

About Communication

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A Guide for Office Administration-Health Services Students

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Introduction

Communication is necessary within healthcare environments to ensure accurate, timely, and current transfer of necessary information. Gaps in communication impact healthcare. Always remember that we are the administrative personnel that support all the teams that care for patients. Our communications also impact the loved ones caring for patients. While we are administrative personnel, not clinical, we are often the front-line personnel that people see upon entering a healthcare facility. We are often relied upon as the information hub for all details regarding patients. We are critical to accurate documentation of patient information, transfer of information between multiple clinical areas caring for the patient, and provision of information to patients and their loved ones.



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Operational and business communications are moving away from essay-style paragraphs and moving towards concise, quickly delivered, professional points to convey information for rapid consumption and understanding.

To understand operational communications for all personnel, correct language is required, including effective use of words, correct grammar/spelling and punctuation.

Healthcare is diverse! It is one of the most diverse fields of employment today. Effective, clear communication is vital to supporting patients, care teams, and loved ones.

This resource is designed to support the learning of administrative personnel working towards healthcare employment for those students enrolled in Medical Office Procedures 1 and Medical Office Procedures 2. It is focused on the following learning outcomes from the two Medical Office Procedures courses:



Learning Objectives

- *Demonstrate* the ability to complete accurate, professional documentation within specified time frames using recommended resources, proofreading, and editing techniques.
- *Enhance* communication and note-taking skills by interpreting verbal and written instructions.
- *Identify and apply* manual and electronic health record management using standard guidelines for medical correspondence, forms and health records.
- *Identify and apply* the skills, strategies, task coordination and organization necessary for effective patient communication, including reception, telephone, patient education, and cultural diversity.
- *Review* the basic requirements of medical research, publication, and grant proposals.

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MODULE 1: GENERAL GRAMMAR

Module Overview

- [1.1 Subject-Verb Agreement](#)
- [1.2 Verb Tense](#)
- [1.3 Capitalization](#)
- [1.4 Pronouns](#)
- [1.5 Articles](#)
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- [1.10 Plurals](#)
- [1.11 Proofreading](#)

1.1 Subject-Verb Agreement

In the workplace, you want to present a professional image. Your outfit or suit says something about you when meeting face-to-face, and your writing represents you in your absence. Grammatical mistakes in your writing or even in speaking make a negative impression on coworkers, clients, and potential employers. Subject-verb agreement is one of the most common errors that people make. Having a solid understanding of this concept is critical when making a good impression, and it will help ensure that your ideas are communicated clearly.

Agreement

Agreement in speech and in writing refers to the proper grammatical match between words and phrases. Parts of sentences must *agree*, or correspond with other parts, in number, person, case, and gender.

- **Number.** All parts must match in singular or plural forms.
- **Person.** All parts must match in first person (*I*), second person (*you*), or third person (*he, she, it, they*) forms.
- **Case.** All parts must match in subjective (*I, you, he, she, it, they, we*), objective (*me, her, him, them, us*), or possessive (*my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, their, theirs, our, ours*) forms. For more information on pronoun case agreement, see [7.5 "Pronoun Agreement"](#) in *Putting the Pieces Together*.
- **Gender.** All parts must match in male or female forms.

Subject-verb agreement describes the proper match between subjects and verbs.

Subjects and verbs are either singular or plural, and the subject of a sentence and the verb of a sentence must agree with each other in number. That is, a singular subject belongs with a singular verb form, and a plural subject belongs with a plural verb form. For more information on subjects and verbs, see [section 7.1 "Sentence Writing"](#) in *Putting the Pieces Together*.

Singular: The cat *jumps* over the fence.

Plural: The cats *jump* over the fence.

Regular Verbs

Regular verbs follow a predictable pattern. For example, in the third person singular, regular verbs always end in -s. Other forms of regular verbs do not end in -s. Study the following regular verb forms in the present tense.

Table 1.1.1: Regular Verbs

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I live.	We live.
Second Person	You live.	You live.
Third Person	He/She/It lives.	They live.



Tip

Add an -es to the third-person singular form of regular verbs that end in -sh, -x, -ch, and -s.
(I wish/He wishes, I fix/She fixes, I watch/It watches, I kiss/He kisses.)

Singular: I *read* every day.

Plural: We *read* every day.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the first-person singular and the first-person plural.

Singular: You *stretch* before you go to bed.

Plural: You *stretch* before every game.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the second-person singular and the second-person plural. In the singular form, the pronoun *you* refers to one person. In the plural form, the pronoun *you* refers to a group of people, such as a team.

Singular: My mother *walks* to work every morning.

In this sentence, the subject is *mother*. Because the sentence only refers to one mother, the subject is singular. The verb in this sentence must be in the third-person singular form.

Plural: My friends *like* the same music as I do.

In this sentence, the subject is *friends*. Because this subject refers to more than one person, the subject is plural. The verb in this sentence must be in the third-person plural form.



Tip

Many singular subjects can be made plural by adding an -s. Most regular verbs in the present tense end with an -s in the third person singular. This does not make the verbs plural.

Singular subject, singular verb: The cat *rac*es across the yard.

Plural subject, plural verb: The cats *rac*e across the yard.

Irregular Verbs

Not all verbs follow a predictable pattern. These verbs are called irregular verbs. Some of the most common irregular verbs are *be*, *have*, and *do*. Learn the forms of these verbs in the present tense to avoid errors in subject-verb agreement.

Be

Study the different forms of the verb *to be* in the present tense.

Table 1.1.2: Irregular Verb “be”

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I am.	We are.
Second Person	You are.	You are.
Third Person	He/She/It is.	They are.

Have

Study the different forms of the verb *to have* in the present tense.

Table 1.1.3: Irregular Verb “have”

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I have.	We have.
Second Person	You have.	You have.
Third Person	He/She/It has.	They have.

Do

Study the different forms of the verb *to do* in the present tense.

Table 1.1.4: Irregular Verb “do”

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I do.	We do.
Second Person	You do.	You do.
Third person	He/She/It does.	They do.

Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

Errors in subject-verb agreement may occur when

- a sentence contains a compound subject.
- the subject of the sentence is separate from the verb.
- the subject of the sentence is an indefinite pronoun, such as *anyone* or *everyone*.
- the subject of the sentence is a collective noun, such as *team* or *organization*.
- the subject appears after the verb.

Recognizing the sources of common errors in subject-verb agreement will help you avoid these errors in your writing. This section covers the subject-verb agreement errors in more detail.

Compound Subjects

A **compound subject** is formed by two or more nouns and the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *or*, or *nor*. A compound subject can be made of singular subjects, plural subjects, or a combination of singular and plural subjects.

Compound subjects combined with *and* take a plural verb form.

Two singular subjects: Alicia and Miguel *ride* their bikes to the beach.

Two plural subjects: The girls and the boys *ride* their bikes to the beach.

Singular and plural subjects: Alicia and the boys *ride* their bikes to the beach.

Compound subjects combined with *or* and *nor* are treated separately. The verb must agree with the subject that is nearest to the verb.

Two singular subjects: Either you or Jason *takes* the furniture out of the garage.

Two plural subjects: Either you or the twins *take* the furniture out of the garage.

Singular and plural subjects: Either Jason or the twins *take* the furniture out of the garage.

Plural and singular subjects: Either the twins or Jason *takes* the furniture out of the garage.

If you can substitute the word *they* for the compound subject, then the sentence takes the third person plural verb form.

Separation of Subjects and Verbs

As you read or write, you may come across a sentence that contains a phrase or clause that separates the subject from the verb. Often, prepositional phrases or dependent clauses add more information to the sentence and appear between the subject and the verb. However, the subject and the verb must still agree.

If you have trouble finding the subject and verb, cross out or ignore the phrases and clauses that begin with prepositions or dependent words. The subject of a sentence will never be in a prepositional phrase or dependent clause.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a prepositional phrase:

The students with the best grades *win* the academic awards.

The puppy under the table *is* my favourite.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a dependent clause:

The car that I bought *has* power steering and a sunroof.

The representatives who are courteous *sell* the most tickets.

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to an unspecified person, thing, or number. When an indefinite pronoun serves as the subject of a sentence, you will often use a singular verb form.

However, keep in mind that exceptions arise. Some indefinite pronouns may require a plural verb form. To determine whether to use a singular or plural verb with an indefinite pronoun, consider the noun that the pronoun would refer to. If the noun is plural, then use a plural verb with the indefinite pronoun. View the chart to see a list of common indefinite pronouns and the verb forms they agree with.

Table 1.1.5: Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite Pronouns That Always Take a Singular Verb	Indefinite Pronouns That Can Take a Singular or Plural Verb
anybody, anyone, anything	All
each	Any
everybody, everyone, everything	None
much	Some
many	
nobody, no one, nothing	
somebody, someone, something	

Singular: Everybody in the kitchen *sings* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *everybody* takes a singular verb form because *everybody* refers to a group performing the same action as a single unit.

Plural: All the people in the kitchen *sing* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *all* takes a plural verb form because *all* refers to the plural noun *people*. Because *people* is plural, *all* is plural.

Singular: All the cake *is* on the floor.

In this sentence, the indefinite pronoun *all* takes a singular verb form because *all* refers to the singular noun *cake*. Because *cake* is singular, *all* is singular.

Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and considers those people, places, or things one singular unit. Because collective nouns are counted as one, they are singular and require a singular verb. Some commonly used collective nouns are *group*, *team*, *army*, *flock*, *family*, and *class*.

Singular: The class *is* going on a field trip.

In this sentence, *class* is a collective noun. Although the class consists of many students, the class is treated as a singular unit and requires a singular verb form.

The Subject Follows the Verb

You may encounter sentences in which the subject comes after the verb instead of before the verb. In other words, the subject of the sentence may not appear where you expect it to appear. To ensure proper subject-verb agreement, you must correctly identify the subject and the verb.

Here or There

In sentences that begin with *here* or *there*, the subject follows the verb.

Here *is* my wallet!

There *are* thirty dolphins in the water.

If you have trouble identifying the subject and the verb in sentences that start with *here* or *there*; it may help to reverse the order of the sentence so the subject comes first.

Questions

When you ask questions, a question word (*who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, or *how*) appears first. The verb and then the subject follow.

Who *are* the people you are related to?

When *am* I going to go to the grocery store?



Tip

If you have trouble finding the subject and the verb in questions, try answering the question being asked:

When am I going to the grocery store? I am going to the grocery store tonight!



Key Takeaways

- Parts of sentences must agree in number, person, case, and gender.
- A verb must always agree with its subject in number. A singular subject requires a singular verb; a plural subject requires a plural verb.
- Irregular verbs do not follow a predictable pattern in their singular and plural forms. Common irregular verbs are *to be*, *to have*, and *to do*.
- A compound subject is formed when two or more nouns are joined by the words *and*, *or*, or *nor*.
- In some sentences, the subject and verb may be separated by a phrase or clause, but the verb must still agree with the subject.
- Indefinite pronouns, such as *anyone*, *each*, *everyone*, *many*, *no one*, and *something*, refer to unspecified people or objects. Most indefinite pronouns are singular.
- A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and treats those people, places, or things as one singular unit. Collective nouns require singular verbs.
- In sentences that begin with *here* and *there*, the subject follows the verb.
- In questions, the subject follows the verb.

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1.2 Verb Tense

Suppose you must give an oral presentation about what you did last summer. How do you make it clear that you are talking about the past and not about the present or the future? Using the correct verb tense can help you do this.

It is important to use the proper verb tense. Otherwise, your listener might judge you harshly. Mistakes in tense often leave a listener or reader with a negative impression.

Regular Verbs

Verbs indicate actions or states of being in the past, present, or future using tenses. Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from the present to past tense. For example, to form a past-tense or past-participle verb form, add *-ed* or *-d* to the end of a verb. You can avoid mistakes by understanding this basic pattern.

Verb tense identifies the time of action described in a sentence. Verbs take different forms to indicate different tenses. Verb tenses indicate

- an action or state of being in the present,
- an action or state of being in the past,
- an action or state of being in the future.

Helping verbs, such as *be* and *have*, also work to create verb tenses, such as the future tense.

Present Tense: Time *walks* to the store. (Singular subject)

Present Tense: Sue and Kimmy *walk* to the store. (Plural subject)

Past Tense: Yesterday, they *walked* to the store to buy some bread. (Singular subject)

Irregular Verbs

The past tense of irregular verbs is not formed using the patterns that regular verbs follow. Study Table 1.2.1 “Irregular Verbs”, which lists the most common irregular verbs. The best way to learn irregular verbs is to memorize them. With the help of a classmate, create flashcards of irregular verbs and test yourselves until you master them.

Table 1.2.1: Irregular Verbs

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
be	was, were	lose	lost
become	became	make	made
begin	began	mean	meant
blow	blew	meet	met
break	broke	pay	paid
bring	brought	put	put
build	built	quit	quit
burst	burst	read	read
buy	bought	ride	rode
catch	caught	ring	rang
choose	chose	rise	rose
come	came	run	ran
cut	cut	say	said
dive	dove (dived)	see	saw
do	did	seek	sought
draw	drew	sell	sold
drink	drank	send	sent
drive	drove	set	set
eat	ate	shake	shook
fall	fell	shine	shone (shined)
feed	fed	shrink	shrank (shrunk)
feel	felt	sing	sang
fight	fought	sit	sat
find	found	sleep	slept
fly	flew	speak	spoke
forget	forgot	spend	spent
forgive	forgave	spring	sprang
freeze	froze	stand	stood
get	got	steal	stole
give	gave	strike	struck

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
go	went	swim	swam
grow	grew	swing	swung
have	had	take	took
hear	heard	teach	taught
hide	hid	tear	tore
hold	held	tell	told
hurt	hurt	think	thought
keep	kept	throw	threw
know	knew	understand	understood
lay	laid	wake	woke
lead	led	wear	wore
leave	left	win	won
let	let	wind	wound

Here, we consider using irregular verbs.

