4.1 Grammar Principles

Welcome to the grammar chapter! This information is designed to help you in several ways. First, you may have had lingering questions during your high school and college education about where to insert punctuation or how to make sentences better constructed and less awkward. As you complete this advanced writing requirement in your university experience, we hope that this information will help you fill in any missing gaps so you can write even more effectively throughout your life.

Second, in today’s world, we “meet” many people through our writing before we are formally introduced in person. This writing (via email or text, for example) may create a “first impression” and influence their expectations about our level of professionalism. Good composition and an understanding of grammar can make a positive impression and get important things done.

Finally, we are writing about an important subject matter: people. The world needs the information we can offer. We are more likely to be able to spread that message if we can convey it clearly. In addition, we may be able to publish it more widely or be seen as more credible if our writing is engaging, authentic, interesting, and well-edited. To accomplish good style, knowing the fundamentals is important.

As you proceed through each section, take time to read the information slowly and carefully. Make note of the examples and the ways they demonstrate the principle being discussed. Note sections for review that are new to you or where you might need more practice. Then, when you review these principles in preparation for the grammar exam, study strategically by spending more time on those areas that are less familiar and by utilizing the additional resources provided in the answer key section to make sure you have a firm grasp on all...
these principles.

This grammar instruction includes three major sections to share principles of

1. structure
2. power, and
3. clarity.

**Structure** represents the building block principles that help you understand the organization of sentences and teaches ways to add punctuation to keep your meaning clear to the reader. The **power** section contains rules that can help your writing gain more convincing power by deliberately managing the placement of words and phrases. Finally, the **clarity** section discusses principles to help you apply polishing touches that will help your writing go from good to great.

### 4.2 Principles of Structure

Understanding grammar might sometimes seem like an impossible task. How do you remember when you need a comma and when you don’t? Why do you have to say “whom” instead of “who” sometimes? When do you use a semicolon? Why so many rules and so many exceptions?

If you feel at a loss when these questions come up, you’re not alone! Many people do not feel very confident in their knowledge of grammar and usage rules, and so most tend to guess or write simply enough to avoid these confusing grammar questions when writing. But you don’t always have to feel this way. By the end of this grammar course, you should be able to gain the skills and knowledge that you need to identify many of your own mistakes and make conscious choices in the editing process to improve your writing.
Drill the fundamentals to get good at basketball and grammar. Photo by Malcolm Lightbody [https://edtechbooks.org/-dkDb] on Unsplash

To start this journey of improving your grammar and writing, we first need to understand the very basics of writing: the building blocks of sentences. Just like professional basketball players drill basic skills like dribbling the ball and shooting free throws, we will start with a discussion of the fundamentals, or the the basic parts of sentence structure.

In the next few sections, we’ll review the two main parts of every complete sentence, what makes sentences incomplete, and how you can recognize these important sentence elements. When you understand these simple concepts, you’ll be able to apply them to almost any grammar rule with ease, including using punctuation skillfully.

**Two Ingredients Make a Sentence**
All **complete sentences** have two basic ingredients: a main **noun** and a main **verb**. As you will recall, a noun is any person, place, thing, or idea. A noun can be as simple as the word “I.” You’ve probably learned that a verb is any action word or a state of being (so some of these verbs might not always involve a lot of movement). Your verb can be as simple as the word “walk.” Together, this noun and verb create a complete sentence: “I walk.” Essentially, the noun tells us who or what the **actor** of the sentence is, and the verb tells us what the actor is doing, or the **action**.

However, most sentences aren’t made up of one simple noun and one simple verb. Sentences usually contain **noun phrases** and **verb phrases**. These phrases include other words that might not look like a noun or verb, but these extra words often help specify or describe the actor and the action or state. Noun phrases, for instance, can be very long and complicated.

**Noun phrase**: The little old lady who lives in the fluorescent pink house on the corner of 13th Street. . .

Notice that we have not yet gotten to the point of saying what the old lady is actually doing,
so we haven’t managed to add a “main verb” yet. While this phrase does have a verb, “lives,” don’t let this word deceive you! This verb is still within the entire noun phrase and doesn’t actually tell us what the little old lady is doing in the sentence. The word “lives” here is just describing something about the lady. To know what the real action is in the sentence, we need a verb phrase.

Verb phrase: . . . went to the store on Center Street to buy a delicious chocolate cake for her favorite grandson’s birthday party.

Notice how this verb phrase was just as complicated as the noun phrase, but it still started with a verb (“went”) that everything else related to it in some way. Together, the noun phrase and verb phrase make a complete sentence.

Complete sentence: The little old lady who lives in the fluorescent pink house on the corner of 13th Street went to the store on Center Street to buy a delicious chocolate cake for her favorite grandson’s birthday party.

Let’s look at a few more sentences and practice recognizing which part of the sentence is the noun phrase and which part is the verb phrase. Try to figure it out on your own from the example sentence, and then look at the noun phrases and verb phrases listed below to see how you did.

Example: The green martian flew to earth in his rocketship.

Noun phrase: The green martian

Verb phrase: flew to earth in his rocketship

Example: The boy in the flannel shirt wanted to go on a hike with his friends.

Noun phrase: The boy in the flannel shirt

Verb phrase: wanted to go on a hike with his friends

Example: Family vacations can strengthen family relationships and leave lasting memories.

Noun phrase: Family vacations

Verb phrase: can strengthen family relationships and leave lasting memories

Notice that in these examples, the noun phrase came first in these sentences, and everything after the noun phrase was included in the verb phrase. While not every sentence is quite this simple, this basic pattern of having a main noun followed by a main verb is essential to making a complete sentence.
Completing Sentences

If a sentence is missing either the noun phrase or the verb phrase, it is an incomplete sentence. Unfortunately, however, some writers don’t realize they are breaking the rules and leave a sentence fragment in a place where it only serves to reduce credibility: “Because it was snowing.” Here, we sense that something is missing. If you’d seen any of those example noun phrases or verb phrases on their own, you probably would have had that same sense and questioned the author’s meaning. Some writers in public scholarship do use these incomplete words or sentence fragments, such as “Really?!” as its own sentence. The principle here is that it is best to know the rules before you break the rules for a stylistic purpose.

When sentences begin with words like after, when, or because, they introduce the need for more information to complete the thought. These helping words (also called “subordinate conjunctions”) signal to readers that the incomplete thought is related to another thought in some way. For instance, adding because tells us that the incomplete sentence is a reason for something else. Here’s an example of this transformation:

**Complete sentence:** We won the game.

**Incomplete sentence:** After we won the game . . .

The first example is a complete sentence since “We” is the noun phrase, and “won the game” is the verb phrase. But as soon as we added the word “after” to the sentence, we wondered, “What happened after we won the game?” Now that sentence is incomplete and depends on another complete sentence to finish the thought. Where the complete sentence could stand independently (called an “independent clause”), the second or incomplete sentence depends on additional meaning (called a “dependent clause”).

When you realize that you have a dependent clause, just add another complete sentence or independent clause (like “we celebrated by getting ice cream”) to finish your idea. Now the entire thought makes sense and feels finished:

**Complete sentence:** After we won the game, we celebrated by getting ice cream.

With few exceptions, you should always write in complete sentences, especially in academic, research-based writing. As mentioned, a fragment can occasionally be used skillfully to add emphasis or nuance to your writing, but for the most part, focus on writing complete sentences to aid in communicating your ideas clearly.

Technical Terms to Learn

This basic information has given you examples of the building blocks we use in discussions of grammar. For additional review, you can also watch this short video about sentence structure to be sure you understand the differences between phrases and clauses.
As a reference, here are the terms we will use throughout the rest of the grammar instruction:

**Subject**: A noun or noun phrase that operates as the subject of the sentence’s verb.

**Predicate**: A verb or verb phrase that relates to the subject of the sentence.

**Phrase**: An incomplete sentence that is either missing the subject (or noun phrase) or missing the predicate (verb phrase).

**Clause**: A group of words that has both a subject and a verb and which can either be independent or dependent:

**Independent Clause (IC)**: A complete sentence that can stand on its own because it is made of a subject (noun phrase) and predicate (verb phrase), such as “I walk.”

**Dependent Clause (DC)**: An incomplete sentence that has a helping word (subordinate conjunction) that requests additional information. It relies on another complete sentence (independent clause) for more details or action, such as “After we won the game.”

**Coordinate Conjunction**: A linking word that puts two IC’s together. There are only a few, so they are easy to memorize with the acronym FANBOYS, which stands for the conjunctions *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so.*
**Subordinate Conjunction**: A word such as *after*, *when*, or *because* that turns phrasing from a complete sentence and creates a DC, which is now subordinating because it relies on other information within the sentence to make it complete. Here’s an expanded (though not exhaustive) list of common subordinate conjunctions you may encounter:

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<thead>
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<th>After</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>Until</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Although</td>
<td>Provided that</td>
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<td>As</td>
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<td>Because</td>
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<td>Before</td>
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<td>Even though</td>
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<td>If</td>
<td>Though</td>
<td>While</td>
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<tr>
<td>In order to</td>
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<td>Why</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although these grammatical terms might seem a little tricky to keep straight, try using them interchangeably with the more familiar terminology we’ve used so far. For instance, try saying both “noun phrase” and “subject” whenever one of these two terms comes up in this textbook. As you grow more comfortable with these terms, you’ll be able to recognize grammar principles and mistakes more easily. As you go along, please take time to watch the short review videos and to do the practice exercises. In this way, you’ll have a better chance of mastering these rules.

**Rule #1: Separate and Set Off Main Clauses Correctly**

This principle shows how you can use your knowledge of the basic building blocks of sentences to punctuate them correctly. This rule contains three sections—with these errors in your papers always marked in green.

**1A. Choosing punctuation to fit your sentence.**

Some people avoid using complicated sentences altogether because they don’t think they can keep all of the punctuation rules straight. However, if you’ve already mastered the building blocks of sentences, these punctuation rules are now much easier to apply.

First, let’s do a quick review of ICs and DCs with this short video, which will also give you an introduction to comma rules.
In this section, we’re going to look at combining different kinds of clauses in a variety of ways. Using sentences with different structures will help your writing to feel less choppy and help you present your ideas in a more interesting way. We’ll look at how to punctuate first when combining two ICs and then when putting ICs together with DCs. We’ll tackle these both with and without linking words.

The linking words we’re using are called **FANBOYS conjunctions**. Like the subordinate conjunctions that we reviewed earlier, these linking words (or “coordinate conjunctions”) help show us the relationships between our different phrases and clauses. The acronym FANBOYS stands for the conjunctions *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so.* These are some of the most commonly used linking words in our writing, so be sure to memorize these words! This video can help you review their use.
Joining ICs with FANBOYS Conjunctions

When two or more ICs are joined by one of the FANBOYS conjunctions, you need a comma before the linking word.

**No:** My family lives in a blue house and my neighbors live in a white house.

See how each portion of the sentence (aside from the “and” conjunction) is an IC? Each of these clauses are independent and could stand on their own in separate sentences. However, when linking them here with a FANBOYS conjunction, “and,” we need to insert a comma.

**Yes:** My family lives in a blue house, and my neighbors live in a white house.

Here’s another example of a FANBOYS linking word joining two complete sentences:

**No:** Sue’s parents told Sue to be home by midnight but she was fifteen minutes late.

**Yes:** Sue’s parents told Sue to be home by midnight, but she was fifteen minutes late.

See how each part of the sentence is complete? And since we split them with one of our FANBOYS conjunctions, “but,” we needed to add a comma right before the linking word.
This comma rule is simple but is often broken. Just keep in mind that when linking two complete thoughts with a FANBOYS conjunction, you must use a comma to separate them.

**Joining ICs with a Semicolon or Colon**

Sometimes to make a more striking statement, an author may choose to keep two ICs in the same sentence but join them with a semicolon.

**No:** I invited her to my party, she didn’t come.

**Yes:** I invited her to my party; she didn’t come.

Though we could have added a FANBOYS conjunction (“I invited her to my party, **but** she didn’t come”), the use of the semicolon makes the second phrase ring with a little more irritation. Semicolons are best used between two independent clauses that are closely related and equal in weight. Semicolons work like a soft period, allowing the reader to roll through the sentence break rather than coming to a full stop.

**Yes:** My family lives in a blue house; my neighbors live in a white house.

**Yes:** Sue’s parents told Sue to be home by midnight; she was fifteen minutes late.

However, if you mistakenly put a comma in the place of the semicolon here, you’ll have created a **comma splice**. Commas are a weak pause and are too small to keep apart two complete sentences on their own. If you *do* want to use a comma, you’ll have to choose to add a FANBOYS conjunction.

Another option in working with two ICs (especially if your sentences have become long and complicated) is to separate them into their own sentences. Periods will create the strongest pause you can make because periods represent a full stop.

**Yes:** Sue’s parents told her they were worried about her long drive in the dark down the winding country road; they made it clear that they preferred she take the road trip during daytime hours.

**Better:** Sue’s parents told her they were worried about her long drive in the dark down the winding country road. They made it clear that they preferred she take the road trip during daytime hours.

Finally, you can also use a colon to combine two ICs. However, it’s best to use a colon when one sentence seems to introduce, point to, or emphasize the other. While the colon represents a similar pause in length as the semicolon, the colon signals to readers that something really important is coming up.

**Yes:** Sue was nervous about going home: She was fifteen minutes late.
In this sentence, the second IC, “she was fifteen minutes late,” explains why Sue is so nervous in the first IC.

The most important thing to remember when using colons is that you can only use them after an IC. This means that you’ll rarely use colons after verbs or prepositions because these words don’t usually end our sentences.

No: Please take care of the dog, including: walking him every day.

Yes: Please take care of the dog: Walk him every day.

Although “please take care of the dog” is a complete sentence, the word “including” is a phrase. Since that phrase is an incomplete sentence, we can’t follow it with a colon. By taking out “including,” we can place the colon after an IC. Also notice that when you use a colon, you capitalize the next word if the sentence that follows is also a complete sentence.

Combining ICs and Phrases

Let’s look at an example of combining an IC (“I went to the fair”) with a phrase (“didn’t win any prizes”) and linking it with one of our FANBOYS conjunctions.

Yes: I went to the fair but didn’t win any prizes.

“I went to the fair” is our independent clause and “but” is our FANBOYS conjunction. Since “didn’t win any prizes” is a phrase (because it is missing a subject), we don’t need to worry about adding a comma before the linking word because we aren’t joining two ICs. The FANBOYS conjunction is just fine on its own, simple as that! You might be tempted to add a comma here just for flair, but notice that this usage doesn’t follow punctuation rules, so the comma should not be added. Here’s another example:

Yes: Sue got lost on the way home and was 15 minutes late as a result.

Notice that “Sue” is the subject of our first clause, but the second clause “was fifteen minutes late as a result” doesn’t have a subject; it’s just a verb phrase. Sue operates as the subject of both verb phrases (“got lost on the way home” and “was fifteen minutes late as a result”). We can easily keep track of one subject with two verb phrases, so no comma is required.

Let’s say that you wanted to add emphasis and chose not to use a FANBOYS conjunction to link an IC and a phrase—like in that sentence about the fair. Here’s another option: Use a dash.

No: I went to the fair didn’t win any prizes.

Again, adding a comma to put this IC + phrase combination together would lead to a sort of comma splice—so, don’t do that! Because the portion of the sentence after the dash is just a
noun phrase, not a complete sentence, an **em dash** is a great way to separate that fragment from the rest of the sentence without any other linking words.

**Yes:** I went to the fair—didn’t win any prizes.

**Yes:** My father completed his doctorate while working a full-time job—a difficult task.

This dash is not a hyphen. Notice how the em dash is formatted. This is a long dash (the same width as the capital letter M) and is significantly longer than a hyphen. Be sure to place no spaces on either side of the em dash. If you’re typing in Word, you can accomplish this without inserting a special character by simply typing the word before the dash, two hyphens, the next word, and then a space or punctuation mark. Word will then automatically format the two hyphens into an em dash for you.

**Example:** “word--word” becomes “word—word” as soon as you hit the spacebar after typing the second word.

**Practice: Choosing Punctuation to Fit Your Sentence**

Now it’s your turn! Check the following sentences for correct punctuation. You might first try to label the clauses and phrases to make the task easier. Try fixing the incorrect sentences in a variety of ways to get comfortable with using different types of punctuation correctly.

