sentence into just one clause with the subject "members" and the verb "were smoking." Since this revised sentence has both a subject and a verb, it is complete.

Explanation

All Standard and Formal checking styles in Grammatik require that sentences be complete. To be complete, a sentence must have:

- ◆ an initial capital
- ◆ a subject (a noun or pronoun) in a main clause
- ◆ a verb in a main clause
- ◆ the ability to stand alone coherently.
- ◆ end punctuation

If it is missing one of these, the result is an incomplete sentence (also called a sentence fragment). Incomplete sentences are grammatically incorrect. More importantly, they can confuse your reader.

You can correct most incomplete sentences by one of the following methods:

Connect the fragment to the sentence before or after it.

"Bob decided not to study marine biology. Because he had never been in the marines." **[incorrect]**

"Bob decided not to study marine biology because he had never been in the marines." **[correct]**

Supply the fragment with its own subject and/or verb.

"He has several favorite pastimes. For example, swimming, knitting, and tickling the dog." **[incorrect]**

"He has several favorite pastimes. For example, he enjoys swimming, knitting, and tickling the dog." **[correct]**

Combine and reword the fragment and sentence before or after it.

"People who think directing traffic is fun. They have never stood in a busy intersection." **[incorrect]**

"People who think directing traffic is fun have never stood in a busy intersection." **[correct]**

References

Gordon, "The Transitive Vampire," pp. 107-10

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," pp. 29-34

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 304-12

Williams, "Style," pp. 170-71



[Related Concepts](#)

Incorrect Verb Form

Grammatik flags a variety of errors in the formation and use of verbs.

Example 1

Change: They **have working** out at that gym for some time now.

To: They **have been working** out at that gym for some time now.

An error like this usually happens because a word gets lost in editing.

Example 2

Change: We **should of phoned** before we came.

To: We **should have phoned** before we came.

In speech, **have** sometimes sounds like **of**. This can result in a writing error.

Example 3

Change: The birds **flied** south for the winter.

To: The birds **flew** south for the winter.

Flied is a correct past form of **fly** for some special cases, usually involving baseball, clockwork, or the theater. However, the normal simple past tense of **fly** is **flew**.

Explanation

Even if they agree with their subjects, verbs can take nonstandard forms which you should avoid.

Perhaps the most common of these is the "ize" suffix which, when attached to a noun or adjective, creates a verb (for example, "prioritize"). Avoid such artificial verbs. They are a form of jargon and will therefore exclude part of your audience. Keep in mind, however, that many legitimate verbs, like "realize" and "sympathize," end in "ize."

Another common incorrect verb form is the confusion of "of" for "have" in phrases like "should of" and "could of." The correct form is "should have" and "could have." This confusion is due to the similar sound of "have" and "of." Other examples of incorrect verb form follow:

Instead of: "finalize"

Use: "complete," "finish"

Instead of: "if that was"

Use: "if that were" (subjunctive mood)

Instead of: "reoccur"

Use: "recur"

Instead of: "suppose to"

Use: "supposed to"

References

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," p. 223, 512.



[Related Concepts](#)

Infinitive

Grammatik flags an infinitive incorrectly used after certain adjectives and verbs. Most are verbs that can only take a gerund (-ing verb form).

Example 1

Change: The plumber suggested **to replace** the pipes.

To: The plumber suggested **replacing** the pipes.

The verb **suggest** cannot take an infinitive like **to replace** after it. **Suggest** requires a verb ending in **-ing** after it, for example, **replacing**.

Example 2

Change: The bookkeeper is responsible **to balance** the accounts.

To: The bookkeeper is responsible **for balancing** the accounts.

The adjective **responsible** does not usually take an infinitive like **to balance** after it. The normal form of this expression is **responsible for (doing something)**.

Explanation

The infinitive, also called infinitive phrase, is "to" plus the base form of a verb ("to run," "to be"). Use only the base form of the verb after "to" ("to laugh," not "to laughs").

When an infinitive is the subject of your sentence, always match it with a singular verb:

"To err IS human."

"To leave now SEEMS rude."

Be careful not to confuse an infinitive with a present participle, as in the following examples.

"I hope visiting my Aunt Gert this summer."

(Replace "visiting" with the infinitive "to visit.")

"He enjoys to talk with people."

(Replace "to talk" with "talking.")

Certain verbs, like "decide" and "expect," invite infinitives to follow them:

"He decided to ask for a raise."

"I expect to graduate in June."

"I want to see the Grand Canyon."

Remember also that "to" can be a preposition. If it is followed by a noun or pronoun, "to" is a preposition. If it is followed by the base form of a verb, "to" is beginning the infinitive phrase:

"to propose" (infinitive)

"to the moon" (prepositional phrase)

"to see" (infinitive)

"to him" (prepositional phrase)

References

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," pp. 317-18

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 342-43

Williams, "Style," pp. 196-97



[Related Concepts](#)

Jargon

Grammatik flags "bureaucratese" terms and other heavy expressions, especially those commonly found in business documents.

Examples

Change: Have they tried **accessing** him on his private line?

To: Have they tried **calling** him on his private line?

Change: We received a notice **pertaining to** the reorganization.

To: We received a notice **about** the reorganization.

Explanation

Jargon is the specialized vocabulary of a group or profession. When properly used, it can be a compact and efficient means of communication. An electrical engineer saves time and avoids confusion by referring to LEDs (light-emitting diodes) instead of "those funny blinking lights." Terms such as "interface" in computer technology, "complex" in psychology, and "party" in law are other examples of jargon.

However, jargon may also be a way to keep those outside the group confused and intimidated, and the word itself usually has a negative connotation. (Some writers make a distinction between "technical language," which aids communication, and "jargon," which obscures it.)

Jargon's "bad reputation" has another source. Terms that are legitimate in a certain field become distorted when misused outside that field. A noun like "interface," which has a specific meaning in the computer field, sounds both pompous and vague when people use it as a verb: "I will try to interface with you next week over a power lunch." This is not language for the purpose of communication.

Avoid jargon when you can. Use words that your readers will immediately understand.

References

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," pp. 203-04

Jordan, "The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage," p. 105

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," p. 331

Strunk and White, "The Elements of Style," pp. 81-84

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 46-47



[Related Concepts](#)

Long Sentence

Grammatik flags sentences that exceed the "Maximum Allowed" setting in your checking style.

Grammatik will only flag long sentences if the Long Sentence rule class is turned on. You can specify the number of words that you want Grammatik to allow in a sentence.

Examples

Change: Although the branch was a great deal higher than he had ever climbed before, and despite the fact that he had had his cast removed only a week earlier, Joshua was determined to climb the tree and seat himself in lordly nonchalance on the branch, since he knew that this was the only way he could forever impress his little brother Tim.

To: The branch was a great deal higher than he had ever climbed before, and his cast had come off only a week ago. Still, Joshua was determined to climb the tree. He knew that only by seating himself in lordly nonchalance on that branch could he forever impress his little brother Tim.

Explanation

Long sentences can make your reader's job unnecessarily difficult.

While not every sentence needs to be, or should be, four or five words long, sentences such as this one that make your reader wait too long for such vital information as the main clause or the verb to a subject that appeared some thirty words before are tedious and confusing. In a sentence like the last, the reader notices the sentence's length, not its content.

Avoid excessively long sentences. If you do write one, perhaps for sentence variety, take pity on your reader. Give the most important information first, and keep your subjects and verbs fairly close together.

References

Brusaw, et al., "Handbook of Technical Writing," pp. 625-26

Williams, "Style," pp. 108-19



[Related Concepts](#)

Mid-Sentence Adverb

Grammatik flags certain adverbs in the middle of a sentence when they occur in an awkward position in relation to the verb.

Examples

Change: It **almost is** too late to ask them.

To: It **is almost** too late to ask them.

Change: She **already may have left**.

To: She **may already have left**.

- ◆ The preferred position for adverbs like **almost**, **definitely**, and **already** is
- ◆ after a single-word form of the verb **to be**
- ◆ after the first auxiliary verb in a verb phrase
- ◆ before any other single-word verb

These are style guidelines, not rigid grammar rules. They reflect the style preferred in more formal types of writing.

Explanation

Adverbs do not always have a fixed location. The adverb "suddenly" can describe the verb "appeared" from any of the following positions:

Suddenly, the man appeared at the door.

The man suddenly appeared at the door.

The man appeared suddenly at the door.

The man appeared at the door suddenly.

'Mid-sentence' or 'medial' adverbs are those, like 'usually' and 'seldom', that generally come in the middle of a clause. In a verb phrase containing more than one verb, a mid-sentence adverb should come before the second verb.

'He has never been arrested'

is preferable to

'He never has been arrested'.

When a form of 'to be' is the only verb, the mid-sentence adverb should come after it.

'Ann is often late'

is preferable to

'Ann often is late'.