Present Tense: Lauren *keeps* all her letters.

Past Tense: Lauren *kept* all her letters.

Future Tense: Lauren *will keep* all her letters.

Maintaining Consistent Verb Tense

Consistent verb tense means the same verb tense is used throughout a sentence or a paragraph. As you write and revise, it is important to use the same verb tense consistently and to avoid shifting from one tense to another unless there is a good reason for the tense shift. In the following box, see whether you notice the difference between a sentence with consistent tense and one with inconsistent tense.

Inconsistent tense:

The crowd *starts* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line.

Consistent tense:

The crowd *started* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line.

Consistent tense:

The crowd *starts* cheering as Melina *approaches* the finish line.



Tip

In some cases, clear communication will call for different tenses. Look at the following example:

When I was a teenager, I wanted to be a firefighter, but now I am studying computer science.

If the time frame for each action or state is different, a tense shift is appropriate.



Key Takeaways

- Verb tense helps you express when an event takes place.
- Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from present to past tense.
- Irregular verbs do not follow regular, predictable patterns when shifting from present to past tense.
- Using consistent verb tense is a key element to effective writing.

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1.3 Capitalization

Text messages, casual e-mails, and instant messages often ignore the rules of capitalization. In fact, it can seem unnecessary to capitalize in these contexts. In other, more formal forms of communication, however, knowing the basic rules of capitalization and using capitalization correctly gives the reader the impression that you choose your words carefully and care about the ideas you are conveying.

Capitalize the First Word of a Sentence

Incorrect: the museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

Correct: The museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

Incorrect: cooking can be therapeutic.

Correct: Cooking can be therapeutic.

Capitalize Proper Nouns

Proper nouns—the names of specific people, places, objects, streets, buildings, events, or titles of individuals—are always capitalized. When an acronym is a proper noun, each letter of the acronym is capitalized.

Incorrect: He grew up in london, ontario.

Correct: He grew up in London, Ontario.

Incorrect: The bmo field will be renamed to the toronto stadium for the 2026 fifa world cup.

Correct: The BMO Field will be renamed to the Toronto Stadium for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Always capitalize nationalities, races, languages, and religions. For example, Canadian, African American, Hispanic, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on.

Do not capitalize nouns for people, places, things, streets, buildings, events, and titles when the noun is used in general or common way. See the following chart for the difference between proper nouns and common nouns.

Table 1.3.1: Common and Proper Nouns

Common Noun	Proper Noun
museum	The Royal Ontario Museum
theater	Royal Alexandria Theater
country	Malaysia
uncle	Uncle Javier
doctor	Dr. Jackson
book	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
college	Smith College
war	the Spanish-American War
historical event	The Renaissance

Capitalize Days of the Week, Months of the Year, and Holidays

Incorrect: On wednesday, I will be traveling to Ottawa for a music festival.

Correct: On Wednesday, I will be traveling to Ottawa for a music festival.

Incorrect: The twenty-fourth of may is my favorite holiday.

Correct: The Twenty-fourth of May is my favorite holiday.

Capitalize Titles

Incorrect: The play, fences, by August Wilson is one of my favorites.

Correct: The play, Fences, by August Wilson is one of my favorites.

Incorrect: The prieme minister of canada will be speaking at my university.

Correct: The Prieme Minister of Canada will be speaking at my university.

Computer-related words such as “Internet” and “World Wide Web” are usually capitalized; however, “e-mail” and “online” are never capitalized.



Key Takeaways

- Learning and applying the basic rules of capitalization is a fundamental aspect of good writing.
- Identifying and correcting errors in capitalization is an important writing skill.

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1.4 Pronouns

If there were no pronouns, all types of writing would be quite tedious to read. We would soon be frustrated by reading sentences like *Bob said that Bob was tired* or *Christina told the class that Christina received an A*. Pronouns help a writer avoid constant repetition. Knowing just how pronouns work is an important aspect of clear and concise writing.

Pronouns indicate respect for diverse communities. If someone provides you with their pronouns, you use them to indicate respect. Not using those pronouns may be considered disrespectful.

Healthcare has an incredibly diverse culture and requires professionals to create a safe and respectful environment for all community members. Please be as respectful as possible.

Pronoun Agreement

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of (or refers back to) a noun or another pronoun. The word or words a pronoun refers to is called the antecedent of the pronoun.

1. *Lani* complained that *she* was exhausted.

- *She* refers to *Lani*.
- *Lani* is the antecedent of *she*.

2. *Jeremy* left the party early, so I did not see *him* until Monday at work.

- *Him* refers to *Jeremy*.
- *Jeremy* is the antecedent of *him*.

3. *Crina and Rosalie* have been best friends ever since *they* were freshman in high school.

- *They* refers to *Crina and Rosalie*.
- *Crina and Rosalie* is the antecedent of *they*.

Pronoun agreement errors occur when the pronoun and the antecedent do not match or agree with each other. There are several types of pronoun agreement.

Agreement in Number

If the pronoun takes the place of or refers to a singular noun, the pronoun must also be singular.

Incorrect: If a *student* (sing.) wants to return a book to the bookstore, *they* (plur.) must have a receipt.

Correct: If a *student* (sing.) wants to return a book to the bookstore, *he or she* (sing.) must have a

receipt.

*If it seems too wordy to use *he or she*, change the antecedent to a plural noun.

Correct: If *students* (plur.) want to return a book to the bookstore, *they* (plur.) must have a receipt.

Agreement in Person

Table 1.4.1: Pronoun Agreement

	Singular Pronouns			Plural Pronouns		
First Person	I	me	my (mine)	we	us	our (ours)
Second Person	you	you	your (yours)	you	you	your (your)
Third Person	he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her, its	they	them	their (theirs)

If you use a consistent person, your reader is less likely to be confused.

Incorrect: When a *person* (3rd) goes to a restaurant, *you* (2nd) should leave a tip.

Correct: When a *person* (3rd) goes to a restaurant, *he or she* (3rd) should leave a tip.

Correct: When *we* (1st) go to a restaurant, *I should* (1st) should leave a tip.

Indefinite Pronouns and Agreement

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person or thing and are usually singular. Note that a pronoun that refers to an indefinite singular pronoun should also be singular. The following are some common indefinite pronouns.

Table 1.4.2: Common Indefinite Pronouns

Common Indefinite Pronouns				
all	each one	few	nothing	several
any	each other	many	one	some
anybody	either	neither	one another	somebody
anything	everybody	nobody	oneself	someone
both	everyone	none	other	something
each	everything	no one	others	anyone

Indefinite pronoun agreement

Incorrect: *Everyone* (sing.) should do what *they* (plur.) can to help.

Correct: *Everyone* (sing.) should do what *he or she* (sing.) can to help.

Incorrect: *Someone* (sing.) left *their* (plur.) backpack in the library.

Correct: *Someone* (sing.) left *his or her* (sing.) backpack in the library.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns suggest more than one person but are usually considered singular. Look over the following examples of collective nouns.

Table 1.4.3: Common Collective Nouns

Common Collective Nouns		
audience	faculty	public
band	family	school
class	government	society
committee	group	team
company	jury	tribe

Collective noun agreement

Incorrect: Lara's *company* (sing.) will have *their* (plur.) annual picnic next week.

Correct: Lara's *company* (sing.) will have *its* (sing.) annual picnic next week.

Subject and Object Pronouns

Subject pronouns function as subjects in a sentence. Object pronouns function as the object of a verb or a preposition.

Table 1.4.4: Subject and Object Pronouns

Singular Pronouns		Plural Pronouns	
Subject	Object	Subject	Object
I	me	we	us
you	you	you	you
he, she, it	him, her, it	they	them

The following sentences show pronouns as subjects:

1. *She* loves Agawa Canyon in the fall.
2. Every summer, *they* picked up litter from national parks.

The following sentences show pronouns as objects:

1. Marie leaned over and kissed *him*.
2. Jane moved *it* to the corner.



Tip

Note that a pronoun can also be the object of a preposition.

Near *them*, the children played.

My mother stood between *us*.

The pronouns *us* and *them* are objects of the prepositions *near* and *between*. They answer the questions *near* whom? And *between* whom?

Compound subject pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the subject of the sentence.

The following sentences show pronouns with compound subjects:

Incorrect: *Me and Harriet* visited the Calgary Stampede last summer.

Correct: *Harriet and I* visited the Calgary Stampede last summer.

Correct: Jenna accompanied *Harriet and me* on our trip.



Tip

Note that object pronouns are never used in the subject position. One way to remember this rule is to remove the other subject in a compound subject, leave only the pronoun, and see whether the

sentence makes sense. For example, *Me visited the Grand Canyon last summer* sounds immediately incorrect.

Compound object pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the object of the sentence.

Incorrect: I have a good feeling about *Janice and I*.

Correct: I have a good feeling about *Janice and me*.

It is correct to write *Janice and me*, as opposed to *me and Janice*. Just remember it is more polite to refer to yourself last.

Who versus Whom

Who or *whoever* is always the subject of a verb. Use *who* or *whoever* when the pronoun performs the action indicated by the verb.

Who won the marathon last Tuesday?

I wonder *who* came up with that terrible idea!

On the other hand, *whom* and *whomever* serve as objects. They are used when the pronoun does *not* perform an action. Use *whom* or *whomever* when the pronoun is the direct object of a verb or the object of a preposition.

Whom did Frank marry the third time? (direct object of verb)

From *whom* did you buy that old record player? (object of preposition)



Tip

If you are having trouble deciding when to use *who* and *whom*, try this trick. Take the following sentence:

Who/Whom do I consider my best friend?

Reorder the sentence in your head, using either *he* or *him* in place of *who* or *whom*.

I consider *him* my best friend.

I consider *he* my best friend.

Which sentence sounds better? The first one, of course. So the trick is, if you can use *him*, you should use *whom*.



Key Takeaways

- Pronouns and their antecedents need to agree in number and person.
- Most indefinite pronouns are singular.
- Collective nouns are usually singular.
- Pronouns can function as subjects or objects.
- Subject pronouns are never used as objects, and object pronouns are never used as subjects.
- *Who* serves as a subject of a verb.
- *Whom* serves as an object of a sentence or the object of a preposition.

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1.5 Articles

Definite and Indefinite Articles

The word *the* is a definite article. It refers to one or more specific things. For example, *the woman* refers to not any woman but a particular woman. The definite article *the* is used before singular and plural count nouns.

The words *a* and *an* are indefinite articles. They refer to one nonspecific thing. For example, *a woman* refers to any woman, not a specific, particular woman. The indefinite article *a* or *an* is used before a singular count noun.

Definite Articles (*The*) and Indefinite Articles (*A/An*) with Count Nouns

I saw **the** concert. (singular, refers to a specific concert)

I saw **the** concerts. (plural, refers to more than one specific concert)

I saw **the** Barenaked Ladies concert last night. (singular, refers to a specific concert)

I saw **a** concert. (singular, refers to any nonspecific concert)



Key Takeaways

- *The* is a definite article and is used to refer to a specific person, place, or thing, such as **the** Queen of England.
- *A* and *an* are indefinite articles, and they refer to nonspecific people, places, or things, such as **an** apple or **a** bicycle.

“[A.1.3 Count and Noncount Nouns and Articles](#)” from [Putting the Pieces Together](#) by Andrew M. Stracuzzi and André Cormier is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.—Modifications: Used section Definite and Indefinite Articles; removed Exercises, Writing Application; Used Key Takeaways for Articles only.

1.6 Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are descriptive words that bring your writing to life.

Adjectives and Adverbs

An adjective is a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. It often answers questions such as *which one*, *what kind*, or *how many*?

1. The *green* sweater belongs to Iris.
2. She looks *beautiful*.

- In sentence 1, the adjective *green* describes the noun *sweater*.
- In sentence 2, the adjective *beautiful* describes the pronoun *she*.

An adverb is a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs frequently end in *-ly*. They answer questions such as *how*, *to what extent*, *why*, *when*, and *where*.

3. Bertrand sings *horribly*.
4. My sociology instructor is *extremely* wise.
5. He threw the ball *very* accurately.

- In sentence 3, *horribly* describes the verb *sings*. How does Bertrand sing? He sings *horribly*.
- In sentence 4, *extremely* describes the adjective *wise*. How *wise* is the instructor? *Extremely* wise.
- In sentence 5, *very* describes the adverb *accurately*. How *accurately* did he throw the ball? *Very* accurately.

Comparative versus Superlative

Comparative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare two people or things.

1. Jorge is *thin*.
2. Steven is *thinner* than Jorge.

- Sentence 1 describes Jorge with the adjective *thin*.
- Sentence 2 compares Jorge to Steven, stating that Steven is *thinner*. So *thinner* is the comparative form of *thin*.

Form comparatives in one of the following two ways:

- If the adjective or adverb is a one-syllable word, add *-er* to it to form the comparative. For example, *big*, *fast*, and *short* would become *bigger*, *faster*, and *shorter* in the comparative form.
- If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word *more* in front of it to form the comparative. For example, *happily*, *comfortable*, and *jealous* would become *more happily*, *more comfortable*, and *more jealous* in the comparative.

Superlative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare more than two people or two things.

1. Jackie is the *loudest* cheerleader on the squad.
 2. Kenyatta was voted the *most confident* student by her graduating class.
- Sentence 1 shows that Jackie is not just *louder* than one other person, but she is the *loudest* of all the cheerleaders on the squad.
 - Sentence 2 shows that Kenyatta was voted the *most confident* student of all the students in her class.

Form superlatives in one of the following two ways:

- If the adjective or adverb is a one-syllable word, add *-est* to form the superlative. For example, *big*, *fast*, and *short* would become *biggest*, *fastest*, and *shortest* in the superlative form.
- If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word *most* in front of it. For example, *happily*, *comfortable*, and *jealous* would become *most happily*, *most comfortable*, and *most jealous* in the superlative form.



