Brush Up on Your American Grammar Skills

Grammar Goddess Communication
Look Smart. Sound Smart.

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Dear Business Professional:

Thank you for your interest in updating your American grammar and usage skills. You know that anything you write or say has an impact on your professional reputation, and you know that you’ve probably forgotten a few things since your last grammar class back in junior high (assuming you were even listening to the teacher when you were 13 or 14). Or you may have followed the lead of a very smart person, only to realize that person IS smart in many things, but not in American grammar.

Oops.

This is a practical grammar class, one intended to help you (re)learn information you may be confused about. It is a shortened version of my traditional six-hour class, which makes it perfect for a business professional. The information in this workbook comes from 20+ years of teaching American grammar classes and learning what the most common issues are among the adult students.

Even though American grammar has changed somewhat over the last few years, there are still a few absolutes in punctuation and usage and you will find them here. But there are also some choices you can make, and I will show you what they are and what the impact of making those choices might be.

Then it’ll be up to you.

I hope your goal is the same as mine is for you:

To always look and sound as smart as you are.

Susan Rooks
The Grammar Goddess
What You’ll Find in This Program

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The Grammar Goddess Asks:

Which sentences are written correctly? Note: There may be more than one right answer in any group.

1a. Our files are completely up to date.
1b. Our files are completely up-to-date.

2a. Carly said, “Fred’s a “geek”.”
2b. Carly said, “Fred’s a geek.”
2c. Carly said, “Fred’s a ‘geek.’ ”
2d. Carly said, “Fred’s a geek”.

3a. The set includes: knives, forks and spoons.
3b. The set includes knives, forks, and spoons.
3c. The set includes knives, forks and spoons.

4a. Who shall I say is calling?
4b. Whom shall I say is calling?

5a. The company has issued their preliminary report.
5b. The company has issued its preliminary report.
5c. The company has issued it’s preliminary report.

6a. Jeff invited Bruce and I to meet with he and Stacey.
6b. Jeff invited Bruce and myself to meet with him and Stacey.
6c. Jeff invited Bruce and myself to meet with he and Stacey.
6d. Jeff invited Bruce and me to meet with he and Stacey.
6e. Jeff invited Bruce and me to meet with him and Stacey.

7a. Tom Smith (the president of Tom’s Shoes) will be in the office today.
7b. Tom Smith, the president of Tom’s Shoes will be in the office today.
7c. Tom Smith, the president of Tom’s Shoes, will be in the office today.

8a. Susan Jones’ car is the red one.
8b. Susan Jones’s car is the red one.
8c. The Joneses’ cars are in the south parking lot.
8d. The Jones’ cars are in the south parking lot.

9a. The chicken layed an egg in the nest.
9b. I’m going to lay down for a nap.
9c. I’m going to lie down for a nap.
9d. The chicken laid an egg in the nest.
9e. Earlier, I lay down for a nap.
9f. Earlier, I lied down for a nap.

How well did you do?
# Right: ______
# Wrong: ______

Sarcasm: The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person who doesn’t get it.
Commas (,)

Essential vs. Nonessential Information
Essential information is required to make complete sense of a sentence; it is often used to help a reader identify one person or thing among many. **Never enclose or set off essential information with any punctuation mark.**

Nonessential information can be left out of a sentence without major loss of understanding because it often describes a single item that is easy to identify. **Always enclose or set off nonessential information.**

An easy way to decide if information is essential or nonessential is to think of parentheses. If the information belongs inside them, it’s not essential (it may be interesting or useful, but not essential). Replace each half of the parentheses with a comma or dash (one for one).

**Essential:** The committee meeting **that was held Monday** was interesting.
   (If there was more than one meeting, the phrase “that was held Monday” is essential to specify which meeting was interesting.)

**Nonessential:** The committee meeting **(which was held Monday)** was interesting.
The committee meeting, **which was held Monday**, was interesting.
The real sentence is The **committee meeting was interesting**.
   (If there was only ONE meeting, any description of it is extra and not needed to identify it.)

**Reality check:** Writing the sentences above requires you to know the truth of the situation before writing. Are you writing about one thing or more than one?

