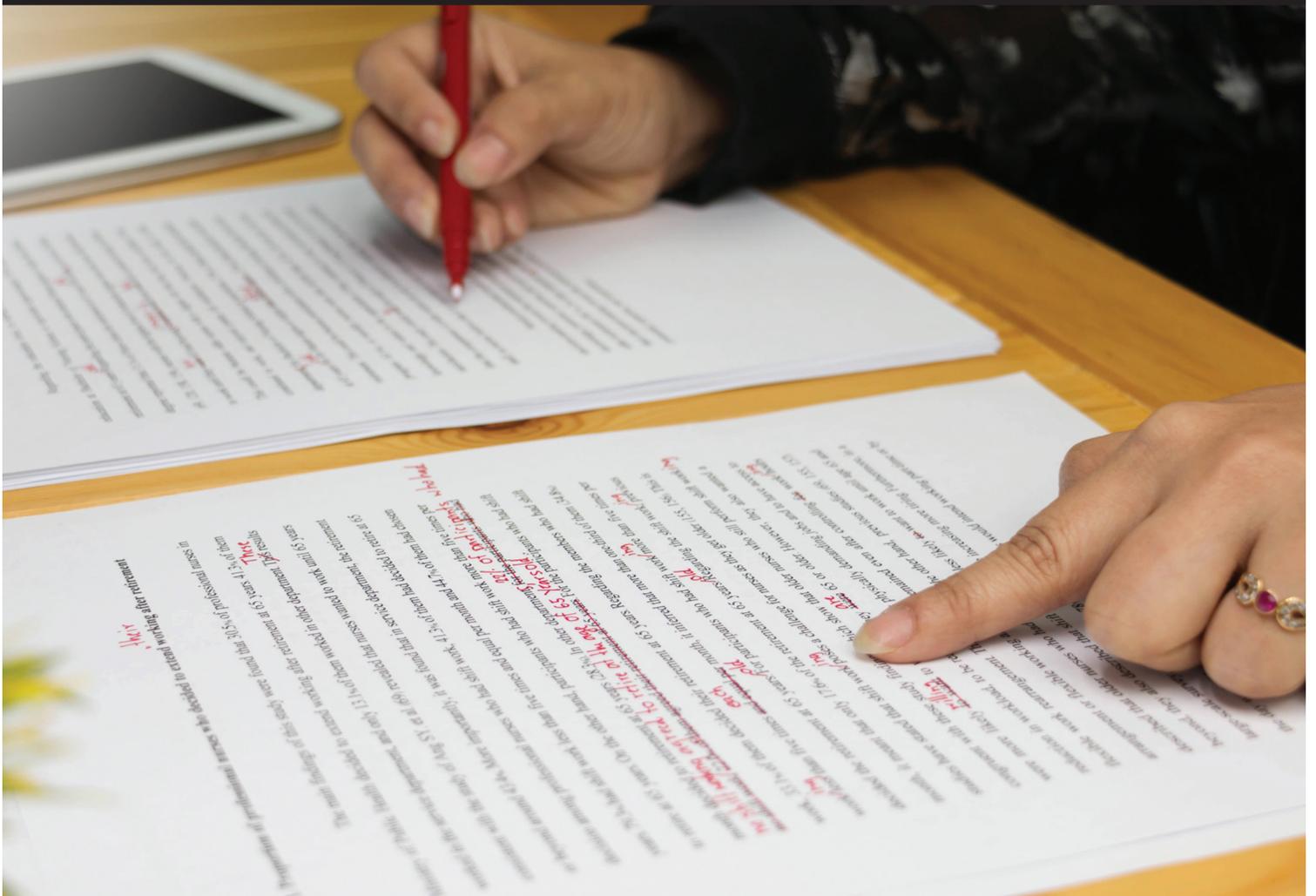


# ESSENTIAL SKILLS IN GRAMMAR AND PROOFREADING



# Essential Skills in Grammar and Proofreading

*The best of Business Management Daily's advice*

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**Memorizing a ton of finicky grammar rules is a tough thing to ask of a busy adult!**

**In this special report, we've collected the best of Business Management Daily's advice on grammar and proofreading in a format that leans heavily on informal quizzes and lists so you're not overwhelmed by rules—and have an easier time remembering the basics of good communication.**



## **Zoom in on document trouble spots**

Proofreading a document for grammar and spelling mistakes won't snag every error, and while program features such as automatically updated fields help, they aren't completely foolproof. Take **at least** one additional pass through the pages to check for blunders in these areas:

**Appearance.** Look at each page and sets of facing pages with a "big picture" view of the layout, spacing and any special headings or fonts. Are styles consistent? Look closer at the layout for other errors and visual distractions, such as several lines of type in a row ending in the same word or a hyphen, creating a "stacked" appearance. Are words correctly split over lines? ("Proj-ect" is a noun, "pro-ject" a verb.)