Placing the adverb in this medial position is a matter of style, not grammar. The above examples show the commonly preferred word order in most formal writing.

References

Jordan, 'The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage', p. 7

Missing Modifier

Grammatik flags a noun that is singular and countable but does not have a modifier before it.

Examples

Change: I really enjoyed **movie** last night.

To: I really enjoyed **the movie** last night.

Change: Reading nonfiction **book** is his favorite pastime.

To: Reading nonfiction **books** is his favorite pastime.

Explanation

In English, only uncountable or plural nouns can normally appear without modifiers before them.

These two sentences are correct:

We have **time**.

time = uncountable noun

We need **chairs**.

chairs = plural noun

The next sentence is not correct, because the singular countable noun **chair** needs a word like **a**, **the**, **your**, **one**, or **this** before it.

We need **chair**. (incorrect)

chair = singular countable noun



Related Concepts

Noun Phrase

Grammatik flags a variety of errors in the formation of noun phrases.

Examples

Change: They may discover how right we were one of **these day**.

To: They may discover how right we were one of **these days**.

Change: **Both** of the **call** were for him.

To: **Both** of the **calls** were for him.

Change: **A** quick **glances** at the letter will give you some idea what they mean.

To: **A** quick **glance** at the letter will give you some idea what they mean.

Explanation

A noun phrase is a group of words that acts like a noun. It consists of a noun and its modifiers, or a pronoun, acting as a subject, object, or complement. Most noun phrase errors are due to missing words, number disagreement, and scrambled word order. The following list highlights the major error types:

- ✦ Missing modifier before a noun
("He let out dog.")
- ✦ Number discrepancy
("A family with five boy moved in next door.")
- ✦ Scrambled word order
("His time for the race sets a new record track.")



Related Concepts

Number Style

Grammatik flags figures that should be in spelled-out form, and also flags certain spelled-out numbers that should be figures instead.

Grammatik will only flag number style problems if the Number Style rule class is turned on. You can specify the range of numbers in figure form that you want Grammatik to flag.

Example 1

Change: All **3** rooms have built-in bookcases.

To: All **three** rooms have built-in bookcases.

Spell out whole numbers between 0 and 9 in most writing styles. In certain styles, the convention is to spell out numbers between 0 and 99.

Example 2

Change: Only **fifty** per cent of the voters participated in the election.

To: Only **50** per cent of the voters participated in the election.

Write a percentage as a figure unless it comes at the beginning of a sentence.

Explanation

Depending on the checking style you have selected, Grammatik suggests spelling out numbers from zero to nine or from zero to ninety-nine instead of referring to them as figures (1, 2, 3, etc.).

If you are using the Very Strict checking style, spell out numbers from zero to ninety-nine. For all other checking styles, spell out only the numbers from zero to nine. Whichever style you are in, however, avoid mixing spelled-out numbers and figures in the same sentence or paragraph. Use figures if one or more numbers falls outside the range required by your checking style.

Examples

"He ordered 450 sandwiches, 56 side orders of potato salad, and 3 ducks."

The following are other rules governing the use of numbers.

- ◆ Spell out any number that begins a sentence or clause.
("Thirteen people joined the dance troupe.")
- ◆ Use figures when you refer to dates, times, addresses, measurements, fractions, identification numbers, chapters, and pages.
("We read Chapter 21, pp. 303-351, on August 19.")
- ◆ Use a hyphen between spelled-out two-word numbers.
("twenty-three," "forty-six," "ninety-nine")

Unless the numbers involved are statistics, spell out round numbers ("thirty thousand" instead of "30,000," "five hundred" instead of "500") unless doing so conflicts with another number rule.

References

Brusaw, et al., "Handbook of Technical Writing," pp. 440-43

Jordan, "The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage," pp. 144-45

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 208-220

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 572-73

Object of Verb

Grammatik flags sentences where an object is missing, or where there are extra objects. It does this by distinguishing between transitive and intransitive verbs. Grammatik also flags the complement of a linking verb when it does not agree in number with the subject of the verb.

Example Set 1

Change: I received **a letter my aunt**.

To: I received **a letter from my aunt**.

Change: I received **a letter my acceptance** to the university.

To: I received **a letter, my acceptance** to the university.

The verb **received** can only take one object, not two. In the first case, a word was missing. In the second, the problem was a missing comma.

Example Set 2

Change: The sun **shined** brightly.

To: The sun **shone** brightly.

Change: He **shone** his shoes before the interview.

To: He **shined** his shoes before the interview.

The base verb **shine** has two past forms: **shined** and **shone**. When there is no object, as in the first example above, use **shone**. When there is an object, as in the second example, use **shined**.

Example Set 3

Change: His **sons were engineer**.

To: His **sons were engineers**.

Change: The greatest **expense was her trips**.

To: The greatest **expense was her trip**.

Or: The greatest **expenses were (for) her trips**.

Or: The greatest **expense resulted from her trips**.

The subject at the left of a linking verb like **be** should usually be the same number as the noun or pronoun to its right, called a complement. Normally, subject and complement should either both be singular or both be plural.

The first example in this set contains a real grammar error, probably from mistyping. The second example is a matter of style. The sentence is grammatically acceptable, but informal and a little awkward.

Explanation

An object is a noun or pronoun that follows a transitive verb. Be careful not to give an intransitive verb like "arrive" or "cough" an object.

A direct object receives the action of an action verb. An indirect object tells to whom or for whom an action was done. To identify a direct object, ask "whom?" or "what?" after the verb. Your answer, if the verb is transitive, will be the direct object.

Examples

"I called Lou." ("Lou" = direct object.)

"He needs attention." ("attention" = direct object)

"Sarah asked a question." ("question" = direct object)

If we change the last sentence to read, "Sarah asked Jim a question," "Jim" is the indirect object because the action was done "for" him. The question "for whom?" or "to whom?" will produce the indirect object just as a "whom?" or "what?" question will produce the direct object.

Examples

"She bought her dog diamonds."

(Bought what? diamonds (direct object))

(Bought diamonds for whom? dog (indirect object))

References

Brusaw, et al., "Handbook of Technical Writing," pp. 445-46

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," p. 80

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 194-95



Related Concepts

Offensive

Grammatik flags words and phrases that might offend your reader.

Examples

Change: Who the **hell** do they think they are?

To: Who do they think they are?

Change: He kept **bitching** about it.

To: He kept **gripping** about it.

Explanation

Offensive language includes so-called curse words like **hell**, vulgar or obscene expressions, and pejorative words or phrases...Pejorative language is the use of insulting terms to refer to a race, sex, nationality, religion, etc. Terms such as "jew someone down" and "broad" used to mean "woman" are always offensive and have no place in nonfiction writing.

Pejorative language also calls attention to one's race or sex unnecessarily. Sometimes, of course, it is necessary to refer to the race or sex of a person:

"Bessie Smith, the black blues singer, bled to death because a whites-only hospital refused to admit her."

But there is no good reason to mention that a "black man" robbed a convenience store or that a "woman scientist" discovered a cure for a certain disease. In both instances, the assumptions are prejudiced: that a "man" is white and a "scientist" male unless otherwise specified.

Avoid unnecessary references to race, (physical disabilities), gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, etc.

References

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," p. 169

Miller and Swift, "The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing."



[Related Concepts](#)

Overstated

Grammatik flags pretentious expressions and offers replacements to simplify them.

Examples

Change: Our technicians have **ascertained** the solution.

To: Our technicians have **found** the solution.

Change: He reacted **in such a manner as to stifle** further conversation.

To: He reacted **in a way that stifled** further conversation.

Explanation

Overstated language is pompous and often wordy. It puts an extra burden on your reader, who must mentally translate the difficult phrases into plain English before grasping the meaning of the text.

Some writers mistakenly believe that inflated language gives their writing an air of authority and sophistication. Actually, the best writing is clear and easy to understand. Consider the silliness of a sentence like this:

"The council's postulation that canines of an unrestrained nature have bedecked the community with malodorous substances has been the *raison d'etre* of the recent legal imposition: namely, that the previously designated canines be severely limited as to their freedom and that such limitation manifest itself in the physical form of a wire run or leash."

Translated, this sentence merely means, "The council recently passed a leash law." There is no reason to subject your reader to such an assault.

Of course, Grammatik cannot flag all overstated language; the possibilities are too vast. Here are some steps you can take to keep your writing clear:

- ◆ Avoid lofty, pretentious diction
- ◆ Avoid using foreign expressions unnecessarily
- ◆ Choose the active voice whenever possible
- ◆ Always choose a word over a phrase (e.g., "law," not "legal imposition")
- ◆ Replace abstractions with concrete language

References

Strunk and White, "The Elements of Style," pp. 21-25

Williams, "Style," pp. 85-86, 104-06



[Related Concepts](#)

Paragraph Problem

Grammatik flags a paragraph if it contains only one sentence.

Examples

Change: Everyone in our office now uses a computer.