1. My family took me to Disneyland for my ninth birthday, that day was one of the best days of my life.
2. If you give me any excuses for: missing a class or not completing your homework, I will accept only an emergency related to your health or your family.
3. Technology can be a great benefit since it allows us to communicate all around the world but it can also be a great distraction for communicating with the people right in front of you.
4. There was a news report about the parade; and I think they got a good shot of me at one point.
5. I always felt that families were important, I feel even stronger about that now that my father has passed away.
6. One of the best ways to get to know someone is to spend time with them, and ask meaningful questions.
7. My father and I like to go to football games together, cheering for our team together really strengthens our relationship.
8. After a while: I was able to calm my sister down, and we had a meaningful conversation to make our feelings understood.
9. I’ve always wanted to travel to Asia someday and I just heard about a study abroad that might give me that opportunity.
10. I enjoyed going out to see the movie, however, I stayed up too late and didn’t do very well on my test the next morning.
Now, try this practice test question. All practice test questions are formatted exactly the way you’ll see on your actual grammar test. As you progress throughout the textbook, you’ll notice that although each practice test question tests a principle you’ve just learned, it will also test a past principle that you’ve learned earlier on in the text. This first question, however, will only test principles from this section. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no changes.”

1. Kenneth has a Family Resiliency course exam next week; I recommend he review his notes, and study with other students in his class.
   1. no changes
   2. week, I | notes and
   3. week; I | notes and
   4. week, I | notes, and

See answer key on page 87.

1B. Introducing your ideas.

We begin many of our sentences with introductions of some sort, and these often need a comma after them to set them off from the subject. In this section, we’ll go over how to recognize introductory phrases that use DCs, phrases, or other transitional words.

Introducing Sentences with a DC

Remember that using words that are subordinate conjunctions can turn an independent clause into a dependent clause. These conjunctive words help to show relationships between different thoughts and signal that there is more information to come after that phrase. You’ll remember some from the Technical Terms list (because, when, and until), but you can use the acronym AAWUBBS (after, although, as, while, when, until, before, because, if, since) to remember more. If it helps, you can shorten the acronym to AWUBIS and remind yourself that many of the letters can stand for multiple conjunctions.

Whenever you see one of these kinds of words at the beginning of a sentence, it should warn you that you are encountering an introductory phrase, which you will need to separate from the main subject with a comma. Here’s an example:

No: While I was visiting my aunt I tried her homemade apple pie.

Yes: While I was visiting my aunt, I tried her homemade apple pie.

You probably noticed that “while” was the word that signaled to you that the subject of an IC was still coming, but how do we know where the phrase ended and where we should put the comma? This is where being able to identify noun phrases comes in handy. You just need to find the subject of the IC that follows. In this case, it was the word “I” in the phrase “I tried her homemade apple pie.” Thus, the comma had to come right before the subject to
separate the two clauses from each other.

Let’s look at another example:

**No:** If enough people sign the petition the school may have to change its policy.

**Yes:** If enough people sign the petition, the school may have to change its policy.

Here we can see how the comma separates the introductory DC (“If enough people sign the petition”) from the IC (“the school may have to change its policy.”)

**Introducing Sentences with Prepositional Phrases**

We often give our readers additional details as we write with helpful phrases that begin with words like *in, to,* and *on.* They tend to give a little more detail about an object, like something “on the chair” or someone “with her friend.” We call these isis **prepositional phrases** because the helping words they begin with are called **prepositions.**

When prepositional phrases begin a sentence, you should make sure to put a comma after them so your readers can keep them separate from the following subject of your sentence. Although you may not always feel that you need a comma in these situations and not every style guide requires it, use it routinely to emphasize the noun phrases in your sentences.

Let’s look at this example:

**No:** In the garden I lost my trowel.

**Yes:** In the garden, I lost my trowel.

**Yes:** I lost my trowel in the garden.

Since we know *in* is a preposition, we recognize that “in the garden” is a prepositional phrase, not the subject of the sentence, so we separate this introductory element from the subject. We place a comma after the introductory phrase to separate it from the upcoming noun phrase, “I.”

Notice how there is no comma in the last example because the prepositional phrase does not introduce the subject.

Here’s one more example:

**No:** During the school year my roommates are usually too busy to exercise with me regularly.

**Yes:** During the school year, my roommates are usually too busy to exercise with me regularly.
Notice how “during the school year” isn’t our subject. The true actor of the sentence is “my roommates,” which is why we separated this main unit from the introductory phrase with a comma.

**Introducing Sentences with Transition Words**

Another way that we help our readers get the details they need is by using transition words to connect ideas or show shifts in our writing. We may use words like *however, indeed, rather, and therefore*. These words are also known as adverbs, and they always need a comma after them when they introduce a sentence.

No: Unfortunately we need to make a quick trip to the store before we go to the party.

Yes: Unfortunately, we need to make a quick trip to the store before we go to the party.

Because these adverbs signal a transition in thought or attitude, the pause of the comma after them helps the reader pause just enough to prepare for that anticipated change. Note that transition words can also be adverbs that end in -ly.

No: Currently the number of children without the required childhood vaccinations is decreasing.

Yes: Currently, the number of children without the required childhood vaccinations is decreasing.

Notice again how putting a comma after this one-word introduction helps separate the phrase from the subject of the sentence. This slight pause helps the reader process the sentence more easily.

**Practice: Introducing Your Ideas**

Now it’s your turn! Determine whether these sentences have introductory phrases that need punctuation and insert the comma appropriately.

1. When you want to make a good impression he suggests you speak politely but genuinely.
2. Since I’ve been studying family sciences, my whole perspective on life has changed.
3. Therefore, parents should take advantage of opportunities to connect with their children.
4. In the middle of the school year I’m always grateful for a break to reset and relax.
5. Before Steve took the test he made sure to turn off his cell phone.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. *With some embarrassment* Angela realized that she and Jane hadn’t finalized their
1C. Using detours in your sentences.

An important way that we can give our readers extra details in our writing is by making small detours. We insert various phrases and clauses to add more meaning and context—information sometimes adding to the thought midstream. At times, these detours can be distracting or awkwardly placed (which we explore in rule 5E), but they can also be used effectively if you know how to punctuate them.

In this section, we’ll go over the required punctuation of three types of detours: specific detours, general detours, and dependent clauses used as detours.

Specific Detours

Some descriptive phrases are very specific and especially help us to convey the meaning of our sentences. These phrases add more meaning by helping us clearly distinguish something (like a noun phrase) apart from everything else. These specific detours are also called restrictive clauses.

For instance, let’s say you’re writing about two types of bread. Perhaps you’re arguing that wheat bread is healthier than white bread. One way that you could communicate which kind of bread you’re specifically talking about is by using restrictive clauses. These clauses will not only describe the previous noun, bread, but will also identify which kind of bread we mean. Here, the restrictive clauses are marked in red:

**Example:** Bread that is made from wheat flour is healthier than bread that is made from white flour.

One way to easily figure out if a clause is restrictive is by reading the sentence as if the clause weren’t there. If the sentence doesn’t make as much sense or becomes unclear without the clause, you know that the clause is essential to the sentence and therefore restrictive. So, if we took out those descriptions from our bread example, we would have this sentence:

**No:** Bread is healthier than bread.

The sentence doesn’t really make sense now, does it? We need those clauses to tell us what kind of bread is healthier so that we understand the sentence.
Another trick you can try to help you identify these specific restrictive clauses is reading the sentence as if the descriptive phrase were in parentheses. If putting parentheses makes the phrase sound out of place, then you know that the information is probably essential and specific to that noun phrase.

**No:** Bread (that is made from wheat flour) is healthier than bread (that is made from white flour).

When we put the descriptions of the bread aside in parentheses like this, we make it sound like *all* bread comes from wheat flour at first. Then we turn around and say that *all* bread is made from white flour. We know that this is silly, of course, because there are many types of breads from a variety of flours. We’re not trying to talk about bread in general but specific kinds of bread, so we know that we must use a restrictive clause to describe the bread.

Now that you know how to recognize a restrictive clause, let’s talk about how to format and punctuate it. These kind of clauses should begin with the word *that* rather than *which.* Because they are necessary to the sentence’s meaning, they do not require any punctuation to set them off from the rest of the sentence. You can remember not to put punctuation around these descriptions based on the trick you used earlier. If you couldn't logically place parentheses around that phrase, you shouldn't put any other punctuation, either.

Here’s another example of a specific, or restrictive, clause:

**Yes:** Video games that include excessive violence can be harmful to an adolescent’s development.

Here, “that include excessive violence” is a description that identifies the kind of “video games” the author intends to discuss and sets those video games apart from other video games—specific and vital to the main point. We can double check that this clause is necessary by reading the sentence without the clause or by putting it in parentheses.

**No:** Video games can be harmful to an adolescent’s development.

**No:** Video games (that include excessive violence) can be harmful to an adolescent’s development.

While taking out the clause may sound okay at first, understanding the context and author’s intent helps us know that not *all* video games may hurt teenagers; the author hopes to specifically highlight the danger of violent video games. Using the parentheses trick may make this distinction a little clearer. When we put the description in an aside like that, it sounds like a simple matter of fact. We make it sound like *all* video games include excessive violence. And although many video games do, we know that plenty of them are actually violence free. We definitely have a restrictive clause here.

Remember, because the specific clause gives more meaning to the sentence and helps the
author identify what kind of video games can be harmful, we use *that* and no punctuation around the phrase.

How essential or specific does the information need to be to count as a restrictive clause? The answer sometimes depends on the writer making a judgment call as in the next example:

**No:** The restaurant, which is right down the street, serves tacos for a dollar each on Tuesday.

**Yes:** The restaurant that is right down the street serves tacos for a dollar each on Tuesday.

In this case, the author felt that the reader might need the information about which restaurant is being discussed since Taco Tuesdays are popular in the area. However, let’s say that the taco restaurant is the only one in town. In that case, the phrase is not needed to differentiate the taco restaurant, only to offer some incidental, but non-crucial information. In your own writing, you’ll need to pay close attention to whether your descriptive detours are helping you to specify necessary information or not. As you continue to watch for these detours and decide how specific you’re trying to be, you’ll become more confident with some of these subtler detours.

**General Detours**

Other detours that we use to describe objects in our sentences are more general than specific. These descriptions are general because they add more information than readers technically need. You could actually put these phrases in parentheses as if they were an aside, and the whole sentence would still make sense. These phrases are called **nonrestrictive clauses**. They should begin with *which* and should have commas around them (right where you would have put parentheses).

**Example:** My family, which has seven kids, loves to go to Lake Powell during the summer.

You can see from this example that the phrase “which has seven kids” still describes “my family,” but it is general information that could easily be set off with parentheses or even left out if we wanted. We don’t need the information about how many kids are in the family because the possessive “my” already identifies the family as the one specifically belonging to the author. Thus, we began the clause with *which* and surrounded it with commas. Here is another example:

**No:** He picked up his book from the library that is a great place to find reliable resources.

**Yes:** He picked up his book from the library, which is a great place to find reliable resources.

As you can see, the reader doesn’t need the extra information that libraries have great resources. When we treat this description as a specific, restrictive clause, it actually
identifies a specific library (perhaps the only library) that has reliable resources, but even without much context, we know that most libraries have these resources. Instead, it makes much more sense that this description is just an extra idea that the author added as if to say, “By the way, this is something that libraries are generally known for.” Because we have a general detour, we set it off with commas and start it with the word which.

Note that you can use other forms of punctuation to set off these detours—especially if you want to make a more emphatic statement. In that case, you can set off these detours with em dashes. Dashes will always emphasize the detour more than commas because dashes create a stronger pause than commas do. Additionally, you can also use parentheses if you want to de-emphasize the descriptive detour.

Whatever punctuation you decide to use, make sure to pair like punctuation marks together. You wouldn’t put one parenthesis at the beginning of the detour and finish the detour with a comma on the other side. Otherwise, your reader would be left looking for the final parenthesis! Similarly, pair commas with commas and dashes with dashes. Don’t mix and match these punctuation marks around your detours.

No: Bees—which are a type of stinging insect, help pollinate the earth.

Yes: Bees—which are a type of stinging insect—help pollinate the earth.

Yes: Bees, which are a type of stinging insect, help pollinate the earth.

Finally, there is one exception to using the word that or which to begin restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. Whenever your clause describes people, you’ll want to use the word who instead.

No: I contacted a person yesterday that could help me solve my computer networking problem.

Yes: I contacted a person yesterday who could help me solve my computer networking problem.

Who can operate in the same way as that or which, so you’ll need to be careful about using your punctuation to show whether your detour is restrictive or nonrestrictive. Here, “who” does not need to be set off by commas since it specifically identifies people by giving helpful, essential information.

Who also relates more to individual people, so no need to switch to who when referring to a team or group.

No: The team who won the hula hoop contest received a standing ovation from the crowd.

Yes: The team that won the hula hoop contest received a standing ovation from the crowd.
Yes: The person who won the hula hoop contest received a standing ovation from the crowd.

**Dependent Clauses as Detours**

We’ve talked a little about how DCs work as introductory phrases, but what about when they come in the middle of a sentence or at the end, somewhere after the independent clause?

Although introductory DCs need a comma after them, which we learned in rule 1B, the situation is different when these phrases come after the main part of your sentence. In other words, if you flip the DC behind the IC, you don’t need a comma or any other punctuation before the DC (unless the DC is nonrestrictive, or general information added to the sentence).

No: Dad went to the store, while Mom went to pick up the kids from soccer practice.

Yes: Dad went to the store while Mom went to pick up the kids from soccer practice.

Since “while” turns the IC about Mom into a DC, we didn’t put a comma before that clause. Here’s another example:

No: Alfred got a job as a butler, because he excels at being polite.

Yes: Alfred got a job as a butler because he excels at being polite.

Here, we can see that “because” is our helping word and signals to the reader that more information, a reason, is coming. The information that followed the subordinate conjunction was essential to the sentence, so we didn’t need a comma before “because.”

Here’s an example of a general, nonrestrictive DC that would need a comma:

Yes: She plans to go to the beach, whether it rains or not.

In this sentence, the author’s intent and context can help make it clear that the weather is beside the point. Readers don’t need to know this general information to understand her plans even though the DC detour helps to emphasize them.

**Practice: Using Detours in Your Sentences**

Now it’s your turn! At this point, it would be a great idea to watch this that vs which video as a quick reminder of what you’ve learned.
Then, practice placing punctuation around various detours in the sentences below. Remember that all nonrestrictive (or general) clauses need commas or dashes, but anything restrictive (or specifically identifying) does not need punctuation. Remember to also watch out for people and use who appropriately.

1. The team went out for milkshakes, after the game.
2. The park that is just down the street from my house has a tennis court beside the playground.
3. I stayed up all night because I had to study extra hard for my final exam today.
4. I am allergic to lactose, which is in most dairy products.
5. The neighborhood kids say the house, that is on the corner, might be haunted.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. My new townhouse, which was built in 2007, is really well constructed: I have taken great care of it.
   1. no changes
   2. townhouse which was built in 2007 | constructed:
   3. townhouse, which was built in 2007, | constructed
   4. townhouse which was built in 2007 | constructed

See answer key on page 90.
1D. Constructing lists with punctuation.

Here’s a few more rules about using punctuation to help you, especially when you handle lists:

**Using the Serial Comma and Semicolons in Lists**

Whenever you list three or more things in your writing, you’ll be expected to use the serial comma in the social sciences. The serial comma, also known as the Oxford comma, is the final comma that comes before the last item in your list. While some disciplines or particular style guides for organizations aren’t proponents of the serial comma, it is a convention that the social sciences adhere to for purposes of clarity.

Let’s go ahead and look at an example.

**No:** I enjoy reading, biking and cooking.

Did you notice that there wasn’t a comma after biking? That’s exactly where a serial comma should go.

**Yes:** I enjoy reading, biking, and cooking.

This rule is a pretty simple concept to keep in mind with short list items, but be careful when you start listing longer, more complicated items. You still need to use the serial comma before that last item.

**No:** Committee members are responsible for advertising about upcoming events, planning activities and panels for conferences and recruiting volunteers to help run all activities.

**Yes:** Committee members are responsible for advertising about upcoming events, planning activities and panels for conferences, and recruiting volunteers to help run all activities.

