

## Grammar & Punctuation Review

The Writing Center provides 1:1 tutoring as well as practice grammar and punctuation quizzes.

### GRAMMAR

**Subject-Verb Agreement:** Subjects and verbs must agree in number. Singular subjects require singular verbs, and plural subjects require plural verbs. Generally this is easy to spot. For example, “the cats are” or “a cat is.” However, note the following complications:

- 1) Most indefinite pronouns are singular and require singular verbs, even though the sentence may sound odd. However, a few indefinite pronouns may be singular or plural.

#### Indefinite Pronouns

Singular	Singular or Plural
Another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, every, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, something	none, some, more, most, any, all  (These may be singular or plural depending on what the word means to the sentence.)

**Example:** Each of the boys is home

**Example:** All he asks is a chance. (“Chance” is singular so “all” is singular.)

**Example:** All of the people are gone. (“All” refers to plural “people.”)

- 2) When words separate the subject from the verb, cross out all clauses, prepositional phrases and any phrases that start with “including,” “together with,” “in addition to” and “as well as.”

**Example:** One of the problems that plague American society in the United States, as well as the rest of the world, is poverty.

**Example:** The moon, as well as Venus, is visible in the night sky.

**Warning:** Be careful to select the true subject of the verb. For example, in the sentence, “Studying before a test is one of those simple measures that reap big rewards,” reap needs to match measures, not one.

- 3) Two or more subjects joined by “and” require a plural verb.

**Example:** The Dalmatian and the Terrier are destroying my flowerbed.

- 4) With subjects joined with “or,” “nor,” “neither/nor,” “either” /“or” and “not only”/“but also,” The verb agrees with the subject closest to it.

**Example:** Neither the crabs nor the lobster tempts my appetite.

**Example:** Neither the lobster nor the crabs tempt my appetite.

- 5) *With questions:* Reverse the sentence to determine the true subject and verb.

**Example:** Do/Does one of the planets have a life-sustaining atmosphere?

One of the planets does have a life-sustaining atmosphere.

6) Some nouns may refer to a group of individuals or things, but are singular if the group refers to ONE unit.

**Example:** The team controls the ball.

**Example:** Humanities was my favorite area of study.

However, these nouns are plural if they are referring to separate individuals:

**Example:** The jury reports its verdict. (one unit)

**Example:** The jury still disagree on a number of counts. (the members)

**Sentence Fragment:** A complete sentence must have a subject (can be implied) and a verb, and it must convey a complete thought. Without even one of these items, you have a fragment.

**Tip:** With fragments, your voice DOES NOT fall at the end.

**Example:** Because the actress could not locate a lawyer who would be willing to handle her lawsuit against the production company.

**Correction:** Omit “Because.”

**Comma Splices and Fused Sentences:** Two complete sentences cannot be joined with a comma (comma splice), or without any punctuation at all (fused sentence).

**Example:** The dogs were afraid, they didn’t want to go to the vet.

**Correction:** The dogs were afraid; they didn’t want to go to the vet.

**Correction:** The dogs were afraid. They didn’t want to go to the vet.

**Misplaced/Dangling Modifiers:** Modifiers (describing words) need to be as close as possible to what they describe. What they are describing needs to be explicitly included in the sentence.

**Example:** Anita listened to the teacher read to the class with her eyes closed.

**Correction:** With her eyes closed, Anita listened to the teacher read to the class.

**Example:** After swimming for hours, the sun dried every drop of water.

**Correction:** After swimming for hours, David allowed the sun to dry every drop of water.

**Faulty Predication:** Your subject and its complement must match. Your subject equals its complement.

**Example:** A stereotype is when someone characterizes others....

**Correction:** A stereotype is an unfair characterization....

**Pronoun Agreement:**

1) Make sure that your pronoun agrees in number with its antecedent (the word it is replacing).