Tip

Remember the following exception: If the word has two syllables and ends in *-y*, change the *-y* to an *-i* and add *-est*.

For example, *happy* would change to *happiest* in the superlative form; *healthy* would change to *healthiest*.

Irregular Words: *Good*, *Well*, *Bad*, and *Badly*

Good, *well*, *bad*, and *badly* are often used incorrectly. Study the following chart to learn the correct usage of these words and their comparative and superlative forms.

Table 1.6.1: Comparative and Superlative forms of Irregular Words

		Comparative	Superlative
Adjective	good	better	best
Adverb	well	better	best
Adjective	bad	worse	worst
Adverb	badly	worse	worst

Good versus *Well*

Good is always an adjective—that is, a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. The second sentence is correct because *well* is an adverb that tells how something is done.

Incorrect: Cecilia felt that she had never done so *good* on a test.

Correct: Cecilia felt that she had never done so *well* on a test.

Well is always an adverb that describes a verb, adverb, or adjective. The second sentence is correct because *good* is an adjective that describes the noun *score*.

Incorrect: Cecilia's team received a *well* score.

Correct: Cecilia's team received a *good* score.

Bad versus Badly

Bad is always an adjective. The second sentence is correct because *badly* is an adverb that tells how the speaker did on the test.

Incorrect: I did *bad* on my accounting test because I didn't study.

Correct: I did *badly* on my accounting test because I didn't study.

Badly is always an adverb. The second sentence is correct because *bad* is an adjective that describes the noun *thunderstorm*.

Incorrect: The coming thunderstorm looked *badly*.

Correct: The coming thunderstorm looked *bad*.

Better and Worse

The following are examples of the use of *better* and *worse*:

Tyra likes sprinting *better* than long-distance running. The traffic is *worse* in Chicago than in Atlanta.

Best and Worst

The following are examples of the use of *best* and *worst*:

Tyra sprints *best* of all the other competitors. Peter finished *worst* of all the runners in the race.

Remember *better* and *worse* compare two persons or things. *Best* and *worst* compare three or more persons or things.



Key Takeaways

- Adjectives describe nouns or pronouns.
- Adverbs describe a verb, adjective, or another adverb.
- Most adverbs are formed by adding *-ly* to an adjective.
- Comparative adjectives and adverbs compare two persons or things.
- Superlative adjectives or adverbs compare more than two persons or things.
- The adjectives *good* and *bad* and the adverbs *well* and *badly* are unique in their comparative and superlative forms and require special attention.

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1.7 Prepositions

A preposition is a word that connects a noun or a pronoun to another word in a sentence. Most prepositions, such as above, below, and behind, usually indicate a location in the physical world, but some prepositions, such as during, after, and until, show location in time.

There are two rules to remember when using prepositions.

1. To make sentences clear, specific prepositions are needed. Some prepositions are interchangeable, but not always. *I want to see you **in** the office* means something very different from *I want to see you **on** the office!*
2. Prepositions are generally followed by nouns or pronouns. *I am seeking someone I can depend **on*** ends with a preposition on, so people who insisted that sentences shouldn't end with a preposition would be forced to use convoluted and unnatural phrasing. To avoid ending that sentence above with a preposition, you'd have to say, someone I can depend on is whom I am seeking.

(Ginger, n.d.)

In, At, and On

The prepositions in, at, and on are used to indicate both location and time, but they are used in specific ways. Study Table 1.7.1, Table 1.7.2, and Table 1.7.3 to learn when to use each one.

Table 1.7.1: Use of the preposition “in”

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
In	Year	“in 2024”	country	“in Canada”
	month	“in August”	province	“in Ontario”
	season	“in the summer”	city	“in London”
	time of day (not with night)	“in the afternoon”		

Table 1.7.2: use of the preposition “on”

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
on	day	“on Monday”	surfaces	“on the table”
	date	“on May 23”	streets	“on 124th Street”
	specific days/dates	“on Monday the 23rd”	modes of transportation	“on the bus”

Table 1.7.3: Use of the preposition “at”

Preposition	Time	Example	Place	Example
at	specific time	“at five o’clock”	addresses	“at 1001 Fanshawe College Blvd.”
	time of night	“at night”	location	“at the campus store”

Prepositions after Verbs

Prepositions often follow verbs to create expressions with distinct meanings. These expressions are sometimes called prepositional verbs. It is important to remember that these expressions cannot be separated.

Table 1.7.4: Common preposition and verb pairings

Verb + Preposition	Meaning	Example
agree with	To agree with something or somebody	“My friend always agrees with me.”
apologize for	To express regret for something, to say sorry about something	“I apologize for being late.”
apply for	To ask for something formally	“I will apply for that job.”
believe in	To have a firm conviction in something; to believe in the existence of something	“I believe in the value of education.”
care about	To think that someone or something is important	“I care about the health of our oceans.”
hear about	To be told about something or someone	“I heard about the teachers’ strike.”
look after	To watch or protect someone or something	“Will you look after my dog while I am away on vacation?”
talk about	To discuss something	“We will talk about the importance of recycling.”
speak to, speak with	To talk to/with someone	“I will speak to the teacher about this.”
wait for	To await the arrival of someone or something	“I will wait for my package to arrive.”



Tip

It is a good idea to memorize these combinations of verbs plus prepositions. Write them down in a notebook along with the definition, and practice using them when you speak.

Prepositions after Adjectives

Similar to prepositions after verbs, prepositions after adjectives create expressions with distinct meanings unique to English. Remember, like prepositional verbs, these expressions also cannot be separated.

Table 1.7.5: Common adjective and preposition pairings

Adjective + Preposition	Meaning	Example
angry at/angry about	To feel or show anger toward (or about) someone or something	"I am angry about the oil spill in the ocean."
confused about	To be unable to think with clarity about someone or something	"Shawn was confused about the concepts presented at the meeting."
disappointed in/disappointed with	To feel dissatisfaction with someone or something	"I was disappointed in my friend for voting for that candidate."
dressed in	To clothe the body	"He was dressed in a pin-striped suit."
happy for	To show happiness for someone or something	"I was happy for my sister who graduated from college."
interested in	Giving attention to something, expressing interest	"I am interested in musical theater."
jealous of	To feel resentful or bitter toward someone or something (because of their status/ possessions, or ability)	"I was jealous of her because she always went on vacation."
thankful for	To express thanks for something	"I am thankful for my wonderful friends."
tired of	To be disgusted with, have a distaste for	"I was tired of driving for hours without end."
worried about	To express anxiety or worry about something	"I am worried about my father's health."



Tip

The following adjectives are always followed by the preposition at:

Good – She is really good at chess.

Excellent – Henry is excellent at drawing.

Brilliant – Mary Anne is brilliant at playing the violin.



Key Takeaways

- The prepositions in, at, and on are used to indicate both location and time, but they are used in specific ways.
- The preposition in is used when expressing the following: year, month, season, time of day (not with night), country, state, and city.

- The preposition on is used to express day, date, and specific days or dates and surfaces, streets, and transportation modes.
- The preposition at is used for expressions of time, with night, and with addresses and locations.
- Prepositions often follow verbs to create expressions with distinct meanings that are unique to English.
- Prepositions also follow adjectives to create expressions with distinct meanings that are unique to English.

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1.8 Basic Guideline when Writing Numbers

Professional communicators have a few debate points on writing numbers, but most of the advice is consistent.

Any number less than 10 is to be written in words. Generally, the word is followed by the numeral in parenthesis.

Zero (0), one (1), two (2), three (3), four (4), five (5), six (6), seven (7), eight (8), and nine (9).

Numbers greater than nine are written as digits until you reach the millions. Then, for ease of reading, you may write large numbers in the following style: 3.2 million, half a billion, 453 billion, 1.22 trillion, and so on.



Example

I have a sentimental attachment to these two (2) things.

That happened two months ago.

Twelve percent of men and women experience issues with seeing colours.

Tips

- When writing a number less than one and greater than -1 in a decimal format, include a leading zero before the decimal point. That is, write “0.5” and not “.5” or “-0.25” and not “-.25”; this will provide greater visual clarity.
- Negative numbers are always written as digits, showing the negative symbol before the number.
- If your number has units attached or is expressed as a fraction or in some mathematical equation, always express it as digits. Here are some examples: \$1.00, 2%, 3/4, 5°, etc.
- You should usually use the percent symbol with percentages, but writing “percent” is also acceptable. Whatever choice you make, be consistent. Do not write “per cent” with a space in it.
- For APA style, if the numbers precede a unit of measurement, use the numerals.



Examples

5-mg dose

A ratio of 4:1

6%

Within the 4th percentile

Fun activities for Grade 8 students

Exceptions

If you begin a sentence with a number, you'll write out the whole number to avoid confusion. Here's an example:
"Fifty-five years ago, music reached its zenith."

If you're keeping score at a sporting event or putting a number on the back of a player's jersey, the numbers are always expressed as digits. Addresses are virtually always expressed as digits, even when only a single digit is part of the address, and commas are not added in street numbers of four digits or longer.

"[Appendix B: Writing Numbers](#)" from [Professional Writing Today](#) Copyright © 2022 by Sam Schechter is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.—Modifications: Edited for brevity; Added examples.

1.9 Apostrophes/Possessive S

Two main ways to show ownership in writing are using a *possessive apostrophe* or a *possessive pronoun*. This section will define and provide examples of each.

Possessive Apostrophes

Apostrophes are signals telling the reader that a word is possessive or a contraction. As a communicator, it's important to understand the difference between the two.

Apostrophes are used to form contractions to indicate omitted letters, such as *couldn't* (the apostrophe indicates the missing letter o).

Apostrophes are also used to signal omitted numbers, such as *The '80s* (the apostrophe indicates the missing numbers 19). But this has nothing to do with apostrophes used to show possession.

To use an apostrophe to show ownership, you simply add ***apostrophe s*** or ***s apostrophe*** to a noun, depending on whether it's singular or plural. **Singular Possessive Apostrophe:** to indicate singular ownership, add ***apostrophe s***:



Example

- The car's new tires were next to John's workstation. (there is only one car and one John, so we simply add an **apostrophe s** to indicate singular ownership).
- The woman's home needed refurbishing, so she used last week's pay to go furniture shopping.

Plural Possessive Apostrophe: to indicate plural ownership, add ***s apostrophe***.



Examples

- The cars' new tires were stacked up next to the mechanics' workstations (in this case there is more than one car and more than one mechanic, so we would use **s apostrophe**).
- The roommates' house needed repairs, so they all agreed to use some of the extra months' rent money they'd saved to go furniture shopping.

Joint and Individual Ownership: to show joint ownership, only the last noun/name has the *apostrophe s*. To show individual ownership, each noun/name has an apostrophe s.



Examples

- **Joint:** Mary, Beth, Phil, and Bill's house.
- **Individual:** Mary's, Beth's, Phil's, and Bill's houses.

Nouns Ending in S: When making a *possessive of a singular noun that already ends in s*, writers can make the possessive by adding 's to the word; however, some writers and editors argue that there's no need to include an s after the apostrophe since the apostrophe already tells readers that the word is possessive. Others argue that you should drop the final s only on words of several syllables but retain it on short words. Since there is no agreement on this, must make your own choice. Regardless of which option you choose, **be consistent**.



Examples

Table 1.9.1 shows three proper nouns that end in s, each of which is correct:

Table 1.9.1: Proper Nouns Ending in S

NAME	APOSTROPHE S	S APOSTROPHE
James	James's	James'
Jones	Jones's	Jones'
Jesus	Jesus's	Jesus'

***NOTE:** There are irregular nouns like fish (one fish, two fish) and goose (one goose, two geese), but we won't worry about those right now.

Possessive Pronouns

Pronouns, such as *him*, *her*, *they*, and *them* are stand-ins for proper nouns; in other words, they refer to someone or something specific without using the proper noun or name. **Possessive pronouns show ownership**. Some are used alone, while others are used to modify or describe a noun.

Used alone: *mine*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *ours*, *theirs*, *whose*



Examples

That computer is **hers**. That car is **mine**.

Used as modifier: *my, your, his, her, its, ours, their, whose*

EXAMPLE: That is **her** computer. The car needs **its** clutch replaced.

*Note that **none** of the possessive pronouns uses an apostrophe to show ownership. Pay extra attention to your use of possessive pronouns, as several of them sound like some commonly used contractions. For example, watch your use of the following commonly confused possessive pronouns and contractions: **Your/You're, Its/It's, Their/They're**, and **Whose/Who's**.

"[Grammar Lesson – Apostrophes/Possessive S](#)" from [Technical Writing for Technicians](#) Copyright © 2019 by Will Fleming is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.

1.10 Plurals

A plural noun indicates that there is more than one of that noun (while a singular noun indicates that there is just one of the nouns). Most plural forms are created by simply adding an -s or -es to the end of the singular word. For example, there's one **dog** (singular) but three **dogs** (plural). However, English has both regular and irregular plural nouns. Regular plurals follow this rule (and other similar rules), but irregular plurals are, well, not regular and don't follow a "standard" rule.

Let's start with regular plurals: regular plural nouns use established patterns to indicate there is more than one of a thing.

As was mentioned earlier, we add the plural suffix -s to most words:

- cat → cats
- bear → bears
- zebra → zebras

However, after sounds *s*, *z*, *sh*, *ch*, and *j*, we add the plural suffix -es:

- class → classes
- sash → sashes
- fox → foxes

Some words that end in *z* also double their ending consonant, like *quizzes*.

After the letter o.

We also add the plural suffix -es to most words that end in *o*:

- potato → potatoes
- hero → heroes
- mosquito → mosquitoes

However, when the words have a foreign origin (e.g., Latin, Greek, Spanish), we just add the plural suffix -s

- taco → tacos
- avocado → avocados
- maestro → maestros

Note: While you won't be expected to know which words have a foreign origin, being familiar with (or memorizing) some common words that use this plural can be really helpful. And remember, if you're ever in doubt, the dictionary is there for you!

