

## Grammar List

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### The Grammar List: 10 Common Grammar Mistakes to Avoid

Strong grammar and mechanics are crucial for being a strong writer. If your writing is littered with grammar mistakes, it doesn't matter how strong the ideas are, your reader will get frustrated, give up, and not take the writing seriously. This is true not only in writing college papers, but also with any written form of communication. An email you send to a client or employer will also be judged as such if the writing has poor grammar. With so much of our communication occurring through writing, especially today with the expansiveness of the internet, grammar has become even more important. Often, the first impression someone has of you will be your writing, which is why knowing the common grammar pitfalls will help keep that first impression clean and easy to read.



## **Misused Homophones**

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Homophones are words with the same sounds, but different spellings and meanings. There is a long list of homophones, but some of the commonly misused ones are:

1. Than, then

I would rather be here than there. = Except, other

Let's go to a movie and then eat pizza. = Next, after

2. To, too, two

They went to see if there were any tickets left. = Direction

I was too excited to sit down. = More than necessary

The man ordered two coffees. = Number

3. Its, it's

The tree beat its branches against the window. = Possession

It's always so sad when a dog runs away. = It is

4. There, their, they're

There was a letter in the mailbox. = Location

They're going on vacation this weekend. = They are

Their class ends at noon. = Possession

5. Principle, principal

The school principal was very strict. = Title, position

It was a principle of his not to lie. = Truth, idea, theory

6. Your, you're

Your homework is due every Sunday at 11:59 PM. = Possession

If you're tired, you should go take a nap. = You are

## **Wordiness**

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Wordiness occurs when we use filler to extend a sentence. It may happen because we aren't exactly sure what we want to say, or how to say it. Always try to simplify. Don't get caught trying to say too much at once. Keep it simple and say it straight.

**Wordiness:** While not always crucial to understanding the matter of whether good grades denote high intelligence, many universities believe it's a matter of fact that strong testing reveals capable students.

**Simplified:** Many universities look at test scores when determining whether a perspective student will be able to handle a college workload.



## Misused or Missing Commas

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There are a few rules that apply to commas, each with their own purpose and reasoning. That being said, the main use of a comma in all instances is to add a space or breath to the writing. It's easiest to tell when to use a comma if you read your writing out loud. When you read it out loud, you'll find yourself wanting to pause for emphasis, just as you would if speaking naturally. This is where the comma would go. Again, this is an umbrella rule for commas under which the other more specific comma rules fall. Some, but not all, of the specific rules can be seen in the following examples:

**Introductory comma after words or phrases:** However, there was no monster under the bed.

**Interrupting comma:** With a little luck, and a whole lot of hard work, he finished his project.

**Series comma:** I went to the store for milk, eggs, and bread.

**Separating clause comma:** This course is hard, but I'm learning a lot of great information.

## Vague Pronouns

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A vague pronoun is when we use a pronoun (he, she, they, it, etc) without it being clear who or what we are referring to. A good example would be:

**Vague Pronoun:** *They said that we could colonize Mars in the next century.*

**Corrected:** *NASA scientists said that humans could colonize Mars in the next century.*

If the reader doesn't know whom you're referring to, they'll be forced to stop and read back over material they already read to try and connect who or what the pronoun is referring to.

## Run-On Sentences

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Any sentence that is actually two or more sentences pushed together constitutes a run-on sentence. To fix these sentences, you just need to break them up into separate sentences, reword them, or put in the proper punctuation.

**Incorrect:** *The dog loved to be in the woods behind the old farmhouse where he kept his bones buried under the oak tree but he enjoyed the warmth of the fire inside best.*

**One Possible Correction:** *Though the dog loved to be in the woods behind the old farmhouse, which is where he kept his bones buried under the oak tree, he preferred the warmth of the fire inside.*



## **Lack of Sentence Variation**

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When all our sentences are of the same length and space, we create a monotonous effect. Think of it like a person who speaks in a monotone voice; it becomes boring to listen to and we lose interest. It's important that you mix up sentence lengths to create a natural rhythm in your writing:

1. Use shorter sentences for a bold effect.
2. Use longer sentences to explain detailed ideas.
3. Use medium sentences to transition.

**The sentences outlined above don't always have to be used in the manner prescribed, but you'll often see them used in the capacities above.**

## **Passive Voice**

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Academic writing should have what is called active voice. To put it simply, active voice means the subject in a sentence is performing the action of the sentence i.e., the dancers danced across the stage. Passive voice is the reverse, meaning the subject is instead being acted upon by the verb i.e., *across the stage the danced the dancers*. Active voice usually denotes a strong, clear, and declarative style. Passive voice usually is attributed with less ownership and can be seen when we put the subject of the sentence the end while the object is put at the beginning.

## **Unnecessary Font Changes or Punctuation Usage**

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When writing, you might feel compelled to add in an exclamation point for effect or capitalize an entire word for the same reason. Steer clear of those stylistic choices. Rather than bolding a word, or using unnecessary punctuation, trust that your writing can convey the importance of a moment without drawing such attention to it. Though bolding or italicizing a word for effect or emphasis can be used, it should be used infrequently.



## Slang / Text-Talk

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Since we communicate so often through writing via emails, texts, social media, etc., it's crucial to shake those "shorthand" habits when writing academic papers or professional emails. Make sure you spell out the correct words and spell out acronyms.

**Incorrect:** *BTW, if ur gonna be late, call me ASAP.*

**Correct:** *By the way, if you're going to be late, call me as soon as you can.*

## Semicolon Usage

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Semicolons are used to join two clauses that, while are more than capable of standing on their own as their own sentences, work much better together stylistically. You can write a whole paper without semicolons, so long as you're breaking up those clauses where you would usually put a semicolon. It really depends on the writer to some extent and how they want their work to be read and appear on the page. Do not use semicolons when conjunctions (but, or, etc.) are used.

**Incorrect:** *I went to the park my father went to work.*

**Correct:** *I went to the park; my father went to work.*

**Incorrect:** *School is hard working minimum wage is harder.*

**Correct:** *School is hard; working minimum wage is harder.*

**\*The incorrect sentences could have also been altered to use a conjunction and comma instead of the semicolon, or by breaking the sentence into two separate sentences\***