Singular Pronouns	Plural Pronouns
I/me/my	we/us/our
you/your	you/you
he/him/his; she/her; it/its	they/them/their

**Example:** Any Texas State student could access their own e-mail account.

**Correction:** Any Texas State student could access his/her own e-mail account.

2) Make sure that your pronoun agrees in case with its antecedent (the word it is replacing).

Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns
I/we	me/us
you	you
he/she/it/they/who	him/her/it/them/whom

**Example:** My entire family is taller than me.

**Correction:** My entire family is taller than I [am].

(Finish the comparison in order to determine the correct verb).

**Tip:** For a simple way to remember when to use “who” and “whom,” substitute “he” for “who” and “him” for “whom.” This also works with “she”/“her” and “they”/“them”

**Example:** Give the money to whomever. (Give the money to HIM.)

However, remember to look first to the right of “who,” “whom,” “whoever” and “whomever.” Thus if a sentence reads, “Give the money to whoever/whomever needs it,” ask yourself if *he* needs it or if *him* needs it. *He* needs it, so you would select “whoever” needs it.

**Example:** Give the money to whoever needs it.

**Pronoun Reference:** It must be absolutely clear which noun a pronoun is referring to. Failure to do so results in a pronoun reference error.

**Example:** My mother told me to put my shoes in their boxes, but I couldn’t find them.

**Correction:** My mother told me to put my shoes in their boxes, but I couldn’t find the boxes.

**Faulty Parallelism:** When listing items in a series or a comparison, they must be in the same grammatical form (all nouns, all verbs, all infinitives, etc.) Failure to do so results in faulty parallelism.

**Example:** I like swimming, fishing and to hike.

**Correction:** I like swimming, fishing and hiking.

**Example:** I sent him to the store for bread, milk and to get butter.

**Correction:** I sent him to the store for bread, milk and butter.

**AFFECT and EFFECT:** “Affect” is always a verb, and “effect” is a noun.

**Example:** The war in Iraq affects US gas prices; the effect is that prices are continuing to increase.

**LESS VS. FEWER:** “Less” refers to a proportion. “Fewer” refers to something you can count.

**Example:** I have five pieces of pie and you have three; you have less pie and fewer pieces.

**LIKE VS. AS:** When describing how something occurs, do not use “like.” Like is reserved for comparing one noun to another. For example, “her skin is like a baby’s,” or “her eyes were like pools of water.” When you use “as” or “as if,” you are usually comparing an action to a noun.

**Example:** Her voice sounds like she had her head in a barrel.

**Correction:** Her voice sounds as if she had her head in a barrel.

**WHICH VS. WHO/WHOM:** Use “who” and “whom” when referring to people.

**LAY VS. LIE:** The definition of “lie” is “to recline.” You lie down ALONE. The definition of “lay” is “to place or put.” You must have an object “to place or put.”

Present Tense	Past Tense	Past Perfect	Present Continuous
Today I <b>lie</b> down.	Yesterday, I <b>lay</b> down.	I <b>have lain</b> down in the past.	I am <b>lying</b> down.
Today I <b>lay the pencil</b> down.	Yesterday, I <b>laid the pencil</b> down.	I <b>have laid the pencil</b> down in the past.	I am <b>laying the pencil</b> down.

**BADLY:** Never use “badly” to describe how you feel. If someone asked you how you were feeling, you wouldn’t say “goodly,” so do not say “badly.”

**Example:** The woman feels badly because she cannot make it to her son’s baseball game.

**Correction:** The woman feels bad because she cannot make it to her son’s baseball game.

## PUNCTUATION

**APOSTROPHES** (2 rules): Used to show

- 1) Omission of letters: '08 or don't
- 2) Possession: If a word is singular, then add an apostrophe and an "s."

**Examples:** one cat's fleas or Lewis's beans

If a word is plural and has an "s" at the end, add an apostrophe after the "s."

**Examples:** ten cats' fleas or the Jones' house

If a word is plural and does not have "s" at the end, add an apostrophe and an "s."

**Examples:** women's shoes

\*\*\*\*NOTE: it's = it is/its = possessive form\*\*\*\*

**SEMICOLONS** (two rules)

- 1) Use when joining two independent clauses (sentences).