**Which, that, or who?** Use **which** to introduce nonessential information and **who** or **that** to introduce essential information.

**Appositives**
Words that explain what came before, which are considered **nonessential**.

Jane Smith (**our assistant vice president**) will be at the meeting.
Jane Smith, **our assistant vice president**, will be at the meeting.
The real sentence is **Jane Smith will be at the meeting**.
(While **our assistant vice president** gives further information about Jane Smith, it’s not essential for sentence clarity.)

**Our assistant vice president (Jane Smith)** will be at the meeting.
**Our assistant vice president, Jane Smith**, will be at the meeting.

**BUT:** Assistant Vice President **Jane Smith** will be at the meeting.
(Why no commas?)

Shouldn’t there be a shorter word for monosyllabic?
More Commas

Dates and States
The contracts must be signed by June 15, 20XX, to be valid.
The envelopes must be postmarked in Boston, Mass., by February 5.

Interrupters
A word or words that interrupt the flow of a single sentence, sometimes preceded by a slight hesitation of voice. Place a comma before and after the word(s).

If you need more time, however, please let me know.
If you still need more time, of course, we could make some other arrangements.
She, nevertheless, will be out of the office on Monday.
I have, therefore, revised the recommendation.

BUT: Leave the commas out if the word or words are woven into the flow of the sentence, and you would not hesitate when saying them (you might even slightly stress them).

I have therefore revised the recommendation.
If you still need more time, of course we could make some other arrangements.

Compound Sentences (also see page 7 for another treatment)
These are two or more independent clauses (complete sentences) that are connected by a comma and one of the seven coordinating conjunctions: and, for, nor, or, so, yet (see the acronym FANBOYS ➔).

John likes to play soccer, but Fred prefers to play baseball.
Amy set the table, and I organized the seating plan.
Bob wanted to see the early movie, so we left the house at noon.

Remember: A comma connecting two complete sentences by itself is a “comma splice,” which creates a run-on sentence. Bad grammar!

Introductory Elements
When a sentence begins with a dependent clause (one that cannot take an end mark of punctuation), place a comma after the dependent clause. These clauses begin with a subordinating conjunction such as after, although, as, as soon as, because, if, unless, until, when, whether, or while.

As soon as the train arrives, I’ll be on my way.
If the train arrives late, I might not make my appointment.
Because the forecast was for rain, I took my umbrella to work.
When John called, I was really surprised.
After I get home, I’ll give you a call.

I wonder how much deeper the ocean would be without sponges.
Even More Commas!

Direct Address / Afterthoughts
Use commas to set off names or titles used in direct address and to set off afterthoughts.

Tom, we’re going camping this Friday, aren’t we?
Make your decision quickly, Doctor, please.
Thank you, Karen, for the wonderful necklace!
The party was great, wasn’t it?
Thanks for sharing, Susan!

Items in a Series
Although most grammar guides no longer require the serial (final) comma in a series (aka the Oxford comma), most still recommend it for clarity (as I do).

Which sentence is easier to be sure of?

Several positions are available: account manager, maintenance supervisor, receptionist and typist.

Several positions are available: account manager, maintenance supervisor, receptionist, and typist.

Why? ____________________________________________________________

NOTE: While we may not connect two sentences with just a comma, we may connect three or more sentences in a series that way:

Jennifer likes dogs, Kim prefers cats, and Art is crazy about both.

Any comma questions?
1. Mike likes to read, but Karen prefers to watch television.