**Fancy fonts.** Typos love to hide in text formatted differently from the rest of the document, particularly words that are all capitalized.

**Sequence.** Are the page and chapter numbers in order? Does the information in the table of contents match the document? (Is that the chapter title, and does it start on that page?) In lists, does "G" follow "F" and "4" precede "5," or are they out of order?

**Connections.** Do footnotes, figures and other illustrations appear on the appropriate pages? Are cross-references within the document in order? If it's an electronic file, are hyperlinks working correctly?

**Adding up.** Is the sum of numbers in a row the same as the "total" figure? Do percentages on a pie chart add to more than 100? (Perhaps you need a footnote explaining they have been rounded.)

**Known trouble spots.** Keep a list of common types of errors in text that you proofread regularly. And if you find one error, look closer at that section because another error is likely lurking in the same word or sentence.

**Boilerplates.** Don't overlook standardized information, such as the description of your organization or its mission, the address and the phone number.

**Sense.** Finally, question the author about passages or numbers that puzzle you. A section of text may be missing, or transposed numbers or a lost decimal could cause your document to cite gasoline prices of \$7.16 or \$176 per gallon.



## **'That' or 'Which'? Rules to decide**

**“That” is used with restrictive clauses.** A restrictive clause is a part of a sentence you can't get rid of without changing the overall meaning. *Example:* “Weather that is warm is my favorite” contains the restrictive clause “that is warm.” If you remove “that is warm” the sentence would be declaring that any and all weather is your favorite.

**Restrictive clauses don't have commas around them.** When you use “that” in a restrictive clause as in the previous example, there is no need for commas around the phrase.

**“Which” is used with nonrestrictive clauses.** Non-restrictive clauses can be removed from a sentence without changing its intent. *Example:* “Paper towels, which are good for cleaning, are available in most stores.” The nonrestrictive clause “which are good for cleaning” could be removed from the sentence without changing the meaning that paper towels are available in stores.

**Nonrestrictive clauses are surrounded by commas.** Notice that there are commas around “which are good for cleaning.” The commas show the phrase is an aside—it adds some context but isn't necessary to the overall meaning.

**“That” is necessary; “which” is optional.** Do a quick test in your head: If the phrase is needed for the sentence's meaning, use “that.” If you could toss out the phrase and the sentence still means the same thing, use “which.”

## **Quiz - Can you spot the grammar and writing errors in the sentences below?**

1. Come quick or you'll miss the bus.
2. Hank felt badly about missing the deadline.
3. Which would be best, a raise or an extra vacation?
4. Speak slower when you answer the phones.

### **Answers:**

1. Replace “quick” with “quickly.” You need an adverb to modify the verb “come.”
2. Replace “badly” with “bad.” Saying he feels badly implies there's something wrong with Hank's ability to feel.
3. Replace “best” with “better.” When comparing two things, use “better.” When comparing three things or more, use “best.”
4. Replace “slower” with “more slowly.” Again, an adverb is needed to modify “speak.”



## **Common flaws and fixes**

Four sentences that need repair, along with fixes:

**1. Subject/verb agreement.** Seek out your true subject to match it to the correct verb.

*Example:* *One of the five members of our group, which meets monthly, get to attend the award ceremony.* Fix the sentence by using “gets” instead of “get” because it refers to one member of the group, and one takes a singular verb.

**2. Actionless, dull sentences.** Whenever possible, replace “there are” and passive verbs with action-oriented words.

*Example:* *There are three awards being handed out this year, and the top award is being given to one of the members of our group, Tom. That is quite an honor, so we congratulate you, Tom.* Rewrite the sentence this way: *This year’s award ceremony honors three well-deserving recipients. And the top award goes to Tom, one of the members of our group. What an honor! Congratulations, Tom!*

**3. Negative structure.** Rewrite sentences built around the word “not” to include strong, positive verbs.

*Example:* *Because the copier has not been fixed, I cannot distribute hard copies of the improvement plan to every department manager.* Rewrite the sentence this way: *When the copier is fixed, I will distribute hard copies of the improvement plan to every department manager. In the meantime, I’m circulating a digital version.*

**4. Comma splice.** Commas help link sentences, but they need help from words like “and,” “but” and “yet.”

*Example:* *John ran out of the office, his boss chased after him.* Rewrite the sentence this way: *John ran out of the office, and his boss chased after him.*

## **Quiz - Which sentence is correct?**

1. a. I was lying on the couch watching TV.  
b. I was laying on the couch watching TV.
2. a. He is one of those people who like snakes.  
b. He is one of those people that like snakes.
3. a. Between you and me, he’s dishonest.