After -y and -f, -fe

When a word ends in *y* and there is a consonant before *y*, we change the *y* to *i* and add -es.

- sky → skies

- candy → candies
- lady → ladies

However, if the *y* follows another vowel, you simply add an *-s*.

- alloy → alloys
- donkey → donkeys
- day → days

When a word ends in *-f* or *-fe*, we change the *f* to *v* and add *-es*.

- leaf → leaves
- life → lives
- calf → calves

However, if there are two terminal *fs* or if you still pronounce the *f* in the plural, then you simply add an *-s*:

- cliff → cliffs
- chief → chiefs
- reef → reefs

“1.3 Regular Plural Nouns” from [Guide to Writing](#) by Lumen Learning is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).—Modifications: Removed Practice

1.11 Proofreading

When proofreading documentation, as many office administration-health services students are asked to do during employment, here is a list of items to carefully check

This will be the list of subjects once we have determined the right order.

- Determine if the documentation is formal or informal, and then create it appropriately, for example: formal or informal minutes
- Addresses – include the postal code
- Content-specific vocabulary
- Envelopes with enclosures
- Emails with attachments
- Dates – correct day of week, correct day number, order of dd/mm/yyyy is consistent
- Names are to be double checked, and spelled correctly – your name, the patient's name, the organization's name
- Times – a.m. | p.m., 24-hour clock

MODULE 2: PUNCTUATION

Module Overview

[2.1 Commas](#)

[2.2 Semicolons](#)

[2.3 Colons](#)

[2.4 Using Quotes](#)

[2.5 Apostrophes](#)

[2.6 Parentheses](#)

2.1 Commas

One of the punctuation clues you may encounter when reading is the comma. A comma is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause in a sentence or a separation of things in a list. Commas can be used in a variety of ways. Look at some of the following sentences to see how you might use a comma when writing a sentence.

- **Introductory word:** Personally, I think the practice is helpful.
- **Lists:** The barn, the tool shed, and the back porch were destroyed by the wind.
- **Coordinating adjectives:** He was tired, hungry, and late.
- **Conjunctions in compound sentences:** The bedroom door was closed, so the children knew their mother was asleep.
- **Interrupting words:** I knew where it was hidden, of course, but I wanted them to find it themselves.
- **Dates, addresses, greetings, and letters:** The letter was postmarked December 8, 1945.

Commas after an Introductory Word or Phrase

You may notice a comma that appears near the beginning of the sentence, usually after a word or phrase. This comma lets the reader know where the introductory word or phrase ends and the main sentence begins.

Without spoiling the surprise, we need to tell her to save the date.

In this sentence, *without spoiling the surprise* is an introductory phrase, while *we need to tell her to save the date* is the main sentence. Notice how they are separated by a comma. When only an introductory word appears in the sentence, a comma also follows the introductory word.

Ironically, she already had plans for that day.

Commas in a List of Items

When you want to list several nouns in a sentence, you separate each word with a comma. This allows the reader to pause after each item and identify which words are included in the grouping. When you list items in a sentence, put a comma after each noun, then add the word *and* before the last item. However, you do not need to include a comma after the last item.

We'll need to get flour, tomatoes, and cheese at the store.

The pizza will be topped with olives, peppers, and pineapple chunks.

Commas and Coordinating Adjectives

You can use commas to list both adjectives and nouns. A string of adjectives that describe a noun is called a coordinating adjective. These adjectives come before the noun they modify and are separated by commas. One important thing to note, however, is that, unlike listing nouns, the word *and* does not always need to be before the last adjective.

It was a bright, windy, clear day.

Our kite glowed red, yellow, and blue in the morning sunlight.

Commas before Conjunctions in Compound Sentences

Commas are sometimes used to separate two independent clauses. The comma comes after the first independent clause and is followed by a conjunction, such as *for*, *and*, or *but*. For a full list of conjunctions, see [Chapter 7: Writing Basics: Sentence Writing](#) in *Putting the Pieces Together*.

He missed class today, and he thinks he will be out tomorrow, too.

He says his fever is gone, but he is still very tired.

Commas before and after Interrupting Words

In conversations, you might interrupt your train of thought by giving more details about what you are talking about. In a sentence, you might interrupt your train of thought with a word or phrase called Interrupting words. Interrupting words can come at the beginning or middle of a sentence. When the interrupting words appear at the beginning of the sentence, a comma appears after the word or phrase.

If you can believe it, people once thought the sun and planets orbited around Earth.

Luckily, some people questioned that theory.

When interrupting words come in the middle of a sentence, they are separated from the rest of the sentence

by commas. You can determine where the commas should go by looking for the part of the sentence that is not essential for the sentence to make sense.

An Italian astronomer, Galileo, proved that Earth orbited the sun.

We have known, for hundreds of years now, that the Earth and other planets exist in a solar system.

Commas in Dates, Addresses, and the Greetings and Closings of Letters

You also use commas when you write the date, such as in cover letters and e-mails. Commas are used when you write the date, when you include an address, and when you greet someone.

If you are writing out the full date, add a comma after the day and before the year. You do not need to add a comma when you write the month and day or when you write the month and the year. If you need to continue the sentence after you add a date that includes the day and year, add a comma after the end of the date.

The letter is postmarked May 4, 2024.

Her birthday is May 5.

He visited the country in July 2023.

I registered for the conference on March 7, 2020, so we should get our tickets soon.

You also use commas when you include addresses and locations. When you include an address in a sentence, be sure to place a comma after the street and after the city. Do not place a comma between the province (or state) and the postal/zip code. Like a date, if you need to continue the sentence after adding the address, simply add a comma after the address.

We moved to 4542 Boxcutter Lane, London, Ontario N5Y 4R6.

After moving to Toronto, Ontario, Eric used public transportation to get to work.

Greetings are also separated by commas. When you write an e-mail or a letter, you add a comma after the greeting word or the person's name. You also need to include a comma after the closing, which is the word or phrase you put before your signature.

Hello,

I would like more information about your job posting.

Thank you,

Anita Al-Sayf

Dear Mrs. Al-Sayf,

Thank you for your letter. Please read the attached document for details.

Sincerely,

Jack Fremont



Key Takeaways

- Punctuation marks provide visual cues to readers to tell them how to read a sentence. Punctuation marks convey meaning.
- Commas indicate a pause or a list in a sentence.
- A comma should be used after an introductory word to separate this word from the main sentence.
- A comma comes after each noun in a list. The word *and* is added before the last noun, which is not followed by a comma.
- A comma comes after every coordinating adjective except for the last adjective.
- Commas can be used to separate the two independent clauses in compound sentences as long as a conjunction follows the comma.
- Commas are used to separate interrupting words from the rest of the sentence.
- When you write the date, you add a comma between the day and the year. You also add a comma after the year if the sentence continues after the date.
- When they are used in a sentence, addresses have commas after the street address and the city. If a sentence continues after the address, a comma comes after the postal/zip code.
- When you write a letter, you use commas in your greeting at the beginning and in your closing at the end of your letter.

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2.2 Semicolons

Another punctuation mark that you will encounter is the semicolon (;). Like most punctuation marks, the semicolon can be used in a variety of ways. The semicolon indicates a break in the flow of a sentence but functions differently than a period or a comma. When you encounter a semicolon while reading aloud, this represents a good place to pause and take a breath.

Semicolons to Join Two Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon to combine two closely related independent clauses. Relying on a period to separate the related clauses into two shorter sentences could lead to choppy writing. Using a comma would create an awkward run-on sentence.

Correct: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview; appearances are important.

Choppy: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview. Appearances are important.

Incorrect: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview, appearances are important.

In this case, writing the independent clauses as two sentences separated by a period is correct. However, using a semicolon to combine the clauses can make your writing more interesting by creating a variety of sentence lengths and structures while preserving the flow of ideas.

Semicolons to Join Items in a List

You can also use a semicolon to join items in a list when the items in the list already require commas. Semicolons help the reader distinguish between items in the list.

Correct: The colour combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey; green, brown, and black; or red, green, and brown.

Incorrect: The colour combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey, green, brown, and black, or red, green, and brown.

By using semicolons in this sentence, the reader can easily distinguish between the three sets of colours.



Tip

Use semicolons to join two main clauses.

Do not use semicolons with coordinating conjunctions such as and, or, and but.



Key Takeaways

- Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses.
- Use a semicolon to separate items in a list when those items already require a comma.

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2.3 Colons

The colon (:) is another punctuation mark used to indicate a full stop. Use a colon to introduce lists, quotes, examples, and explanations. You can also use a colon after the greeting in business letters and memos.

Dear Hiring Manager:

To: Human Resources

From: Deanna Dean

Colons to Introduce a List

Use a colon to introduce a list of items. Introduce the list with an independent clause.

The team will tour three provinces: Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia.

I have to take four classes this semester: Composition, Statistics, Ethics, and Italian.

Colons to Introduce a Quote

You can use a colon to introduce a quote.

Mark Twain said it best: "When in doubt, tell the truth."

If a quote is longer than forty words, skip a line after the colon and indent one default tab, or set the paragraph indentation from the left margin of the quote. Since quotations longer than forty words use line spacing and paragraph indentation to indicate a quote, quotation marks are not necessary.

My father always loved Mark Twain's words:

There are basically two types of people. People who accomplish things and people who claim to have accomplished things. The first group is less crowded.



Tip

Long quotations, which are forty words or more, are called block quotations. Block quotations frequently appear in longer essays and research papers.

Colons to Introduce Examples or Explanations

Use a colon to introduce an example or to further explain an idea presented in the first part of a sentence. The first part of the sentence must always be an independent clause; that is, it must stand alone as a complete thought with a subject and verb. Do not use a colon after phrases like *such as* or *for example*.

Correct: Our company offers many publishing services: writing, editing, and reviewing.

Incorrect: Our company offers many publishing services, such as: writing, editing, and reviewing.



Tip

Capitalize the first letter following a colon for a proper noun, the beginning of a quote, or the first letter of another independent clause. Do NOT capitalize if the information following the colon is not a complete sentence.

Proper noun: We visited three countries: Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Beginning of a quote: My mother loved this line from *Hamlet*: "To thine own self be true."

Two independent clauses: There are drawbacks to modern technology: My brother's cell phone died, and he lost a lot of phone numbers.

Incorrect: The recipe is simple: Tomato, basil, and avocado.



Key Takeaways

- Use a colon to introduce a list, quote, or example.
- Use a colon after a greeting in business letters and memos.

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2.4 Using Quotes

Quotation marks (“ ”) set off a group of words from the rest of the text. Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotations of another person’s words or to indicate a title. Quotation marks always appear in pairs.

Direct Quotations

A direct quotation is an exact account of what someone said or wrote. To include a direct quotation in your writing, enclose the words in quotation marks. An indirect quotation is a restatement of what someone said or wrote. An indirect quotation does not use the person’s exact words. You do not need to use quotation marks for indirect quotations.

Direct quotation: Carly said, “I’m not ever going back there again.”

Indirect quotation: Carly said that she would never go back there.

Punctuating Direct Quotations

Quotation marks show readers another person’s exact words. Often, you will want to identify who is speaking. You can do this at the beginning, middle, or end of the quote. Notice the use of commas and capitalized words.

Beginning: Madison said, “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Middle: “Let’s stop at the farmers market,” Madison said, “to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

End: “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner,” Madison said.

Speaker not identified: “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Always capitalize the first letter of a quote, even if it is not the beginning of the sentence. When using identifying words in the middle of the quote, the beginning of the second part of the quote does not need to be capitalized.

Use commas between identifying words and quotes. Quotation marks must be placed *after* commas and periods. Place quotation marks after question marks and exclamation points only if the question or exclamation is part of the quoted text.

Question is part of quoted text: The new employee asked, “When is lunch?”

Question is not part of quoted text: Did you hear her say you were “the next Picasso”?

Exclamation is part of quoted text: My supervisor beamed, “Thanks for all of your hard work!”

Exclamation is not part of quoted text: He said I “single-handedly saved the company thousands of dollars”!

Quotations within Quotations

Use single quotation marks (' ') to show a quotation within a quotation.

Theresa said, “I wanted to take my dog to the festival, but the man at the gate said, ‘No dogs allowed.’”

“When you say, ‘I can’t help it,’ what exactly does that mean?”

“The instructions say, ‘Tighten the screws one at a time.’”

Titles

Use quotation marks around titles of short works of writing, such as essays, songs, poems, short stories, and chapters in books. Usually, titles of longer works, such as books, magazines, albums, newspapers, and novels, are italicized.

“Annabelle Lee” is one of my favourite romantic poems.

The *New York Times* has been in publication since 1851.



Key Takeaways

- Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotes and titles of short works.
- Use single quotation marks to enclose a quote within a quote.

- Do not use any quotation marks for indirect quotations.

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2.5 Apostrophes

An apostrophe (') is a punctuation mark that is used with a noun to show possession or to indicate where a letter has been left out to form a contraction.

Possession

We have already discussed using apostrophes as an indicator of possession in [Chapter 1.9: Apostrophes/Possessive S](#) in *Putting the Pieces Together*. This section will briefly review those concepts.

An apostrophe and the letter s indicate who or what owns something. To show possession with a singular noun, add 's.

Jen's dance routine mesmerized everyone in the room.

The dog's leash is hanging on the hook beside the door.

Jess's sister is also coming to the party.

Notice that singular nouns that end in s still take the apostrophe s ('s) ending to show possession.

To show possession with a plural noun that ends in s, just add an apostrophe ('). If the plural noun does not end in s, add an apostrophe and an s ('s).

Plural noun that ends in s: The drummers' sticks all moved in the same rhythm, like a machine.

Plural noun that does not end in s: The people's votes clearly showed that no one supported the management decision.

Contractions

A contraction is a word that is formed by combining two words. In a contraction, an apostrophe shows where one or more letters have been left out. Contractions are commonly used in informal writing but not in formal writing.