Semicolons can also be used effectively in lists, but only under certain conditions. When you use a semicolon in a list, it acts as a “super,” more powerful comma to separate items that also need normal commas within them. Using semicolons in this way keeps your list clear and organized. Here’s an example of when you might need semicolons to clarify a list:

**No:** My favorite foods are strawberries, a fruit, carrots, a vegetable, and ice cream, a dessert.

See how this list gets so confusing? Phrases like “a fruit” are meant to describe the previous term, “strawberries,” but these phrases seem like other items in the list. To add clarity, we’ll add semicolons after these descriptive phrases to show exactly where the next list item begins.

**Yes:** My favorite foods are strawberries, a fruit; carrots, a vegetable; and ice cream, a
dessert.

See how each of these list items are now separated by semicolons? Even though there are commas within each item, we can clearly see when the next food is listed. Also notice that you still use the semicolon right before the last full item, just like you do with a normal serial comma.

One more thing to remember with semicolons in lists is that even if only one of your list items needs an interior comma, you must still use semicolons to separate your list items. Here’s an example:

No: I need to run errands at the grocery store, the library, which is near the grocery store, and the bank.

Yes: I need to run errands at the grocery store; the library, which is near the grocery store; and the bank.

**Using Colons or Dashes to Introduce Lists**

You can use colons to introduce lists too. However, remember that the same rules we discussed with colons before still apply here. Since you can only use colons after an IC, you’ll rarely use one after a verb or preposition. If a list is introduced with a DC, no colon is required. If you want to use a colon, introduce your list with an IC.

Here’s an example:

No: The job requirements are: organization, diligence, and honesty.

A colon is not needed here since the sentence reads fine without a break and you have not inserted an IC to introduce it. “The job requirements are” is a fragment. To fix this sentence, we can either take out the colon or rephrase the first part of the sentence to be a complete sentence.

Yes: The job requirements are organization, diligence, and honesty.

Yes: The job requires the following qualities: organization, diligence, and honesty.

Notice that when using a colon to introduce a list, you don’t need to capitalize the first word in the list.

Occasionally, you may want to start your sentence with a list. If that is the case, you can transition from that list to the rest of your sentence with an em dash. Make sure that the part of your sentence following the dash is an independent clause, however.

Let’s look at this example.
No: Commas, semicolons, colons, dashes—can all be incorporated into lists.

Notice how the phrase after the dash is a fragment? There’s no subject! To fix this mistake, we can either take out the dash and insert a conjunction into our list, or we can change the second part of the sentence into an independent clause by adding in a subject.

Yes: Commas, semicolons, colons, and dashes can all be incorporated into lists.

Yes: Commas, semicolons, colons, dashes—these punctuation marks can all be incorporated into lists.

You can also incorporate the list into the middle of your sentence. This type of list functions like the detours we saw in rule 1C.

Yes: Various punctuation marks—commas, semicolons, colons, dashes—can all be incorporated into lists.

Practice: Use Commas, Semicolons, Colons, and Dashes in Lists

Now it’s your turn! Look at these sentences and see which ones use serial colons, semicolons, colons, or dashes to correctly organize and introduce the list items. What would you do to fix these mistakes?

1. Sometimes, all you need is faith, trust and pixie dust.
2. My reasons for going to this school are: the teachers are excellent, the campus is beautiful, and the opportunities there are unique.
4. Our company is looking for employees with a good work ethic, an ability to analyze situations quickly and a strong initiative.
5. Lions, tigers, bears—are very dangerous and lead us to say, “Oh, my!”
6. In the Lord of the Rings, there are well known and well-loved characters such as Frodo, the brave hobbit, Sam, his loyal friend, Gandalf, the wise wizard, and Aragorn, the mysterious ranger.
7. My best friend is loyal, hilarious, but shy, and always honest.
8. Technology—phones, tablets, computers—is practically everywhere and accessible to almost anyone nowadays.
9. There are four general styles of parenting: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved.
10. Rain, rain, and more rain—all it ever seemed to do in this place was rain.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Effective parent-child communication includes: trust, generosity, and patience.
   1. no changes
Rule #2: Follow Agreement and Reference Rules

Part of structuring sentences well is remembering how to use verbs with nouns and pronouns to make sure they agree in number. Also, pronouns can be tricky and confusing, especially if they don’t agree with the noun they were referencing. These rules of agreement and reference in English are important to building a grammatically correct structure, with errors marked in red to match this rule.

2A. Match the number of your subjects and verbs.

As you have been able to see, subjects (or noun phrases) and predicates (or verb phrases) are the basic building blocks of every sentence. Understanding these elements is foundational to your understanding of all grammar principles, which you’ll see throughout this section.

One principle that we follow pretty naturally in our writing is the way we match our subjects and verbs by number. If you’ve grown up as a native English speaker, this is a grammar rule that you rarely have to consciously think about. You reflexively say things like “I am” rather than “I are” or “we are” rather than “we is.” To do so, we make our subjects and verbs “agree” by making them both singular or both plural. We call this rule subject-verb agreement.

Subject-verb agreement can be difficult to understand in some cases. For instance, sometimes two singular pronouns may match with different verbs, like “I have” and “she has.” If you’ve ever had to conjugate verbs when you learned another language, you may realize that keeping all these forms straight can get confusing. However, you can still use some simple tricks to help you use verb forms correctly. Here, we’ll go through two situations where you’ll need to pay special attention to whether your subjects and verbs match in number or not.

Detours Between the Main Noun and the Verb

Sometimes, we try to match our verbs with the wrong noun when we write as a result of having detours in our sentences. That’s why you need to be very good at identifying the true subject of your sentence. One situation where you might accidentally focus on the wrong noun is when you have a detour like a short prepositional phrase between the main noun and the verb. Here’s an example:

No: The vase of roses look lovely there on the table.

At first, this sentence sounds all right. After all, the segment “roses look lovely” sounds
correct. However, are the roses the main noun of the sentence? No, it’s really the vase that is the subject, and the roses are simply attached to it with the preposition of. If you took out that little detour, the sentence that results, “The vase look lovely,” would sound awkward and incorrect.

To fix this mistake, all you have to do is ignore the detour made by the prepositional phrase and focus on the true actor of our sentence: the vase.

Yes: The vase of roses looks lovely there on the table.

Now that sentence looks lovely and is grammatically correct, too. Let’s try another one.

No: Amanda, along with her family, are going to see a play tonight.

Although we know from the detour “along with her family” that Amanda isn’t going to see the play alone, Amanda is still the only person in the main noun phrase. Try ignoring the detour. Does “Amanda are going to see a play tonight” sound right? Because the subject is singular, we also need to keep the verb singular.

Yes: Amanda, along with her family, is going to see a play tonight.

**Indefinite Pronouns**

You might recognize that we use pronouns in place of noun phrases all the time to avoid repetition. Instead of saying something like “the boy in the flannel shirt” repeatedly in a sentence, we can simply say “he” after we have mentioned him. Pronouns are especially useful because they can replace entire noun phrases, not just the main noun itself. But what happens when the pronoun is not so clear? Is everyone, no one, each, and some a reference to multiple people, or are these words considered singular?

The answer is that by definition, they are singular indefinite pronouns and will take a singular verb. Here are the most common singular indefinite pronouns: anyone, everyone, someone, somebody, nobody, each, and one. While most of these indefinite pronouns are singular, two others, all and both, are plural indefinite pronouns and will take a plural verb.

No: Each complete the necessary tasks.

This sentence may sound natural enough at first, but we’ve actually matched “each,” a singular pronoun, with “complete,” a plural verb. All we need to do to fix this mistake is to make the verb singular by adding an “s” to the end.

Yes: Each completes the necessary tasks.

Make sure to keep focused on the main subject and its verb as you look out for subject-verb agreement mistakes, because it’s easy to get distracted by other words or phrases as in the
following examples:

No: Somebody from the group of students volunteer at the animal shelter every Thursday.

Yes: Somebody from the group of students volunteers at the animal shelter every Thursday.

As you can see, “somebody” is one of our singular pronouns, even though that “somebody” comes from a larger group. Thus, we need to say that “somebody . . . volunteers” rather than “volunteer.”

**Practice: Match the Number of Your Subjects and Verbs**

Now it’s your turn! Determine which sentences below match subjects and verbs according to number. If they don’t agree, adjust the sentence.

1. Many people, like my sister Mary, has to take the bus to school.
2. A box of assorted chocolates were left on the table with a note for Juliet.
3. Each of the students has read the assigned chapter from the textbook in preparation for class.
4. One of the rules in my family are to always say “I love you” before you leave the house.
5. The dog from up the street barks all night long.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Writing down thoughts, including writing letters and journaling, are important practices for enhancing personal development, progression, and growth.
   1. no changes
   2. is an important practice | development, progression and growth
   3. are important practices | development, progression and growth
   4. is an important practice | development, progression, and growth

See answer key on page 91.

**2B. Match the case in your pronouns.**

We use pronouns like he, she, and it in place of nouns all the time in our writing. However, these pronouns have a lot of different forms; just the pronoun he can also become him, his, and himself. How do we know when to use which one? By understanding which case a pronoun should be.

The case of a noun or pronoun shows what role that word is playing in the sentence. The optional roles are subject, object, or possessive. For example, you refer to yourself with a different form depending on whether you are the subject of the sentence, the object of the
action, or the possessor of something. Here’s an example of each using the base pronoun “I”:

**Subject:** I am going to the store.

**Object:** He gave me a present. OR He gave a present to me.

**Possessive:** Would you like to pet my dog?

### Deciding on Case with Multiple Pronouns

When you are using more than one pronoun to talk about a group of people, like “he and I,” you may not be sure which pronoun forms to use. He and I? Him and me? He and me? Him and I? There are so many potential combinations! Though it may seem tricky at first, remember that you only need to know which role the pronoun is playing in the sentence (subject or object) to get it right. Although each sentence will be unique, a couple of tricks will help you use the right pronouns every time.

First, if you’re using a first-person pronoun (like “I”), make sure you always put the other pronoun or name first. Think of it as a polite gesture to let the other person go before you. However, if you’re not using a first-person pronoun, don’t worry about who goes first; just decide the order by whichever sounds best.

**No:** I and my grandmother made cookies on Saturday afternoon.

**Yes:** My grandmother and I made cookies on Saturday afternoon.

Next, isolate your pronouns one at a time to determine which form you need for each one. While you’ll always need both of your pronouns in the same case (all subject, all object, or all possessive), it can be difficult to keep these forms straight. This trick allows you to rely on your ear without any risk of accidentally misguiding yourself.

**Example:** He and (me/I) went for a walk through the scenic old town.

To be sure you are right, try saying your sentence with one pronoun at a time. Whichever form your ear tells you sounds right, use it!

**Yes:** He went for a walk through the scenic old town.

**Yes:** I went for a walk through the scenic old town.

**Yes:** He and I went for a walk through the scenic old town.

Let’s try another one.

**Example:** My parents spoke to my siblings and (I/me) about how important it is to choose
good friends.

Okay, let’s run our test to see whether we should use “I” or “me.”

Does “My parents spoke to I” or “My parents spoke to me” sound better? Definitely the second option. Here’s the final sentence:

**Yes:** My parents spoke to my siblings and me about how important it is to choose good friends.

**Choosing Between Who and Whom**

Knowing when to use *who* or *whom* follows the same rules for case that you have just learned. To help you decide, you need to know whether the word is being used as a subject or object. *Who* is in the subject case, and *whom* is in the object case. Because *he* is in the subject case, we can use it to replace *who*. Similarly, because *him* is in the object case, we can replace *whom* with *him*. Switching these pronouns is easy to remember because both *whom* and *him* end with the letter *m*. This trick also works for *whoever* in the same way as *who* and for *whomever* in the same way as *whom*, so we’ll use these words interchangeably in this section.

To figure out whether to use *who* or *whom*, just answer the question in your sentence with *he* or *him*. Then, use the corresponding *who* pronoun. Let’s try an example.

**Example:** (Who/whom) is taking you to the dance?

Let’s answer with *he* and *him* and see which sounds most natural. “He is taking you to the dance,” or “Him is taking you to the dance.” *He* definitely sounds better, which means that we should use *who*.

**Yes:** Who is taking you to the dance?

Here’s another sentence. See if you can figure it out!

**Example:** I will send the invites to (whoever/whomever) I want.

Answer the question with both *he* and *him*. “I will send the invites to he” or “I will send the invites to him”? Since *him* sounds best, this answer should lead you to choose *whomever*.

**Yes:** I will send the invites to whomever I want.

Now, occasionally you’ll run into a sentence where both *he* and *him* seem to work just fine. This will happen when the *who/whom* pronoun is functioning as both the object of the first part of the sentence and the subject of the second part of the sentence. Instead of wondering which one really sounds best, just remember that the subject form always trumps when you have both options. This means you should always use *who* (represented by *he*) or
**whoever** in these situations.

**No:** The speech will be given by whomever is most qualified.

**Yes:** The speech will be given by whoever is most qualified.

Although “The speech will be given by him” sounds right, “he is most qualified” sounds just as good. Because the subject, *he*, always trumps the object in these situations, we default to using *whoever*.

**Practice: Match the Case in Your Pronouns**

Now it’s your turn! Review this short video on when to use *who* or *whom* before you try this exercise.

[Watch on YouTube](https://edtechbooks.org/-Rxqu)

Look at these examples and practice using these two tricks as you look for which pronouns marked in red are in the correct case.

1. Me and Jacob had only been dating for three months when he surprised me with a proposal—a proposal I wasn’t sure I was ready to say “yes” to yet.
2. I and she have a teacher who is really good at explaining complicated principles.
3. Everyone says that I should go to law school, but between you and I, I would rather study to be a family counselor.
4. After months of searching, my supervisor was desperate to find a job candidate whom would qualify for the open position.
5. As much as I didn’t like it, Delilah and her were my only options for carpooling to work.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. When I discovered whom had written this volume I was even more impressed by its credibility.
   1. no changes
   2. whom | volume, I
   3. who | volume, I
   4. who | volume I

See answer key on page 92.

2C. **Match pronouns to their references.**

Just like your subjects always need to agree with their verbs, your subjects also need to agree with the related **pronouns** that refer back to them. Additionally, you’ll need to make sure that your pronoun references aren’t ambiguous.

**Matching Pronouns to Their References in Number**

You want to be sure that a noun that is plural is followed by a pronoun that is also plural. Remember that pronouns are words that can stand in for any noun or noun phrase: words like he, she, it, I, you, we, and they. In the following sentence, notice which pronoun accurately refers back to the main subject (e.g. the students):

**No:** The students left the books on the desks when it went out to recess.

**Yes:** The students left the books on the desks when they went out to recess.

In the first sentence, “the students” was a plural subject. The following pronoun, “it,” referred to the original subject, but “it” is singular. In the second sentence, we simply changed “it” to a plural pronoun, “they.”

Here’s another example:

**No:** An individual should help their neighbors in need.

See how the subject “an individual” is singular, but the later pronoun “their” is plural? There are a couple of ways to fix this mistake.

**Yes:** An individual should help his or her neighbors in need.
Now both the subject and the pronouns are singular. Since using the “his or her” is sometimes a wordy or awkward construction, another solution is to make the subject plural (if possible) to match the plural “their.”

**Yes:** Individuals should help their neighbors in need.

Now both terms are plural and agree with each other.

This rule applies to both clear, definable subjects as well as indefinite pronouns (e.g. words like *everyone, anyone, and each*). As we discussed in a prior section, most of these words are singular by nature, so they will need singular pronouns to match with them.

**No:** By now, everyone should know how to tie their shoes.

The subject, “everyone,” is a singular indefinite pronouns, but “their” is plural. Here are two ways to correct this problem and achieve agreement:

**Yes:** By now, everyone should know how to tie his or her shoes.

**Yes:** By now, all should know how to tie their shoes.

Here’s another example with an indefinite pronoun:

**No:** Each of the boys wanted to spend their money at the candy store.

**Yes:** Each of the boys wanted to spend his money at the candy store.

Although we know there are multiple boys, the word “each” tells us that we have to think of them individually. Thus, we used the word “his” instead of “their” because “his” is singular. However, there are a couple of other solutions we could employ here. We could also manipulate the sentence so that we don’t need a second pronoun. You may find that these strategies change the meaning of your sentence too much, but they may also add to your flexibility as a writer.