2. Ms. Smith 55 has been affiliated with the agency for ten years.

3. The site, that Carly finished last month, looks great!

4. Ann loves coffee, Bob prefers tea and Diane enjoys both.

5. Chairman and CEO, Bill Gates, has been widely quoted in the press.

6. The Chairman and CEO of Microsoft, Bill Gates, has a MBA.

7. Bill Gates Chairman and CEO of Microsoft has a MBA.

8. The marketing strategy which we implemented last week is excellent.

9. Thank you for your order, we’ll fill it this afternoon.

10. Mr. Smith my boss Ann Carpenter and I will discuss it tomorrow.

11. The man who was wearing the red hat left early.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alot</td>
<td><strong>not a real word</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allot</td>
<td>many; much; numerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td>to give out in portions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oral</td>
<td>having to do with words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbal</td>
<td>spoken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stationary</td>
<td>writing paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stationery</td>
<td>not moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affect</td>
<td>to influence; to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effect</td>
<td>the result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>principal</td>
<td>the most important; the main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>principle</td>
<td>fundamental idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irregardless</td>
<td>not an accepted word; <strong>do not use</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regardless</td>
<td>without regard for objections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxious</td>
<td>looking forward to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eager</td>
<td>nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assure</td>
<td>to buy insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ensure</td>
<td>to make confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insure</td>
<td>to make certain something happens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emigrate</td>
<td>to enter a country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrate</td>
<td>to leave a country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyday</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>every day</td>
<td>each day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accept</td>
<td>exclude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>except</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its</td>
<td>it is; it has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it’s</td>
<td><strong>does not exist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its’</td>
<td>possessive pronoun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Borrow money from pessimists — they don't expect it back.
Colons ( : )

There must be a complete sentence in front of a colon used to introduce a list within a sentence. Do not put a colon after any word that is not the logical end of the sentence.

YES: There will be some new people at the meeting: Liz, Jeremy, and Lauren.
YES: There will be some new people at the meeting including Liz, Jeremy, and Lauren.

NO: The people who will be at the meeting are: Peter, Jeremy, and Lauren.
NO: The set consists of: knives, forks, and spoons.
NO: The trip includes: airfare, hotel, and two meals per day.

BUT: When introducing a bulleted-style list, use either a complete sentence or a phrase that ends with a preposition or a verb in front of the colon:

The accountant wants:
1. Last year’s sales figures.
2. Last year’s profit figures.
3. This year’s cost projections.

Reality check: If your boss insists on a colon after includes or including, fine. Don’t lose a job over this. It’s not worth it.

Punctuating Bulleted Items
There are only two approved ways to punctuate bulleted items: an end mark or nothing.

Use an end mark after each bulleted item if the item itself is a complete sentence or question.

Before we can approve the budget:
1. Stephanie has to finalize last year’s expenses.
2. Teresa needs to send the draft to the CFO for initial approval.
3. John needs to decide if we’re having an awards dinner in the spring.

Also place an end mark after each item if it would logically end what came before the colon.

The accountant wants to know if we have:
1. Last year’s expense figures.
2. Last year’s profit.
3. This year’s sales projections.

But if the items in the list are very short, sort of like a shopping list, use no punctuation.

The people who will be at the meeting are:
Jennifer Miller
Diane Murphy
Suzanne Sparrow
Rachel Tillman

Reality check: If your boss wants semicolons or commas after bulleted items, fine. You won’t confuse or embarrass anyone. But grammatically, they’re wrong.

Change is inevitable, except from vending machines.
Semicolons (;)

There are only three main reasons to use a semicolon in business writing.

**Compound Sentences** (also see page 3)
Use a semicolon by itself to link both parts of a compound sentence.

Tim loves his iPhone; Gina prefers her Android.

**Transitional Expressions**
When using terms such as *however, nevertheless, namely, moreover, therefore,* and *for example* to link independent clauses (full sentences), replace the period of the first sentence with a semicolon.

We’ll go to the movie. However, we’ll wait until the 9 p.m. show.
We’ll go to the movie; however, we’ll wait until the 9 p.m. show.

She’s fully qualified for the job. For example, she’s had ten years’ experience.
She’s fully qualified for the job; for example, she’s had ten years’ experience.

**Complex Items in a Series**
Semicolons are required to separate items in a series that contain required commas.

Who is who?
Please invite the Chairman, Diane Murphy, the Executive Vice President, Suzanne Sparrow, the Director of Investor Relations, and Penny Roll, the Chief Financial Officer.

Easier?
Please invite the Chairman; Diane Murphy, the Executive Vice President; Suzanne Sparrow, the Director of Investor Relations; and Penny Roll, the Chief Financial Officer.

Our offices are in Miami, Florida; Provo, Utah; Boise, Idaho; and Atlanta, Georgia.