I do not like ice cream.

I **don't** like ice cream.

Notice how the words *do* and *not* have been combined to form the contraction *don't*. The apostrophe shows where the *o* in *not* has been left out.

We will see you later.

We'll see you later.

Look at the chart for some examples of commonly used contractions.

Table 2.5.1: Common Contractions

Common Contractions	
aren't	are not
can't	cannot
doesn't	does not
don't	do not
isn't	is not
he'll	he will
I'll	I will
she'll	she will
they'll	they will
you'll	you will
it's	it is, it has
let's	let us
she's	she is, she has
there's	there is, there has
who's	who is, who has



Tip

Be careful not to confuse *it's* with *its*. *It's* is a contraction of the words *it* and *is*. *Its* is a possessive pronoun.

- **It's** cold and rainy outside. (It is cold and rainy outside.)
- The cat was chasing **its** tail. (Shows that the tail belongs to the cat.)

When in doubt, substitute the words *it is* in a sentence. If the sentence still makes sense, use the contraction *it's*.



Key Takeaways

- Use apostrophes to show possession. Add 's to singular nouns and plural nouns that do not end in s. Add ' to plural nouns that end in s.
- Use apostrophes in contractions to show where a letter or letters have been left out.

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2.6 Parentheses

Parentheses () are punctuation marks that are always used in pairs and contain material that is secondary to the meaning of a sentence. Parentheses must never contain the subject or verb of a sentence. A sentence should make sense if you delete any text within parentheses and the parentheses.

Attack of the Killer Potatoes has to be the worst movie I have seen (so far).

Your spinach and garlic salad is one of the most delicious (and nutritious) foods I have ever tasted!



Key Takeaways

- Parentheses enclose information that is secondary to the meaning of a sentence.
- Parentheses are always used in pairs.

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MODULE 3: WORD USE

Module Overview

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[3.2 Spelling](#)

[3.3 Homonyms](#)

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[3.5 Prefixes and Suffixes](#)

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3.1 Synonyms and Antonyms

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

Synonyms

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

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

The English language is full of pairs of words with subtle distinctions between them. All writers, professionals and beginners alike, struggle to choose the most appropriate synonym to best convey their ideas. When you pay particular attention to synonyms in your writing, they reach your reader. The sentences become much more clear and rich in meaning.

Antonyms

Antonyms are words that have the opposite meaning of a given word. The study of antonyms will not only help you choose the most appropriate word as you write; it will also sharpen your overall sense of language. Table 3.1.1 “Common Antonyms” lists common words and their antonyms.

Table 3.1.1: Common Antonyms

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

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



Key Takeaways

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

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3.2 Spelling

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

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

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

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

- achieve, niece, alien
- receive, deceive

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

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

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

- delay + ed = delayed

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

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

- write + ing = writing
- pure + ity = purity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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3.3 Homomyns

Homonyms are words that sound like one another but have different meanings. English is full of homonyms and different types of homonyms at that. The two types addressed here are homophones and homographs.

A homophone is a word that has the same pronunciation as another word but is spelled differently.

A homograph is a word that has the exact spelling of another word but is pronounced differently.

Commonly Misused Homonyms

Can, May

Many people misuse the word can and ignore the use of the word may. Can is the word used to indicate that there is an ability to do something or a capability of accomplishing a task.

- I can walk.
- I can type 50 wpm.

May is the formal and polite word to be used when asking permission.

- May I use your cell phone?
- May I walk over to the store?

Principle, Principal

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

Where, Wear, Ware

- Where (adverb). The place in which something happens.
 - Where is the restaurant?
- Wear (verb). To carry or have on the body.

- I will wear my hiking shoes when go on a climb tomorrow morning.
- Ware (noun). Articles of merchandise or manufacture (usually, wares).
 - When I return from shopping, I will show you my wares.

Lead, Led

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

Learned, Learnt

- Learned (verb). North American spelling
 - I learned about Canadian history in high school.
- Learnt (verb) British spelling
 - I learnt how to ride a bike in Bristol.

Which, Witch

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

Peace, Piece

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

Passed, Past

- Passed (verb). To go away or move.

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

Lessen, Lesson

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

Patience, Patients

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

Sees, Seas, Seize

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

Threw, Through

- Threw (verb). The past tense of throw.
 - She threw the football with perfect form.
- Through (preposition). A word that indicates movement.

- She walked through the door and out of his life.

Most Common Homonyms

Below is a list of the most common homonyms. This list is not exhaustive! There are hundreds (thousands?) of homonyms in English. You'll find [additional lists of homonyms online](#).

- **accept vs. except:** These two words have an almost opposite meaning. To *accept* means to include something, either in meaning or participation or as a statement of fact. On the other hand, if I say that I like all punctuation marks *except* the exclamation mark, that means the exclamation mark is excluded from the list (not accepted by me at all).
- **ad vs. add:** The word “ad” is short for “advertisement.” The word “add” is used to put two numbers (or anything else) together.
- **advice vs. advise:** These two words are closely related. “Advise” is a verb. When you perform the action of *advising*, you have provided somebody with *advice*, the noun form.
- **affect vs. effect:** This one is infamously difficult; [see Grammar Girl's explanation here](#).
- **a lot vs. allot vs. alot:** Let's start with the problem here: “alot” isn't a word. There is no correct use of “alot.” The word “lot” is complex, with a large number of sometimes disparate meanings. It can refer to a portion of land or a portion of anything, really. When people write that they have “a lot” of something, they mean a large quantity. The verb, “to allot” means to give people something in portions (and often in equal portions).
- **allusion vs. illusion:** An “allusion” is a reference, sometimes subtle or indirect, to something else. An “illusion” is the creation of an appearance that isn't real, as in a magic trick.
- **altar vs. alter:** An “altar” is a special table or raised structure used for religious ceremonies. The verb “to alter” means to change something.
- **appraise vs. apprise:** The verb, “to appraise” means to determine the value of something. The verb “to apprise” means to inform somebody of something.
- **assure vs. ensure vs. insure:** *The Grammar Guru* at the University of Nebraska explains this one for us; [see the explanation here](#).
- **band vs. banned:** A “band” is an object that holds a group of items together, such as an elastic band around pencils. It can also refer to a ring, such as a wedding band. “Banned” is the past tense of “to ban,” which means to prohibit.
- **bare vs. bear:** The word “bare” means uncovered, empty, or naked. “Bear” has many meanings, such as a large forest-dwelling mammal with big claws, or it can mean merit or ownership, such as a statement that “bears repeating” or a person who “bears responsibility for an action.”
- **bases vs. basis:** A “basis” is the reason given for an action, policy, or decision. The word “bases” is plural for the noun “base,” which can refer to a station, as in a military base. It can also refer to something that is simple, as in “basic” in a “base-level automobile.”
- **beat vs. beet:** The word “beat” has a number of meanings, but “beet” is very simple; it's a round, purple/red root vegetable that is popular in eastern European cuisine.
- **blew vs. blue:** “Blue” is the colour of the daytime sky or the ocean, as seen from outer space. The word “blew” is the past tense of the verb “to blow,” which indicates the pushing of air, usually from the mouth or by wind.
- **buy vs. by vs. bye:** [See this explanation from Grammarist](#).

- **capital vs. capitol:** The word “capital” is almost always the word you want here. The word “capitol” has one specific meaning: the physical building where lawmakers meet in the capital city of a state, province, country, or other major jurisdiction. (These tend to be large, old, pretty buildings, often made of stone.)
- **cell vs. sell:** The verb “to sell” means the action of exchanging a possession, either for oneself or on behalf of another, for money. A “cell” is a single unit, often of a larger whole, such as a single human skin cell. “Cell” can also be short for “cellular,” as in a cellular phone or a mobile phone.
- **cent vs. scent vs. sent:** [See the explanation from Grammarist here.](#)
- **cereal vs. serial:** The word “serial” refers to something that happens in a *series*; the word “cereal” refers to food from grains, as in breakfast cereal or cereal oats.
- **cite vs. sight vs. site:** Let’s [go to the Grammar Monster for an explanation of this one.](#)
- **coarse vs. course:** The word “coarse” refers to an abrasive texture. The word “course” has many meanings, such as taking a college course for learning or playing in an obstacle course for aerobic fun.
- **complement vs. compliment:** The verb “to compliment” means to say something kind or favourable about another person (or sometimes an object, such as a beautiful house). “Complement” has a number of meanings. The most confusing is when somebody says that one item or person “complements” another, which means they work together well or provide a favourable synergy together. In audio, the pronunciation is the same, so be careful to listen for context.
- **council vs. counsel and councillor vs. counselor:** A “council” is a group of people who gather to form policy of one type or another. A member of such a council is a “councillor.” A person who provides advice, often a therapist or a lawyer, is a counselor. The verb “to counsel” is the action they take when providing advice. That advice is often called “counsel,” as in “if charged with a crime, seek legal counsel.”
- **crews vs. cruise vs. crus:** The verb “to cruise” means to travel, usually leisurely, and is often used to mean a luxurious voyage on a large ship, known as a “cruise ship.” A “crew” is a group of people who work together, often in the trades or performing outdoor labour. The word “crus” has to do with legs as an anatomical part and isn’t commonly used, but the words “Grand Cru” or “Grand Crus” in plural refer to a high quality of French wine.
- **defer vs. differ:** To “defer” is to delay. To “differ” is to disagree.
- **desert vs. dessert:** A “dessert” is a dish served after the main meal; it is usually sweet and the last course served in a meal. As a noun, “desert” is a biome that receives little or no precipitation. As a verb, “to desert” means to abandon.
- **dew vs. do vs. due:** [See this explanation from Grammarist.](#)
- **dissent vs. descent:** To “dissent” is to publicly disagree, often with government or another authority. The word “descent” refers to a drop, usually in elevation, as when an airplane begins its landing. “Descent” can also refer to ancestry, as a person is of “French descent” if their grandparents are from France.
- **dual vs. duel:** A “duel” is a fight between two combatants, historically on a point of honour and often to the death. In contemporary speech, it often simply refers to a contest between two people. The word “dual” refers to the number two, as in a “dual engine aircraft,” which would have two engines.
- **eminent vs. imminent:** The word “eminent” describes somebody prestigious or famous, as in an eminent scholar who is foremost in their field. The word “imminent” refers to an event that is about to happen.
- **enquiry vs. inquiry:** These two words are really variants of each other. They can be used interchangeably, but be consistent in your use of one or the other. If quoting somebody else, use the spelling they use.
- **fair vs. fare:** [See this explanation from Grammar.com.](#)
- **farther vs. further:** “Farther” is a greater physical distance. The verb “to further” means to advance something, as in “he aims to further his cause by recruiting more supporters.” In spoken English, there is not always clarity about which is being used; in some contexts, either word could be acceptable to achieve similar meaning.
- **faze vs. phase:** A “phase” is a stage or step in a larger process, such as in construction or human development, that is connected to other sequential stages or steps. The verb “to faze” means to affect

somebody, often in a negative sense, as in to discourage or concern a person. This is frequently used as a person who is “unfazed,” as in “she was unfazed by the dangers ahead.”

- **for vs. fore vs. four:** [See this explanation from Grammarist.](#)
- **forward vs. foreword:** “Forward” is a direction that means to move in the direction ahead. A “foreword” is a portion of writing that lands before the main text. For example, when somebody writes a book, another author will sometimes write a “foreword” that is included before the main author’s writing to provide context or interpretation. A foreword could be seen as the *words before*.
- **halve vs. have:** To “halve” means to cut something in half. The word “have” is a possessive verb.
- **hear vs. here:** To “hear” is a verb that indicates audio reception through the ears. The word “here” indicates the present location.
- **it’s vs. its:** This is a common challenge for many students. [See The Oatmeal’s explanation here](#) (scroll down).
- **knight vs. night:** A “knight” is a medieval warrior clad in armour, riding on horseback. The word “night” refers to the period of time after the sun has set, but before it has risen again the next day.
- **later vs. latter:** “Later” refers to something that occurs in time after the current moment or point of discussion. The word “latter” refers to the last item on a list (and that list often has only two items).
- **lay vs. lie:** Oh, boy. This is a big one. [See Merriam-Webster’s own explanation of these words](#), which they note have caused confusion for centuries.
- **lead vs. led:** The word “led” is the past tense of the verb “to lead,” which means to go before another (as in “leadership”). The words “lead” and “lead” are different and have different pronunciations. Oh, how do we explain this better? Click on the link to “lead” and scroll down to the definition of “lead” where the word means a particular metal (Pb #82 on the periodic table of elements) and listen to the pronunciation there. You’ll hear that the metal “lead” is pronounced the exact same way as “led,” the past tense of the verb “lead.” Consult your instructor for help if needed.
- **leased vs. least:** The verb “to lease” is a form of rental agreement with specific timelines. The word “least” means the lowest amount that can be considered in the conversation, as in “\$500 was the least he could accept when selling his bicycle, as it was worth double and he needed the money badly.”
- **liable vs. libel:** The word “libel” is a legal term that refers to written defamation, as when somebody publishes malicious lies about another person or organization. The word “liable” can also have legal significance, but relates to responsibility for an action. It can also refer to a future likelihood, as in “the instructor is liable to know the difference between these two words.”
- **loan vs. lone:** A “loan” is a financial arrangement where one person or organization temporarily gives money to another with an expectation that that money will be returned, usually in a larger sum than originally given. The word “lone” means “one” and is connected to “alone,” as in “the lone samurai now needed to defend the shogun from four intruders, but skill and cunning were on his side; the intruders would be no match in the end.”
- **loose vs. lose:** “Loose” is the opposite of “tight” or sometimes the opposite of “well defined,” as in “because the records are missing, we only have a *loose* understanding of what happened.” “Lose” is the opposite of “win” or “keep,” as in “don’t *lose* that parcel; the contents are very valuable.”
- **may be vs. maybe:** The two words “may be” provide a qualified indication that something is possibly true, as in “that may be the situation, but we need confirmation” (from the verb “to be”). The word “maybe” is used to note a similar uncertainty, but it is in an adverb form.
- **morning vs. mourning:** “Morning” is the period of time after the sun rises, but before it reaches its zenith in the sky at high noon. The word “mourning” refers to the experience of grief upon the death of a loved one or some other significant personal loss.
- **oar vs. or vs. ore:** [Grammar Monster explains the differences here](#) (and adds “awe” to the mix, too).
- **overdo vs. overdue:** The word “overdue” means that something should have happened previously, but still has not happened, as in “all assignments were due to be submitted by Friday, but mine is now overdue.”