**Yes:** Each of the boys wanted to spend the money at the candy store.

**Yes:** Each of the boys wanted to spend money at the candy store.

As you’ve already seen in the few examples we’ve gone over, there are multiple ways to fix these pronoun agreement problems. When one term is singular and the other is plural, here are some of your options:

1. Make both terms singular.
2. Make both terms plural.
3. Replace possessive pronouns with an article like *the* or *a*.
4. Remove one of the pronouns.
5. Rewrite the sentence to avoid awkward phrasing.

Since not all of your sentences will be the same, one solution probably won’t work every time for you. Having a variety of rephrasing options allows you to make sure that you have the tone and nuance you want in your sentences.

For instance, if you decide to match a singular term like “a teacher” with a singular pronoun, you’ll need to use “him or her” to avoid using sexist language (which we cover more in rule 4A). However, saying “him or her” could get old if you need to keep using a pronoun multiple times. In this case, you might decide to alternate using “him” and “her” (as long as you avoid confusing your reader), or you might decide to use plural terms from the start. Practice using all of these options as you correct this type of error in the follow examples so you can have flexibility and control in your writing.

**Practice: Match Pronouns to Their References in Number**

Now it’s your turn! Identify which sentence examples below have pronoun agreement errors and practice using different methods to fix the mistakes.

1. Anyone can lose their head and say something they don’t mean when they get angry.
2. My cousins like us to get together at their house every Saturday for games and treats.
3. If one person can’t finish the project by themselves, they should ask for help.
4. Individuals should take his or her time each day to take care of his or her body’s needs through healthy eating and appropriate exercise.
5. Each member of the family can find a way to show greater love and appreciation for their family members.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. **A great professor** sees their students as individuals *whom* are full of potential.
   1. no changes
   2. A great professor | who
   3. Great professors | who
   4. Great professors | whom

See answer key on page 92.

**Avoiding Ambiguous References**

Writing in the social sciences values clarity very highly. Because of this, you will be expected to use pronouns that refer to other terms clearly, leaving no room for questionable interpretations. Pronouns are confusing or ambiguous to the reader when they don’t tell the reader exactly which earlier word or phrase they are talking about. Here’s an example:

**No:** Cynthia told Tiffany that she should study for the exam.
This sentence can be interpreted in two ways. Either Cynthia thinks that she herself should study, or she thinks that her friend Tiffany should study. But which one are we talking about? The reader doesn’t know, so it’s the author’s job to make the misunderstanding clear.

**Yes:** Cynthia told Tiffany that Cynthia should study for the exam.

**Yes:** Cynthia told Tiffany that Tiffany should study for the exam.

**Yes:** Frustrated by her roommates frequent complaints about bad test scores, Cynthia told Tiffany to study for the upcoming exam.

Using either name to replace the pronoun can be an acceptable solution depending on the author’s intent. The last sentence builds more context and takes out the confusing pronoun “she.”

Pronouns like *it* and *this* can be especially problematic since we use them often as we write without thinking much about what they refer to. When a writer isn’t clear, the reader could be confused or need to make some assumptions and possibly choose the wrong meaning. If these pronouns directly follow whatever term they’re talking about, however, they can be used without ambiguity. Otherwise, *it* and *this* should either be followed or replaced by a clarifying noun phrase.

**No:** When the bat hit the baseball, it made a loud *crack*.

In this example, the “it” is ambiguous because it could refer to either “bat” or “baseball.” To clarify, we simply replace the pronoun with the correct noun.

**Yes:** When the bat hit the baseball, the bat made a loud *crack*.

If you don’t want to be too repetitive in your writing, you can also clarify ambiguous pronouns like *it* and *this* by adding a noun that sums up the previous noun or noun phrase. This strategy is especially useful when you’re talking about an idea, a principle, or an experience. Here’s an example of an ambiguous pronoun that could use another noun to sum up an idea:

**No:** The Founding Fathers believed in equal rights among all land owners, and this has since grown to include all men and women.

See how “this” is a little ambiguous? It could be referring to any one of several nouns: the Founding Fathers, equal rights, land owners, or the belief of the Founding Fathers. To adjust, we’ll simply insert a word that summarizes the correct idea.

**Yes:** The Founding Fathers believed in equal rights among all land owners, and this ideology has since grown to include all men and women.
Notice how adding one simple word to summarize, “ideology,” clarified the meaning of the pronoun and the sentence.

**Practice: Avoiding Ambiguous References**

Now it’s your turn! Review this video about pronoun reference.

Watch on YouTube https://edtechbooks.org/-SGk

Then look at the following sentences and see which ones have ambiguous pronouns.

1. While family vacations often create happy memories, this requires adequate planning beforehand.
2. Lillian told Margaret that she should have been more careful not to procrastinate her final project.
3. John and I worked hard last year to meet our goals in our schooling, work, and extracurricular activities.
4. If you find it at the store, make sure to bring a pumpkin home.
5. When the plate hit the table, it broke.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”
1. Researchers must share this information sheet with study participants, before they sign the consent form.
   1. no changes
   2. participants before | the participants
   3. participants, before | the participants
   4. participants before | they

See answer key on page 94.

Congratulations! You have completed the first section of the grammar course and reviewed the rules that help us understand how to structure sentences well with agreement, case, and punctuation. These rules are standard (except the controversial serial comma) and can be used throughout your future to create professional writing of many kinds. We next turn to principles of power that will help you to keep your readers engaged.

### 4.3 Principles of Power

While having grammatically correct sentences is a fine goal for your writing, you will want to use your knowledge of grammar not just to say things clearly but also to share your ideas with power and grace. To do so includes understanding your audience and showing them proper respect, writing without overstating scientific conclusions, using logic in the ordering of the ideas in your sentences, and preferring the active voice. We call these important principles of power rhetorical choices. Make your rhetorical choices wisely by considering the following rules, many of which are associated with using APA style—the convention for social science writing. We use the royal purple and royal blue to mark errors in this area to remind you to use your power wisely.

**Rule #3: Increase Your Credibility with Respectful and Logical Language**

Writing is becoming increasingly globalized, and your audience is likely to include people of many different backgrounds and perspectives. To avoid offending or alienating readers who may have an important stake in your research or arguments, be sensitive to a variety of issues that may distance or offend your reader if handled inappropriately.

3A. Eliminate bias or stereotyping.

Avoiding biases or stereotypes in your writing may seem like a no-brainer, but you might be surprised by how often assumptions and biases can creep into a paper. We’ll take a look specifically at avoiding biases regarding gender, race, and disability, but be aware that other biases, such as age or sexual orientation may also require careful treatment to show sensitivity.

**Avoiding Gender Biases**
Gender is a sensitive issue in the world today, and there are a few ways to make sure that your writing acknowledges the various opinions and ideas surrounding gender.

First of all, make sure that you use inclusive language when you use pronouns. Historically, we used to use *he* as an inclusive pronoun when talking about any individual. In recent years, however, modern conventions, including APA guidelines, have encouraged writers to include "she" when appropriate, and it almost always is.

**No:** An individual should take care of his family.  
**Yes:** An individual should take care of his or her family.

Depending on the type of document you’re writing, especially if it’s long enough, you may choose to follow the acceptable format of alternating the use of “he” and “she” so as not to use “he or she” every time you need a pronoun. Whatever way you decide to handle the issue, make sure to include both genders or keep subjects neutral unless you truly need to specify one gender or the other. Here is an example of when the subject should remain neutral:

**No:** Corporate officers and their wives have been invited to the summer company picnic.  
**No:** Corporate officers and their spouses have been invited to the summer company picnic.  
**Yes:** Corporate officers and their partners have been invited to the summer company picnic.

Another aspect of using inclusive language with gender is to use neutral job titles. Sometimes we don’t think about how a job title can specifically call out one gender or another, but even these subtle terms can come across as sexist to a reader who notices the bias.

**No:** The policemen in our city work diligently to keep the streets safe.  
**Yes:** The police officers in our city work diligently to keep the streets safe.

Since we probably can’t assume that every police officer is indeed male in the city, we can’t say “policemen” without excluding the female police officers. Here’s another example:

**No:** My family tends to tip waitresses twenty percent.  
**Yes:** My family tends to tip servers twenty percent.

While a lot of servers may be female and therefore waitresses, there are still plenty of male waiters. The easy solution here is to use the gender neutral term *servers*.

Finally, make sure to use parallel terms whenever referring to both genders. This principle means that you should use terms that are essentially equivalent, such as “male and female”
rather than “male and woman.” Here’s an example in a sentence:

No: Welcome to all the men and girls who are attending this conference.

Yes: Welcome to all the men and women who are attending this conference.

Yes: Welcome to all the boys and girls who are attending this conference.

These methods of using inclusive, nonsexist language should come pretty naturally and easily once you’re aware of them. As long as you remain aware, you’ll be able to avoid offending members of your audience who could be especially sensitive to issues of gender.

Avoiding Biases in Race and Ethnicity

Next, race and ethnicity also require careful handling in our use of language. In general, make sure to use the ethnic terms that a certain ethnicity or race prefers. So when you do need to bring up these sensitive issues, make sure to research which terms are preferred by these individual groups. For instance, most people with dark skin find the term Negro or Black offensive. Some groups prefer the term African American, but others aren’t from Africa and would want another term to describe their ethnicity. Here’s an example of using appropriate terminology when mentioning race is necessary:

No: The study included 48 Hispanics and 42 Orientals.

Yes: The study included 48 Hispanics and 42 Asians.

Yes: The study included 48 Hispanic Americans and 42 Asian Americans.

People from Asia prefer the term “Asian” to “Oriental,” so we’ve replaced that term in the yes example. “Hispanics” is generally accepted, although certain groups might prefer that you specify which country they originate from. Another option here, since we’re likely dealing with a study from the US, is to specify these terms further with “Hispanic Americans” and “Asian Americans.”

Each edition of the APA manual makes a point to list the current preferred designation for particular races and ethnic groups. The APA official website, www.apastyle.org, is a good place to turn for checking current preferences of various groups in the Guidelines for Unbiased Language. You can also search elsewhere on the internet or find members of these groups in your community to confirm the most appropriate terminology. Additionally, if you are reading scholarly information that mentions race, you can follow the protocol of recently published work in APA peer-reviewed scholarly journals, which are required to use designations correctly and sensitively.

As a general rule, don’t bring up the topic of race unless it’s truly relevant and vital to your argument. These same principles of showing respect for diversity apply to many other things that can be sensitive in our society, such as religion and politics. Often, these ideas aren’t
important to mention. If you find them relevant to your argument and your audience, keep in mind any opposing viewpoints. Address these perspectives respectfully—not just to avoid alienating those audience members, but to gain others’ respect by treating people with differing backgrounds and perspectives fairly.

**Putting People First**

Because there are so many ways to easily (and accidentally) label people unfairly in our society, APA style encourages writers to “put people first” when describing individuals from different groups and backgrounds. For instance, people with disabilities usually don’t like to be referred to as “disabled people.” By calling them “people with disabilities,” you focus on the *people* as their primary designation rather than their disabled conditions, which don’t necessarily define them. Here’s another example of using the “people first” guideline:

**No:** I work in a school with retarded children.

**Better:** I work in a school with special needs children.

**Best:** I work in a school with children who have special needs.

The word *retarded* itself is very controversial and seen as highly offensive when talking about special needs, but even saying “special needs children” implies that the children are defined by those qualities. When we put the word *children* first, we focus more on the individuals and less on the handicap.

While this rule works generally, some communities decide that they prefer the shorter form, which doesn’t follow the “people first” designation. When you write about particular populations, be aware of how expert authors in the field currently designate those groups and what those groups prefer to be called. For example, autistic individuals don’t mind being called “autistic individuals” or “autistics”; that’s just the accepted term that they themselves use. Again, if unique characteristics like disabilities or handicaps aren’t truly relevant to your writing and audience, no need to bring them up!

**Practice: Eliminate Bias or Stereotyping**

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice identifying which sentences have stereotypes or biases. How would you adjust these sentences? What resources would you seek out to verify preferred terms and names?

1. A teacher should provide his class with ample resources to complete their assignments and properly learn the required material.
2. Living with a roommate who is blind has completely changed my perspective on a number of things in my life.
3. The firemen have been working tirelessly to quench the numerous wildfires scattered along the west coast of the United States.
4. While serving as a missionary for my church, I was able to meet some Indians on various reservations.
5. The boys and girls in my fifth-grade class usually liked to play soccer together during recess.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Most every teacher wishes for her students to behave well in class—an optimistic hope.
   1. no changes
   2. her | class; an
   3. his or her | class; an
   4. his or her | class—an

See answer key on page 94.

3B. Avoid absolute language.

Writing in the social sciences, or any science, for that matter, is like contributing to a conversation at a party. At a party, you walk up to a group, listen to the chatter, and then start offering your own opinions and experiences when ideas come to you and as you feel accepted and competent to speak in that setting. But the conversation doesn’t usually stop with whatever you had to say. If it did, it would probably feel a little awkward.

Now, imagine someone at a party insisting that everyone likes watermelon—but you happen to be someone who doesn’t like watermelon. (Maybe you can’t even stand the smell of watermelon!) So you clear your throat and inform those at the party that not everyone likes watermelon, and you’re living proof. That person who made that comment will probably feel a little silly about what he or she said and certainly couldn’t keep on insisting on this claim very believably or kindly.

Writing in a specific field is much the same as a conversation at a party—it’s just a much slower conversation. The point is, people don’t just stop writing about and contributing to the field after you’ve finished an article. They keep right on writing, researching, and discovering, and you probably will, too.

This is one of the biggest reasons why we stress using appropriate language whenever you make even the smallest claim as you write. To do this, you need to avoid overstating anything in your argument. Imagine how you might feel in five years after making a clear claim on an issue that overstated the findings when information showing your error comes to light and your article is still in print under your name.

If scientists were to claim something that could apply universally to everyone, their papers and research could be disproven and discredited as soon as someone else found one exception to their argument. While you may not be planning on making any major
breakthroughs in research, you still want your writing to contribute to your field’s conversation—and you don’t want to make the mistake of saying something you might regret later.

To avoid overstating your claims, refrain from using **absolute language**, which are words that are either completely inclusive or completely exclusive. These are words like *always, never, everyone, and no one*. You can also make your claims sound absolute when you use verbs that imply absoluteness like *will* and *do*.

Let’s look at some examples.

**No:** Never let a Friday night go by without going on a date with your spouse if you want a healthy marital relationship.

**Yes:** Spending time with your spouse can lead to a healthier marital relationship.

**No:** Letting your children eat dessert every night will make them unhealthy and lead them to feel entitled to sugary treats.

**Yes:** Letting your children eat dessert every night may lead them to be unhealthy or feel entitled to sugary treats.

Do you see how the first sentence in each pair sounds so absolute, as though the result is completely unavoidable? But surely you can’t speak for the future of every marital relationship or child, no matter how strongly you believe in your researched stance. The second sentence in each pair fixes this rigid stance by instead focusing on a possible, and even likely, outcome without implying that *every* marriage or child will face these consequences. This writing strategy is called **hedging**.

There are certain words that can help you hedge like this and leave a little room for exceptions. These hedging words include words like *might, may, could, some, suggest, are related to, and more likely*.

Let’s do one more example.

**No:** Research proves that people will help you if you ask nicely.

**Yes:** Research suggests that people may be more likely to help you if you ask nicely.

We used a number of different hedging words in this example. Depending on the context of your writing, you may need to include more or fewer of these kinds of words. You can still make clear statements and be convincing without overstating information or the current state of research in the field. Make sure to choose your words carefully so that you don’t sound too timid while you try to avoid using absolute language.

**Practice: Avoid Absolute Language**
Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice identifying which sentences have
absolute language. See what hedging words you might add to make some of these
statements less absolute.

1. Inflation will never stop unless we prevent our country from sliding further into debt.
2. Studies show that continually dating a spouse after marriage is guaranteed to prevent
any strain or hardship in a couple’s relationship.
3. College-aged students with helicopter parents are more likely to use medication for
depression and anxiety.
4. The best way to cope with difficulties like loss and stress is to talk to a professional
counselor.
5. While many individuals think of peer pressure as a negative influence, there are times
when peer pressure can lead to a positive experience.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select
the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. The overuse of media **undoubtedly has the biggest** effect on many **children’s:**
   psychological, mental, and physical health indicators.
   1. no changes
   2. may have a large | children’s
   3. undoubtedly has the biggest | children’s
   4. may have a large | children’s:

See answer key on page 95.