- b. Between you and I, he's dishonest.
- 4. a. She gave the tickets to Tom and myself.  
b. She gave the tickets to Tom and me.
- 5. a. The experiment was a simple study of cause and affect.  
b. The experiment was a simple study of cause and effect.
- 6. a. Everyone should bring their notes to class.  
b. Everyone should bring his or her notes to class.
- 7. a. I'll vote for whoever I want.  
b. I'll vote for whomever I want.
- 8. a. The cat jumped out the window.  
b. The cat jumped out of the window.
- 9. a. He is more athletic than I.  
b. He is more athletic than me.
- 10. a. She looks more happy today.  
b. She looks happier today.

**Answers: 1. a; 2. a; 3. a; 4. b; 5. b; 6. b; 7. b; 8. a; 9. a; 10. b**



## **Sentence beginnings and endings**

What's the rule on these four sentence-starting and -stopping strategies?

**1. Starting a sentence with “and” or “but”:** It's perfectly OK, though be aware that it sets a less formal tone. If formality is the goal, reword. *Example:* “And we still hope to see you on the 14th” might become “Furthermore, we still hope to see you on the 14th.”

**2. Launching a sentence with “There is” or “There are”:** At times, “there is” or “there are” can be a fine way to start a sentence. Generally, though, a writer can reword the start and cut to the chase. Most likely, you don't need “there.” *Example:* There is a leak in the ceiling in our office that needs to be repaired vs. The leak in the ceiling in our office needs to be repaired.

**3. Ending a sentence with a preposition:** Though many believe otherwise, putting a preposition at the end of a sentence is acceptable. Putting it at the end often sounds more natural. *Example:* “Where did you come from?” vs. “From where did you come?”

**4. Starting a sentence with “however” is acceptable,** as long as you put a comma after “however” if it means “nevertheless.” If you use “however” at the beginning of a sentence and don't insert a comma, “however” means “in whatever manner” or “to whatever extent.” *Example:* However carefully they paraded down the street vs. However, it's vital to remember to call home before leaving work.



## **An exercise to get serious about editing**

Try this if you want to sharpen your editing skills, think outside the box, and maybe have a little fun: Take a news story off the Internet and go through it with a red pen until you've deleted every single word that isn't absolutely necessary to express that information. Being as unforgiving as possible with the text is a good way to teach yourself how to slim down your own writing.

## **Quiz - Can you spot the punctuation errors in the sentences below?**

Correct any punctuation errors in the following sentences. *Caution:* Some sentences may already be correct, so don't be fooled.

1. Whenever Dan is in the office he keeps his door open.
2. Yes Eloise, you were right.
3. The deadline for applications will be Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2011 and two copies of the application will be required.
4. The deadline for the applications will be the second Tuesday of December 2011.
5. He is a brilliant highly-creative author.
6. "Do you understand why Roger was angry," she asked me?
7. We had insurance but still owed \$80 in copayment fees.

### ***Answers:***

1. Whenever Dan is in the office, he keeps his door open.
2. Yes, Eloise, you were right.
3. The deadline for applications will be Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2011, and two copies of the application will be required.
4. The deadline for the applications will be the second Tuesday of December 2011.

### **CORRECT**

5. He is a brilliant, highly creative author.
6. "Do you understand why Roger was angry?" she asked me.
7. We had insurance but still owed \$80 in copayment fees. **CORRECT**



## **Guidelines for using parentheses**

Parentheses are one form of punctuation that can cause some confusion. Some people have trouble determining when to use them, while others may apply them without really knowing if parentheses are the most appropriate punctuation. General guidelines:

**Use parentheses to set off nonessential elements in a sentence.** *Example:* We will need to clean out Julia's desk (she resigned last week) before her replacement starts on Monday.

**Use parentheses to enclose information that is independent of the main sentence.** *Example:* Our new office in Miami has much more open space than our previous location (in Orlando).

**For better clarity, use parentheses instead of commas when the information you want already contains commas.** *Example:* All administrative assistants (Mary, Joanne, Gerry and Cory) have asked to take vacation at the same time.

**Do not place punctuation such as commas, semicolons or dashes before an opening parenthesis or before the closing parenthesis unless it relates only to the material in the parentheses.** *Wrong:* We'll order our typical refreshments: (pizza, salad, cookies and soda) for tomorrow's meeting. Often dashes can be used to set off parenthetical phrases. *Example:* We'll order our typical refreshments—pizza, salad, cookies and soda—for tomorrow's meeting.

**Do not capitalize the first word of a phrase inside parentheses unless it's a proper noun or it is a complete sentence.** *Example:* Please reply by Sept. 30, 2016. (A post-paid envelope is enclosed.)

## **Quiz - Can you spot the grammar and writing errors in the sentences below?**

1. The final changes were made by our CEO, and the report was submitted by Helen on time.
2. We're excited to announce this new innovation.
3. The marketing team is not hiring at the present time.
4. She said the vendor's pricing is too high, I'm not sure where she got that idea.
5. Here's three ways we could solve the scheduling problem.