Another example
Paula, who lives in Seattle, rarely sees the sun; Jim, who lives in Miami, sees more of it than he really wants; and Susan, who lives in Boston, has the best of both worlds.
**Hyphens ( - )**

**Compound Numbers**
Hyphenate all two-word numbers, which begin with twenty-one and end with ninety-nine, when you write them out. (“And” is optional.)

- four thousand three hundred (and) seventy-six
- twenty-one hundred *** one hundred (and) thirty-three

**Compound Nouns**
No single rule governs the formation of all compound nouns: Some are separate words, some are hyphenated, and some are written in solid form. Look up the ones that are important to you in a dictionary such as www.YourDictionary.com, which gives information from several dictionaries.

For example:

- **fundraiser** (was two words, then hyphenated, now one word)
- a **9-year-old** or a **nine-year-old** (all related words hyphenated)
- a **decision maker** (still two words)

**Compound Adjectives**
Here’s the **general rule**: Hyphenate all elements of a **multi-word phrase** coming immediately before a **noun** that creates a single, unified thought (it’s then considered a compound adjective). If the phrase is used elsewhere in a sentence, the hyphens are usually omitted because the phrase reverts to its normal function.

**Compound Adjectives**

- These are **up-to-date reports**.
- We have **long-term benefits**.
- It is a **state-of-the-art computer**.
- It's a **follow-up letter**.
- I have a **five-year car loan**.
- Lee has a **30-year mortgage**.
- He is a **decision-making officer**.
- She's a **32-year-old woman**.
- We have **back-to-school specials**.
- He's a **7-foot-2-inch player**.
- She's a **well-known artist**.
- We will get **on-the-job training**.
- It's a **high-level meeting**.
- He built **three-level condos**.

**Other Part of Speech / (Compound Noun)**

- The report is **up to date**.
- The benefits are for a **long term**.
- The computers are **state of the art**.
- We need to **follow up** later. (a **follow-up**)
- The loan is for **five years**.
- The mortgage is for **30 years**.
- She is a **decision maker**.
- She is **32 years old**. (a **32-year-old**)
- The kids are going **back to school**.
- That player is **7 feet 2 inches** tall!
- She is very **well known**.
- We’ll get training **on the job**.
- They’re meeting at a **high level**.
- He built condos with **three levels**.
Exceptions

Some commonly understood phrases that do not require the hyphens are high school principal, real estate office, accounts payable records, life insurance policies, Social Security payments, and word processing program.

Also, we do not hyphenate phrases beginning with adverbs ending in ly.

For example (the ones below are written correctly):

- **Commonly used words**
- **Poorly constructed house**
- **Clearly defined set of terms**
- **Wholly owned subsidiary**

But because both adjectives and adverbs can end in *ly*, it’s important to distinguish one from the other. To do that, put the word ending in *ly* in front of a noun; if it fits, it’s an adjective (adjectives modify nouns). If it doesn’t, it’s an adverb (adverbs modify many things, but not nouns). Say the words out loud; your ears will know if it’s right.

For example:

- **Commonly words?** No. Commonly, therefore, is an **adverb**.
- **Poorly house?** **Clearly** terms? A **wholly** subsidiary? Those are all **adverbs**, so no hyphens.

- **Friendly-sounding** voice (Friendly voice? Yes. Friendly, therefore, is an **adjective**.)
- **Motherly-looking** woman (Motherly woman? Yes. **Adjective**.)
- **Heavenly-feeling** massage (Heavenly massage? Yes. **Adjective**.)

Hyphenate phrases whenever they are in an inverted word order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular word order</th>
<th>Inverted word order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>exempt from taxes</td>
<td>a tax-exempt purchase / the purchase is tax-exempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bond owned by a government</td>
<td>a government-owned bond / the bond is government-owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an agency run by the state</td>
<td>a state-run agency / the agency is state-run</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Always hyphenate terms ending in *free*: toll-free, fat-free, taste-free, interest-free.

**Suspending the Hyphen**

If you have two or more phrases that have a common last element, you have a choice: Either write them all out fully or “suspend” the hyphen in the first one(s).