The verb “to overdo” means to complete a task beyond the necessary level and to excess. “He wanted to impress on the first date, but was bringing a horse-drawn carriage, a mariachi band, and 144 red roses going to overdo it?”

- **passed vs. past:** The word “passed” is the past tense of the verb “to pass.” If one moves by another person, they have “passed” that person, as in a race: “the fastest horse passed the rest on the home stretch.” The word “past” refers to events that occurred in history before the present.
- **patience vs. patients:** The word “patients” refers to the people treated by doctors and other medical professionals. The word “patience” is the state of waiting without exhibiting frustration. (The word “patients” was derived from the need to wait to see a doctor, which is not a recent phenomenon.)
- **peace vs. piece:** A “piece” is a portion or component of a larger whole. The word “peace” is the opposite of war or disturbance.
- **plain vs. plane:** [See this thorough explanation from English Grammar Lessons](#) online.
- **pole vs. poll:** A “pole” is a long object that is straight on its axis and round, as in a pipe or the straw in a drink. A “poll” is a form of survey that is used to estimate how people feel about a topic or what they think about an issue. These words can also be used as verbs, wherein a person “poles” to push their way somewhere, as with a boat across shallow water, or “polls,” which is to ask people questions (used to produce a poll).
- **precede vs. proceed:** The word “precede” denotes events that transpired before the present matter. The word “proceed” means to make progress or advance in a forward direction.
- **principal vs. principle:** A “principal” is a person in a primary or authoritative position, as in the principal of a school or business; it can also mean the main actor(s) in a film or play. “Principal” can also mean an initial investment upon which an investor hopes to gain a return. The word “principle” refers to a belief or value based on some moral or ethical idea(s).
- **rational vs. rationale:** The word “rational” is an adjective that means an action or idea has a clear logical basis. The word “rationale” is a noun that is a reasoning or explanation (as derived through rational thinking).
- **read vs. red:** “Red” is a colour, as of the colour of a ripe raspberry or strawberry. The word “read” has multiple meanings and, in the past tense of “to read,” has the same pronunciation of “red.”
- **respectfully vs. respectively:** The word “respectfully” means that something is in the spirit of fairness, honesty, honour, and sometimes deference. The word “respectively” indicates that something applies to one or more objects, people, or phenomena in the order as stated or sometimes equally.
- **right vs. write:** The word “right” has multiple meanings, such as being a synonym for virtue or being of the side of the body that is the same as the liver and opposite the heart or of the side of a clock with the numbers one, two, three, four, and five. The word “write” means to create markings that can be read by another person, usually with a pen or pencil on paper, but also on wood, stone, glass, or other surfaces and with other instruments.
- **road vs. rode:** A “road” is a cleared trail from one place to another, usually paved, but at least flattened for use by wheeled vehicles. The word “rode” is the past tense of “to ride,” which means to travel by vehicle or by horse (or sometimes other animals, such as a camel or elephant).
- **role vs. roll:** A “roll” is something that can be stored by circling the object around itself, as in a rug that is put in a roll for storage. It can also refer to pastries or buns that are sometimes made by circling the dough around itself before baking. A “roll” can also be a list, especially of people. The term “roll call” refers to checking for attendance of people on a list. This can also be a verb for achieving the same outcome, as in “she rolled the rug up and stood it against the wall.” The word “role” refers to a duty or task, as in “as a lawyer, her role was to provide the best defense possible.”
- **than vs. then:** See [Merriam-Webster’s explanation here](#).
- **there vs. their vs. they’re:** See [Merriam-Webster’s explanation here](#).
- **to vs. too vs. two:** [See the BBC’s explanation here](#).

- **who's vs. whose:** This is a common error, but it's actually easily avoided. The words "who is" or "who has" are shown as a contraction in "who's." The word "whose" is possessive, showing that somebody else owns something. When in doubt, ask yourself if "who is" or "who has" would work as a substitute. If yes, use "who is" or "who has." If no, stick with "whose." Avoid "who's" in professional writing (as with all contractions).
 - **your vs. you're:** This issue follows the same pattern as with "who's" and "whose" above. The words "you are" are shown as a contraction in "you're." The word "your" is possessive, showing that somebody else owns something. When in doubt, ask yourself if "you are" would work as a substitute. If yes, use "you are." If no, stick with "your."
-

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"[Appendix C: Homonyms and Other Problem Words](#)" from [Professional Writing Today](#) by Sam Schechter is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.—Modifications: Used list of common homonyms.

3.4 Commonly Confused Words

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

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

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

Commonly Confused Words

Some words in English cause trouble for speakers and writers because these words share a similar pronunciation, meaning, or spelling with another word. These words are called commonly confused words. For example, read aloud the following sentences containing the commonly confused words *new* and *knew*:

I liked her *new* sweater.

I *knew* she would wear that sweater today.

These words may sound alike when spoken, but they carry entirely different usages and meanings. *New* is an adjective that describes the sweater, and *knew* is the past tense of the verb *to know*. To read more about adjectives, verbs, and other parts of speech, see [Chapter 7: "Writing Basics"](#) in Putting the Pieces Together.

Recognizing Commonly Confused Words

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

Commonly Confused Words

A, An, And

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

Accept, Except

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

Affect, Effect

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

Are, Our

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

By, Buy

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

Its, It's

- *Its* (pronoun). A form of *it* that shows possession.

The butterfly flapped **its** wings.

- *It's* (contraction). Joins the words *it* and *is*.

It's the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

Know, No

- *Know* (verb). Means to understand or possess knowledge.

I **know** the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.

- *No*. Used to make a negative.

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

Loose, Lose

- *Loose* (adjective). Describes something that is not tight or is detached.

Without a belt, her pants are **loose** on her waist.

- *Lose* (verb). Means to forget, to give up, or to fail to earn something.

She will **lose** even more weight after finishing the marathon training.

Of, Have

- *Of* (preposition). Means *from* or *about*.

I studied maps **of** the city to know where to rent a new apartment.

- *Have* (verb). Means to possess something.

I **have** many friends to help me move.

- *Have* (linking verb). Used to connect verbs.

I should **have** helped her with that heavy box.

Quite, Quiet, Quit

- *Quite* (adverb). Means *really* or *truly*.

My work will require **quite** a lot of concentration.

- *Quiet* (adjective). Means not loud.

I need a **quiet** room to complete the assignments.

- *Quit* (verb). Means to stop or to end.

I will **quit** when I am hungry for dinner.

Right, Write

- *Right* (adjective). Means proper or correct.

When bowling, she practices the **right** form.

- *Right* (adjective). Also means the opposite of left.

The ball curved to the **right** and hit the last pin.

- *Write* (verb). Means to communicate on paper.

After the team members bowl, I will **write** down their scores.

Set, Sit

- *Set* (verb). Means to put an item down.

She **set** the mug on the saucer.

- *Set* (noun). Means a group of similar objects.

All the mugs and saucers belonged in a **set**.

- *Sit* (verb). Means to lower oneself down on a chair or another place

I'll **sit** on the sofa while she brews the tea.

Suppose, Supposed

- *Suppose* (verb). Means to think or to consider

I **suppose** I will bake the bread, because no one else has the recipe.

- *Suppose* (verb). Means to suggest.

Suppose we all split the cost of the dinner.

- *Supposed* (verb). The past tense form of the verb suppose, meaning required or allowed.

She was **supposed** to create the menu.

Than, Then

- *Than* (conjunction). Used to connect two or more items when comparing

Registered nurses require less schooling **than** doctors.

- *Then* (adverb). Means next or at a specific time.

Doctors first complete medical school and **then** obtain a residency.

Their, They're, There

- *Their* (pronoun). A form of *they* that shows possession.

The dog walker feeds **their** dogs every day at two o'clock.

- *They're* (contraction). Joins the words *they* and *are*.

They're the sweetest dogs in the neighbourhood.

- *There* (adverb). Indicates a particular place.
The dogs' bowls are over **there**, next to the pantry.
- *There* (pronoun). Indicates the presence of something
There are more treats if the dogs behave.

To, Two, Too

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

Use, Used

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

Who's, Whose

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

Your, You're

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

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

Strategies to Avoid Commonly Confused Words

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

The following strategies can help you avoid misusing confusing words.

1. **Use a dictionary.** Keep a dictionary at your desk while you write. Look up words when you are uncertain of their meanings or spellings. Many dictionaries are also available online, and the Internet's easy access will not slow you down. Check out your cell phone or smartphone to see if a dictionary app is available.
2. **Keep a list of words you commonly confuse.** Be aware of the words that often confuse you. When you notice a pattern of confusing words, keep a list nearby and consult the list as you write. Check the list again before you submit an assignment to your instructor.
3. **Study the list of commonly confused words.** You may not yet know which words confuse you, but before you sit down to write, study the words on the list. Prepare your mind for working with words by reviewing the commonly confused words identified in this chapter.



Tip

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



Figure 3.4.1 A Commonly Misused Word on a Public Sign. “[Road Sign Grammar](#)” by [Damien Ayers](#), CC BY 2.0



Key Takeaways

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

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3.5 Prefixes and Suffixes

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

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

Prefixes

A prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word to create a new meaning. The main rule to remember when adding a prefix to a word is not to add letters or leave out any letters. See Table 3.5.1 “Common Prefixes” for examples of this rule.

Table 3.5.1: Common Prefixes

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

Suffixes

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

Rule 1

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

Examples:

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

Exceptions to Rule 1

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

Examples:

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

Rule 2

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

Examples:

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

Exceptions to Rule 2

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

Examples:

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

Rule 3

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

Examples:

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

Exceptions to Rule 3

Examples:

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

Rule 4

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

Examples:

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

Rule 5

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

Examples:

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



Key Takeaways

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

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3.6 Compound Words

Compounds are words built from more than one root (though they can also be constructed from derived words); if you find a word that contains more than one root, you are dealing with a compound. English is a language that builds compounds very freely.

- **Noun-Noun** compounds include:
 - doghouse
 - website
 - basketball
 - sunflower
 - moonlight
 - beekeeper
 - heartburn
 - spaceship
- **Adjective-Noun** compounds include:
 - greenhouse
 - bluebird
- **Verb-Noun** compounds include:
 - breakwater
 - baby-sit
- **Noun-Adjective** compounds include:
 - trustworthy
 - watertight
- **Adjective-Adjective** compounds include:
 - purebred
 - kind-hearted
 - blue-green
- **Noun-Verb** compounds include:
 - browbeat
 - manhandle
 - sidestep
- **Adjective-Verb** compounds include:
 - blacklist

Compounds and Spelling

In English, we don't consistently spell compounds. Some compounds—typically older ones—are spelled without a space, while others are spelled with a hyphen, and many new compounds are spelled with spaces as though they are separate words.

We can tell that some sequences of “words” are compounds, though, in a few different ways. First of all, there is a difference in pronunciation. Compounds are always stressed (given emphasis) on their first member, while phrases (sequence of words) get stress on their last member.

So the compounds:

- bláckboard
- gréenhouse
- blúebird

Are pronounced differently than the corresponding phrases with adjectives followed by nouns:

- black bóard
- green hóuse
- blue bírd

Another difference is in the interpretation: a *blackboard* need not be black, and a *greenhouse* usually isn't green (though you grow green things in it).

Finally, there's a *syntactic* difference. If you notice a string of "words" in English that all look like nouns, you are most likely to be dealing with a compound.

English really likes building very long compounds out of nouns, though this is something many English users associate with German. In German, unlike in English, compounds are always spelled without spaces. So you get words like:

Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitän
Donau-dampf-schiffahrts-gesellschafts-kapitän
"Danube steam shipping company captain"

The second row inserts the hyphens in this German compound so that you can see the roots more clearly—but if you look at the English translation, it actually tracks all the same nouns in the German example. English writing has just adopted the convention of writing long or novel compounds with spaces. Structurally, English compounds work just like their German counterparts.

Compounds and Headedness

If compounds have more than one root in them, which root determines the category of the word?

Most compounds—especially new compounds you might invent on the spot—have a head. The head of a compound determines its interpretation (a *sunflower* is a type of flower, a *bluebird* is a type of bird, etc.) as well as its category.

In English, the head of a compound is always on its right: English is a right-headed compound language.

Compounds that have a head are called endocentric. This is the same *endo-* morpheme you find in *endo-skeleton*. An animal (like a human) with a skeleton inside of it is endoskeletal, and a compound with a head inside of it is endocentric.

What about the compound equivalent of exo-skeletal, animals that have a carapace instead of a skeleton (like insects or crabs)? Compounds that are exocentric don't have a head inside of them—they don't describe either of their members.

Some exocentric compounds don't have an interpretive head, but still have what we might call a category head, in that the root on the right matches the category of the whole compound. For example, *redhead* ("person with red hair") is often listed as an exocentric compound, because it does not describe a type of head.

Similarly *sabretooth* is exocentric because it doesn't describe a type of tooth. But both of these are noun-noun compounds that are themselves nouns, so their right-hand member is almost a head. A *spoilsport* ("person who spoils other people's fun") is not a type of sport, but it is still a noun.

But other exocentric compounds don't even have a head in this sense. For example, *outcome* looks like a compound of a preposition and a verb, but is a noun. *Dust-up* is a compound of a noun and a preposition, but is a noun. *Tell-all* is a compound of a verb and a determiner (all), but is an adjective.