The secretaries type all our correspondence on WordPerfect, and our bookkeeper uses the QuattroPro spreadsheet program. All the salespeople depend on computerized records, too.

To: Everyone in our office now uses a computer. The secretaries type all our correspondence on WordPerfect, and our bookkeeper uses the QuattroPro spreadsheet program. All the salespeople depend on computerized records, too.

Explanation

The most common paragraph problem is the one-sentence paragraph. This is not an error in fiction, advertising, or personal correspondence. In most writing, however, excessively short (or excessively long) paragraphs indicate a lack of focus.

Paragraphs and sentences communicate ideas, but they do so on different levels. The paragraph conveys a general thought which each of the sentences within it should support. In a paper arguing against capital punishment, each paragraph would present one reason why capital punishment should be abolished. The sentences within each paragraph would support that one reason. A one-sentence paragraph blurs this distinction between sentences and paragraphs and inadequately develops its point.

A one or two-sentence paragraph in most writing styles almost certainly belongs to the paragraph before or after it. Similarly, an excessively long paragraph is probably overlapping ideas.

Always ask yourself, "What is the specific purpose of this paragraph?" If you cannot provide a clear answer, chances are you need to combine paragraphs or break up lengthy ones.

References

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," pp. 308-09

Strunk and White, "The Elements of Style," pp. 15-17

Williams, "Style," pp.42-43



[Related Concepts](#)

Parallelism

Grammatik flags certain structures that should be parallel but are not.

Examples

Change: The tribesmen **had neither** writing tools **nor knew** how to write.

To: The tribesmen **neither had** writing tools **nor knew** how to write.

Correlative conjunctions like **neither . . . nor** should come before similar structures. The verb had should come after **neither**, because the verb **knew** comes after **nor**.

Explanation

When we think, we make connections and comparisons. Parallelism is a way to clearly express and emphasize these connections in writing. Keeping structures parallel is not only correct, but improves the balance in your writing, making it easier to read.

Grammatik cannot find most cases of nonparallel structure, since they can appear in many forms. Here are some examples of common ways to improve parallelism:

✦ Be alert for nonparallel structures **in a series**:

Change: We **had** dinner, **washed** the dishes, and then **we sat down** to play cards.

To: **We had** dinner, **we washed** the dishes, and then **we sat down** to play cards.

Or: We **had** dinner, **washed** the dishes, and then **sat down** to play cards.

The word **we** is the subject of the verbs **had**, **washed**, and **sat down**. Repeating **we** before just the third verb in the series disrupts the balance and violates the parallelism of the sentence.

You can revise by putting **we** before each verb, or by using it just once, at the beginning. This second, briefer option is probably better.

Change: She wants **to travel**, **read**, perhaps **to write** a little, but not **spend** much money.

To: She wants **to travel**, **to read**, perhaps **to write** a little, but not **to spend** much money.

Or: She wants to **travel**, **read**, perhaps **write** a little, but not **spend** much money.

In the error sentence, the list of what she **wants** contains both infinitives (to travel, to write) and base verbs (read, spend).

You can revise by putting **to** before each base verb (thus turning it into an infinitive), or by using **to** just once, after **wants**. Again, the second, briefer option is probably better.

✦ Be alert for nonparallel structures **in lists**:

Change: The committee will do the following:

1. **Buy** refreshments.
2. **Collecting** money at the door.
3. **We should also get** addresses so we can send follow-up letters .

To: The committee will do the following:

1. **Buy** refreshments.
2. **Collect** money at the door.
3. **Get** addresses for follow-up letters.

Items in a list should have a parallel structure, be of nearly equal importance, and be of about the same length.

✦ When comparing parallel ideas, try to express them with the same part of speech, in structures of similar length and rhythm:

Change: **Success** is usually a pleasure, while nobody really likes **to fail**.

To: **Success** is usually a pleasure, while **failure** appeals to no one.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 247-48

Brusaw, et al., "Handbook of Technical Writing," pp. 385-86, 480-85

Strunk and White, "Elements of Style," pp. 26-28

Passive Voice

Grammarly flags the passive voice and suggests changing the phrase to active voice, in many cases offering a rewrite that does this for you.

Examples

Change: Tell me **whom the book was written by**.

To: Tell me **who wrote the book**.

Change: **He was believed to be** a man of great integrity.

To: **We believed that he was** a man of great integrity.

Explanation

A verb in the passive voice emphasizes the receiver, or object, of the action of a sentence, rather than the subject who does the action. In fact, the subject may be entirely missing in the passive voice:

The ball **was thrown** to the catcher. (We don't know who threw the ball.)

The report **is being presented** today. (We don't know who is presenting the report.)

Sometimes the subject appears in a prepositional phrase starting with "by":

The ball **was thrown** to the catcher by **Joe**.

The report **is being presented** today by **the Marketing Department**.

To turn the passive voice into the active voice,

- ◆ Start with the real subject, the doer of the action: **Joe**
- ◆ Put the main verb into the tense you need: **threw**
- ◆ Use the subject of the passive sentence as the object in your active sentence: **the ball**.

The first sentence above now becomes

Joe threw the ball to the catcher.

Joe = subject

threw = active verb

the ball = object

The second sentence becomes

The Marketing Department is presenting the report today.

the Marketing Department = subject

is presenting = active verb

the report = object

The passive voice is useful if you want to be vague about who is responsible for something. It is also convenient if the writer did the action but the writing style does not allow much use of **I** or **we**. Bureaucrats and government officials often use the passive voice for the first reason, while scientists often use it for the second.

You should avoid the passive voice for most writing styles:

- ◆ It is wordier than the active voice.
- ◆ It is more vague.
- ◆ It can be deceptive, since it does not reveal the subject.

If you are writing for a technical or academic field, you may want to use the passive voice for impersonal descriptions of processes. Otherwise, consider rephrasing. The best guide, of course, is to choose the voice most appropriate for your audience.

References

Brusaw, et al., "Handbook of Technical Writing," pp. 704-07

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," pp. 273-74

Strunk and White, "Elements of Style," pp. 18-19

Williams, "Style," pp. 22-27



Related Concepts

Possessive Form

Grammatik flags nouns that should be in the possessive form, or that have the wrong possessive form.

Examples

Change: He stole the **dogs** bone.

To: He stole the **dog's** bone.

Change: Mrs. Johnson knows all her **customer's** names.

To: Mrs. Johnson knows all her **customers'** names.

Explanation

The possessive form indicates ownership. There are two kinds of possessives:

- ◆ possessive nouns (e.g. "Bill's")
- ◆ possessive adjectives (also called "possessive pronouns"). Possessive adjectives consist of the following:
my/mine, your/yours, his, her/hers, its, our/ours, their/theirs, whose

Possessive adjectives need no apostrophe because the words themselves are possessive. Possessive nouns are merely nouns made possessive by adding an apostrophe (and, usually, an "s"). This is also true of non possessive pronouns like "someone."

To make a non possessive noun or pronoun possessive, simply look at the last letter. Words ending in "s" take an apostrophe (s'); words not ending in "s" take an apostrophe "s" ('s):

Bob's car, Chris' pancreas, The Smiths' house, nobody's business.

To indicate joint ownership in a pair or list, make only the last name possessive. For example, "Dick and Jane's paintings" means that Dick and Jane own paintings together; "Dick's and Jane's paintings" refers to separate ownership of paintings.

The possessive form has nothing to do with whether a word is singular or plural. "Child," for example, is singular, and "children" is plural, but you form the possessive the same way in both cases by adding an apostrophe "s" ('s).

Note that some writers add apostrophe "s" to singular nouns which end in "s" (for example, "James's") in order to distinguish the singular possessive from the plural possessive. This usage is more British than American but is also acceptable in the U.S. Whichever form you choose, be consistent.

To see if you have formed the possessive correctly, turn the word receiving the possession and the word doing the possessing into a phrase like the following:

Chris' pancreas = the pancreas of Chris

the people's choice = the choice of the people

someone's idea = the idea of someone

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 151-57

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 526-527



[Related Concepts](#)

Pronoun Case

Grammatik flags subject pronouns incorrectly used as objects, and object pronouns incorrectly used as subjects.

Example 1

Change: Just between you and **I**, these bagels are too salty.

To: Just between you and **me**, these bagels are too salty.

The subject pronoun **I** cannot be the object of the preposition **between**. Use the object pronoun **me**.

Example 2

Change: You and **him** are our best customers.

To: You and **he** are our best customers.

The object pronoun **him** cannot be a subject. Use the subject pronoun **he**.

Explanation

Pronoun case errors can confuse your reader and distort your meaning.

There are three cases in English: subjective, objective, and possessive. Pronouns in the subjective case act as subjects. Pronouns in the objective case act as direct objects, indirect objects, and objects of prepositions.