**YES:** 1-word, 2-word, and 3-word phrases

**YES:** 1-, 2-, and 3-word phrases

**NO:** 1, 2, and 3-word phrases

**And PLEASE:** Use hyphens OR quotation marks to hold a phrase together, not both.

**YES:** A “state of the art” or a state-of-the-art computer

**NO:** A “state-of-the-art” computer
Pronouns replace nouns in sentences, and each is used in a specific way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominative (Subject)</th>
<th>Objective (Object)</th>
<th>Possessive Before Noun</th>
<th>Possessive After</th>
<th>Reflexive (Mirror Image)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Me</td>
<td>My</td>
<td>Mine</td>
<td>Myself / My / Myselfs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>Your</td>
<td>Yours / Your’s</td>
<td>Yourself / Yours / Yours’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>Him</td>
<td>His</td>
<td>His’s</td>
<td>Himself / His / His’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>Her</td>
<td>Her</td>
<td>Hers / Hers’s</td>
<td>Herself / Hers / Herself’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It</td>
<td>It</td>
<td>Its</td>
<td>Its’s</td>
<td>Itself / Its / Itself’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>Us</td>
<td>Our</td>
<td>Ours / Ours’s</td>
<td>Ourselves / Ours / Ourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>Them</td>
<td>Their</td>
<td>Their’s</td>
<td>Themselves / Them / Themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>Whom</td>
<td>Whose</td>
<td>Whose’s</td>
<td>Themselves / Them / Themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Basic rules**

- **Nominative pronouns** are the subject of a verb / sentence.
- **Objective pronouns** are the object of a verb, preposition, or sentence.
- **Reflexive pronouns** must “reflect” back to the subject of the sentence (be the same person) or be used as an intensifier (again, of the same person).

---

1. Do you want to meet with Carol and (I / me / myself) after the show?

2. (She / Her) and her grandmother ate dinner.

3. (Me / I / Myself) and my friends had fun at the party.

4. Lynne asked Bonnie and (I / me / myself) to go with (she / her) and Laura.

5. Phil and Claire are younger than (us / we).

6. That’s between (he and I) **OR** (him and me) **OR** (him and I).

7. Either Beth or (me / myself / I) will call you back shortly.

8. I often sing to (me / myself) in the shower.

Reality Check for #5: _____________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

---

Families are like fudge . . . mostly sweet, with a few nuts.
Pronouns: Who and Whom

*Who* and *whom* follow the basic pronoun rules: *Who* is always the subject of a sentence, and *whom* is always the object of a verb or a preposition.

Here’s how you know which to use:
1. Always start with the clause **following (containing)** *who* or *whom*.
2. First, try a simple substitution: *he* for *who* and *him* for *whom*.
3. If you need to, rewrite the sentence to help you see which pronoun to use.

**Your Turn!**

1. May I tell her (*who/whom*) is calling?
2. The question of (*who/whom*) should pay for the cleanup is bothering me!
3. You may vote for (*whoever/whomever*) you wish.
4. You may vote for (*whoever/whomever*) appeals to you.
5. I will speak to (*whoever/whomever*) answers the phone.
6. I will speak to (*whoever/whomever*) you suggest.
7. (*Who/Whom*) were you talking to?

**Any pronoun questions?**
Apostrophes: Possessives ( ’ )

A noun ending in s followed immediately by another noun is usually in the possessive form, which shows a relationship (not ownership) between them. This relationship may be about humans, other animate beings, inanimate objects, or ideas.

Verify possessives by turning the original two-word phrase around, inserting of or of the between the words. If it makes sense, it’s a possessive phrase. This also helps you focus on the word to make possessive, the first word of the original pair. It’s your base word, and you need to know if it’s singular or plural before trying to make it possessive.

For example:
- The students accounts could be the accounts of the student or the students.
- The walls color could be the color of the wall or the walls.

You, the writer, should know whether you’re writing about one or more than one.

Forming Possessives

1. If the base word is singular, add an apostrophe and s.
   - IF the students accounts = accounts of the student = the student’s accounts
   - IF the walls color = color of the wall = the wall’s color
   - IF tonights specials = specials of tonight = tonight’s specials

2. If the base word is a regular plural, one ending in s, add just the apostrophe.
   - IF the students accounts = accounts of the students = the students’ accounts
   - IF the walls color = color of the walls = the walls’ colors
   - IF the kids toys = toys of the kids = the kids’ toys.