**Answers:**

**Answers:**

1. Replace the passive “were made by” and “was submitted by” with the less-cumbersome active voice: “The CEO made the final changes, and Helen submitted the report on time.”
2. Redundant. An innovation is always new. Rewrite to “We’re excited to announce this innovation.”
3. Wordiness will tire your readers. Change “at the present time” to “now.”
4. This run-on sentence is two sentences separated by a comma split. Turn this sentence into two complete sentences.
5. Subject and verb are not in agreement. Rewrite to “Here are three ways we could solve the scheduling problem.”



## **7 proofreading traps that are lying in wait for you**

Remember these tips when reading something one last time before giving it the thumbs-up:

1. **Look for the elephant in the room.** The big bold text in headlines has a way of slipping right past our consciousness—after all, how could anyone make an error in such a prominent space? Ask the people who misspelled “college” on a huge banner spread across a baseball team’s dugout during a nationally televised game in 2013.
2. **Hyphens can be harsh.** A word split in two by a hyphen and continued on the next line is a devious thing; when text breaks, your mind does an invisible double-take and is susceptible to a swindle. Make sure nothing was left behind or added accidentally when that dash jumped into the fray.
3. **Stamp out identity theft.** Does Bob stay Bob throughout your document, or did he suddenly become Pete? Sometimes a search-and-replace doesn’t quite update everything, and name consistency is not typically something you focus on during the first or even second read.
4. **Do the math.** Simple addition and subtraction is almost never checked with a calculator when someone writes a piece. Come on, who would bother when seven times five is, and always has been, 42? Oops. Look at every number carefully—dates too. Are you just assuming the 14<sup>th</sup> of March is a Sunday because someone wrote it down that way? Inaccurate dates can be a stealthy assassin to a proofreader.
5. **Count your bullets.** This article is called “7 cruel proofreading traps that are lying in wait for you.” Now, count how many we actually describe. Yes, the numbers match up.

(They do, don't they? Please say yes.) No one deleted or added one at the last minute—*this* time, but it could easily happen, making you look arithmetically challenged.

**6. A picture is worth a thousand headaches.** So, those photos that have been placed so artistically inside the document ... they *do* actually match up with the text, right? You never know when someone's left an old picture where it shouldn't be, or they've simply grabbed the wrong one. For example, the image to the right. And then there's the one-in-a-thousand chance that a picture's position on the page syncs up with text you don't want it to, creating unfortunate (and sometimes bizarre) connections in the reader's mind.

**7. Beware the Mistake of Mistakes.** Just as Count Dracula is always keeping an eye out for wooden stakes in the area, so must you always be on guard for the world's most sinister typo—of course we're talking about the "public/pubic" misadventure, infamous in urban legend. If you misspell the word "misspell" or let a calendar go out showing Christmas on June 25, fine, but whatever happens, *don't let this one through*. The Internet is ready to preserve it forever ... and ever ... and ever.

Now make a bold final charge against pesky typos. When you're 99.9 percent sure your document is gold, try the following to recalibrate your mind and detect what may *still* be cleverly hiding:

- 1. Run the pages through the copier to produce something twice their normal size** and be amazed at what you spot when sentences get huge.
- 2. Read the document while standing up**, or lying down, or in some other slightly unusual position. Just come at it from a slightly different physical angle.
- 3. Find everything totally fascinating.** Pore over the material as if you're not looking for errors at all; you're just a fan of the subject matter and immersing yourself like a reader would. You'll make different connections and new logical inferences.

## **Quiz - Choose the correct word in each sentence:**

1. The supervisor (advised/told) the employees that the laptops would be back-ordered.
2. Seth (intends/aims) to report the mistake.
3. Jules was (anxious/eager) for a promotion to sales director.
4. The boss told Josh that he has the (ability/capacity) to develop management skills.
5. Katie and Greg couldn't agree (between/among) themselves.
6. Barbara (continually/continuously) looks for more efficient ways to do things.
7. (Everyone/Every one) of the books had a damaged cover.

**Answers:**

1. TOLD, meaning to utter or relate, is the better choice. Advised often includes the connotation or cautioning or warning.
2. INTENDS, meaning to plan to do something, is correct. Aim means to point a weapon or to point toward some objective.
3. EAGER, meaning highly desirous of something, is correct. Anxious should be used when anxiety or worry is evoked.
4. ABILITY is correct. It means the state of being able or the power to do something. Capacity is the potential to receive or contain something.
5. BETWEEN is correct, because the statement refers to just two people. Among is used when referring to three or more people.
6. CONTINUALLY is correct. It means recurring frequently. Continuously means without interruption.
7. EVERY ONE, meaning each one, is correct. Everyone means all people.