Pronouns in the possessive case indicate ownership and usually act as adjectives. The following will help to identify the case of pronouns:

Subject pronouns: I, he, she, we, they

Object pronouns: me, him, her, us, them

Possessive pronouns: my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs

The sentence, "He handed the report to Jim and I," has a pronoun case error because "I" is a subject pronoun trying to be the object of the preposition "to." The correct pronoun is "me."

In such a sentence, where there is more than one subject or object, block out the other subjects or objects. This will make the case of the pronoun in question more clear.

Examples

"Wilson expects Jean and I to reorganize the committee."

(Omit "Jean and.")

The sentence, "Wilson expects I to reorganize the committee," is ungrammatical. The pronoun "I," always a subject pronoun, is unable to act as the direct object of the verb, "expect." The sentence should read, "Wilson expects Jean and me to reorganize the committee."

The following is a list of rules for correct pronoun case usage and examples:

- ◆ Use "who" and "whoever" as subject pronouns. Use "whom" and "whomever" as object pronouns.
"My rich uncle says he will give his money to whomever he wants."
"Here is the man who saved my life."
- ◆ Use subject pronouns after linking verbs.
"The ones responsible are she and I."
"I am calling for Mr. Duffy."
"This is he."
- ◆ Use subject pronouns after "than" or "as" when an implied verb could follow the pronoun.
"He is more desperate than I (am)."
"She likes squid more than I (do)."

Be careful, however, not to convey a different meaning than you intend by confusing subject and object pronouns. Contrast the above sentence with the following:

"She likes squid more than me."

This last sentence means that "She" likes squid more than she likes me. When in doubt which pronoun to use, see if you can insert an implied verb after the pronoun in question.

References

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," p. 54-63

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 233-239

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 248-53



Related Concepts

Pronoun Number Agreement

Grammarly flags a pronoun and the word it stands for when they do not agree in number.

Example 1

Change: **Many** of the **index** he compiled were excellent.

To: **Many** of the **indexes** he compiled were excellent.

The pronoun **many** shows that the noun **index** should be plural.

Example 2

Change: The **boys** hurt **himself**.

To: The **boys** hurt **themselves**.

Or: The **boys** hurt **him**.

The noun **boys** does not agree with the singular reflexive pronoun like **himself**.

Explanation

Pronouns must agree in number with the nouns or pronouns they refer to (called "antecedents"). A singular pronoun must reflect a singular antecedent; a plural pronoun must reflect a plural antecedent.

When the numbers of the antecedent and pronoun do not agree, the result is a pronoun (or number) error, as in the following:

"In this tropical paradise, a **PERSON** can really lose **THEMSELVES**."

The simplest way to fix such an error is to make the pronoun and antecedent plural. This solution sidesteps the problem of using masculine (or feminine) pronouns generically.

Another solution is to use "he or she," or, for the above sentence, "himself or herself." This has the disadvantage of being awkward, especially upon repeated use.

A third solution is simply to reword the sentence in such a way as to avoid the need for a pronoun:

"In this tropical paradise, cares and responsibilities disappear."

The following rules offer help for different types of problems.

- ◆ Use a plural pronoun for antecedents joined by "and."
"Laurel and Hardy made **THEIR** best films for Hal Roach Studios."
- ◆ Use a singular pronoun for antecedents joined by "or."
"Either Ralph or Sam left **HIS** shoes in the sink."

When pronouns joined by "or" or "nor" differ in number or gender, make the pronoun agree with the closest antecedent:

"Neither the twins nor **SHEILA** has **HER** passport."

"Neither Sheila nor the **TWINS** have **THEIR** passports."

- ◆ Use a singular pronoun for most indefinite pronoun antecedents.
"Everyone needs to pay for **HIS OR HER** ticket."
"Someone is taking more than **HIS OR HER** share."

Indefinite pronouns are words like "someone," "anyone," "everybody," and "nobody." Most indefinite pronouns are singular, but some, like "none," "some," "any," and "all," can be singular or plural, depending on context:


"**Some** set **their** goals impossibly high."

"**Some** of the difficulty has **its** origins in misunderstanding."

- ◆ Use a singular pronoun when "each" and "every" precede singular nouns joined by "and."
"Every language and culture has **ITS** own richness."
"Each child and adult should do **HIS OR HER** best."

References

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 284-88

 [Related Concepts](#)

Punctuation

Grammatik flags a variety of punctuation errors, many of them involving commas.

Examples

Change: When the package **arrives** bring it to me at the office.

To: When the package **arrives,** bring it to me at the office.

When you use a dependent clause like **when the package arrives** to introduce a sentence, put a comma after it. This makes the sentence easier to read. It also emphasizes the important information in the main clause (in this case **bring it to me at the office**).

Change: The next morning, she woke early.

To: The next morning, she woke early.

Explanation

Punctuation lets your reader know how to read what you have written. Punctuation marks are somewhat like traffic signals: both give order to what would otherwise be chaos. What follows is a list of the major punctuation marks and their functions.

APOSTROPHE

Apostrophes have two purposes:

- ◆ For use in contractions, to represent a missing letter or letters.
For instance, the apostrophe in "I'm" represents the missing "a" ("I am"); the apostrophe in "doesn't" represents the missing "o" in "does not."
- ◆ To show possession.
To make a noun (or non possessive pronoun) that does not end in "s" possessive, add apostrophe and "s" ('s). If the word does end in "s," simply add an apostrophe after it.

COLON

The colon has one purpose:

- ◆ To separate the general from the specific. (The preceding sentence is itself a good model for colon use.)
In the above sentence, the general information is "one purpose." To learn what that one purpose is, we need to look to the right of the colon. The colon, in essence, "promises" to specify the general information that comes before it. You should always be able to pick out the word or phrase that represents the general information:
"There is only one reason [General] he feeds the homeless: money." [Specific].
"Two subjects [General] plagued her throughout college: math and gym." [Specific].

NOTE: The "General" part must be a complete thought; the "Specific" part may be but does not need to be. Never put a colon where you could not put a period, as in the following example:

"My favorite colors are: red, yellow, and black." **[incorrect]**

COMMA

Use a comma according to the following four rules:

- ◆ After an introductory word, phrase, or clause.
- ◆ To separate items in a series (a, b, c, and d).
NOTE: Do not omit the comma before the "and" which closes the series. Although some writers disagree on this point, this comma tells the reader that "c" and "d" are separate items, not halves of one item. This is especially helpful when the items in a list consist of more than one word, for example, Laurel and Hardy.
- ◆ Before a coordinating conjunction **but only** when the conjunction connects two complete thoughts.
- ◆ Before and after nonessential words, phrases, and clauses. (If the nonessential element begins the sentence, consider it introductory (rule 1); if the nonessential ends the sentence, the period replaces the second comma.)

SEMICOLON

The semicolon has two purposes:

- ◆ To separate two complete thoughts (equivalent to comma plus conjunction; see comma rules).
- ◆ To separate items in a series when there is any question where one item ends and another begins.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 18-24, 78-79

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 481-532



Related Concepts

Questionable Usage

Grammatik flags a variety of awkward or incorrect words and phrases.

Example 1

Change: I **disremember** why they had to postpone the meeting.

To: I **forget** why they had to postpone the meeting.

Forget is preferable to **disremember**, since it is both shorter and more commonly used.

Example 2

Change: A chess set **is comprised of** thirty-two pieces.

To: A chess set **consists of** thirty-two pieces.

Or: Thirty-two pieces **comprise** a chess set.

Comprised of is never correct. **Comprise** alone means both "include" and "compose." One thing includes, contains, or **comprises** several parts. Several parts make up, compose, constitute, or **comprise**, one thing.

Explanation

Words and phrases of questionable usage may be either incorrect or less preferred than a more standard alternative. The following are common examples of such errors. When in doubt, consult your dictionary.

Instead of:	Use:
dreamt	dreamed (in the U.S.)
inferior than	inferior to
one's self	oneself
orientate	orient
preventative	preventive



Related Concepts

Question Mark

Grammatik flags a sentence if looks like a question but does not end with a question mark.

Examples

Change: Did the plane arrive on time.

To: Did the plane arrive on time?

Change: How many people came.

To: How many people came?

Explanation

◆ Use a question mark after any direct question.

"What will you be wearing tonight?"

"He asked, 'When is the report due?'"

◆ Do not use a question mark after indirect questions.

"He asked if there were any dip left."

"They wondered whether or not to adopt the new plan."

Remember that a direct question asks a question, and an indirect question tells that a question was asked. Remember too not to place a period or comma before or after a question mark.

◆ If you are quoting a question, the question mark belongs inside the second pair of quotation marks:

He asked, "Have you seen my armadillo?"

◆ Place the question mark outside the second pair of quotation marks if the question is yours and not part of the quote:

Who was it who said, "Give me liberty, or give me death"?