**Example:** Professor Jones asked the class to evaluate the course; he wanted to determine his popularity.

- 2) Use when listing items in a series when the items themselves contain commas.

**Example:** We invited Joe Smith, President of State Bank; Detective Jill Williams; Susan Price, CEO of CFAN; and Bob Jenkins, Ombudsman.

**Example:** The chefs were in the kitchen chopping onions, peppers and garlic; slicing tomatoes, eggplant and celery; and sautéing chicken, beef and pork.

**COLONS** (three rules)

- 1) Use with an independent clause (sentence) before the colon. In a sentence look to the left of the colon. Ask yourself, "Is this a complete sentence?" If the answer is "Yes," then the colon can be used.

**Example:** My favorite teachers are: Dr. Cohen, Ms. Wilson and Dr. Ogletree.

**Correction:** My favorite teachers are Dr. Cohen, Ms. Wilson and Dr. Ogletree.

- 2) After salutations in letters (Dear \_\_\_\_\_:).
- 3) When writing the time (1:00).

**COMMAS** (five rules)

- 1) Use a comma when you have two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

**Example:** Georgia has great peaches, but peaches host terrible parasites.

**Example:** Georgia has great peaches, and peaches host terrible parasites.

**Example:** Georgia has great peaches, yet peaches host terrible parasites.

- 2) Use a comma after an introductory phrase or clause over four words long.

**Example:** Although I was very tired last night, I did not go to bed until 3 a.m.

- 3) Use commas with dates, addresses, titles and numbers.

**Example:** Monday, July 31, 1982, is my wedding anniversary.

**Example:** Portland, Oregon, is much larger than Portland, Maine.

- 4) Use two commas when including a non-restrictive element. That is, if the information is not essential to defining who or what the subject is, set the information off with commas.

**Example:** Jake Holmes, my accountant, fixed my taxes this year.

**Tip:** You will never separate a subject from its verb with a single comma.

- 5) Do not use two commas when including a restrictive element. That is, if the information is vital to defining who or what the subject is, do not set the information off with commas.

**Example:** Students, who fail their exams, must forfeit their scholarships.

**Correction:** Students who fail their exams must forfeit their scholarships.

**Tip:** In a list or series, do NOT use a comma preceding “and” or “or.” (Note: General grammar rules state that both ways are correct, but to be consistent in using one or the other. The GSP exam consistently does not use the comma.)

**Example:** Red, white and blue.

### QUOTATION MARKS (three rules)

- 1) Periods and commas always go inside the quotation marks, even triple quotation marks.

**Example:** My mother once told me, “All girls are ‘delicate flowers.’”

- 2) Colons and semicolons always go outside the quotation marks.

**Example:** My grandmother once said, “stupid is as stupid does”; granny would have liked Forrest Gump.

- 3) Question marks may go inside or outside, depending on the context.

**Example:** Do you believe that “ignorance is bliss”?

**Example:** Jesse asked, “When is dinner being served?”

### HYPHENS (two rules)

- 1) Use hyphens to spell out whole numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine.

- 2) Hyphenate compound-adjectives. That is, if two or more adjectives are used as one word to modify a noun, hyphenate them IF they precede the noun.

**Example:** We no longer live in the twentieth century, but I live in a twentieth-century house.

(Here “twentieth” and “century” need to be hyphenated because they act together to describe the house).

**TIP:** Sometimes to shorten a sentence, one can use suspended hyphens.

**Example:** Four- to six-week-old puppies are usually eating solid food instead of milk.

**TIP:** DO NOT hyphenate an adverb-adjective combination. For example, “This was a poorly written story.” (NOT poorly-written)

**DASHES** They come in pairs (like parentheses), unless the second dash falls at the close of the sentence. Note that two hyphens (“--”) are sometimes substituted for an em dash (“—”).

**Example:** In one of my classes we are studying female writers—Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf—who had a great impact on the world of literature.