**Quiz - To capitalize or not to capitalize?**

1. He was born in the (South/south) in 1950 and has lived there all his life.
2. There were floods in (Eastern/eastern) Massachusetts during the storm.
3. They traveled through the Sahara (Desert/desert) as part of their tour.
4. The highway cut right through the (Desert/desert) and led to the mountains.
5. They served excellent (French/french) fries at that diner.
6. He was interested in (Roman/roman) architecture.
7. She was elected to (Congress/congress) in 1994 by a close vote.
8. Those statistics are part of a (Congressional/congressional) report.
9. The (University/university) received an increase in state funds.
10. His son plays football at Syracuse (University/university).
11. The author deals with financial issues in (Chapter/chapter) 3 of his new book.
12. The next (Chapter/chapter) provides an overview of starting a small business.
13. The Civil Rights (Act/act) brought about social change in America.
14. It would take an (Act/act) of Congress to change that law.
15. They moved to Kansas (City/city) in 1980 when her father died.
16. Crime has decreased in the (City/city) of New York recently.
17. Tom was required to take (History/history) 210 as a sophomore.
18. He also signed up for a course in (Biology/biology).
19. They visited Yellowstone National (Park/park) when they went on vacation.
20. The (Park/park) was closed for the day, and they had to make other plans.
21. The poem celebrated (Summer/summer) as she “arrived in a blaze of sunshine.”
22. They spent the (Summer/summer) at the shore when they were children.
23. The (Duke/duke) of Windsor renounced his throne to marry an American.
24. We met a (Duke/duke) when we visited England last year.
25. He earned a (Ph.D./PH.D.) degree in linguistics from a well-known university.

**Answers:** 1) South 2) eastern 3) Desert 4) desert 5) French 6) Roman 7) Congress 8) congressional 9) university 10) University 11) Chapter 12) Chapter 13) Act 14) act 15) City 16) city 17) History 18) biology 19) Park 20) park 21) Summer 22) summer 23) Duke 24) duke 25) Ph.D

## **Quiz - Can you spot the grammar and writing errors in the sentences below?**

1. If you have any further questions, feel free to call Tina or myself.
2. I see no reason to stop now, please continue as planned.
3. The meeting was held just for rosemary and I.
4. The party is over, yet, who knows?
5. I am going to read a book, write some checks, and will be calling home.
6. It lasted 6 hours.
7. Each of the managers are gone today.
8. It will be a tough road to hoe.
9. Nether the list or the books is available.

### **Answers:**

1. The word 'myself' should be replaced by 'me.' As for the word 'further,' isn't it just taking up space?
2. When two phrases each work as their own independent sentence, feel free to reach for a semi-colon to join them.
3. The lowercase 'r' in 'rosemary' isn't the only noticeable flaw. It should be 'Rosemary and me.'
4. Here's an instance where a pause that probably sounds natural when spoken comes off as awkward in print. That second comma disrupts the flow of the sentence.
5. No one's going to arrest you for delicately changing tenses at the end of this sentence, but simply 'and call home' is a better way to finish it.
6. Spell out numbers one through nine; when you hit double digits, it's time to go numeric.
7. What is the subject of this sentence? It's the word 'each,' not the word 'managers.' Replace 'are' with 'is' to bring everything into sync.
8. You don't hoe roads; you hoe rows. (Say that three times fast.)
9. Follow the either/or and neither/nor rule to set this sentence on the straight and narrow, but only after fixing the spelling of that first word.

## **Quiz - Can you spot the grammar and writing errors in the sentences below?**

1. The final changes were made by our CEO, and the report was submitted by Helen on time.
2. We're excited to announce this new innovation.
3. The marketing team is not hiring at the present time.
4. She said the vendor's pricing is too high, I'm not sure where she got that idea.
5. Here's three ways we could solve the scheduling problem.

### ***Answers:***

1. Replace the passive "were made by" and "was submitted by" with the less-cumbersome active voice: "The CEO made the final changes, and Helen submitted the report on time."
2. Redundant. An innovation is always new. Rewrite to "We're excited to announce this innovation."
3. Wordiness will tire your readers. Change "at the present time" to "now."
4. This run-on sentence is two sentences separated by a comma split. Turn this sentence into two complete sentences.
5. Subject and verb are not in agreement. Rewrite to "Here are three ways we could solve the scheduling problem."



## **Handle a heavy reading chore with these 4 tactics**

You absorb most material that crosses your desk with ease. But once in a while, a heavy assignment—reading a book, proofing a long report or being asked to give your input on a complicated competitive analysis—can throw you off. Cut through that daunting reading assignment with these tactics (Get your tools ready: highlighter, self-adhesive notes, pen/pencil):

- 1. Take 10 minutes to flip through the material to see how it's organized.** Note: The table of contents won't tell you what you need to know. (Long or short chapters/sections? Are they subdivided by headings, or is each a long copy block? Lots of diagrams and charts or all text?)
- 2. Follow with a five-minute evaluation.** Determine: 1. How much of the material is new to you. 2. Whether the material deserves high priority. 3. How much of it will require full concentration and how much you can simply skim. 4. How much time you'll need to complete the job.