Finally, there is a special kind of compound usually called *dvandva* compounds. This term comes from Sanskrit, where *dvandva* means "pair". Dvandva compounds can be thought of as "co-headed"—they can be paraphrased with an "and" between the two members. Many dvandva compounds in English involve two roots that only occur in the compound, and that mirror each other's sounds. These are sometimes called reduplicatives.

- zigzag
- helter skelter
- flip flop
- riff raff
- hocus pocus

But we also have some other dvandva compounds:

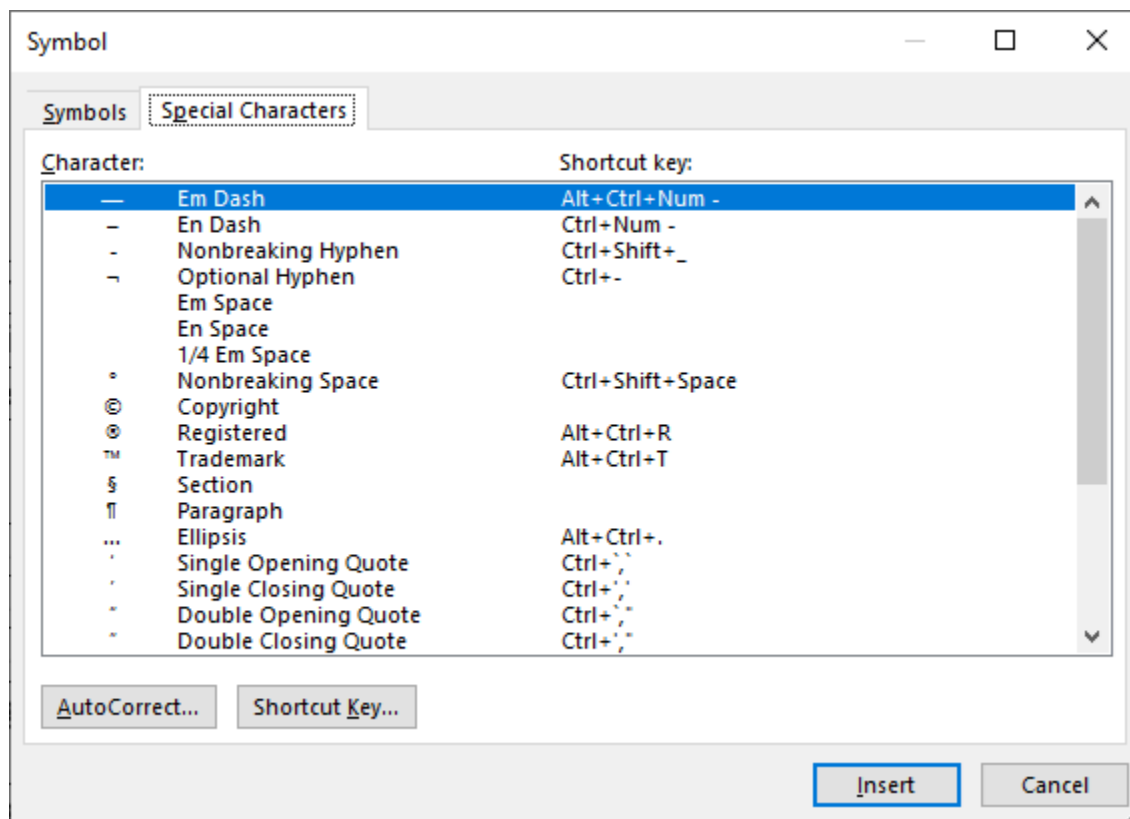
- bittersweet
- secretary-treasurer
- parent-child (as in "a parent-child bond")
- blue-green (and many other terms for intermediate colours)

Overall, dvandva compounds are less common than other types of compounds in English.

"5.8 Compounding" from [Essentials of Linguistics, 2nd edition](#) Copyright © 2022 by Catherine Anderson; Bronwyn Bjorkman; Derek Denis; Julianne Doner; Margaret Grant; Nathan Sanders; and Ai Taniguchi is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.—Modifications: Removed Check Your Understanding; limited edits for brevity.

3.7 Common Symbols

Using Special Characters in MS Word



Special Characters in Word. Screenshot © Microsoft, [FDEd \(CAN\)](#).

Image Description

The image shows a “Symbol” dialogue box from a software application, likely Microsoft Word, under the “Special Characters” tab. The dialogue box contains a list of special characters with their corresponding shortcut keys. The list includes:

- Em Dash (Shortcut key: Alt+Ctrl+Num -)
- En Dash (Shortcut key: Ctrl+Num -)
- Nonbreaking Hyphen (Shortcut key: Ctrl+Shift+_-)
- Optional Hyphen (Shortcut key: Ctrl+-)
- Em Space
- En Space
- 1/4 Em Space
- Nonbreaking Space (Shortcut key: Ctrl+Shift+Space)
- Copyright (Shortcut key: Alt+Ctrl+C)
- Registered (Shortcut key: Alt+Ctrl+R)
- Trademark (Shortcut key: Alt+Ctrl+T)

- Section
- Paragraph
- Ellipsis (Shortcut key: Alt+Ctrl+.)
- Single Opening Quote (Shortcut key: Ctrl+`)
- Single Closing Quote (Shortcut key: Ctrl+')
- Double Opening Quote (Shortcut key: Ctrl+“
- Double Closing Quote (Shortcut key: Ctrl+”)

Below the list, there are buttons labelled “Insert,” “AutoCorrect,” and “Shortcut Key...,”

Below are descriptions of some of the commonly used Special Characters.

Em dash

- Longest of the dashes, used to separate descriptive phrases that add meaning to the sentence but are not critical to the understanding of the sentence
- It is as long as an uppercase M character in the chosen font
- Similar to the use of commas and parentheses



Example

Mary —the one in the red coat—is my aunt.

En dash

- Is longer than a dash, shorter than an Em dash
- It is as long as an uppercase N character in the chosen font
- Commonly used between numbers, dates to indicate that something is up to or including



Examples

The surgery will be performed from 2:00 p.m.—4:00 p.m.

Hyphen

- The shortest of the dashes
- Used to connect words that are stand-alone words that have been connected to create a new idea



Examples

Some of the workers are part-time employees.

Part and time are both used elsewhere as single words with unique meanings, but when joined, they have different meanings.

Optional hyphen

- In Word found under Insert | Symbols | Special Characters
- Used to indicate where a word should divide if it is at the end of a line
- Generally visible with the use of the Show Hide option in Word if the word does not break throughout the line, but will become visible if the word does break at the end of a line



Examples

In a line where the word does not break: document

In a line where the word does break at the end of the line document

The visible hyphen appears automatically at the end of a line once it is added to the word as a special character.

Non-breaking hyphen

- Displays in the text docu-ment, and will not allow the word to break at the end of a line.
- At the end of the line, if the entire word cannot be on the line, the whole word is moved to the next line.



Examples

If the word fits on the line: docu-ment

If the word does not fit on the line, the entire word is moved to the next line.

Also used for telephone numbers that use the dash to separate numbers: 519-123-4567, allowing the telephone number to always remain on the same line.

Em space and en space and ¼ em space

- Used if an author wanted various sizes of spaces, not generally used in business communications but is used in formal documentation
- Non-breaking space is used when words normally breaking at the end of line are forced to stay on the same line.



Examples

Since 2015, the prime minister of Canada has been Justin Pierre James Trudeau. The word Justin fits on the line above, it is being forced to stay connected with the full name, to make the name easier to read. The full name will not break over a line, all words will be moved to the next line.

This is how the text would appear with Show Hide active:

Justin°Pierre°James°Trudeau

Text with Show Hide active. Screenshot © Microsoft, [FDEd \(CAN\)](#).

GUIDES

Module Overview

[Business Letters](#)

[Proposals](#)

[Other Documents](#)

[Citing and Referencing](#)

[Writing Resources](#)

Business Letters

When creating letters for business use, consider using templates for each type of letter.

Within smaller clinics, a full EMR/EHR with reporting capabilities may not be installed. You may be asked to create new patient letters. These will hold repetitive text that is used in each letter conveying the information. This information would be the hours of operation, address, contact information, parking, etc. This information rarely changes. There will be unique text such as the date, the name and address of the recipient and any targeted information for that recipient.

Templates allow you to create a document that holds the repetitive information, and generally, with a few clicks or the use of an icon, the letter with the general content launches. The only additional content to be added is the unique information. The use of templates makes document production efficient.



Common Examples

Common examples of clinic-oriented documents are:

- New patient letters welcoming a new patient to the clinic
- Accounting letters for outstanding balances
- Change of appointment letters

These documents may be sent via secured email or regular mail. If the letter is being sent via email, any accompanying documents are indicated as attachments, as the documents will be attached to the email. If the letter is being sent through regular post, any accompanying documents plus the letter will be inserted into an envelope. The accompanying documents are indicated as enclosures, as they will be enclosed within the envelope.

Remember to include the postal code in all letters. An address is considered incomplete without the postal code.

Here is a guideline of the three items listed above showing the various parts for most business letters:

- [New Patient Letter \(Word Doc\)](#)
- [Outstanding Balance Letter \(Word Doc\)](#)
- [Change of Appointment Letter \(Word Doc\)](#)

Proposals

Proposals are an important tool for requesting funding for the programs.

Summary Statements

A summary statement is a short, concise paragraph detailing what you are proposing. A summary is a review of all the information that provides the reader with the important facts about the proposal.

The summary is used to filter out the most important information in case the reader is unable to read the entire proposal. There should be a summary at the beginning of every proposal you write. You need to have a quick, short description of what is in your proposal so the reader knows what the topic is right away.

Your summary should include an explanation of the program/service, who the program/service will be targeted at, a budget overview and any other information that is important for the reader to know before they read the proposal.

What Do I Include in My Summary Statement?

Start off by stating who you are, what company you are associated with, and where the program/service will be located. The next step is to explain to the client group to which the program/service will be directed. Will it be for youths or adults? Women or men or both? The person or organization running the program/service will be the next person to introduce the information. It is important to know that the program/service will be run by a person or people who are qualified.

Quickly state how the success of the program/service will be measured and how long the program/service will run. Also include the aspired start date for the program/service. Remember to be brief in this summary; the details will be further explored later in the proposal.

Sections of a Proposal

Cover Page

The first page of your proposal should be a cover page. This cover page should include the topic of the proposal, the person/organization/agency writing the proposal and the person/organization/agency the proposal is for. The date and any contact information will also be included on the cover page. Adding a small picture can sometimes makes the proposal look better, but only when it is called for. For example, if the proposal is for a new halfway house in the city then a picture of the house on the front would be a great idea.

Statement of Purpose

The statement of purpose should include what is being proposed, who it is being proposed to, and why you are writing a proposal (is there a need for this service /program?).

Example: *I am proposing to create a program for ex-offenders to continue getting their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) at Laurentian University, Sudbury campus. There are many people in the community*

stuck in the system because they cannot get a job. My skills will be shown as I run this program as it will be a place I will be challenged and further develop my teaching skills.

Evidence-Based Rationale

The evidence based rationale is all the the facts and research that was gathered to show why this program/service is needed. This is where you will explain the reasoning behind creating the program/service. The use of charts and photos to further explain your evidence is encouraged.

Description of Service or Program

This is the section where the program/service will really shine. Be thorough when describing the program/service; do not leave out any details. Ensure that the entire program/service has been thought out before creating a proposal, or it will not be granted.

How the Service or Program Will Be Measured

This section is asking about the success of your program/service. How will you know if your program/service worked or didn't?

Example: *We will give clients satisfaction surveys of two to three questions to answer when the program/service is complete. After three years, we will gather all data to check if the program/service worked for our clients.*

Staff and Agency Profile

Who will be running this program/service? It is important that the person you are proposing your program/service to knows that the staff will be educated and well-trained before hire.

Budget

Of course, how much money will you be asking for? Make sure to include every single cost that you anticipate the program requiring to start and continue to run. There should be no surprises later on after someone accepts the proposal. They need to know exactly what they are getting into before they invest.

Funding Proposal Introduction

A funding proposal is a way in which we can share our ideas and passions with the world. It is used to request funds by providing a convincing case for a project. A funding proposal can be used in many different environments, such as businesses or schools, but what we will be focusing on is the purpose and the importance it plays in our correctional system.

What is it?

A funding proposal is a great way for us to be able to request funds by providing a compelling case for a proposed program or service. A funding proposal will typically try to focus on the goals and objectives of the program/service. The proposal will also outline a set of measures for evaluation of success. The proposal will give a detailed breakdown of the amount of resources and funds needed for the project. Funding proposals typically

like to focus on measures because it helps the listener gauge the success of the proposal by providing them with evidence of success.

What is it used for, and what is its purpose?

Funding proposals can really be useful in many different scenarios and aren't only used in the correctional system. They are commonly used all the time, especially by bigger corporations or schools. The purpose of people requesting funds usually varies between two types, some people will request funds for the greater good of everyone, and well others do it for their own personal gain. A funding proposal can be done for somebody with an aspiring business idea, or it can be done for something like a reading program at a school. Either way, funding proposals are a great thing because it gives people with great ideas a chance to bring their project or plan to life. I believe the real purpose of funding proposals is so that we can advance economically and socially because so many people have great ideas but don't have the funds to do it. I believe funding proposals will help us advance because, typically, the proposal will be addressing some sort of issue that we feel the need to address. This can really be helpful in our corrections system because it will only help us improve our system and the rehabilitation process.

When would someone need to use it?