If you are asking a question and you are also quoting a question, place the question mark inside the second pair of quotation marks. Never double punctuate by placing one question mark inside the second pair of quotation marks and one outside.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 8-11

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 477-78



[Related Concepts](#)

Quotation Marks

Grammatik flags quotation marks not found in pairs.

Because American usage of quotation marks differs from British usage, this rule class is inactive in the British version of Grammatik.

Examples

Change: Take your time," he told us.

To: "Take your time," he told us.

Change: They advertised the car as almost new" in the paper.

To: They advertised the car as "almost new" in the paper.

Explanation

Quotation marks (" ") operate in pairs. They tell your reader that the words in between are someone else's **exact** words, written or spoken. Always be sure to close a quotation with the second pair of quotation marks.

You can introduce a quotation in one of four ways:

- ◆ With a colon, if what precedes the colon is a complete thought.
He spoke as if possessed: "Out of my sight!"
- ◆ With a comma after a verb that implies a "that" clause (or, in the case of questions, an "if" clause).
Hopkins writes, "Nothing is so beautiful as Spring."
- ◆ With a "that" after the verb (no comma -- "that" substitutes for the comma and vice-versa. See above example.)
Hopkins writes that "Nothing is so beautiful as Spring."
- ◆ By blending the quoted words in with your own.
E.M. Forster declares that the people he most admires "represent the true human tradition."

NOTE: It is unnecessary to put a comma before this quotation. In such cases, when you are trying to decide how to punctuate, treat the quoted words as if they were your own.

Avoid beginning a sentence with a quotation and making a quotation its own sentence. Provide a context for a quotation before you give it.

Punctuate the end of quotations as follows.

- ◆ Place commas and periods inside the second pair of quotation marks.
- ◆ Place semicolons and colons outside the second pair of quotation marks.
- ◆ Place question marks and exclamation points inside the second pair of quotation marks if they are part of the quotation, outside if they are yours and do not apply to the quotation. If you and the quotation are asking (or exclaiming), place the question mark (or exclamation point) inside the second pair of quotation marks. That single punctuation mark applies to you and the quotation. Never double punctuate (e.g., **?"? or ?".**).

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 56-72

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 534-42



[Related Concepts](#)

Redundant

Grammatik flags phrases in which two or more words say the same thing.

Examples

Change: We can **as a rule usually** count on their support.

To: We can **usually** count on their support.

Change: The two houses were **exactly identical**.

To: The two houses were **identical**.

Explanation

A redundant phrase says the same thing twice. "Real truth," for example, is redundant because there is no other type of truth. Similarly, one could revise "past history" to simply "history," and "free gift" to just "gift."

Redundancies clutter a document and weaken its message. You can correct them by omitting the unnecessary word in the phrase. For example:

Change:	To:
add on	add
recur again	recur
red in color	red

References

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," pp. 512-13

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 368-69



Related Concepts

Relative Pronoun

Grammatik flags relative pronouns used incorrectly.

Example 1

Change: Our latest report, **that** we sent last week, contains all the details.

To: Our latest report, **which** we sent last week, contains all the details.

Use **which** to begin a clause that is not essential for identifying the noun before it (in this case, **report**). The words **our latest** identify the report.

Example 2

Change: The information **which** Philip supplied was helpful.

To: The information **that** Philip supplied was helpful.

In general, use **that** to begin a clause that is essential for identifying the noun before it (in this case, **information**). The clause **that Philip supplied** is necessary for the reader to understand what information the writer means.

Explanation

Many people use the relative pronouns "that" and "which" incorrectly to begin clauses.

✦ Use "which" to begin clauses that are not essential to the meaning of a sentence. "That" is always incorrect in the following construction:

"Her new red car, that she bought last week, is already rusting." **[incorrect]**

✦ Use "that" to begin clauses that are essential to the meaning of the sentence. These clauses are not set off from the rest of the sentence by commas.

NOTE: Grammatik flags these errors in the "Formalisms" rule class.

✦ Use "who" to refer to people in either type of clause.

Always set off nonessential clauses with commas. Do not set off essential clauses with commas.

Examples

"Goodwin's new movie, which is being released this summer, is about the McCarthy era." (nonessential, requires commas)

"The issue that began the Civil War was the debate over slavery." (essential, no commas)

"The man who rescued a basset hound from a burning building is receiving a medal for heroism." (essential, no commas)

"Sid's girlfriend, who tried to kill him last year, has agreed to marry him." (nonessential, requires commas)

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," p. 236-38

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 264-65



Related Concepts

Run-on Sentence

Grammarly flags sentences that contain many coordinating conjunctions.

Examples

Change: They came **and** they saw **and** they conquered **and** they went home.

To: They came, they saw, they conquered, **and** they went home.

Change: The construction took longer than expected, **so** we have had to extend the completion date **and** this of course resulted in a change in the relocation plan, **so** we have delayed the press releases, **but** we now believe the new facility should be ready by June.

To: The construction took longer than expected, **so** we have had to extend the completion date, change the relocation plan, **and** delay the press releases. We now believe the new facility should be ready by June.

Cutting down the number of coordinating conjunctions and breaking up long sentences usually creates a shorter, clearer text.

Explanation

A run-on sentence is simply one that runs on too long. This error is usually due to using conjunctions to connect an excessive number of clauses in a single sentence, as in the following example:

"He loved the woman and wanted to marry her, BUT he feared their differences would drive a wedge between them, SO he kept his feelings to himself EVEN THOUGH they threatened to overpower him and interfere with his work, YET he could think of no other solution, FOR he knew their love could never survive."

Break up such sentences by replacing some of the conjunctions with a period and beginning a new sentence.

◆ Related Concepts

Second-Person Address

Grammatik flags the word **you** in certain checking styles.

Examples

Change: **You** had better submit your request to the Planning Committee by June 15.

To: The Planning Committee will take requests until June 15.

Explanation

The second person ("you") is considered informal. It seems to presume an intimacy towards the reader which is inappropriate in formal writing; it is also too easily repeated, and overuse can threaten to bury the reader under an avalanche of "yous." If you are writing in a style such as "Memo," "you," of course, is not only allowed but may be essential. In formal writing styles, however, try to find an alternative to this overused pronoun. Two possibilities follow:

◆ Substitute the third person ("he," "she," "it," "they," or any noun which could be represented by these pronouns) for the second person. Instead of

"When you walk down the avenue, you can see many varieties of flowers"

write

"When one walks down the avenue, one can see many varieties of flowers"

or

"When people walk down the avenue, they can see"

However, "one" and "people" can be just as repetitive as "you." For this reason, the second possibility is usually preferable.

◆ Reword to avoid the need for pronoun reference altogether. The above sentence could simply read

"Many varieties of flowers line the avenue."

Notice that such a revision also improves the sentence by eliminating its wordiness.

References

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," p. 263

◆ Related Concepts

Sentence Variety

Grammarly flags a sentence that begins with the same word or phrase as any two other sentences within the last ten.

Examples

Change: **We** had a great time. **We** found a lot to do. **We** swam. **We** had lunch after that, and then we played volleyball. **We** stayed until sundown.

To: **We** had a great time and found a lot to do. First we swam, then ate lunch. After that, we played volleyball. **We** didn't leave until sundown.

Explanation

Repetition of sentence parts or sentence structures can make your writing monotonous. You can keep your writing fresh and your readers interested by varying the following.

Introductory words. Are you using an introductory word (like "However" or "Obviously") to begin every sentence? Even if you vary the particular word, using any introductory word to begin all or most of your sentences is repetitious.

Your Subjects. Identify your subjects. Do they change, or are you repeating the same subject sentence after sentence?

Your verbs. Are many or most of your verbs merely forms of "to be" (am, is, are, was, were) or "to seem"? Keep linking verbs like these to a minimum. Active verbs will diversify and animate your sentences better than "is" or "are."

Pronouns. Sentences filled with pronouns like "he," "she," or "it" have no sparkle. Try to vary your word choices and strike a balance between your nouns and pronouns.

Sentence Structures. The same sentence structure (for example, dependent clause followed by main clause) when repeated three or four times can grate on the inner ear of a reader. No particular structure is "bad," but the repetition of the same structure soon becomes tedious.

Sentence Lengths. Paragraphs filled with long sentences can lull your readers to sleep. Paragraphs with nothing but short sentences can give them a case of mental whiplash. Try to vary the length of your sentences, so you spare your reader the monotony of either extreme. (Keep in mind, however, that writing styles will dictate the length of your sentences to some degree. Technical writing, for example, will use longer sentences than advertising copy.)

Prepositional Phrases. Try to avoid long strings of prepositional phrases. You can turn some prepositional phrases into possessives, some into adverbs, and reword or omit others.

Examples

Change: the choice of the people

To: the people's choice

Change: in a sudden manner

To: suddenly

Change: generous by nature

To: generous

Nouns. Overusing nouns can deaden your writing, as the following example shows:

The proposal for the allowance of additions to the number of ramps providing accessibility for citizens with disabilities has met certain levels of resistance.