**3. Mark it up.** If the material is yours to keep, circle, underline, write notes in the margin: anything to mark your progress and help yourself through it. If possible, take it to a quiet location with no distractions. (Can you take it home to read comfortably in bed? If so, try a 2-in-1 pen and highlighter.) If the material isn't yours to keep, use self-adhesive notes to write notes and keep your place.

**4. Skim or bypass any material that is repetitious,** irrelevant or overly wordy.

## **Quiz - Punctuate the following sentences by placing semicolons or commas**

*Some sentences require both.*

1. Jill is qualified for the job for example she has training in human resources development as well as accounting procedures.
2. Seth's article on webinars was confusing hence the training coordinator asked him to rewrite it.
3. Although the reception area was wet and slippery no one had called the maintenance department.
4. Amanda knew the proposal was unclear she didn't know how to organize it.

### **Answers:**

1. *Jill is qualified for the job; for example, she has training in human resources development as well as accounting procedures.* Use a semicolon before introductory words *for example* (e.g.), *namely*, and *that is* (i.e.) when they link two independent clauses. Use a comma after them.
2. *Seth's article on webinars was confusing; hence the training coordinator asked him to rewrite it.* Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses connected by the conjunctive adverbs *hence*, *then* or *thus*.
3. *Although the reception area was wet and slippery, no one had called the maintenance department.* Use a comma to separate a subordinate clause from an independent clause.
4. *Amanda knew the proposal was unclear; she didn't know how to reorganize it.* Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses in a compound sentence when a coordinating conjunction is not present.



## Say It Right, Write It Right, Spell It Right!

**Rifle or riffle?** It's *rifle* when you're referring to the act of ransacking and stealing. (Someone rifled through my desk drawer.) And it's *riffle* when you're referring to the act of leafing through a book, index cards, etc. (She riffled through her recipe book.)

**Let's home in on this:** Is it *home in on the problem* or *hone in on the problem*? *Home* as a verb means to move toward a goal. *Hone* as verb means to sharpen. Thus, "Let's *hone* our archery skills and *home* in on the target." A good rule of thumb: if you need the phrase "in on" after the verb, your verb is *home*, not *hone*. However, the increasing misuse has some sources accepting *hone in on* as an alternative.

**Bellwether or not?** *Bellwether* is something that indicates a trend. It is often misspelled *bellweather*. The word comes from the Middle English *bellewether*, which is a castrated male sheep bearing a bell to lead its flock.

**Resumé, résumé or resume?** Should you include accent marks when writing the word *résumé*? Yes, if you don't want your reader to confuse it with the verb *resume*, which means "to begin again after an interruption" when pronounced "ri-zoom." Although it would be rather easy to make the distinction by context alone. So, is it one or two? Resources favor using two accent marks.

**Drop the "the":** It's *Ukraine*, not *the Ukraine*. The *Ukraine* is the way the Russians referred to that part of the country during Soviet times. *The Ukraine* now implies disregard for the Eastern European country's sovereignty. There's no *the* before *Ivory Coast* either...

**Noisy vs. noisome:** *Noisy*, of course, refers to something that is annoyingly loud or boisterous. "The neighbor's kids are noisy." If you say that the neighbor's kids are *noisome*, you implied that they emitted a foul odor. *Noisome* means "having an extreme offensive smell."

**Since they're made of dough ...** You can thank Dunkin' Donuts for popularizing the easier way to spell those tasty fried dough rings. The informal spelling *donut* has been around since the 1800s, and is used by many folks, although *doughnut* is dictionary-approved.

**It's an it!** When referring to a business or entity (such as a city), call it an *it*. For example, Domino's improved *its* pizza (not *their* pizza). Also, it's Los Angeles won *its* third straight game; but, the Dodgers won *their* third straight game.

**Mast confusion:** When flags are lowered in honor of the dead, it's half-staff when the pole is on land. Only on a ship, or a land-based naval facility, is the flag flying at half-mast.

**Bring or take?** When deciding which of these verbs to use in your sentence, it's a matter of direction from the perspective of the speaker, at that point in time. For example: "If you're going on a long walk today, you should take an umbrella." "We advise you to bring an umbrella when you come visit us this weekend." You would tell your friend: "Take those books back to the library today." The librarian might say: "Bring those books back today."

**Awe-inspiring!** Awful (not awful) means very bad or unpleasant. "My visit to the dentist was awful." It also means a great deal. "We spent an awful lot of money." Aweful does not mean "full of awe." That would be awesome. So there's no such word as aweful.