A funding proposal can be used in many different environments, but most of the time, it will be used in an institutional setting. For example, a school may have a high percentage of students who report going to school without having breakfast. They could do a study on this and try to propose to the school board a need for a breakfast program. They would show all the evidence and facts on why this is important and hope to have the program transpire. A lot of the time, when we are doing a funding proposal, it is addressing something that seems to be an issue for people physically, mentally, or emotionally. Our physical, emotional, and mental health is very important, and this is why it's good that we can request funds so we can address these issues. This is especially true when we are talking about a prison environment, where if these issues aren't addressed, it could have very negative repercussions. For example, if we were at a prison where violent behaviour is really bad and only getting worse, we would have a reason to look into this. Because this issue is affecting people's physical safety, it would give us reasonable grounds to look into it. By not addressing it, we would be putting the institution and the people at risk. In this particular situation, we could have a funding proposal for an anger management program because the problem is violence, and typically, anger is associated with violence. By having this program, it would teach the offenders better ways to deal with their anger and impulsivity. All these reasons would be a big part of the funding proposal and would most likely provide a pretty good case for the program to transpire.

What elements should be included in this element?

There are many important elements that should be included in a Funding proposal, and rightly so. If you are going to be requesting money from someone, especially a substantial amount, it is important that you provide them with as much relevant detail as possible. Important elements would include information on yourself. The investor is going to want to know what kind of a person you are, like your background, experiences, education, work history, etc. You need to be able to prove you're the right person for the job and why you would be the best person. Probably one of the key elements in a funding proposal is the objectives and goals because there needs to be a reason for the program or service. It should be very clear in your proposal what you are aspiring out of receiving the funds. Your proposal should also include the resources you have and the resources you'll be needing, like staff, money, and equipment. In your proposal, it is important to also say who the clientele is and why there is a need for whatever we are trying to fund. Another big part of the funding proposal is providing

them with a budget and a plan because they will want evidence as to why you are requesting for however amount of money.

What is the structure format?

Funding proposal outline

1. Background Information
 - 2.1. Opportunity Statement
 - 2.2. Vision
 - 2.3. Positioning
2. Project Details
 - 3.1. Goals & Objectives
 - 3.2. Customers
 - 3.3. Methods
 - 3.4. Staff / Administration
3. Available Resources
4. Required Resources
 - 5.1. Personnel
 - 5.2. Facilities
 - 5.3. Equipment
 - 5.4. Suppliers
 - 5.5. Budget
5. Evaluation Plan
 - 6.1. Formative Evaluation
 - 6.2. Summative Evaluation
6. Appendix 1: Project Plan

Program Proposals

What is a Program Proposal?

A program proposal or a project proposal contains key information about your program; it is essential information of your program for your sponsors to understand your outlook; all the planned activities and events in a program proposal are scheduled in an orderly to make sure they're going to be completed in the corresponding time, and a program proposal varies and how much it would cost and if they'll allocate funds for it such programs include:

- A Feeding Program -Program Evaluation
- Training Program -Academic Program
- Radio Program

Usually, a program proposal is drafted during the early stages of a project; the proposal is a rough draft at best and is not a contract. Some individuals confuse a program proposal with a business proposal, but it is not this; sponsors would sign the proposal to approve its contents; after the sponsors have approved the proposal, a business starts to further the paperwork like contracts, project plans and other things.

What is a Program proposal used for, and what is its reason to use it?

A program proposal is used to show your program and its information and what you hope to achieve if an organization would fund your program. It needs to be worded and organized well so that the organization you're pitching to is intrigued, and you have to lay out a very organized picture for them to understand what you actually want to do, what it would achieve, and what kind of progress would be continually achieved through your program.

When would someone need to use a Program Proposal?

An individual could want to use a program proposal if they wanted a new program in an institution they are working in. If you were working in a correctional institution and you wanted a program that introduced e-cigarettes into facilities since there are rules against smoking in facilities, you'd have to write down in your program proposal all the reasons you think it be beneficial for the offenders to be able to use e-cigarettes like anger management, anger release, withdrawal assistance.

What elements should be included in a Program Proposal?

Program Proposals start with an introduction, and in this introduction, you should include what the program will accomplish, why the program should be funded and how your program will help the institution reach its goals.

After the introduction you would give a background of the needs that your program will assist with, remind the institution the issues that are around it and explain how the program could assist that institution with said issues, also give a small explanation of how the programs idea came about.

This step explains all the aspects of the procedure for undertaking the project, and this will be the longest portion of all the elements because you have to explain your entire basic outlook on the program from a well-constructed scope statement to a timeline of how long the program will take these aspects need to be worded well and made intriguing to the audience the other aspects include making a statement of milestones and deliverables, a statement of known risks and how they will be overcome and a list of relevant stakeholders, known team members, and how they will be involved.

Finally, you will include a budget, and when making this budget, make sure the readers know how much money the program will need, when you need the money and how the money will be spent. The readers will want to know all of this information, so make sure to make it as detailed as possible. The better you make your budget, the easier it will be to acquire funding.

Example Funding Proposal:

Shelter for Abused Men

Horizons: Request for Funding

275 Bloor St

Sudbury, ON, P3C 2L2

—

Jo Danis

Logan Desage

Bajot Singh Tatla

Do you know where to go if you are a man who is abused? Not many people do. Intimate partner violence, where the male is the victim, is more likely to include major assault, weapons or injuries. There is no shelter in Sudbury designated for abused males, so we would like to make one.

Police reported victims of intimate partner violence in 2016 as Intimate partner violence where the Canadian male is the victim is more likely to include major assault, weapons or injuries. **Example:** Males are more likely to be the victims are physical assault compared to females (87% for males, 74% for females). Males are also more likely to be victims of level 2 and level 3 assaults (level 2 assault is an assault with a weapon causing bodily harm, and level 3 assault is assault that wounds, maims, disfigures or puts the other person's life in danger).

Men often feel emasculated and ashamed to come forward when it comes to being abused by their partner. There is a general stigma in modern society that in a heterosexual relationship, the man is the primary abuser in an intimate relationship.

Of course, women can be just as abusive and destructive as any male. A professor from Penn State recalls a husband who was being physically attacked by his police officer wife. She monitored his behaviour, threatened him with weapons and threatened to do things to their children, and since she was a police officer, he could not turn to law enforcement.

Another man was mistakenly referred to a program for abusive men when he was trying to call for help.

Men should know that there is a place for them to go if they are in a position of abuse, whether it's from a spouse, family member, or otherwise. Men do not typically like to take a stand when they are in positions of abuse because of the societal stigma. Men need to be 'manly', so they will usually just stay in the abusive relationship they have. This shelter will include many programs for men and their children to take, as well as help them build their own support systems. We will be including a drug/alcohol prevention program, drug/alcohol abuse program, abuse management program, family/marital counselling, a parental support program and even a program for the support system of the abused. It can be hard to watch a loved one be in this position, and even harder when you do not know what to say or do to help.

This program will give advice and share other people's journeys. Our service is to be available for all and any men and their children to come stay if they need a place to get away from abuse. We have

six separate apartment-style dorms that people can stay in. Each is equipped with one bathroom, two four-person bedrooms, a living space, and a kitchen. We will also have programs available, such as Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, a Parental Support Program, and an Employment Opportunity Program.

We will have a database that tracks every single person who comes in and out of our care, and tracks how many times a person has used one or more of our services. After one year we will pool all information together and will be able to tell if the shelter can afford to stay open.

For the safety and security of the males in our care, we will be hiring only men for the startup of this operation. We feel that after being abused by a woman, one might be the last person they would want to see. We will be employing a total of 6 social workers who will work 10-hour shift rotations. We will also be employing two secretaries for check-in details and a cleaning/maintenance crew of three people to clean and maintain the building.

Our total maximum budget for this project is (including paychecks for one year): \$5,187,040 Total budget without paychecks: \$401,000

- House purchase cost: \$330,000
 - Legal fees: \$3,000
 - Approx. Land transfer tax: \$2,000
 - Renovations: \$60,000
- Food/month: \$3,500
- Security System (including instillation): 25,000
- Employees: Social workers' total cost- 410,000/month= \$4,920,000/year, Secretaries- \$2,400/month= \$28,800/year, Cleaning services: \$2,520/month= \$30,240

Horizons is a small non-profit organization in Sudbury dedicated to helping homeless people in the community.

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Other Documents

Within the healthcare environment, some other common documents prepared by or proofread by an AHP [Administrative Health Professional] are:

Curricula Vitae

Curricula Vitae – plural and Curriculum vitae singular and often abbreviated to CV, in the fields of academia, medicine and science are multiple pages, listing education, conferences, publications, keynote speaker events and more. McGill University has published a [guide to writing an effective CV for a residency application](#).

Resume

For an application where a CV is not required, a resume will typically be among the requested application documents. This [resume template \(Word Doc\)](#) will give you an idea of how to format your credentials.

Manuscripts

A manuscript will allow others to learn about the research that you are performing. This downloadable [manuscript guideline \(Word Doc\)](#) contains information about suggested formatting and the necessary components to ensure your manuscript meets standards.

Travel Itinerary

As part of your responsibilities, you may have to travel occasionally. When this is necessary you may be required to submit a travel itinerary to ensure to your employers that your travel time is of an appropriate length and work related. This downloadable [itinerary guideline \(Word Doc\)](#) will provide a starting point for creating this document.

Reports

This downloadable [report guideline \(Word Doc\)](#) contains information about suggested formatting and the necessary components to ensure a report meets formal standards and is well received.

Fax

Fax is a technology used to digitally copy paper documents to distant locations that is still used by many businesses for its reliability. This downloadable [fax guideline \(Word Doc\)](#) can be used to ensure clear communication is made when using fax to deliver messages.

Agenda and Minutes

When a meeting occurs, documentation is necessary to communicate who was present, what was discussed, and what decisions were made during the meeting. An [agenda document \(Word Doc\)](#) will provide a brief summary of what the meeting intends to focus on, while a [minutes document \(Word Doc\)](#) will provide a thorough detail of what was discussed and decided during the meeting.

Message

Sometimes, when you need to communicate information to a peer, they will not be available to receive it. A [personalized message \(Word Doc\)](#) can be left at their workspace to inform them of the missed communication when they return.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Myers Briggs Personality Assessment

Myers-Briggs Personality Testing

Much like learning styles, there have been a number of theories surrounding the idea that different personality types may prefer different kinds of learning. Understanding how personality traits and learning styles are categorized can be useful in making decisions and choices for your own learning activities. It can be interesting to review how personality styles may impact your ability to learn.

Whether you put any value on these theories, it's important to recognize that employers may use personality assessments in the hiring process. For example, an organization may identify a lack of strong leadership in its marketing department. Everyone is good at doing the tasks that need to get done, but no one is willing to take charge.

When reviewing a series of qualified applicants, a personality assessment may be used to identify which candidates have a leadership personality style before offering anyone an interview.

What knowing about personality traits and learning can do for you is to help you be aware and informed about how these affect you so you can deal with them directly.

Extroverted (E) vs. Introverted (I): In the Myers-Briggs system, the traits of Extroverted and Introverted are somewhat different from the more common interpretations of the two words. The definition is more about an individual's attitude, interests, and motivation. The extrovert is primarily motivated by the outside world and social interaction, while the introvert is often more motivated by things that are internal to them—things like their own interests.

Intuition (N) vs. Sensing (S): This personality trait is classified as a preference toward one way of perceiving or another. It is concerned with how people tend to arrive at conclusions. A person on the intuitive end of the spectrum often perceives things in broader categories. A part of their process for “knowing things” is internal and is often described as *having a hunch* or *a gut feeling*. This is opposed to the preferred method of a sensing person, who often looks to direct observation as a means of perception. They prefer to arrive at a conclusion by details and facts or by testing something with their senses.

Feeling (F) vs. Thinking (T): This trait is considered a decision-making process over the information gathered through the perception (N versus S). People that find themselves more on the Feeling end of the spectrum tend to respond based on their feelings and empathy. Examples of this would be conclusions about what is good versus bad or right versus wrong based on how they feel things should be. The Thinking person, on the other hand, arrives at opinions based on reason and logic. For them, feeling has little to do with it.

Judging (J) vs. Perceiving (P): This category can be thought of as a personal preference for using either the Feeling versus Thinking (decision-making) or the Intuition versus Sensing (perceiving) when forming opinions about the outside world. A person that leans toward the Judging side of the spectrum approaches things in a structured way—usually using Sensing and Thinking traits. The Perceiving person often thinks of structure as somewhat inhibiting. They tend to make more use of Intuition and Feeling in their approach to life.

The Impact of Personality Styles on Learning

To find out their own personality traits and learning styles, a person takes an approved Myers-Briggs test, which consists of a series of questions that help pinpoint their preferences. These preferences are then arranged in order to build a profile using each of the four categories.

For example, a person that answered questions in a way that favoured Extroverted tendencies along with a preference toward Sensing, Thinking, and Judging would be designated as ESTJ personality type. Another person that tended more toward answers that aligned with Intuitive traits than Sensing traits would fall into the ENTJ category.

Table A.1: Personality Types

Personality Types			
ESTJ	ISTJ	ENTJ	INTJ
ESTP	ISTP	ENTP	INTP
ESFJ	ISFJ	ENFJ	INFJ
ESFP	ISFP	ENFP	INFP

As with other learning style models, Myers-Briggs has received a good deal of criticism. Additionally, the claim that each person has a permanent and unwavering preference towards personality traits and learning styles has not turned out to be as concrete as it was once thought. This has been demonstrated by people taking tests like the Myers-Briggs a few weeks apart and getting different results based on their personal preferences at that time.

“[Myers Briggs Personality Assessment](#)” from [Fanshawe SOAR](#) by Kristen Cavanagh is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.

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Version History

This page provides a record of edits and changes made to this book since its initial publication. Whenever edits or updates are made in the text, we provide a record and description of those changes here. If the change is minor, the version number increases by 0.1. If the edits involve a number of changes, the version number increases to the next full number.

The files posted alongside this book always reflect the most recent version.

Version	Date	Change	Affected Web Page
1.0	August 21, 2024	First publication	N/A