**3C. Arrange words in your sentences logically.**

Have you ever had a friend say something that didn’t quite make sense, but since you knew
the person and situation well, you figured out what your friend meant to say anyway? Now,
that’s not such a big deal when you’re just talking casually. But when you’re writing a
formal research paper, you definitely don’t want someone misunderstanding you or
doubting your logic.

That’s why we’re going to look at the different ways you might **misplace** a phrase or word
to imply something you don’t really mean. We can’t assume an audience will know us or the
situation; thus, as writers, we have the responsibility to write in ways that minimize the
chance of misinterpretation. Part of doing this skillfully means putting phrases, adjectives,
and adverbs close to the words or phrases they are modifying or describing.

**Keeping Introductory Phrases Logical**

Let’s start off with a humorous look at this first example.

**No:** Flying through the air, the dog expertly caught the frisbee in his teeth.
Though someone might argue that we knew or at least assumed that it was the frisbee and not the dog that was flying through the air, this sentence construction technically indicates that dog is flying. We can clarify the meaning of the sentence with a little rephrasing.

This type of mistake is called a **dangling modifier**. The opening phrase sets up the context and then doesn’t anchor the right noun to it. An easy way to fix the problem is to add the noun into the opening phrase so the context is clear. In this version, we clarified the actions of both the frisbee and the dog, showing that it was indeed the frisbee that flew through the air.

**Yes:** As the frisbee flew through the air, the dog expertly caught it in his teeth.

Here’s another example:

**No:** Running down the street, my cell phone fell out of my pocket.

**Yes:** While I was running down the street, my cell phone fell out of my pocket.

Think about what the first dangling modifier sentence implies. Can your cell phone really run down a street? Of course not. Although we can guess that it was you rather than your cell phone that was running down the street, you should make sure you state it this way.

A second way to fix a dangling modifier is to leave the phrase at the beginning without a subject, but place the main subject immediately after the comma, which anchors it by proximity.

**Yes:** Running down the street, I noticed my cell phone fall out of my pocket.

**Properly Placing Descriptive Words and Phrases**

Let’s investigate another type of modifier mistake.

**No:** The parents served hamburgers to the children on paper plates.

**Yes:** The parents served hamburgers on paper plates to the children.

The misstatement may or may not be easy to spot. Technically, the first sentence indicates that the children are on paper plates because “on paper plates” comes right after “the children.” Again, proximity matters to meaning. By putting the phrase “on paper plates” right after “hamburgers,” we know that the writer means that the hamburgers are being served on paper plates.

This **misplaced modifier** mistake happens when a descriptive phrase is placed in the wrong part of the sentence. To fix this problem, just move that phrase to a more logical place. It can take a good editing eye to find some of these errors; our brains work hard to make sense of things and may “autocorrect” the meaning. Checking your work carefully will
help you place modifiers next to the words or ideas they really are intended to describe.

Let’s look at another example.

**No:** She found three birds in the park huddled under some fallen leaves.

Although a smart reader could figure out what the author means by this sentence, it sounds like the park is huddled under some fallen leaves, not the birds. A simple switch solidifies the intended meaning of the sentence.

**Yes:** She found three birds huddled under some fallen leaves in the park.

Be careful as you rearrange these descriptive modifiers. Sometimes, you might accidentally create another misplaced modifier by moving it to the wrong place. Always reread your sentence to make sure your revisions work logically.

**No:** I used to ride to Salt Lake City to participate in an internship on the UTA train every week.

**No:** I used to ride to Salt Lake City to participate on the UTA train in an internship every week.

**Yes:** I used to ride to Salt Lake City on the UTA train to participate in an internship every week.

Although we have looked at phrases, the same principle applies to a single-word descriptor. Note in this example how just a single word can distort the meaning of a sentence.

**No:** I only see peacocks on the hill at twilight.

**Yes:** I see peacocks on the hill only at twilight.

That first sentence probably sounds completely normal and straightforward when you say it out loud. But take a look at what comes right before and right after the word “only.” By saying “I only see,” I’m implying that literally the only thing I ever do is see peacocks on that hill at twilight. I never eat, sleep, breathe, or anything else—nope, all I do is see those peacocks. On the hill. At twilight.

As ridiculous as that interpretation may seem, it’s a result of placing “only” right before the verb “see.” However, if I think about what I actually mean—that twilight is the only time of day when I happen to see peacocks on that hill—then it makes sense that “only” should be right before “at twilight,” as it is in the second example.

This type of mistake can apply to any adverb such as “only.” Just like misplaced modifiers, **misplaced adverbs** are in the wrong part of the sentence. To fix these sentences, consider which part of the sentence the word applies to most and then place the adverb right before
that part of the sentence.

**Practice: Arrange Words in Your Sentences Logically**

Now it’s your turn! Review this video on [dangling modifiers](https://edtechbooks.org/-ycZ).

Watch on YouTube [https://edtechbooks.org/-FIy](https://edtechbooks.org/-FIy)

And watch this video on [misplaced adverbs](https://edtechbooks.org/-LYt).
Watch these before trying these exercises to see more examples and observe how they are fixed. In these sentences, find and fix the dangling modifiers, misplaced modifiers, or misplaced adverbs.

1. Many parents employ a rule that children may only ask for a second serving of food after they have finished every bite of their first serving.
2. The adults served slices of cake on paper plates to the children at the birthday party.
3. Celia will present her report about endangered sea turtles in the conference room.
4. Gnashing its teeth, the hunter slayed the big bad wolf without a moment’s hesitation to save Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother.
5. The delivery boy presented the beautiful bouquet of roses to the astonished woman in a slender glass vase.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. **Unfamiliar with campus**, the construction disoriented the guest speaker and she arrived ten minutes late.
   1. no changes
   2. Because the guest speaker was unfamiliar with campus | speaker, and
   3. Because the guest speaker was unfamiliar with campus | speaker and
   4. Unfamiliar with campus | speaker, and
Rule #4: Use Strong Subjects and Verbs to Make Your Writing Lively and Concise

In addition to treating your audience royally by eliminating bias, avoiding absolute language, and arranging words logically for their benefit, you can also use the principle of power by selecting words to make your topic shine. In this section, we will discuss choosing strong subjects, employing vibrant verbs, and preferring the active voice to make a strong and convincing point as you write.

4A. Find and use strong subjects.

Have you ever read a sentence or paragraph that you had to read twice? Maybe you just got distracted or were tired, but maybe the author didn’t do much to attract your attention at the first of the sentence or paragraph. Although not a strict grammar rule, a principle of power that you should master is the use of strong subjects to engage and hold your audience. You’ll find it helpful to understand the basics of subjects and verbs as you master these next few stylistic principles. For instance, making your subjects strong will keep your writing more concise and engaging for readers.

To begin, think of the subjects of your sentences as the “actors.” You don’t want these actors to be lazy; you want them to be center stage and to act their part. Sometimes without realizing, however, we hide our subjects behind lazy words—especially when we begin a sentence with words like *it* and *there*.

What’s so bad about these words as sentence starters? Well, the answer is that pronouns like *it* and *there* simply aren’t very specific. They’ll often lead to ambiguity or unnecessary wordiness. Take a look at these examples below:

**No:** There are many ways to regulate your children’s media intake.

**Yes:** Parents can regulate their children’s media intake in three ways.

Notice how in the first example, *there* wasn’t really representing anyone or anything. It was a lazy actor with no real role to play. By finding the true actor (in this case, “parents”) and placing it center stage as the subject, we created a stronger and more specific subject and related it to a clear action.

Here’s another example. See if you can figure out why the first sentence’s subject is weak and why the second sentence’s subject is stronger.

**No:** It is important for you to listen to your spouse.

**Yes:** You should listen to your spouse carefully when you counsel together on sensitive issues.
Again, “it” wasn’t the real actor of the sentence. “It” didn’t do anything! Instead, we recognized that the author was speaking to the audience and giving them a call to action. The pronoun “you” addressed the readers directly and served well as a strong subject. Notice that in both of these examples, the second sentence “fix” didn’t just start differently and with more authority— the statement had more to say. Delivering information more efficiently is generally a side benefit of using a stronger subject.

Now, using “it” or “there” as a subject isn’t always bad. These can be useful pronouns when they have a clear reference and may help your writing to be more concise if their meaning is clear. However, if you find yourself falling into a pattern of using these words frequently, try livening up your writing by identifying the true actor of your sentence and putting the actor center stage.

**Practice: Find and Use Strong Subjects**

Now it’s your turn! Review the principle of finding strong subjects in [this video](https://edtechbooks.org/-nCF) and then look at these examples to practice identifying which sentences have weak subjects. Rewrite them to be stronger.

1. It seemed as if the team of researchers had purposely skewed the data.
2. There are so many variables that contribute to this study, so it makes it difficult to conclude what the results truly mean.
3. We can contribute to our families by taking time to communicate lovingly each day.
4. It is important to understand how attachment styles affect relationships.
5. I moved into a new apartment during my sophomore year of college.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. It is generally acknowledged that children, who grow up in a home with both parents and experience low conflict in the home, tend to have a better relationship with each parent.
   1. No changes
   2. Children, who grow up in a home with both parents and experience low conflict in the home,
   3. It is generally acknowledged that children who grow up in a home with both parents and experience low conflict in the home
   4. Children who grow up in a home with both parents and experience low conflict in the home

See answer key on page 97.

**4B. Use vibrant verbs.**

In addition to improving your subjects, you can also improve your use of verbs by avoiding
the overuse of *be* verbs, reducing nominalizations, and keeping your verbs close to your subjects. Let’s talk about these problems and how you might substitute more vibrant and concrete verbs and place them more effectively in your sentences.

**Avoiding the Overuse of Be Verbs**

One trap that can slow the pace of writing or weaken sentences can be the overuse of the handy *be* verbs. Though these words have a place in your writing, overusing them can stifle your writing and leave it flat or unclear. *Be* verbs include any form of the word *be*, like *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *been*, and *being*.

Think about it: When you say that your subject “is” something, all you’re really telling your audience is that the subject exists. It simply is. That’s a pretty obvious and unnecessary statement most of the time. Using *be* verbs isn’t a crime, but replacing *be* verbs with stronger, more specific verbs will add depth and variety to your writing.

You’ll solve half of your *be* verb problems by fixing any weak subjects that you have, which we have just discussed. Spotting other *be* verbs that you can replace with a more vibrant choice may be harder, but with a little practice, you’ll start noticing these *be* verbs all over the place!

Let’s take a look at an example.

**No:** Budgeting is an important way to be financially responsible.

Now, you’ve probably already noticed that this sentence doesn’t have a weak *thereor it* subject. However, we’ve still tied our subject to a weak *be* verb, “is,” that only states a simple, obvious fact. Not only that, but another *be* verb, “be,” comes later on in the sentence.

We can fix this sentence to make it a little more lively in a few different ways depending on what we want to emphasize. Look at the more descriptive use of the verbs (highlighted in red) in these sentences:

**Yes:** You can become more financially responsible by budgeting.

**Yes:** Budgeting allows couples and families to remain financially responsible.

**Yes:** When families budget consistently, they learn to take responsibility for their finances.

Each of these solutions has a slightly different emphasis, but they all convey the same general message without using any *be* verbs. Notice as well how all of these sentences encourage a deeper thought than the original sentence. Rather than just stating an obvious fact, these three other sentences make a connection between a specific action and a desirable outcome.
Here’s another example with some potential solutions:

No: Exercising is the best antidepressant, so many health professionals say.

Yes: Many health professionals advocate for exercise as an effective antidepressant.

Yes: Many health professionals agree that exercise can alleviate some depressive symptoms more effectively than some antidepressant medication.

Again, these potential solutions emphasize different parts of the original ideas, but that’s the beauty of using strong, vibrant verbs; your meaning can instantly become clearer and gain more depth. You’ll find that you start saying a lot more with fewer words as you pair strong subjects with strong verbs. To see some ideas of more vibrant verbs that can better articulate your ideas, check out this list of “action verbs” provided by BYU’s career services.

Practice: Avoid the Overuse of Be Verbs

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice identifying which sentences have weak verbs and rewrite them to be stronger.

1. Indoor plumbing is a commodity that many of us take for granted and is still spreading to third-world countries in places like Africa and Asia.
2. People often find talking to strangers awkward and intimidating.
3. Cleaning is a boring task for most children.
4. Pushups are my least favorite form of exercise.
5. The vase fell onto the floor with a loud crash, sending shards of glass in all directions.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. I think that the north end of the park, that has a waterfall, is prettier than the south end.
   1. no changes
   2. that | looks
   3. which | looks
   4. which | is

See answer key on page 97.

Avoiding Weakening Your Meaning by Turning Verbs into Nouns

Now that you understand how to choose strong subjects and verbs for your sentences, you probably feel a lot more confident about your writing already. But be careful; you might get carried away with choosing fancy-sounding subjects and verbs and fall into the trap of turning your verbs into nouns. Most of these verbs-turned-nouns have a -tion ending, such
as when consider becomes consideration. This transformation is also called a nominalization. You’ll also occasionally see verbs turned into nouns with -ing, -age, -ment or -ance endings, but these nominalizations aren’t as common as the -tion ending.

Now, nominalizations aren’t always bad or even grammatically wrong. However, if too many of those action words are turned into long non-acting words, you have lost some of the power your writing could have had. You don’t need to eradicate all -tion words from your writing. However, we often use these words as crutches to try to sound more sophisticated in our language when in reality, their use tends to clutter up our sentences. Here’s a brief video [https://edtechbooks.org/-uGWx] to make this concept more clear.

So how do we fix this problem? Just remember all the practice you’ve had in identifying subjects and verbs. Find the true action verb that has been turned into a noun and the true actor (or subject), and then place these words in their correct roles near the beginning of the sentence. You’ll have to look especially carefully for your subjects and verbs when dealing with nominalizations, but you’ll soon get the hang of it.

Let’s try an example together.

No: The student officer gave the first-year student directions to the new student’s first class.

This sentence might seem pretty clear at first glance, but look at it closely. See any nominalizations with a -tion ending? You should notice that the noun directions has been transformed from the verb direct. So how do we change that noun back into a verb?

First, think about who is supposed to be doing the directing in this sentence. Is it the first-year student? Is it the student officer? Someone else? If you identified the student officer as the true actor of the sentence, you’re right! Now, let’s rewrite this sentence so that all the action is clear.

Yes: The student officer directed the first-year student to the new student’s first class.

Notice that in rewriting this sentence, we took out the verb gave. This was a weaker verb than directed, and now our sentence is more clear, concise, and lively.

Let’s try another one.

No: Our appreciation for your service is very great.

Yes: We deeply appreciate your service to us.

See how this nominalization led the speaker to use a weak be verb? By making “we” the true actor or subject and by using “appreciate” as the true action or verb rather than using its nominalized noun form, “appreciation,” we were able to naturally take out that be verb and create a clearer, stronger sentence.
Reducing nominalizations can help us focus on more vibrant verbs. Making those changes can be done in a variety of ways depending on your desired meaning. Since you will be able to use these principles to adjust your writing style to capture more power, these rules are worthy of your attention and focus as you produce and edit writing.

**Practice: Avoid Nominalizations**

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice identifying nominalizations by finding the true actor, finding the true action, and rewriting the sentence to make it stronger.

1. Teenagers tend to influence each other more than their parents do.
2. Advocating for equal rights is an ongoing process that needs continuing attention and understanding on all sides.
3. The direction of these meetings is not something we need to mention in great detail.
4. The experience of most newlyweds and fighting over finances is common.
5. The encouragement of parents is a way to help children grow.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Caroline and him gave a presentation about the balance between self-reliance and interdependence in healthy couple relationships.
   1. no changes
   2. He and Caroline | gave a presentation
   3. Caroline and him | presented
   4. He and Caroline | presented

See answer key on page 98.

**Keeping Subjects and Verbs Close**

By now, I hope you see how effectively you can write with more power just by paying a little closer attention to your use of subjects and verbs. However, these strong subjects and verbs might not do very much for you if you don’t place them where they can work together. Subjects and verbs communicate clearest when they sit close together in a sentence, and leaving interruptions between them can add confusion and introduce clumsy wording.

When possible, avoid letting long phrases interrupt the flow of your sentence by placing them between your main subject and your main verb. These interruptions between your subject and verb usually appear after helping words like if, because, and while. You might remember that these helping words are also known as subordinate conjunctions. Here’s an example of this kind of an unnecessary interruption in the vicinity of the verb and its subject:
No: Some families, because they gather each night for family dinner, grow closer together.