**A complimentary tip:** If you're giving something away free as a little side perk, it's complimentary, spelled with an "i." *We're serving a complimentary breakfast at the seminar.* Use complementary (spelled with an "e") when you want to express a completion of a set or group. *Those are complementary colors.*

**Stand and deliver!** Don't confuse a lectern with a podium. There's a distinct difference. A podium is a raised platform on which a person stands to deliver a presentation. A lectern is a fixture where a speaker could place notes. A podium is what you stand *on*. A lectern is what you stand *behind*.

**Chew on this awhile...** Or is it *a while*? The general rule is it depends on whether you use the word "for" or "in" before it. For example, "I'll sit and stay *awhile*." But "I'll sit and stay for *a while*." And, "I'll be home in a while." "Chew on this awhile" is correct.

**No mischief intended:** You've probably heard it, or even say it yourself: mischievious. (mis-CHEE-vee-ous). That's wrong. The word is mischievous (pronounced MISS-chavuss). Perhaps the error is born out of common words that do have the *-vius* ending: obvious, devious, previous, oblivious and envious.

**Linchpin, not lynchpin:** Anything that is a key reason something is held together is a linchpin (with an *i*). "Joe has been the real linchpin on our sales team." Many people spell it *lynchpin*, probably because there is a word *lynch*, but not *linch*, although some dictionaries accept *lynchpin* as an alternative spelling.

**To be or to not be:** It's "To be or not to be." Shakespeare had it right. Put the "not" before the "to." Many people will write, for example: "We are asking you to not smoke on company grounds." The correct way is to write: "We are asking you not to smoke on company grounds." Incorrect: "I was trying to not laugh." Correct: "I was trying not to laugh."

**Are you really nauseous?** Don't confuse nauseous with nauseated. Nauseous refers to that which causes a sensation of queasiness, like a garbage can on a hot day. Nauseated refers to the actual feeling of sickness. If you feel you are about to vomit, you should say "I feel nauseated." If you say, "I feel nauseous," that means you feel you are emitting something that is making others sick to their stomachs.

**Fortunate vs. fortuitous:** Fortunate is an adjective meaning "by a stroke of luck or fortune." "He was fortunate there was no ice on the rocks at the top of the cliff." Some people will use fortuitous as a synonym, but fortuitous means happening by accident or chance, and may not be a favorable event. "It was fortuitous that my old boss and I were on the same flight."

**Collectible or collectable?** Depends on how you're using them—and the difference is subtle. A collectible generally is a thing that is deemed worth collecting, like coins, baseball cards, figurines, old toys, etc. That Partridge Family lunch box is a collectible. Collectable generally means anything that can be collected, including payments. The mayor said \$125,000 in taxes is collectable and will be used to fund the new park. Chances are you'll be using collectible more than collectable, so the best way to remember to use the "i" is to think "I collect those."

**Let's be 'sure':** Insure, assure and ensure are just about the most abused and confused trio of words. Here's the deal: To *insure*, you need an insurance policy; to *assure*, you boost the confidence of a person; to *ensure*, you make certain that something happens. "I *assure* you (boost the confidence of a person); my goal is to *ensure* (making certain something happens) that you *insure* (the policy) your car."

**Thinking or feeling?** Many people use "feel" when they really mean "think." For example: *I feel we can close the deal by Friday.* "Feel" involves emotional sensing or just a hunch. "Think" involves intellectual reasoning or an opinion. You can say *I feel confident we can close the deal by Friday, or I think we can close the deal by Friday.*

**Invaluable vs. priceless:** Normally, the prefix in- indicates a negative, leaving some people to believe invaluable means worthless. Invaluable means that something's value is so great that its worth cannot be determined. "Your advice on how to deal with the pesky street vendors was invaluable." "A bottle of water on a desert hike can prove to be invaluable." Priceless is used mainly on objects. "The work of art is priceless," meaning its worth is beyond putting a price tag on it.

**Strawberry shortcake:** Think of that treat when you're trying to get the spelling of *dessert* right. *Dessert* has two S's, just like **Strawberry Shortcake**. To help you even more, think of the **Sahara** (one S), when you're spelling the word *desert*, a barren tract of land. Also, it's *just deserts* when you're referring to a deserved punishment.

**Cannot or can not?** Use cannot in most cases: *I cannot tell a lie.* The exception is when the word "can" precedes a phrase that begins with "not only": *The new conference room*

*can not only accommodate our entire staff, it also serves as an activity room if we move the table.*

**Ironic? Really?** Many people label an event *ironic* when they really mean *coincidental*. Use *ironic* when the outcome is surprisingly opposite of what one would expect: *The man who runs the butcher shop is a vegetarian. How ironic.* Use *coincidental* when the event is by accident or chance. *The drunken driver crashed into a beer truck. How coincidental.* (not ironic).