3. If the base word is an irregular plural, one not ending in s, add an apostrophe and s.
   - childrens toys = toys of the children = children’s toys
   - mens (womens) room = room of the men (women) = men’s (women’s) room
   - peoples choice = choice of the people = people’s choice

   This one should be the easiest to recognize because the words are already plural without the s. It’s not possible to have plural plurals, so the s must be used for another reason.

4. Form possessives of last names the same way, being careful to make them plural if you’re writing about more than one person with the same last name.
   - Susan Jones car = car of Susan Jones = Susan Jones’s car (or Susan Jones’ car)
   - The Joneses cars = cars of the Joneses = the Joneses’ cars
   - The Smiths cars = cars of the Smiths = the Smiths’ cars

Reality check: You could write “The cars of the Smith family are . . .” or “The Smith family’s cars are . . .”) and not make a last name plural or possessive.
**Apostrophes: Other Uses**

Use an apostrophe to indicate letters or figures missing from words or years.

cannot ____________  there is ________________  will not ________________
in 1970 ________________  in 1885 ________________  in 1985 ________________

**BUT:** What about plurals of figures or acronyms?

back in the **nineties** ________________  temperature / age in the **sixties** ________________

How many ATMS / ATMs / ATM’s are in the building?

She scored all 10s / 10’s / 10S on the floor exercise!

NEVER USE AN APOSTROPHE TO FORM THE PLURAL OF A WORD.

**Subject - Verb Agreement**

1. One of the secretaries (is/are) proofreading the proposal right now.
2. Our secretary and treasurer (is/are) Joan Rogers.
3. The purchase order for the new chairs (have/has) not been sent yet.
4. A key factor, the company’s assets, (is/are) being evaluated carefully.
5. The committee (was/were) unable to agree on a new format.
6. Several grapes or one pear (is/are) a good snack.
7. One pear or several grapes (is/are) a good snack.

Rule for choosing the verb with *or*: ____________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Is a dream in color a pigment of your imagination?
Quotation Marks (" ") the American Way

Rule #1: With quoted material, always place periods and commas inside / in front of / before the final quotation mark(s), even if you’re only quoting the last word(s) in a sentence.

“I made the phone call,” replied Linda.
Victor called Jack a “geek.”

Rule #2: Always place colons and semicolons outside / after / behind the final quotation mark(s).

These are my “comfort foods”: ice cream and chocolate.
I think with my “gut”; Jean uses her head.

Option: Place question marks or exclamation points inside or outside, depending on how the quoted material was said. If the quoted words were said with special emphasis, place the ? or ! inside the final quotation mark(s). If they were not, place the ? or ! outside.

Was it you who cried “foul”?
Was it you who cried “foul?”
“You’re terrific!” cried Martin.

Rule #3: Always place single quotation marks within doubles. Do not use singles alone.

Carly said, “Fred is a true ‘nerd.’”

Dashes (— or --)

Dashes are the all-purpose punctuation mark, so they can be used in place of many other marks. They are an informal — but not a professional — way to highlight information.

Dashes are either two hyphens (the little mark) side by side or the longer “em” mark. They are never just a single hyphen.

YES: My brother — and my father — went to the ballgame yesterday.
YES: My brother -- and my father -- went to the ballgame yesterday.

YES: My brother—and my father—went to the ballgame yesterday.
YES: My brother--and my father--went to the ballgame yesterday.

YES: My brother and my father went to the ballgame yesterday.

NO: My brother - and my father - went to the ballgame yesterday.