In essence, these interrupting phrases make your readers mentally hold their breath until they finally get to the verb, “grow.” Simply moving this detour before or after the subject-verb pairing can help your readers get to the point of your sentence faster as in this revised sentence:

Yes: Some families grow closer together because they gather each night for family dinner.

When you rearrange your sentences like this, take extra care that you haven’t accidentally created a misplaced modifier. You may also need to reword a sentence somewhat if you’re having trouble moving the interrupter elsewhere in the sentence.

This principle of power again seeks to help you strengthen your writing, but is not a hard and fast rule. In fact, on occasion, you might find that an interruption between your subject and verb is the best way to write your sentence to add some important emphasis. Even then, keep these interruptions as short as possible so your readers can process your sentence easily.

Yes: Kind actions, when motivated by charity, bless others lives.

In this example, the interrupting phrase was short and helps to emphasize a key element of the meaning of the sentence. As you might imagine, the principle of keeping subjects and verbs close is particularly important when sentences get long and sometimes complicated. Let’s look at a final example.

No: Competition, although it can be very motivating and invigorating for many individuals, can also bring contention among even the closest of friends.

Here, we see an interruption that can easily be moved elsewhere in the sentence and will help the reader to process the sentence faster.

Yes: Although competition can be very motivating and invigorating for many individuals, it can also bring contention among even the closest of friends.

Yes: Competition can bring contention among even the closest of friends, although it can also be very motivating and invigorating for many individuals.

You can review the principle of keeping subjects and verbs close with this short video [https://edtechbooks.org/-irQ].

Practice: Keep Subjects and Verbs Close

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice rearranging subjects and verbs for better vicinity.
1. Staying organized, which is not always an easy task considering the demanding nature of the principle, is not my cousin’s best attribute.
2. Adolescents, since they are young and often inexperienced due to their developing brains, do not always make the best decisions.
3. The fact that my roommate came to the aftershow party, despite her many protests that she is introverted and does not like to spend a lot of time around people, especially when those people are strangers, was a miracle.
4. While being on time takes careful planning ahead, it can prove your diligence and reliability to a potential employer.
5. The persistent degrading presentation of women in the media, unless we somehow stop it and begin enforcing positive messages in today’s media, will keep women of all ages from understanding who they really are.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. **The author, because he had made so many citation mistakes in his previous drafts, submitted a new draft of the article that discusses social cognition in emerging adults.**
   1. no changes
   2. Because he had made so many citation mistakes in his previous drafts, the author | article, which
   3. The author, because he had made so many citation mistakes in his previous drafts, | article, which
   4. Because he had made so many citation mistakes in his previous drafts, the author | article that

See answer key on page 98.

**4C. Favor the active voice.**

Another way to keep a powerful voice in your writing is to favor the active voice. Perhaps you remember past English teachers reminding you to avoid using the passive voice, or maybe your grammar checker on Word is set at the highest level and you are getting the little green squiggly lines under your passive voice sentences, but have forgotten how to adjust passive voice to active voice. If that’s the case, here’s a quick review of the principle, a few tips on how to spot it, and some simple methods for switching from passive voice to active voice.

**Differences between Active Voice and Passive Voice**

Active voice is stating your sentence in a very straightforward way with an actor followed by its verb—it’s the same principle we’ve been repeating over and over again: using a subject and a verb skillfully and deliberately to convey the meaning of your sentence.

**Active voice:** The cat chased the mouse.
Here, “the cat” is the subject and “chased” is the verb, making “the mouse” the object. When we take the object of the sentence (“the mouse”) and put it into the subject spot, notice what happens—we switch to passive voice.

**Passive voice:** The mouse was chased by the cat.

Now, this sentence has the exact same meaning as the sentence written in active voice, but it does have a different emphasis (maybe eliciting more sympathy for the mouse), and it also uses more words. In addition to simply switching the placement of the sentence’s subject and object, we’ve also had to expand the verb to add a *be* verb (from “chased” to “was chased”). Also, we’ve had to add a helping word “by” to reintroduce the subject.

In fact, we have so de-emphasized the subject that we could leave “by the cat” off entirely and the sentence would still make sense (e.g., “The mouse was chased.”). If this structure seems a little backwards, that’s because it is! Can you just feel the power draining out of the sentence?

As a review, the passive voice switches the position of the subject and the object in a sentence. To make that switch, the verb adds a helping *be* verb and the object adds the word *by* in front of it. Sometimes the entire *by*-phrase of the object will even disappear entirely from the sentence.

So, here’s a handy summary of the three signs you can use to help you find a sentence written in passive voice:

- The subject and object have switched positions.
- The verb includes a helping *be* verb.
- The object has the word *by* in front of it, or you could add the test phrase “by zombies” to the end of the sentence (if the subject of the sentence is not even named at all).

Perhaps you can see why APA standards assert that writers should prefer the active voice over the passive voice except in rare exceptions. Passive writing takes the attention away from the true subject of the sentence. It also tends to be wordier (thanks to those added *be* verbs and the *by* phrasing) and can sometimes be less clear. In general, your writing will improve in clarity and concision if you avoid using the passive voice.

**Changing Passive Voice into Active Voice**

Now that you know how to find the passive voice in your writing, let’s work through a couple of examples to learn how to change the sentences from passive to active voice.

The first step is to identify the subject and object of your sentence and determine which one is the true subject or actor. Here’s a hint: the true subject in a passive voice sentence usually follows the word *by* or needs to be added since it has been eliminated.
Once you’ve realized who or what the true subject is, simply move that subject into the spotlight at the beginning of your sentence, adjust your verbs to be more direct, and move the true object back into its place later on in the sentence.

Let’s do this example together.

No: The tree was chopped down by my grandfather last year.

Can you tell that this sentence is in the passive voice? The verb gives us a clue that the sentence is about chopping, but we are sure that the noun in the subject place is not doing any of the chopping since it’s a tree.

We also note that the person doing the chopping, the grandfather, is tucked nicely behind a by phrase. There’s also that extra be verb in the verb phrase “was chopped.” Since the subject and object have clearly been switched, let’s put the grandfather back into the subject spot and give him credit for his hard work!

Yes: My grandfather chopped down the tree last year.

Great! Now the subject is in the subject position, the object is in the object position, and we don’t have any extra be verbs or prepositions cluttering up the sentence. The sentence has gone from ten words to seven words, which gives the reader fewer words to read to get the same meaning. Review this video [https://edtechbooks.org/-TwE] for more help in understanding how to switch between active and passive voice.

Now, despite the number of how many times you may have been cautioned not to use the passive voice, this construction can be useful in some instances. For example, let’s take the example of someone at your workplace making a mistake that lost the company thousands of dollars. It could be reported in the corporate newsletter in active voice or passive voice. Compare these two statements:

Active Voice: Jordan lost the company thousands of dollars through a careless mistake.

Passive Voice: The company lost thousands of dollars through a careless mistake.

Though corporate leadership may want to encourage employees not to be careless, they may not want to make an example of Jordan. In this case, the use of the passive voice was helpful here in reporting the incident but hiding the actor. In other cases, we use passive voice not so much to hide the actor, but because we simply have no need to mention the actor since it draws emphasis away from the real message. This often happens in methodology sections of scholarly journals.

Passive Voice: Participants were asked to turn off their cell phones during the test.

Active Voice: The three graduate students of Dr. Jones who conducted the first portion of the study asked the participants to turn off their cell phones during the test.
You’ll probably agree that we didn’t mind knowing who gave the participants the instructions about their cell phones, so passive voice was helpful here.

This video [https://edtechbooks.org/-WSAS] helps illustrate other examples where you might choose to use the passive voice, but you should often feel more confident about using active voice instead. When you do choose to write passively, you should be very deliberate and make sure that you feel appropriately justified in using the passive voice.

**Practice: Favor the Active Voice**

Now it’s your turn! Look at the sentences below and figure out which sentences are written in passive voice. If any sentences do use passive voice, practice rewriting them in active voice. If any of the sentences are missing a true subject because there is no by phrase to help, you can invent one that would make sense.

1. The zucchini bread was baked to perfection.
2. All of the students studied diligently for their grammar test.
3. My mother told my brother to be home by midnight, but he stayed out past his curfew.
4. In preparation for the event, decisions were carefully made by the committee members.
5. Not everyone can hope to win the contest, but valiant effort can certainly be given by anyone.
6. The lesson was prepared by the teacher a week in advance.
7. The servers wiped off the tables regularly to ensure a clean environment for the customers.
8. On average, seven hours of television are watched daily by people in the United States.
9. My best friend and I took an amazing trip to Asia over the summer.
10. I told my boss not to worry because everything would be taken care of by the clean-up crew.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. **We designed the study** to determine the quality of the relationship between adopted children and their parents, which may struggle at times.
   1. no changes
   2. The study was designed | which may struggle at times
   3. We designed the study | which always struggles
   4. The study was designed | which always struggles

See answer key on page 99.

Congratulations! You have now completed the second section of the grammar course and applied various rules to make your writing more powerful, including using inclusive
language and choosing strong subjects and verbs. Remember that while these rules are fairly standard in just about any writing genre, they are also stylistic guidelines that you don’t have to follow in every instance. We encourage you to pay attention to these principles carefully in your writing so you can gain a better understanding of when it is appropriate to break these rules and what you prefer in your personal style. As you continue to develop this taste for power in your writing, let’s move on to polishing our prose by paying attention to some small, sentence-level details.

4.4 Principles of Polish

In the final polishing of a written piece, authors typically engage in some fine-tuning to make their piece especially effective. Paying close attention to these small details is a way to show professionalism and respect for your reader. Carefully editing for these last little details will help readers stay focused on your message rather than becoming distracted by minor errors. Hopefully, the streamlining and wordsmithing you do will help you reach greater clarity, which is the focus of this section. These errors will be marked in manuscripts with pink and orange.

Rule #5: Pay Attention to the Small Details

Taking the time to pay attention to the small details of parallelism, hyphens, and apostrophes might seem minor, but all the final touch-ups you make in your writing can help it flow, be clear, and make a difference for your readers.

5A. Use parallelism to increase flow.

Sentences can get unruly and convoluted fast, especially when you have complicated ideas to put on the page. When you can’t quite put your finger on why your sentence seems messy or doesn’t seem to be working, check for consistency in each part of your sentence. Maybe this is what is making it sound awkward.

When the different parts of your sentence all flow in a consistent way, its meaning will naturally be clearer to your readers. This consistency in writing is called parallel structure. The basic idea of parallel structure is assuring that every part of a list or a set of comparative ideas starts in the same grammatical way. For example, notice how awkward this sentence sounds:

No: I like to read, dance, and listening to music.

Perhaps you recognized that the third item in this list did not seem consistent with the way the other two listed elements are stated. The basic way to correct non-parallel structure is to make sure the first word of each item in the list or other phrases is the same part of speech so that all first words of the list are similar (e.g., all prepositions, all verbs, all nouns, and so on).
As you look at these corrected examples, you will see that the author had the choice to state all first words as present tense verbs (like read and dance) or as -ing verbs (to match listening) to bring consistency to the list. In these two examples, you will see that the list is now consistent and the awkward construction is remedied:

**Yes:** I like to read, dance, and listen to music.

**Yes:** I like reading, dancing, and listening to music.

Though it’s a small change, these sentences are now clear and work beautifully. As you make these types of changes, you might think of parallelism like the branches of a tree. Each point where two or more branches split off should grammatically start from the same place, just like each item in your list should start with the same type of word.

Let’s look at another example.

**No:** Young children enjoy chocolate, lollipops, and eat ice cream.

**Yes:** Young children enjoy eating chocolate, lollipops, and ice cream.

**Yes:** Young children enjoy eating chocolate, licking lollipops, and slurping their ice cream.

In the first yes answer, the branch began at eating with the three nouns listed from there (all items that could be eaten). In the second yes answer, the branch began after enjoy with the three -ing verbs starting each part of the three-part list (all actions that could be enjoyed). The beauty is that each list is now consistent in form.

Parallel structure isn’t just used in lists, though. When pairing phrases with the use of the following words (called correlative conjunctions), the clauses or phrases we use on either side should also be parallel. Here are five very common examples that you should watch out for:

- Not only . . . but also . . .
- Neither . . . nor . . .
- Either . . . or . . .
- Between . . . and . . .
- Both . . . and . . .

Just like each item in a parallel list, the first word portion of your sentence that follows each of these words should branch off by using the same type of grammatical word, such as all nouns, all verbs, or whatever part of speech you are using.

Let’s look at one of those sentence types and see how to keep each part consistent. The correlative conjunctions are marked in green and the first word that must be parallel in red so you can see the structuring of the sentence better:
No: Parents strive both to support their children in their activities and guiding them in their aspirations.

Yes: Parents strive both to support their children in their activities and to guide them in their aspirations.

“Both” and “and” are the branch-off points in this sentence. In the no example, “both” is followed by a preposition, “to,” and “and” is followed by a verb, “guiding.” Not parallel! We had to tweak the second part of the sentence a bit in the yes example to get the two branches to match with prepositions, but that’s okay. Although in this case the preposition happened to be the same word, the prepositions can be different words; they just both need to be prepositions to be parallel. Another way to fix this sentence is to place the word “to” (which is common to both phrases) in front of the parallel connective and to use verbs as first words.

Yes: Parents strive to both support their children in their activities and guide them in their aspirations.

Occasionally, you may come across a sentence that you need to rewrite almost entirely so that the structure is parallel. The work required to keep your sentence structure consistent, however, will make your writing crisper and cleaner.

Here’s one more example:

No: I could neither concentrate on my homework nor my chores.

Can you see how the words right after “neither” and “nor” don’t match up? “Concentrate” is a verb, but “my chores” is a noun phrase. Placed in this linked structure, they are not parallel. The first yes example below uses parallel verbs and the second yes example uses parallel noun phrases. Both are great options for fixing the parallel structure.

Yes: I could neither concentrate on my homework nor focus on my chores.
Yes: I could concentrate on neither my homework nor my chores.

Before you try the practice exercise, watch these two short videos on keeping lists [https://edtechbooks.org/-EFHN] and other phrases [https://edtechbooks.org/-pqf] parallel for more examples.

Practice: Use Parallelism to Increase Flow

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and rewrite them to be parallel. Note that you can make your work easier by circling or highlighting the correlative conjunctions or the first word in a list to help you see the problem better.

1. The city of Paris, France is well known for its sights, I love the food there, and romance.
2. Parents need to know how to discipline, compassionate, and teach important life skills to their children.

3. Either we will go to the party together or coming home right after I run some errands.

4. As the coordinator of this international event, I am responsible for negotiating prices for the venue and catering, the speakers have necessary comforts and resources, and managing the social media outreach to advertise.

5. The couple was frustrated and overwhelmed between taking care of their newborn and starting a business at the same time.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

The list of interview questions we ask all of the candidates are focused on their education, experience with children in a formal setting, and reason they want to work here.

1. no changes
2. is | and
3. are | and their
4. is | and their

See answer key on page 100.

5B. Insert hyphens appropriately.

The more nouns and adjectives you pack into a sentence, the more potential you have for rich and interesting writing, but the greater the risk for a muddled sentence. While it can be helpful to rearrange these words with prepositions so your readers can better process your meaning, you have another useful tool at your disposal: hyphens!

Hyphens can link words together to show relationships between them that are helpful as you describe different noun phrases. In order to use hyphens effectively, however, you’ll need to keep a few important rules in mind.

The first is that you use hyphens between two or more words when those words are acting like one word. To show that these words work together to modify, or describe a noun, you may need to use a hyphen. However, the hyphen is only necessary if these words come before the noun. If the description comes after the noun, there’s no need to use hyphens.

No hyphens: I have an adorable, energetic little brother.

Hyphens: I have a 10-year-old little brother who is absolutely adorable.

In the first sentence, we have chosen three very descriptive, independent words to describe this brother (adorable, energetic, and little). We could have left any of those three words out and the sentence would have still made sense.
By contrast, the three descriptive words set right before the noun, brother (10, year, and old) are acting as one word and would not work independently or separately to communicate the brother’s age. Since these words act as one and are set before the noun, they are packaged as one unit by using hyphens. When those same words appear after the noun, they are no longer hyphenated.

No hyphens: My brother is ten years old and is absolutely adorable.

See the pattern? Here’s another example:

No: I live in a middle class neighborhood.
Yes: I live in a middle-class neighborhood.