**Compound possession:** Would you write *Dave and Dan's new book* or *Dave's and Dan's new book*? If they share ownership of the book, that is, if they are co-authors, then it would be *Dave and Dan's new book*, with the apostrophe on the second proper noun.

**Tic talk:** When someone has a facial spasm it's spelled *tic*. If you spell it *tick*, then we might assume there's a tiny black insect hunkering down on their cheek.

**Try and remember:** Many people—and you might be one of them—will construct a sentence using “try and,” for example, *Try and find that library book*. What's wrong with that? It suggests that not only will you try, but you will succeed, which might not necessarily be true. The proper construction would be *Try to find that library book*.

**Counsel vs. council:** Counsel as a noun means advice, or in legal terms, an attorney or attorneys. “She sought my counsel.” “We retained counsel when the lawsuit was filed.” As a verb, counsel means to advise. “She said she would counsel me through the process.” Council is a noun meaning a group of people who meet to make decisions. “Council voted to close the park.”

**Imply vs. infer:** Imply means “to express indirectly” or “to suggest.” You might use it to say “The customer implied—but didn't really say—that she was thinking of leaving us for a competitor.” On the other hand, infer means “to derive,” “to deduce,” or “to conclude.” For example, use this word to say “I don't think we should infer that we've lost the account yet. Don't give up. Let's investigate more and find out what's bothering our customer.”

**Its vs. it's.** *Its* is the possessive of the pronoun *it*. *It's* is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*. *It's* time to give the dog *its* bath.

**Would of, should of, could of?** Here's a gremlin that slips past many writers, readers and spell checkers: “would of” as in “If I knew you were struggling, I *would of* helped.” It gets through because the contraction “would've (would have) sounds like “would of” and slips under lots of radars, even sophisticated ones. Same goes for *should of* and *could of*.

**Subject-verb agreement.** Is it “*one of the dogs are howling*” or “*is howling*”? To check your choice of verb, omit the prepositional phrase “of the dogs.” This leaves you with “one ... is howling,” the correct choice.

**A \$2 dollar tip.** Bet you didn't catch the redundancy. The \$ (dollar sign) takes care of the word "dollar." The soda cost \$2, or the soda cost 2 dollars (not \$2 dollars).

**Chew on this awhile.** Or is it *a while*? The general rule is it depends on whether you use the word "for" or "in" before it. For example, "I'll sit and stay *awhile*." But "I'll sit and stay for *a while*." And "I'll be home in *a while*." "Chew on this awhile" is correct.

**Beck and call.** Not sure if it's *beckon call* or *beck and call*? It really doesn't matter when you speak it because they both sound the same. But for those of you who write it, it's *beck and call*. When you are at someone's *beck and call*, you respond immediately, whether he or she *beckons* (to summon someone by a silent gesture) or *calls*. *Beck* is an old-timey term for *beckon*.

**Contraction action.** Go ahead, use contractions in your writing. In informal writing, a conversational tone—that is, writing like you speak—engages the reader in a folksy way. But be careful. When in doubt write it out, or you'll be creating nonsense words like *I'd've* (for I would have) or *there're* (for there are) or *why'd* (for why did).

**Let's be "sure."** *Insure*, *assure* and *ensure* are just about the most abused and confused trio of words. Here's the deal: To *insure*, you need an insurance policy; to *assure*, you boost the confidence of a person; to *ensure*, you make certain something happens. Let's work all three into one sentence. (drum roll) "I assure you my goal is to ensure that you insure your car."

**A complimentary tip.** If you're giving something away free as a little side perk, it's *complimentary* (spelled with an "i"). "We're serving a *complimentary* breakfast at the seminar." Use *complementary* (spelled with an "e") when you want to express a completion of a set or group. "Those are *complementary* colors."

**Special affection.** Yes, we do have a soft spot for managers. But let's dig into *effect* vs. *affect*. *Effect* is a noun (usually) as in "special *effect*" or "your behavior has an *effect* on the team's morale." *Affect* is a verb as in "raising the price will *affect* sales." *Effect* sometimes can be a verb. "The new boss will certainly *effect* change here."

**Bring or take?** When deciding which of these verbs to use in your sentence, it's a matter of direction from the perspective of the speaker, at that point in time. For example: "If you're going on a long walk today, you should *take* an umbrella." "We advise you to *bring* an umbrella when you visit us this weekend." You would tell your friend: "*Take* those books back to the library." The librarian might say: "*Bring* those books back today."

**Try and remember this.** Many people—and you might be one of them—will construct a sentence using "try and ..." For example: "Try *and* find those keys." What's wrong with that? It suggests that not only will you try, but you will succeed, which might not necessarily be true. The proper construction: "Try *to* find those keys."

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