Reality check: Although the British version puts space before and after the dash and the American version uses no space at all, it really doesn’t matter which you choose. Just be consistent within a single document.
**Vocabulary: Tricksters (aka Homophones)**

1. The cat was (laying / lying / lieing / lyeing) on the bed.
2. Douglas was (sighted / sited / cited / cighted) for speeding.
3. (Desert / dessert) and coffee are included with your meal.
4. Diane and John felt (bad / badly) about the dinner being cancelled.
5. Mary suggested I (lay / lie / lye) down after lunch.
6. Jim was (pouring / pooring / poring) over the schedules.
7. I’m about to (loose / lose) my mind!
8. Getting a driver’s license is a (rite / write / right) of passage for most teens.
9. In the (passed / past), Rebecca would have (passed / past) Suzanne on the highway.
12. Joe says he will help, (i.e. / e.g.), he will help if you can drive him home later.
13. Joe says he has enough helpers, (i.e. / e.g.), Jim, Sam, and Audrey.

i.e. means ____________________________________________________________
e.g. means ____________________________________________________________

**Homographs:** Two or more words with the **same spelling** but a different pronunciation and meaning (*wind* blowing / *wind* up a clock).

**Homonyms:** Two or more words with the **same sound and spelling** but a different meaning, such as a *quail* (bird) and *quail* (cower).

**Homophones:** Two or more words with the **same sound** but a different spelling and meaning (*hear* and *here*).

A dog who gave birth to puppies on the side of the road was __________________ for littering.
Numbers

In business correspondence, use the figure style:

1. Spell out numbers from 1-10; use figures for 11 and over.*
   - We received more than 75 requests for information last month.
   - Fewer than ten people attended the conference.

2. Use figures when they have technical significance or need to stand out for quick understanding, as in #1 above.

3. Spell out big numbers when they’re largely a figure of speech.
   - I’ve told her a million times not to do that!
   - She gave me a thousand and one reasons for her mistakes.

4. Spell out numbers when they’re the first word of a sentence, except for years, which are always written as figures.
   - Eight hundred twenty-five people signed up for the conference.
   - There were 825 people at the conference.
   - 20XX should be a great year for our company.

5. Use million or billion in ordinary correspondence for fast comprehension, rather than a bunch of zeros; put a $ in front of such terms to indicate American money.
   - We spent $21 million last year on our department.
   - There are 12 million people in the system.

6. Leave off the 00s with whole dollar figures unless they’re used in a column or with other mixed numbers.
   - The check came to exactly $20.
   - The books were $3.50, $3.75, and $4.00.

7. Use figures for similar items in sentences with figures over and under 10.
   - John bought 24 hamburgers, 8 hotdogs, and 2 steaks for the barbecue!
   - We spent 11 weeks painting the house, but only 5 weeks wallpapering.

8. Treat other types of related numbers alike.
   - Last year 21,333,594 people applied for aid; in 2000, only 23,000,000 did.

9. Follow the usual rules in #1 if the items are not related.
   - We painted all ten rooms in 13 weeks!

10. Use figures for ages when you want them to stand out.
    - She’s a 25-year-old woman.
    - He’ll be 55 next year.
    - They have two children: a 12-year-old and a 3-month-old.
    - Joe’s only 52 years old — too young to retire.

Reality Check: Some authorities say to use words for numbers 1-9, and figures for 10 and over. Just be consistent, especially in any single document.

Every calendar’s days are numbered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affect</th>
<th>Usually a verb meaning to influence</th>
<th>Remember</th>
<th>Affect</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Usually a noun meaning the result (the end result)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Can be a verb meaning to bring about, to cause</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Frequently, often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allot</td>
<td>Distribute shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alot</td>
<td>Does not exist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Its</th>
<th>The personal pronoun possessive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s</td>
<td>The contraction for it is or it has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its’</td>
<td>Does not exist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lose</th>
<th>Verb meaning get rid of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loose</td>
<td>Adjective meaning not secured</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Article used before words beginning with a consonant sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An</td>
<td>Article used before words beginning with a vowel sound</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| a master’s degree in business administration — an M.B.A. |
| a horse — an hour |
| a union — an upset / a European trip — an excellent article |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Everyday</th>
<th>Ordinary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>Each day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compose</th>
<th>Means to make up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The company is composed of (not comprised of) three divisions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three divisions compose (make up) the parent company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprise</th>
<th>Means to include, to contain, to consist of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The parent company comprises (includes, contains, consists of) three divisions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The phrase “is comprised of” does not exist.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More important</th>
<th>Short for “what is more important”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dentists want us to brush our teeth; more important (not more importantly), they want us to floss.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More importantly</th>
<th>Means “in a more important manner”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Admiral was treated more importantly than I was.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxious</th>
<th>Looking forward to with anxiety, concern, fear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eager</td>
<td>Looking forward to happily, without anxiety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Anxious and eager are not synonyms! |
Just So You Know!