No: I live in a neighborhood from the middle-class.
Yes: I live in a neighborhood from the middle class.

To review, multiple-word descriptions that come before the noun need hyphens; these same descriptions placed after the noun do not. This rule does have occasional exceptions, although not many. One notable exception that you may come across often is the compound term high school when used to describe a noun. This phrase rarely ever takes on hyphens, even when you use it as an adjective.

No: Back in the day, I used to be the high-school mascot.
Yes: Back in the day, I used to be the high school mascot.

Let’s look at a shortlist of hyphenated adjectives with a corresponding noun. Note that if you tried to use these words as unhyphenated, separate words to describe the noun, they wouldn’t make much sense—they only make sense as a unified, single descriptor:

short-term loan up-to-date information
community-based education green-eyed monkey
well-known expert one-way street
five-point star chocolate-covered almonds

What about newly-married couple? If this hyphen looks strange to you, then good. In English, we make an exception to the hyphen principle we’ve just described when an -ly adverb is the first word in the set (even though they are describing a single characteristic). The -ly ending makes their intention clear enough.

No: The bridge ran across a quickly-flowing stream.
Yes: The bridge ran across a quickly flowing stream.

So whenever you’re debating whether you need a hyphen or not and you see an adverb with an -ly ending, you can feel confident knowing that you don’t need a hyphen.

Try another example.

No: The happily-singing bird went about building its nest.

Although “happily” and “singing” are working together to describe “bird,” “happily” is an -ly adverb modifying the adjective that comes next, not an equal partnering word. Thus, the phrase doesn’t need a hyphen.

Yes: The happily singing bird went about building its nest.

Finally, let’s talk about one other frequent use of hyphens. Many words that we use (especially in more technical writing) include some sort of prefix like un, re, or self. Often, we have a difficult time judging whether or not these prefixes should be attached to the word completely or attached by a hyphen. While there are too many prefixes to go over in detail, we’ll give you an overall guideline with one notable exception. Generally, you’ll find that most prefixes do not require a hyphen, such as the prefix over.

No: Half of the employees feel that they are over-worked.

Yes: Half of the employees feel that they are overworked.

However, the one prefix that is almost always hyphenated is self, no matter whether is is placed before a noun or not.

No: Some teenagers struggle with their selfesteem.

No: Some teenagers struggle with their self esteem.

Yes: Some teenagers struggle with their self-esteem.

In a few cases, a prefix not normally requiring a hyphen may need one in order to clarify the word, such as re-establish. As another example, imagine your embarrassment if you asked your boss to “re-sign” a document that had been modified, but left a sticky note on it without your handy hyphen that said “Please resign.” Lesson learned: Hyphens matter!

In doubt on a certain word? Whenever you come across a phrase or compound word that stumps you, refer to a reliable dictionary as you write. For example, you can simply go to m-w.com, the official website for Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, and search the term for any word where you suspect a hyphen might be needed. As you continue to look up words, you’ll become more confident and remember more exceptions.
Practice: Insert Hyphens Appropriately

Now it’s your turn! Take a look at these example sentences and determine which terms need hyphens and which ones don’t.

1. Overly attentive parents can run the risk of spoiling their children.
2. Many young women struggle with self esteem because of the way women are portrayed in the media.
3. One of my favorite classes I’ve taken so far is my class on human development.
4. I have a three year old niece whom I get to babysit every other weekend.
5. After holding the faculty and staff meeting, the administration set expectations and prepared for the upcoming parent-teacher conferences.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. His supervisor is asking him to only select highly qualified members for the research team.
   1. no changes
   2. select only | highly qualified
   3. only select | highly-qualified
   4. select only | highly-qualified

See answer key on page 101.

5C. Use apostrophes appropriately.

Ever wondered about apostrophes? They are also a little mark but can make a difference in showing possession correctly. Most words show possession by adding ’sto the end, but not always. When do you add an apostrophe, and does it come before the letter s or after? Here are a few tips to keep in mind with all possessives, including pronouns.

Using Apostrophes in Possessive Pronouns

His, her, my, and your are all possessive pronouns that we use regularly—and they never use apostrophes. Period. This rule is simple, but possessive pronouns can be easily confused with similar contractions, which do use apostrophes. Different pronouns like it’s/its, you’re/your, who’s/whose, and they’re/their (not to mention there) might seem difficult to keep straight at first, but there’s a simple trick to figuring out which one you need.

Since the pronouns with an apostrophe are a contraction, or a combination of two words, just expand them to include both words again and see if they work in the sentence. For example, its is possessive, as in “its head,” but “it’s” is a contraction, as in “it is going to be a great day.” When you want to use a word like its/it’s in a sentence and expanding the contraction to two words doesn’t make sense, then its should be possessive and you don’t
need an apostrophe.

**Example:** The dog shakes its tail when it recognizes that it’s going to rain.

**Expanded:** The dog shakes it is tail when it recognizes that it is going to rain.

As we can see in the expanded version of this sentence, only the second instance of the expanded “it is” makes sense, so that’s the only one that needs an apostrophe.

**Yes:** The dog shakes its tail when it recognizes that it’s going to rain.

Let’s try one more example.

**Example:** How do you know if your you’re going to be successful in life?

**Expanded:** How do you know if you are going to be successful in life?

The expanded version sounds good, so we know that we can use the apostrophe as a contraction.

**Yes:** How do you know if you’re going to be successful in life?

Try this trick any time you see a pronoun that you think might use an apostrophe. If you can split it logically into two words, keep the apostrophe. If not, throw it out.

**Adding Apostrophes to Plural Words Ending in s**

Normally, making a word possessive is simple: just add an apostrophe and an s. However, when the word is already possessive with an s on the end, you shouldn’t try to add an extra ’s, so just add the apostrophe after the s. A simple rule to help keep this idea straight is to first make the word plural (add the s) and then make it possessive (add the apostrophe).

**One boy:** The boy’s sandcastle washed away with the waves.

**Two or more boys:** The boys’ sandcastle washed away with the waves.

**One woman:** The woman’s style was impeccable.

**Two or more women:** The women’s style was impeccable.

In this last example, the change to plural did not require adding an ‘s, but as our first step, we still made it plural (woman to women). Then, since the plural form didn’t involve adding an ‘s, we could simply add an ‘s to make it possessive. Since the word is already plural, you don’t need to add the s before the apostrophe. Here’s one more example to illustrate the principle:

**No:** I went to visit my childrens’ school one day.
Yes: I went to visit my children’s school one day.

Adding Apostrophes to Names that End with s

Names that end with s are tricky to make possessive, but we’ll follow very similar rules here to the ones we’ve already discussed. First, you have to determine whether the name you’re talking about represents an individual or a group. If the name refers to multiple people, make sure you’ve made it plural first by adding s or es.

Let’s take the last name “Williams,” which already ends in s, as an example. To make singular names like this possessive, add the normal apostrophe-s ending.

**Singular possessive:** I weeded Mr. Williams’s garden. [One Williams]

To make these names plural, add es: “the Williamses.” Once name is plural, simply add an apostrophe to make it possessive. No other s needed!

**Plural possessive:** Let’s go over to the Williamses’ house. [Many Williamses]

You may have seen other variations of these apostrophe rules before, which is understandable. Different universities or groups have their own style guides and rules. However, these guidelines follow the most recent edition of the APA style manual and are the expected convention in your field of writing.

Practice: Use Apostrophes Appropriately

Now it’s your turn! Determine which of the following examples have correct possessives formed.

1. My mother is a woman whose never intimidated by anyone.
2. Childrens’ innocence can be endearing and can also lead to humorous misunderstandings.
3. Meeting with a therapist can really help you understand you’re mental illness.
4. Every day, my older brother and I go over to the Jones’ place to see whether Mr. and Mrs. Jones need any help with chores around the house.
5. My friends car needed a jump, so I met her on 4th Street to provide her with jumper cables.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. There are six faculty members who said their going to the seminar.
   1. no changes
   2. Six faculty members | they’re
   3. There are six faculty members | they’re
   4. Six faculty members | their
Rule #6: Capitalization & Quotation

Our earliest lessons in capitalization taught us how to capitalize at the beginning of sentences and to capitalize proper nouns. We also learned to put quotation marks around the words given verbatim. These rules still work, though since then, you may have run into some special cases that require a little more sophistication. Hopefully, as we provide a few examples of how these principles work, you’ll find some answers to a few nagging questions. Also, here we discuss capitalization rules that work in text. As you know, APA citation rules have their own specific capitalization protocols, which will not be treated here (but can be found in your course resources).

6A. Understand when to capitalize.

Another way that you can increase your credibility and show your respect for individuals and groups is by capitalizing various terms correctly. Like hyphens, capitalization has a myriad of different rules to keep track of, but for now, we’ll just focus on some overarching guidelines and a few notable situations that you should be aware of.

For the most part, whenever you’re facing a name or term that may or may not need to be capitalized, it will fall into one of two categories. That term will either refer to something general or something very specific. General terms rarely need to be capitalized, but specific terms usually should be. If you can identify whether a term is general or specific, you should be able to determine whether you need to capitalize it or not.

Take a look at these examples.

General: Last Friday, my siblings and I went to the bowling alley.

Specific: Last Friday, my siblings and I went to Super Funtime Bowling Alley.

In the first example, the speaker mentioned a bowling alley, but didn’t give us enough specifics to justify capitalizing the term. In the second, the speaker actually named a bowling alley called “Super Funtime Bowling Alley.” Since the speaker referred to the official, specific name, we had to capitalize the term. (Incidentally, if the official name of the business is “Super Funtime” and the bowling alley part is not part of the business’s name, then the correct capitalization would be “Super Funtime bowling alley” since the “Super Funtime” is specific to the business, but a bowling alley is a general term.)

This same pattern of capitalizing specific terms rather than general terms is fairly consistent and reliable for most situations, and we’ll keep looking back to that idea as we look at different capitalization situations, such as the next few examples about educational degrees, seasons, and directions.

Educational degrees may seem like a specific term, but they’re actually not supposed to be capitalized (unless they contain a proper noun such as English).
**No:** I got my degree in Family Life at BYU.

**Yes:** I got my degree in family life at BYU.

**Yes:** I received my Bachelor of Science degree from the Brigham Young University’s School of Family Life.

The same works for class or semester designations.

**No:** I will be taking an Advanced Writing class in the Fall.

**Yes:** I will be taking an advanced writing class in the fall.

**No:** My sister will be taking psychology 101 in winter semester 20XX.

**Yes:** My sister will be taking Psychology 101 in Winter Semester 20XX.

Similarly, although the seasons may seem like a specific name, they’re actually a general term and shouldn’t be capitalized. You would only capitalize a seasonal term if that term were actually used as a name or in some sort of title.

**No:** One of my favorite seasons is Winter because that’s when we have Christmas!

**Yes:** One of my favorite seasons is winter because that’s when we have Christmas!

Here, winter is simply the season. But look below where a season can be used in a title.

**Yes:** I decided to take a class during Summer Term so I won’t have to take so many courses during the fall.

Notice how in this last example, the phrase “Summer Term” is capitalized but “the fall” is not. The first phrase is a title referring to a specific timeframe at BYU, but the latter is simply the general time of year.

Just like the seasons, directions of the compass are not specific enough to require capitalization.

**No:** The wind blew in from the East.

**Yes:** The wind blew in from the east.

However, when you use directions to name specific regions of the world, such as the South or the East in the United States, those terms function as a name or title and should be capitalized.

**No:** I am from the south.
Yes: I am from the South.

Finally, let’s deal with capitalization in personal titles. Titles such as “president” and “mayor” may seem specific at first blush, but they really only refer to a general office. Once you attach one of these titles to a specific name, then the title becomes specific enough to merit capitalization because they now designate a specific individual’s office or position.

No: Kevin J. Worthen, President of BYU, gave an excellent talk at the devotional on Tuesday.

Yes: Kevin J. Worthen, president of BYU, gave an excellent talk at the devotional on Tuesday.

You may be wondering if you really can’t capitalize “president” in this situation. Actually, the term “president of BYU” is generic enough, especially because there have been multiple BYU presidents and will continue to be more. The two main exceptions to this traditionally are the President of the United States and the Queen of England.

Let’s now see what happens once we attach this title to Kevin Worthen’s name.

No: I heard that president Worthen will speak at the BYU devotional today.

Yes: I heard that President Worthen will speak at the BYU devotional today.

Essentially, attaching the title to the beginning of a name makes the position specific rather than general.

What about other titles, such as the title of a book, an article, or your own paper? Typically, after you’ve capitalized the first word, you need to remember to capitalize only four types of words in titles, no matter how long or short they are: nouns (including pronouns), verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Let’s review how to identify these types of words.

Nouns are any person, place, thing, or idea. Verbs are action words, including helping verbs like be, have, or do. Adjectives describe nouns, and adverbs can modify or describe other words, like verbs. Most adverbs (and some adjectives) end in -ly, and adverbs are also known for describing the manner, time, or place of something.

Pretty simple, right? As long as you can identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, you’ll know exactly what to capitalize. Any other helping words in titles don’t need to be capitalized, no matter how long or short. Here’s an example:

No: Laura Padilla-Walker and her associates wrote a book called A better way to teach kids about sex.

Yes: Laura Padilla-Walker wrote a book called A Better Way to Teach Kids about Sex.

In the yes answer, “A” is the first word, so that one is automatically capitalized. “Better” is
an adjective that describes “way,” a noun, so those both get capitalized. “To” isn’t a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb, but “teach” is a verb and “kids” is a noun. “About” is a preposition, so no need to capitalize that, but “sex” is a noun. Great! We capitalized all of the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Let’s look at one more example with all words capitalized. Which words should not be capitalized?

No: My paper is called “Growing Your Business Plan: How To Find Flexibility While Structuring A Career.”

Yes: My paper is called “Growing Your Business Plan: How to Find Flexibility while Structuring a Career.”

Practice: Understand When to Capitalize

Now it’s your turn! See if you can identify which terms are specific enough to need capitalization and which ones are too general and should remain lowercase.

1. My birthday is in the Summer, so it was never really recognized at school.
2. I live just South of campus, and I love passing the duck pond every day on my way to class.
3. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints often feel pressured to be perfect, and this mindset can be detrimental to their spiritual and emotional well-being.
4. One of the reasons that How To Train Your Dragon is my favorite movie is because it teaches such great themes about friendship and family.
5. Go straight through the stop sign, and my house is just east of the elementary school.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. You have been invited to present both your scientific findings and you should share your personal experience from the study you did with Professor James Nelson on Wednesday.
   1. no changes
   2. your personal experience | professor
   3. you should share your personal experience | professor
   4. your personal experience | Professor

See answer key on page 102.

6B. Know how to abbreviate terms and format numbers.

Occasionally, the terms you’ll be using in your writing will require abbreviations. In order to look polished and professional as you use these shortened terms, you’ll need to remember how to format and introduce your abbreviations and numbers correctly in APA format.
Formatting Abbreviations

APA style is fairly straightforward on abbreviations. For the most part, simply don’t use periods when writing your abbreviations.

No: My brother claims he saw a real U.F.O.

Yes: My brother claims he saw a real UFO.

So when in doubt, leave the periods out. There are a few exceptions to this rule, of course. Most initials in names take periods after them, like “C.S. Lewis,” as does the abbreviation for the United States, “U.S.” Generally, however, abbreviations should simply consist of capital letters without any periods in between.

No: I loved President Dallin H. Oaks’ talk from the last General Conference. (Notice the period missing after his middle initial.)

Yes: I loved President Dallin H. Oaks’ talk from the last General Conference.

Introducing Abbreviations

Our society uses many common abbreviations that most people are familiar with, such as the IRS. However, there are plenty of abbreviations that are more specialized to the social sciences and can prove confusing to readers if you don’t expand them at the first usage.

To incorporate abbreviations into your writing effectively, it’s always a safe practice to spell out the term the first time you use it followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. Then, you can feel free to use that abbreviated term on its own for the remainder of your paper.

No: I studied at BYU (Brigham Young University). BYU is located in a beautiful setting near the Wasatch Mountains in Provo, Utah.

Yes: I studied at Brigham Young University (BYU). BYU is located in a beautiful setting near the Wasatch Mountains in Provo, Utah.

No: Parents may engage in PDT (parental differential treatment), favoring some siblings over others. Parent differential treatment is associated with negative mental health outcomes for the less favored sibling.