Such a writing style is certain to lose your reader. You can salvage the above sentence by turning some nouns into verbs and others into adjectives, as shown in the following:

The **proposal** to allow additional **access ramps** for disabled **citizens** has met some **resistance**.

Notice that reducing the number of nouns in a sentence makes it clearer and less wordy.

References

Brusaw, et al., "Handbook of Technical Writing," pp. 625-29

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 398-415

Williams, "Style," pp. 159-161

◆ Related concepts

Similar Words

Grammatik flags a word sometimes mistyped as or mistaken for another, usually because of similar spelling.

Examples

Change: This smog makes it difficult to **breath**.

To: This smog makes it difficult to **breathe**.

Change: He kept it secret, even **form** his wife.

To: He kept it secret, even **from** his wife.

Explanation

One way to misspell a word is to mistake it for another. This may be because the word you misspell looks or sounds like the word you have in mind.

Words that look alike may have the same letters in common, only arranged slightly differently, perhaps because you have mistyped them. Words that sound alike, called homonyms, often present the most difficulty. It may be helpful to distinguish such words by means of a mnemonic (or memory) device. Perhaps the best-known of these is "the princi**PAL** is your **PAL**."

The following is a very partial list of the most frequently confused words. When in doubt, consult your dictionary.

closest/closet

form/from

past/passed

personal/personnel

quiet/quite

than/then

united/untied

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 251-72

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 458-62

◆ [Related Concepts](#)

Special-Case Spelling

This rule class flags split-word spelling errors and other spelling and capitalization problems that Grammatik's general dictionary cannot properly handle.

Example 1

Change: **Never the less**, we expect the shipment on time.

To: **Nevertheless**, we expect the shipment on time.

The terms **never**, **the**, and **less** are all correct words, but they would probably never appear separately in that order. Only the single word **nevertheless** can mean "but."

Example 2

Change: John will buy it **irregardless** of the cost.

To: John will buy it **regardless** of the cost.

Using **irregardless** for **regardless** is a common mistake. **Irregardless** is not a word.

Explanation 1

Split word spelling errors

- ◆ divide single words like **someone** into two ("some one"), or
- ◆ incorrectly combine two words like **all right** into one ("alright," not correct), or
- ◆ use a two-word form like **all ready** incorrectly to mean the single word **already**, or vice versa.

Split-word spelling errors are easy to make because many expressions are valid both as separate and as single words, but with different meanings.

The following sentences are correct:

Every one of these tricks will entertain **everyone**.

every one = "each"

everyone = "all the people"

If there are **any more** disruptions, we will not have a festival **anymore**.

any more = "any other"

anymore = "again," "any longer"

Explanation 2

Grammatik flags several kinds of misspellings in this rule class, including these:

themsself = incorrect, should be **themselves**

brother-in-laws = incorrect, should be **brothers-in-law**

visa versa = incorrect, should be **vice versa**

Washington, d.c. = incorrect, should be **Washington, D.C.**

References

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," p. 463

- ◆ [Related Concepts](#)

Spelling

Grammatik flags words that are not in its extensive spelling dictionary.

Examples

Change: These are **necessary** steps toward reaching an optimal solution.

To: These are **necessary** steps toward reaching an optimal solution.

Change: The kittens **drinked** all the milk in the bowl.

To: The kittens **drank** all the milk in the bowl.

Explanation

This rule class finds spelling errors in single words, using Grammatik's extensive dictionary and ability to analyze morphology (word forms).

The errors found include:

- capitalization mistakes

- wrong endings

- typographical errors

- transposed letters

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 158-63, 175-77

✦ [Related Concepts](#)

Split Infinitive

Grammatik flags infinitives if one or more words separates the infinitive marker **to** from the base verb.

Grammatik will only flag split infinitives if the Split Infinitive rule class is turned on. You can specify the number of words that you want Grammatik to allow between **to** and the base verb.

Examples

Change: We intend **to, in the time remaining, get** to know the candidates well.

To: In the time remaining, we intend **to get** to know the candidates well.

Change: I hope **to thoroughly and efficiently revise** this system.

To: I hope **to revise** this system thoroughly and efficiently.

Explanation

An infinitive, or infinitive phrase, is "to" plus the base form of a verb: "to see," "to run," "to feel." Avoid "splitting" infinitives by placing a word or phrase between "to" and the base form of the verb.

Instead of: "I had failed to, for some reason, notice him."

Use: "For some reason, I had failed to notice him."

Instead of: "He likes to occasionally play billiards."

Use: "Occasionally, he likes to play billiards."

Sometimes, however, it is more awkward not to split the infinitive. In this sentence the split infinitive both sounds better than any of its alternatives and places the emphasis of the sentence where it belongs:

"He decided to really read the books he had only skimmed."

Rely upon your judgment and your ear in making such decisions. If you like, you can tell Grammatik how many words to allow in a split infinitive by editing the "Maximum Allowed" setting in your checking style.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 227-28

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," pp.317-18

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 342-43

◆ [Related Concepts](#)

Subject-Verb Agreement

Grammatik flags clauses whose subject and verb do not agree in number.

Example 1

Change: Every single **one** of our most important products **are** now in stock.

To: Every single **one** of our most important products **is** now in stock.

The subject, **one**, is singular, so the verb must be singular also. Even though **products** comes right before the verb, it is not the subject. **Products** is the object of the preposition "of," in the prepositional phrase "of our most important products."

A word inside a prepositional phrase can never be a subject.

Example 2

Change: Their **investment and faith** in our latest venture **means** a great deal to us.

To: Their **investment and faith** in our latest venture **mean** a great deal to us.

The phrase **investment and faith** is a compound subject. A compound subject takes a plural verb like **mean**, not a singular verb like **means**.

Explanation

A subject and its verb must agree in number. A singular subject requires a singular verb. A plural subject requires a plural verb.

You can correct disagreement errors by changing the number of either the verb or the subject. Each of the following elements can lead to mistakes in subject-verb agreement:

Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases begin with a preposition like "of," "at," or "in." They end with a noun or pronoun, called the object of the preposition. The object of a preposition can never be the subject of a clause or sentence.

Each of **them** **is** distinct.

each = subject of the sentence

them = object of the preposition "of"

is = verb

Since the subject **each** is singular, the verb **is** must be singular, too.

We believe that the **suggestions** in our budget director's most recent **proposal** **have** merit.

suggestions = subject of the clause "that . . . merit"

proposal = object of the preposition "in"

have = verb of the clause

Since the subject **suggestions** is plural, the verb **have** must be plural, too.

Confusing a subject with the object of a preposition is easy to do because our "ear" can mislead us. For example, in the above sentence a writer might mistakenly use the verb **has**, because that verb would agree with **proposal**, the noun closest to it. But the subject is really **suggestions**. No matter how far the subject is from its verb, the verb must agree with it.

Compound subjects

Compound subjects contain two or more subjects that have the same verb. The subjects are connected by a coordinating conjunction like **and** or **or**.

The number of the verb depends on the conjunction that joins the subjects:

✦ When the conjunction is **and**, use a plural verb.

Alice, her sons, and her husband **are** all employees of our company.

Alice, her sons, and her husband = compound subject

and = coordinating conjunction

are = plural verb

The only exception to this rule is if a compound subject refers to only one person or thing:

My best friend and college roommate **is** arriving this weekend.

my best friend and college roommate = compound subject, one person

is = singular verb

✦ When the conjunction is

or

nor

not (only) . . . but (also)

the verb should agree with the subject closest to it:

✦ Curtains **or** a shade covers each window in the room.

a shade . . . covers

- ◆ A shade **or** curtains cover each window in the room.

curtains . . . cover

- ◆ Neither armies **nor** a dictator kills the desire for freedom.

dictator . . . kills

- ◆ Not only Jim **but** his neighbors prefer the fence.

neighbors . . . prefer

- ◆ Not toys **but** affection is what children need most.

affection . . . is

Linking verbs

Linking verbs act like equal signs. They link the subject to a word that names or describes it. Some common linking verbs are **be, become, seem, appear, look, and feel**.

The subject before a linking verb and the complement after it may not be the same in number. The verb must always agree in number with the subject:

The **Alps were** the hardest **part** of the journey.

Alps = plural subject

were = plural verb

part = singular complement

The plural subject **Alps** requires the plural verb **were**.

The hardest **part** of the journey **was** the **Alps**.

part = singular subject

was = singular verb

Alps = plural complement

The singular subject **part** requires the singular verb **was**.