To Lie (to recline)

I lie down every day for a nap.
I am lying down right now for a nap.
I will lie down later for a nap.
I will be lying down later.
Earlier, I lay down for a nap.
I was lying down for a nap when you called.
I have lain down all night.
I had lain down for a nap because I was tired.

Reality Check: (If you can’t imagine using “lain,” just say you slept well, or you took a nap.)

To Lay (to put or place something somewhere)

Watch me lay the book on the desk!
I am laying the book on the desk.
I will lay the book on the desk later.
I will be laying the book on the desk later.
Earlier, I laid the book on the desk.
I was laying the book on the desk when you called.
I have laid the book on the desk as you asked.
I had already laid the book on the desk when you called.

To Lie (to tell an untruth)

I lie frequently.
I am lying right now.
I may lie about it if Mom asks.
I will be lying later if Dad asks.
Earlier, I lied about it.
I was lying when I said I could do it.
I have lied more than once in the past.
I told him I had lied once before.
A Baker’s Dozen Top Proofreading Tips

1. When proofreading on a computer, use “find/replace” to find words like it’s and its or your and you’re. Type each word separately and check the usage in every sentence. And if you often mistype a specific word (e.g., pubic, when you mean public), try to find the one you don’t want.

2. Commit to at least four readings with an important document, focusing on just one type of error at a time. First, read for overall sense, layout, and formatting. Second, check punctuation. Then check usage (e.g., it’s vs. its), and finally look at other grammar issues.

3. Read out loud. Your ears may hear something your eyes missed.

4. Read headlines or other words in large type, not just text in paragraphs. Also check terms that are written in all capital letters, which are tough to proofread because the letters are all the same size.

5. Be especially careful with little words — if, in, it, on, no, not, now — because they’re easy to mistype. (She is not ready. She is now ready.) Spellcheck can’t help here.

6. Check acronyms against their original phrase; sometimes a letter gets left out. WYSWYG stands for What You See Is What You Get . . . or does it?

7. Read out loud to spot words formed by a letter jumping from one word to the next; while both words may be real, the sentence won’t work. (I called her several month sago. How many hours doe sit take? The twigs napped.)

8. Read out loud to detect the difference between two words whose letters have shifted: prefect vs. perfect. You’ll also catch subtle differences such as the or they.

9. Check the last word on each line or page with the first one on the next; if they’re repeated, they’ll be really hard to spot.

10. Check all lists and page numbers for correct sequences (alphabetical or numerical).

11. Be sure that boldface, italics, or underlining are used consistently.

12. Check punctuation marks that come in pairs — brackets [ ], braces { }, parentheses ( ), and quotation marks “ ” — to make sure the second half is there.

13. Check the formatting of quotation marks and apostrophes to be sure you haven’t used "smart quotes" in some places and “curly quotes” in others.
For over 20 years, I have worked as a corporate trainer in the U.S. and internationally, with only one goal in mind: To help business professionals look and sound as smart as they are.

Over the years, knowing how busy most business pros are, I shortened my traditional six-hour workshops and created three-hour “Brush Up on Your Skills” workshops that contain the main elements they need to succeed.

I would love to help your organization’s associates be recognized as the best and the brightest. Please feel free to ask for a copy of one of my basic workbooks:

► Brush Up on Your American Grammar Skills
► Brush Up on Your Business Writing Skills
► Brush Up on Your Interpersonal Skills

The workbooks are in a pdf format and show what I usually cover in a class, although because I don’t print them ahead of time, I can tailor them to meet a client’s particular needs. There’s even a quiz in the grammar one (but no answers, although I will send the answer sheet separately if you wish) that your associates can take to see what they remember from grade school.

I also offer copyediting and proofreading services for your business materials such as annual reports, website content, and/or form letters.

How can I help you?

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