Yes: Parents may engage in parental differential treatment (PDT), favoring some siblings over others. PDT is associated with negative mental health outcomes for the less favored sibling.

If the abbreviation you’re using is so common that it has become a dictionary-approved word such as “IQ,” you don’t need to worry about this introduction method. If you’re unsure whether you need to introduce a word or not, don’t hesitate to look up an abbreviation at m-
Practice: Know How to Abbreviate Terms

Now it’s your turn! See which of these sentences have correctly formatted and introduced abbreviations.

1. I received my degree in S.F.L. at B.Y.U.
2. J.R.R. Tolkien is one of my favorite authors.
3. The high school offers a variety of classes on Family and Consumer Science (FACS).
4. Teenagers face many different types of pressure and stress, and these factors can in turn influence their GPA.
5. My employer asked me to report the incident to the LIC (Library Incident Council).

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. The American Women’s Business Association (A.W.B.A.) offers personal and professional tips to its members.
   1. no changes
   2. Women’s | (AWBA)
   3. Women’s’ | (AWBA)
   4. Women’s’ | (A.W.B.A.)

See answer key on page 103.

Formatting Numbers

In APA style, rules for writing out numbers are fairly simple. First of all, numbers one to nine should be spelled out with letters. Numbers 10 and above should be formatted with numerals.

**No:** I went on a trip to St. George for 3 days with my best friend last summer.

**Yes:** I went on a trip to St. George for three days with my best friend last summer.

**No:** Although forty-two may or may not be the answer to everything, I did find one answer that day.

**Yes:** Although 42 may or may not be the answer to everything, I did find one answer that day.

However, you should keep a few exceptions to these rules in mind as you write.

Whenever a number begins a sentence, title, or heading, it should be spelled out—no matter how big the number is. You should spell out simple fractions such as “one half.” Also, be
aware of certain phrases that might be acceptable in a spelled out form like “the Twelve Apostles.”

No: 76 trombones led the big parade, I heard.

Yes: Seventy-six trombones led the big parade, I heard.

You may sometimes mention numbers that represent scores, points on a scale, chapters, etc. These references should be formatted consistently as numerals.

No: Have you read Chapter Four from the textbook yet?

Yes: Have you read Chapter 4 from the textbook yet?

This instruction is simply a brief overview of how to handle numbers in APA writing. Read this quick guide [https://edtechbooks.org/-hqU] to learn more about what kinds of exceptions you might see in your field and what you’ll be expected to follow in your own writing.

Practice: Formatting Numbers

Now it’s your turn! Read these sentences carefully and determine which numbers have been formatted correctly according to APA style.

1. My father was raised in a family of twelve children.
2. One limitation of this study stems from the lack of environment control.
3. 3 is my favorite number, and I also like multiples of 3 such as 27.
4. I tried pronouncing the word 10 times before giving up.
5. Most children are excited to get baptized when they turn 8.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Our creative writing team has three goals, stay positive, be creative, and be responsible.
   1. no changes
   2. 3 | goals:
   3. 3 | goals,
   4. three | goals:

See answer key on page 103.

6C. Employ quotation marks consistently.

Different writing genres use quotes differently (e.g., literature reviews in the social sciences rarely use them, but public scholarship may regularly use them). Quotations can strengthen
and support your points, so you’ll need to know how to punctuate them correctly. In this section, we’ll talk about two ways that you can quote people, and we will also give you some other general mechanics to be aware of when dealing with quotations.

**Little Punctuation Goes Inside; Big Punctuation Goes Outside**

First, let’s talk about how punctuation should be formatted with quotation marks in general. Whether you’re quoting an entire sentence or a single word, should your punctuation go inside or outside the quotation marks? There are two rules that you should always follow: (a) little punctuation goes inside, and (b) big punctuation goes outside.

All small punctuation marks, essentially the period and the comma, *always go inside* quotation marks, even when the original quote did not include that punctuation mark. (When you need to use APA rules for standardizing citations, that’s a different matter, but otherwise, always keep periods and commas inside quotation marks.)

**No:** He said he was “joking”, but I didn’t believe him.

**Yes:** He said he was “joking,” but I didn’t believe him.

**No:** Make sure your little punctuation stays on the “inside”.

**Yes:** Make sure your little punctuation stays on the “inside.”

**No:** On a small piece of paper, he clearly wrote, “I am not going”, though I returned it and replied, “You really should”.

**Yes:** On a small piece of paper, he clearly wrote, “I am not going,” though I returned it and replied, “You really should.”

In contrast, bigger punctuation marks, like semicolons, colons, question marks, and exclamation points, tend to stay *outside* of quotation marks unless they were actually included in the original quotation.

**No:** Does America truly believe that “all men are created equal?”

**Yes:** Does America truly believe that “all men are created equal”?

Since we know that this phrase from the Declaration of Independence didn’t have a question mark in the original source, we keep the question mark from our sentence on the outside of the quotation marks.

Here’s one more example:

**No:** In my talk, I plan to discuss the meaning of the lyrics in “Choose the Right;” this hymn is known by most members of the Church.
Yes: In my talk, I plan to discuss the meaning of the lyrics in “Choose the Right”; this hymn is known by most members of the Church.

Since there is no semicolon in the title of the hymn “Choose the Right,” we kept the semicolon outside of the quotation marks.

**Practice: Little Punctuation Goes Inside; Big Punctuation Goes Outside**

Now it’s your turn! See which sentence examples keep small punctuation inside and big punctuation outside of quotation marks.

2. People may think you are “weird”; those people just don’t appreciate individuality.
3. Teenagers may describe experiences of “FOMO,” or “fear of missing out”.
4. I can’t wait for my own “happily ever after”!
5. What did the teacher mean by saying “you earn your grades?”

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. In preparation for tomorrow’s class discussion please read the handout entitled “Principles of Civil Discourse on Sensitive Topics.”
   1. no changes
   2. discussion, | Topics”.
   3. discussion, | Topics.”
   4. discussion | Topics”.

See answer key on page 104.

**Using Correct Punctuation with Dialogue Tags and Blended Quotations**

The first way you can quote someone is to use a **dialogue tag**. This is one of the most common ways to quote other people, especially when you want to quote an entire sentence. The dialogue tags we tend to use in these situations are phrases like “he said” or “she said.”

This kind of quotation via dialogue is the exact same kind of format you would find in the dialogue of a novel—we’re just using the same principles in a more academic setting. You can find countless examples in just about any novel that you read, but in general, remember that you should enter and exit dialogue with commas. Here’s some different examples of various cases to illustrate the different places where you might use quotations in your sentences and how dialogue tags should work around those quotations:

Yes: “This is a friendly reminder to use commas instead of periods when you quote something in your paper with a dialogue tag,” she said.
**Yes:** He explained, “You also need to use a comma before your quote if you’ve used a
dialogue tag to introduce your sentence. And don’t forget to capitalize the first word of the
quote.”

**Yes:** “However,” she added, “it’s also appropriate to use commas if there is a dialogue tag in
the middle of the sentence you’re quoting.”

Look closely at how each of these sentences are punctuated. If you use a dialogue tag, no
matter where your quotation comes in the sentence, either introduce or leave the quote with
commas (or both) and make sure that the first word of the quote is capitalized. Any
continuation of a quote after an interrupting dialogue tag, like in the third example, doesn’t
need to be capitalized.

You can also choose to use a colon to introduce a quotation, but remember the one rule we
always keep for colons: They must follow an IC! This means that common tags like “he said”
or “she said” don’t work.

**No:** He explained: “This is not how you introduce a quotation with a colon.”

**Yes:** He explained the new grammar principle: “This is how you introduce a quotation with a
colon.”

The second way you can incorporate quotations into your papers is by blending them into
your sentences. We especially use this style of quoting when we only want to use part of a
statement from another author, such as using a phrase or partial sentence. You can still use
dialogue tags with this method, but they will look a little different. Instead of just saying “he
said” or “she said,” you’ll often use a phrase more like “he said that” or “she said that.”
Here’s an example:

**Yes:** The scientist claimed that “bunnies are going to be the cause of a worldwide carrot
shortage.”

Notice how no comma follows “that” and that “bunnies” isn’t capitalized even though it’s the
first word in the quotation. This is because we’re doing everything we can to blend this
quote into the sentence as if the quotation marks weren’t there. And if the quotation marks
weren’t there, we would never put a comma after “that” or randomly capitalize a word in
the middle of a sentence. In this way, we’ve successfully blended the quotation into our
sentence, only including quotations around the actual words stated by the person we are
quoting but still keeping the meaning of the sentence flowing beautifully.

Let’s see another example.

**No:** Peter Pan insists that, “A happy thought” is necessary to fly.

See how the comma gives the reader an awkward pause in the sentence? And there’s no
need to capitalize “a” since it’s in the middle of the sentence.
Yes: Peter Pan insists that “a happy thought” is necessary to fly.

Whenever you have a quote that you’re trying to incorporate in this way, you can try writing the sentence as if it were truly all one sentence and then slip in the quotation marks wherever they belong. Just make sure you use the exact wording of the original source to be completely accurate. If you try this trick, you’ll probably end up with the right punctuation.

Practice: Use Correct Punctuation with Dialogue Tags and Blended Quotations

Now it’s your turn! Take a look at these examples of quoted material and see if the punctuation works with the dialogue tags correctly or not or if the quotations blend in correctly. If not, add or remove the necessary punctuation and capitalization. (These and following examples are going to ignore APA citations for now.)

1. Elder Christofferson wisely said “To persevere firm and steadfast in the faith of Christ requires that the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrate one’s heart and soul.”
2. Elder Anderson said that only believing parts of The Family: A Proclamation to the World can “Cloud our eternal view, putting too much importance on our experience here and now.”
3. Elder Rasband explained that by using the Atonement to, “press forward with faith, we are fortified against the adversary.”
4. “Our mortal life is designed by a loving God to be a test and source of growth for each of us” President Eyring instructed.
5. President Oaks gave this statement: “Under the great plan of our loving Creator, the mission of His restored Church is to help the children of God achieve the supernal blessing of exaltation in the celestial kingdom, which can be attained only through an eternal marriage between a man and a woman.”
6. Elder Soares taught that, “When we earnestly, heartily, firmly, and sincerely seek to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach it to one another, these teachings may transform hearts.”
7. President Ballard has told us that “loving God and loving our neighbors is the doctrinal foundation of ministering.”
8. President Nelson taught “The new home-centered, Church-supported integrated curriculum has the potential to unleash the power of families, as each family follows through conscientiously and carefully to transform their home into a sanctuary of faith.”
9. Elder Holland explained that “our modified Sunday service is to emphasize the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as the sacred, acknowledged focal point of our weekly worship experience.”
10. “Lessons taught through the traditions we establish in our homes,” said Elder Steven R. Bangerter, “though small and simple, are increasingly important in today’s world.”

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”
1. Devin said “Give the Family Life Education Seminar notes to whomever you want.”
   1. no changes
   2. said, “Give | whomever
   3. said “Give | whoever
   4. said, “Give | whoever

See answer key on page 104.

**Using Brackets and Ellipses Appropriately in Quotations**

Sometimes when you’re blending in a quotation with your sentence, you’ll need to adjust the wording for everything to make sense grammatically. While you should never alter a quote on a whim, using **brackets** as a tool to adjust your quotations is appropriate. You might also decide that you don’t need the entire quote. The following information helps you know how to adjust those quotations accurately so they fit well within your text.

Essentially, whatever you change in a quotation, you must put those changes within square brackets. This practice is especially important for your credibility as an author. For example, if your readers were to look up a quote you used and found that you’d changed the wording without acknowledging your changes in brackets, they might doubt how accurate you’ve been in your research or wonder what other changes you might have made to other quotes. Earn your readers’ trust by being transparent with your changes.

Here’s an example of how to use brackets to alter a quote correctly:

**Original Quote:** Elder Gong said, “Jesus Christ calls us in His voice and His name. He seeks and gathers us. He teaches us how to minister in love.”

Now let’s try to blend this quote into a sentence.

**No:** Elder Gong reminds us that the Savior will “teaches us how to minister in love.”

**No:** Elder Gong reminds us that the Savior will “teach us how to minister in love.”

**Yes:** Elder Gong reminds us that the Savior will “[teach] us how to minister in love.”

**Yes:** Elder Gong reminds us that the Savior will show “us how to minister in love.”

See how leaving the original verb from the quote, “teaches,” wasn’t grammatically correct for our new sentence? However, we couldn’t just change it like we did in the second sentence. Adding brackets around the word we changed in the third example shows our readers that we are consciously weaving another’s words into our own and making reliable changes that don’t skew the meaning. Another option is to place quotes around only the actual words, as in the fourth example, while being true to the original idea.

Let’s do another example.
**Original Quote:** Elder Uchtdorf said, “Wherever you are on this earth, there are plenty of opportunities to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Now we’ll add brackets. Notice how every change is marked clearly by the brackets in the correct example.

**No:** As Elder Uchtdorf has taught, we know that “wherever we are on this earth, we have plenty of opportunities to share” the gospel.

**Yes:** As Elder Uchtdorf has taught, we know that “wherever [we] are on this earth, [we have] plenty of opportunities to share” the gospel.

Another way that we sometimes alter quotes is by leaving out portions of quoted material that is not central to our meaning, especially when a quote is too long for our purposes. We show these omissions in the middle of a quote through **ellipses**, which are the three periods you see in a row. (There is no need to place ellipses before or after the quote, since we assume that the material you are quoting from likely has text before and after it.)

Just like you must be careful with using your brackets accurately, you must do the same with how you utilize ellipses to keep the trust of your readers. When you use ellipses in the middle of a sentence, you should begin with a space, use a space between each period, and end with a space. Incidentally, scriptural passages can be followed by the reference in parenthesis, as shown, and do not need to be hyperlinked or included in a reference list when you use them in public scholarship pieces.

**No:** “I give...men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

**No:** “I give...men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

**No:** “I give ... men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

**Yes:** “I give . . . men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

Sometimes, you will need to use ellipses to cut out more than just a few words. If the portion you’ve cut out includes a new sentence, you need to show that by using **four periods**. And this time, you don’t need to start off with a space—just end with one.

**No:** “And if men come unto me . . . I will make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

Although this ellipses has been formatted normally, it’s missing the fourth period to show that this omission covers a sentence break.

**Yes:** “And if men come unto me. . . . I will make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).
Practice: Use Brackets and Ellipses Appropriately in Quotations

Now it’s your turn! Look up these quotes in the following scripture references and see if they’ve been altered correctly with brackets for #1-5 and for ellipses in #6-10.

**Brackets:**

1. As disciples of Christ, we understand that “a man cannot serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24).
2. The scriptures teach that we must “choose . . . this day whom we will serve” (Joshua 24:15).
3. Although failing can be frustrating, we know that Heavenly Father “[gives] unto men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).
4. In today’s world, we understand that we must make positive choices every day, for “by small and simple things great things are brought to pass” (Alma 37:6).
5. The Savior has reassured us many times that He “will not leave us comfortless,” but He “will come to us” (John 14:18) if we have faith and “doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:36).

**Ellipses:**

1. Nephi taught us the power of obedience when he said “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that . . . he shall prepare a way” (1 Nephi 3:7).
2. We are promised that if our “bowels also be full of charity towards all men . . . then shall [our] confidence wax strong in the presence of God” (D&C 121:45).
3. It is important to treat our bodies with respect and care because our “body is the temple of the Holy Ghost...and [we] are not [our] own” (1 Corinthians 6:19).
4. Most missionaries have memorized Joseph Smith’s account of the First Vision: “I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me, I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (Joseph Smith History 1:16-17).
5. I have always found comfort in this verse about the Savior’s Atonement: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ... and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Mr. Jones’ would always tell us to “trust our gut, . . . and everything would turn out all right.”
   1. no changes
   2. Mr. Jones [ gut, . . . and ]
3. Mr. Jones’ gut,...and
4. Mr. Jones | gut,...and

Well done! You have finished this grammar course and refined your understanding and ability to apply principles of structure, power, and clarity to your writing. As you incorporate these principles into your writing, you’ll see the dividends as you become well respected for your professional communication. Most importantly, you’ll be able to share important information with readers about the family in ways that will be accurate, convincing, and memorable.

**Answer Key**

To see the Answer Key for all Exercises in this chapter, go to this Google document [https://edtechbooks.org/-aLLP].

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