◆ **Pronouns:**

These lists can help you decide whether to use a singular or plural verb to match a subject pronoun:

◆ **Pronouns that always take a SINGULAR verb:**

he, she, it, this, that, another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, each one, everybody, everyone, everything, either, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, something, whatever, whichever, whoever

◆ **Pronouns that always take a PLURAL verb:**

we, they, both, few, others, several, these, those

◆ **Pronouns that can take a SINGULAR or a PLURAL verb:**

all, any, more, most, none, some

Whether a pronoun in this last group takes a singular or a plural verb depends on the word or phrase to which the pronoun refers:

None of the people in the kitchen **were** thirsty.

none = pronoun referring to "people"

people = plural noun

were = plural verb

None of the bread in the kitchen **was** stale.

none = pronoun referring to "bread"

bread = singular noun

was = singular verb

More examples:

All of the benefits **go** to the employees.

All of the money **goes** toward tuition.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 208-220

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 270-83

◆ Related Concepts

Subjunctive

Grammatik flags verbs that should usually be in the subjunctive mood in standard and formal documents.

Example 1

Change: If I **was** you, I would accept the offer.

To: If I **were** you, I would accept the offer.

The "if" clause describes an unreal situation (I am not you). Therefore, in formal writing, it is preferable to use the subjunctive verb **were**. In formal styles, conditional clauses and clauses after "wish" often contain subjunctive verbs.

Example 2

Change: I recommended that he **comes** at five o'clock.

To: I recommended that he **come** at five o'clock.

The verb **recommend** often comes before a "that" clause containing a subjunctive verb like **come**. Other such verbs are **insist, request, demand, urge, and suggest**.

Explanation

Using the subjunctive in these cases is a matter of style and formality level, not a rigid grammar rule. Another option for the last example is to use a modal like "should":

I recommended that he **should come** at five o'clock.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 224-226

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 270-83

Subordination

Grammatik flags a dependent clause starting with a subordinating conjunction when it is mistakenly used as a complete sentence.

Examples

Change: **Though** we cannot guarantee these prices for more than three months.

To: **However**, we cannot guarantee these prices for more than three months.

Change: **Because** the demand for our custom-built furniture is steadily increasing.

To: The demand for our custom-built furniture is steadily increasing.

Or: **This is because** the demand for our custom-built furniture is steadily increasing.

A subordinating conjunction like **though** or **because** begins a dependent clause, not an independent clause. A dependent clause cannot be a complete sentence by itself.

You can fix these problems by

- ◆ changing the conjunction to an adverb (for example, changing **though** to **however**), or
- ◆ deleting the conjunction (changing the clause from dependent to independent), or
- ◆ adding a separate, independent clause (for example, **this is**) to complete the sentence.

Explanation

Subordination in a sentence shows your reader what information you consider most important. By making some clauses independent and others dependent, or subordinate, you show the focus of your ideas and suggest to the reader what kind of information may follow.

Examples

Although the children got sopping wet, **they had fun**.

they had fun = independent (main) clause

although the children got sopping wet = dependent (subordinate) clause

The main clause, or most important element, in the sentence above is **they had fun**. The writer considered this more important than the fact that the children got wet. We might expect the next sentence or two to describe how the children played, or how they benefited from this enjoyable experience.

If we change the subordination, the emphasis changes:

Although the children had fun, **they got sopping wet**.

they got sopping wet = independent (main) clause

although the children had fun = dependent (subordinate) clause

Now the fact that the children got wet is in the main clause, not in a dependent clause. The writer of this sentence clearly considered the children's getting wet more important than their having fun. We might expect what follows to describe the discomfort or harm they suffered as a result of getting so wet.

Two kinds of words coming at the beginning of a clause can make it dependent:

Subordinating Conjunctions

after	if	until
although	in order that	when
as	once	whenever
as if	provided that	where
as soon as	since	wherever
because	so that	while
before	though	
even though	unless	

Relative Pronouns

that	whichever	whom
what	who	whomever
whatever	whoever	whose
which		

If the dependent clause begins your sentence, put a comma after it:

Whenever it rains, the roof leaks.

Though we had already eaten, we joined them for dessert.

When the dependent clause is in the second half of your sentence, you may or may not need a comma after it. This depends on whether the information in the dependent clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence or not.

The roof leaks **whenever it rains**.

The information in the clause **whenever it rains** is essential to the meaning of the sentence. Without it, we might think the roof leaked all the time. Because it is essential, we do not set off the dependent clause with a comma.

We joined them for dessert, though we had already eaten.

The information in the dependent clause **though we had already eaten** is nonessential to the meaning of the main clause, so we set the dependent clause off with a comma.

You can also subordinate information by placing it between pairs of commas, within parentheses, or within pairs of dashes. This punctuation tells the reader that the words within are nonessential.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 20-22

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 378-385

Gordon, "The Transitive Vampire," pp. 97-106

✦ Related Concepts

Tense Shift

Grammatik flags sentences which may have verb tense problems.

Example 1

Change: The puppy **snatched** the food and **runs** away.

To: The puppy **snatched** the food and **ran** away.

The verb **snatched** is in the simple past tense. The verb **runs** is in the present tense. Since these verbs are connected by "and" and have the same subject ("the puppy"), this tense change does not make sense.

Example 2

Change: The committee members **said** that they **will** consider it.

To: The committee members **said** that they **would** consider it.

Change: She **knew** he **takes** the train to work.

To: She **knew** he **took** the train to work.

When you report what someone said or thought, it is preferable to put the verb in the "that" clause into a past tense also, to agree with the verb in the clause before it. The past form of **will** is **would**. The past form of **takes** is **took**.

Explanation

The tense of a verb shows the time it occurs. Try not to change tense unnecessarily. For example, in the following sentence the tense shift is necessary:

This book **describes** Orwell's experiences when he **was** an Imperial police officer in Burma.

describes = simple present tense

was = simple past tense

We usually use the present tense to note what a book or other document says, or **describes**. But Orwell's experience took place in the past, so the verb **was** must be in the past tense.

In the next example, however, there is no reason for the tenses to shift:

Change: The report **is** useful, but the cost outline **needed** to include more details.

To: The report **is** useful, but the cost outline **needs** to include more details.

Grammatik finds certain tense shift errors, but not all. To avoid problems like the one above, keep in mind that:

✦ The present tenses are the most common in business and formal writing:

We **find** this argument persuasive, and we **have** therefore **adjusted** our policy.

find = simple present tense

have adjusted = present perfect tense

✦ Tenses should change only when necessary.

References

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 224-32

Strunk and White, "The Elements of Style," pp. 31-32

Shertzer, "The Elements of Grammar," pp. 27-31

Trademark

Grammatik flags certain copyrighted trademarks and words that might be incorrect versions of trademarks.

Examples

Change: Frank has **coke** with every meal.

To: Frank has **a soft drink** with every meal.

Or: Frank has **Coca-Cola** with every meal.

Explanation

In most cases, it is better to avoid using trademark names.

A trademark is the name a company gives to one of its products, for example, "Xerox" or "Scotch Tape." Companies register these names in order to protect their exclusive use of them.

If you mean a general type of product, rather than a specific brand, use a generic term. If you really mean a specific brand, be sure to capitalize the name and write it exactly as copyrighted.

Change: **xerox**

To: **photocopy** (generic term)

Or: **Xerox** (correct trademark)

References

William and Mary Morris, "Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," pp. 589-90
Jordan, "The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage," p. 209

Unbalanced (), {}, [], or "

Grammarly flags certain punctuation marks when they do not appear in pairs.

Examples

Change: I told him (in confidence that he should ask for more.

To: I told him (in confidence) that he should ask for more.

Change: "Go for the gold, Mary yelled.

To: "Go for the gold," Mary yelled.

Explanation

Parentheses, square brackets, curly braces, and quotation marks come in pairs. If the opening mark comes before a sentence, then the closing mark should come after the end of one or more sentences. For example,

I took the bus. (My car was at the mechanic's. It's broken down three times in the last month.)

If the opening mark comes in the middle of a sentence, then the closing mark should come within the same sentence.

Change: We all felt relieved when the storm lifted (even the dogs. They stopped pacing and settled down on the rug.)

To: We all felt relieved when the storm lifted (even the dogs stopped pacing and settled down on the rug.)

PARENTHESES ()

Parentheses are very useful for enclosing references. Try rephrasing, however, to avoid putting explanatory or extra information in parentheses. Using too many parentheses can make your writing seem poorly planned.

Change: They sell many items (including paint, rollers, and brushes) at a discount.

To: They sell paint, rollers, brushes, and many other items at a discount.

SQUARE BRACKETS [] and CURLY BRACES {}

Square brackets and curly braces occur mainly in scientific or mathematical writing.

References

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 218-26, 296-99

Strunk and White, "Elements of Style," p. 36

"The AP Stylebook," p. 272

"The Chicago Manual of Style," 5.97-101.

User Auto Replacements

This is one of two rule classes in the user's supplementary dictionary that let you add custom words and phrases for Grammatik to flag. The other rule class is User Replacements.

If you **choose QuickCorrect** when adding your word to the supplementary dictionary

- ◆ Grammatik puts the word and its replacement into the **User Auto Replacements** rule class.
- ◆ Whenever the word appears in text, Grammatik will **automatically replace** it.

