

# Writing Basics

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# Why...

Basic problems with punctuation and grammar continue despite computer capabilities with spell and grammar check.

Many students have problems with organization of paragraphs, continuation of one paragraph into the next, and logical sequence of content within course papers.

**You should  
already be  
familiar with:**

Grammar and punctuation

Sentence structure

Paragraph structure

Paper design

APA format

# Common Punctuation Errors

- Errors in use of commas, semicolons, colons, apostrophes, and connectors.
- Other punctuation errors with brackets, parentheses, dashes, hyphens, ellipsis, and abbreviations.

# Comma Rules

- Separate independent clauses, joined by a conjunction (and, but, or, nor, so, yet), within a sentence.
  - Vivian works at the hospital, and she volunteers at a veterinary clinic.
    - Two phrases must be capable of being separate sentences.
- Separate elements that introduce or modify a sentence.
  - After looking at several apartments, Haley chose a larger one.
    - Comma can be omitted after a short introductory phrase if there is no chance of misreading/misinterpreting.

# Comma Rules, cont.

- Quotes: separates a quote from the source
  - Mark Twain said, “The difference between the almost right word and the wrong word is really a large matter-’tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning.”
- Numbers
  - September 12, 2021
  - Not military numbering: 12 September 2021
  - Number value: \$1,650,500
    - Numbers of four-digits, commas are optional: 4,300 or 4300 are both correct

# Semi-colon Rules

- Join related main clauses when a conjunction is not present;
  - I will not do my homework; you can't make me.
- Join main clauses with a conjunctive adverb;
  - I would like to do my homework right after class; however, I need to fix dinner first.
- Separate items in a series that contain commas;
  - I loaded my backpack with new, sharp pencils; blue, yellow, and pink post-it pads; and a spiral notebook.

# Colon Grammatical Rules

- Complete main clauses and separate additions/modifications
  - Chris introduced four new concepts into the cardiovascular lecture: ion movement, electrical balance, action potential, and myocyte cross-bridges.
- Link independent clauses when the second modifies the first
  - Dianne learned an important lesson about cardiovascular physiology: avoid calcium deficiencies for correct myocyte functioning.
- Business or formal letter salutation
  - Dear Dr. Sommers:



# Rules for Apostrophes

- Create the possessive form not ending in **s** or a **s or z** sound;
  - The dog's bone
- Create the possessive form ending in **s** or a **s or z** sound;
  - If singular noun: Chris's book or Liz's binder
  - If plural noun: cats' yarn ball
- Joint possession;
  - Karen and Lisa's simulation material...
- Individual possession;
  - Karen's and Lisa's PowerPoint slides...
- Contractions: don't, can't, haven't, I'm, it's

# Common Grammatical Errors

- who's/whose
- to/too/two
- your/you're
- affect/effect
- there/their/they're
- me/myself/I
- affect/effect
- complement/compliment
- principal/principle
- fewer/less
- then/than
- its/it's
- neighbor's house/neighbors' houses

# Sentence Structure

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Assure tense correlation between noun and verb

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Assure adjectives are closely placed to the noun being described

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One sentence is NOT a paragraph

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Avoid unnecessary wordiness and the use of “25 cent” words when others will convey the intended meaning easily (avoid style above substance).

# More on Sentence Structure

- Avoid vague expressions or descriptors
  - Direct and concise (not informal, conversational tone with slang or idioms- regional dialect)
- Omit the words “the fact” and “to be honest” whenever possible
  - The fact that the research was repeated revealed...
    - The research was repeated, revealing...
  - To be honest, the research lacks...
    - The research lacks...
    - If you weren't being honest, you shouldn't include the statement in your paper!

# Paragraph Structure

- Paragraphs should include at least 4 sentences
  - Opening statement/topic sentence
  - Content sentences
  - Concluding statement/sentence(s) and indication of the direction of the next paragraph
- Each paragraph should contain only one controlling idea
- The last sentence provides a segue for the next paragraph while concluding the current paragraph

# Sentences and paragraphs should...

- Be primarily a presentation of your own words
- Demonstrate analysis and synthesis of presented material
- Avoid "nurses' notes" style
- Resist sequences of quote – reference – quote – reference...
- Express a negative in a positive form (not honest vs. dishonest)

# Paper Design

- Must be ORGANIZED
- Thinking PRECEDES writing
- Many find it helpful to work from an outline
  - Helps assure logical approach through the paper
  - Prepares the writer for bridging or concluding sentences and paragraphs as appropriate
- Some don't find outlines helpful; be sure to find your own style to organize your thoughts

# Benefits of an Outline

- Serves as a formal framework for the paper
- Focuses thinking on the elements of the paper
- Helps direct the overall flow of the paper
- Allows for evaluation of ideas/concepts to be connected in the paper – order of concepts, gaps in thinking or logic, and sufficient evidence supporting concepts
- Enhances organization



# Scholarly Sources

- **Non-scholarly sources** inform and entertain the public or allow practitioners to share industry, practice, and production information

Examples: Newspapers, magazines, trade journals, popular books.

- **Scholarly sources** disseminate research and academic discussion among professionals within disciplines; they are intended for university-level study and research.

Examples: Journals and books

- **All sources should be current (within the past 5 years)**

# Online Resources

<https://www.grammarbook.com>

- Free online grammar and punctuations help with rules, examples, and quizzes

<https://www.grammarly.com>

- Free online assistance with grammar, essays, citations, and plagiarism

<https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar>

- Free helpful hints and tips to help with grammar, word usage, and punctuation