If you **do not choose QuickCorrect** when adding your word to the supplementary dictionary

- ◆ Grammatik puts the word and its replacement(s) into the **User Replacements** rule class.
- ◆ Whenever the word appears in text, Grammatik will **confirm** before replacing it.

Both of these supplementary dictionary rule classes are on by default in all checking styles. You can turn off either or both of these classes if you wish, just like any other rule class.

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Weak

Grammatik flags "there" or "it" at the beginning of a clause or sentence, adverbs like "indeed" and "fairly," and other expressions that can make your writing weak.

Examples

Change: **It is clear that** we must revise this report.

To: **Clearly,** we must revise this report.

Change: The weather has been **fairly** mild.

To: The weather has been mild.

Explanation

Writers sometimes think that words like **certainly** or **indeed** give a sentence a more forceful sound. In fact, words like these usually make the writer seem less serious, not more so. Compare:

We will indeed look into this problem.

We will look into this problem.

In the first sentence, the writer is obviously trying hard to convince the reader. The second sentence is a simple statement of intention. By contrast, it sounds direct and sincere.

Other adverbs, like **somewhat** and **fairly**, are often unnecessary and can make your writing sound unsure or inflated. Try omitting them when you can.

You can also often eliminate clause and sentence openers that start with "there" or "it." One way is to take a noun that comes after "it" or "there" and make it into the subject of your revised sentence:

Change: **There is** an increasing **demand** for such machines.

To: The **demand** for such machines is increasing.

Change: **It is** very unfortunate that **there has been** a **misunderstanding** on this issue.

To: The **misunderstanding** on this issue has been unfortunate.

◆ Related Concepts

Wordy

Grammatik flags phrases that could be shorter but still express the same meaning.

Examples

Change: We hope to satisfy these conditions **to the fullest possible extent**.

To: We hope to **fully** satisfy these conditions.

Change: **Over the course of the last two years**, her health has improved.

To: **Over the last two years**, her health has improved.

Explanation

Wordiness clutters your writing and makes it difficult to read. Here are some ways to get rid of unnecessary words:

✦ Use single words instead of phrases:

Change: He did not know **by what means** he would get to the airport.

To: He did not know **how** he would get to the airport.

✦ Use adverbs instead of prepositional phrases:

Change: He speaks in a loud voice.

To: He speaks **loudly**.

✦ Shorten phrases by rewording when you can:

Change: An example of this is

To: **For example,**

Change: Rich people often think **people who are poor** are lazy.

To: Rich people often think **poor people** are lazy.

Change: **There are some people who** like reading better than watching television.

To: **Some people** like reading better than watching television.

✦ Omit phrases when you can:

Change: **In point of fact**, we now know **for certain** exactly what it will cost.

To: We now know exactly what it will cost.

✦ Use the active voice instead of the passive voice:

Change: The memo **will be sent** to you **by** my secretary.

To: My secretary **will send** the memo to you.

Or: My secretary **will send** you the memo.

✦ Simplify redundant phrases:

Change: The box containing the free gift was large in size and brown in color.

To: The box containing the **gift** was **large** and **brown**.

References

Hodges, Horner, Webb, and Miller, "Harbrace College Handbook," pp. 273-75

Sabin, "Gregg Reference Manual," pp. 208-20

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 358-69

Williams, "Style," pp. 82-92

✦ Related Concepts

Checking Styles

When you select a checking style, Grammatik turns on different grammar, style, and mechanical rule classes to tailor its proofreading to that specific style. You have a choice of ten predefined styles:

- Spelling Plus
- Quick Check
- Very Strict
- Formal Memo or Letter
- Informal Memo or Letter
- Technical or Scientific
- Documentation or Speech
- Student Composition
- Advertising
- Fiction

Grammar Terms

To define basic grammar terms and give examples of their use.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	Lists	

A

- abbreviation
- active verb
- active voice
- adjective
- adjective clause
- adverb
- adverb clause
- antecedent
- appositive
- article
- auxiliary verb

B

- base verb

C

- clause
- colloquial
- common noun
- comparative
- complement
- compound subject
- conditional clause
- conjunction
- coordinating conjunction
- correlative conjunction
- countable noun

D

- dependent clause
- determiner
- direct object
- double negative

E

F

G

- generic
- generic reference
- gerund

H

- homonym

I

- idiom
- idiomatic
- inactive verb
- indefinite pronoun
- independent clause
- indirect object
- infinitive
- interjection
- intransitive verb

J

K

L

- ◆ linking verb

M

- ◆ main clause
- ◆ main verb
- ◆ modal
- ◆ modifier

N

- ◆ nonstandard
- ◆ noun
- ◆ noun phrase
- ◆ number

O

- ◆ object
- ◆ object pronoun

P

- ◆ participle
- ◆ parts of speech
- ◆ passive voice
- ◆ past participle
- ◆ phrase
- ◆ phrasal verb
- ◆ plural
- ◆ possessive
- ◆ possessive adjective
- ◆ possessive pronoun
- ◆ preposition
- ◆ prepositional phrase
- ◆ present participle
- ◆ progressive
- ◆ pronoun
- ◆ proper noun

Q

R

- ◆ relative clause
- ◆ relative pronoun
- ◆ reflexive pronoun

S

- ◆ singular
- ◆ subject
- ◆ subject pronoun
- ◆ subjunctive
- ◆ subordinating conjunction
- ◆ subordinator
- ◆ superlative
- ◆ synonym

T

- ◆ tense
- ◆ transitive verb

U

- ◆ uncountable noun

V

- ◆ verb
- ◆ verb phrase
- ◆ voice

W

X
Y
Z

Rule Classes

To help you understand and correct the problems that Grammatik identifies in your writing.

- ◆ Abbreviation
- ◆ Adjective
- ◆ Adverb
- ◆ Archaic
- ◆ Article
- ◆ Capitalization
- ◆ Cliche
- ◆ Colloquial
- ◆ Comma Splice or Fused Sentence
- ◆ Commonly Confused
- ◆ Comparative or Superlative
- ◆ Conditional Clause
- ◆ Conjunction
- ◆ Consecutive Elements
- ◆ Date and Time Format
- ◆ Double Negative
- ◆ Doubled Word or Punctuation
- ◆ Ellipsis
- ◆ End-of-Sentence Preposition
- ◆ End-of-Sentence Punctuation
- ◆ Foreign
- ◆ Formalisms
- ◆ Gender-specific
- ◆ Homonym
- ◆ Hyphenation
- ◆ Idiomatic Usage
- ◆ Incomplete Sentence
- ◆ Incorrect Verb Form
- ◆ Infinitive
- ◆ Jargon
- ◆ Long Sentence
- ◆ Mid-Sentence Adverb
- ◆ Missing Modifier
- ◆ Noun Phrase
- ◆ Number Style
- ◆ Object of Verb
- ◆ Offensive
- ◆ Overstated
- ◆ Paragraph Problem
- ◆ Parallelism
- ◆ Passive Voice
- ◆ Possessive Form
- ◆ Pronoun Case
- ◆ Pronoun Number Agreement
- ◆ Punctuation
- ◆ Question Mark
- ◆ Questionable Usage
- ◆ Quotation Marks
- ◆ Redundant
- ◆ Relative Pronoun
- ◆ Run-on Sentence
- ◆ Second-Person Address
- ◆ Sentence Variety
- ◆ Similar Words
- ◆ Special-Case Spelling
- ◆ Spelling
- ◆ Split Infinitive
- ◆ Subject-Verb Agreement
- ◆ Subjunctive
- ◆ Subordination
- ◆ Tense Shift

- ◆ Trademark
- ◆ Unbalanced (, {, [,] "
- ◆ User Auto Replacements
- ◆ User Replacements
- ◆ Weak
- ◆ Wordy

Writing

To offer extra information helpful for writing but not related to specific grammar terms or rule class categories.

- ◆ Audience
- ◆ References
- ◆ Suggested Reading

Audience

A writer's audience consists of anyone who reads what the writer has written.

Your audience should determine how you write: your tone, word choice, sentence length, and the voice you choose. An article for a scholarly journal, for example, will use the technical language of that particular field to reach its strictly defined audience. A news article, on the other hand, aims for as wide an audience as possible and avoids technical terms except as needed. Both, however, will discourage the use of the second person ("you") except as part of direct quotations.

Similarly, the editor of a scientific journal will ask you to use the passive voice for its impersonal description of processes. Most journal editors, however, will ask you to use the active voice to make it clearer who is doing what. Always consider your audience before you use foreign expressions, slang, archaisms, or abbreviations. Don't assume these are common knowledge.

Be aware of your readers; use the vocabulary and style best suited to them.

References

Troyka, "Handbook for Writers," pp. 9-12

Williams, "Style," pp. 4-5, 29-30

◆ Related Concepts

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