Grammar Guys
Guide to Writing Errors
The absolute danger of absolutes

Grammar Guys

What Is an Absolute?
An absolute is a word that makes a statement either 100% right or 100% wrong and is rarely true unless you are talking about biological processes. Stop using absolutes to make claims you can’t prove. In other words, they can make you a liar.

Examples of absolute words:

Always Every No None Everyone Everybody All No One Nobody Never Only Everything Nothing

These are very likely untrue statements.

- Everyone knows that.
- Nobody cares about your problems.
- Rocco always lies about everything.
- No one respects women more than I do.
- Nothing ever gets done unless I do it.
- Every person on welfare is a slacker.
- The president is never wrong.
- None of the immigrants are good people.
- All people who smoke weed are bad.
- The only people who hate me are morons.
- Everybody in Congress is a corrupt politician.
When you advise someone, you give them advice.

**ADVISE** is a verb.  
**ADVICE** is a noun.

To remember it, think of ice which is also a noun (a thing).

The Boss **advised** us to control the activity going on at the wharf. We took his advice and advised the guys down there to stop interfering with our business. If they’re smart, they’ll take our advice.

We **advise** you not to give advice to anyone about their personal life even if they ask you to advise them. You’ll be blamed if they take your advice and it goes wrong, so take our advice and don’t advise anyone about their personal drama! Now, **that’s** some good advice! You’ve been well advised!

Some additional advice about the words **CAPITAL** and **CAPITOL**

**Capitol** (with an o) is a building that often has a dome on top. In all other cases use capital (with an a).

We have a lot of capital (money). Murder is a capital offense.

All proper nouns start with a capital letter. A state **capitol** building is usually located in each state’s capital. The **Capitol** is on Capitol Hill.
Two words may sound the same, but they can’t be interchanged.

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Here are a couple of words that people confuse regularly:

Learn the difference between

AFFECT
AND
EFFECT

Affect is a verb: it is something you do. To remember it, think of action verb.

Effect is a noun: a thing.

Something has an effect on something.

Something is affected by something. If something has an influence on something else, it affects it. The boss affects the way we do business.

Your attitude in school or work has an effect on how successful you are.

Your attitude in school or at work affects how successful you are. Go for the best effect!

The effect on the economy was bad. Poor job growth affected it negatively.

Tony’s decision to steal from us affected him in a bad way. The effect was that he lost his job. It will affect him for years to come. What effect did he think it would have?
A lot vs. Allot

Grammar Guys

There is no such word as *alot*. If you have a great deal of something, you have **a lot** of something. (two words)

There is a word spelled *allot* (one word with two Ls). When you *allot* something, you give out portions.

- Jimmy spends **a lot** of time plotting shakedowns while he’s at his desk.
- We were *allotted* $300,000 by the boss to make the deal.
- Joe *allotted* him twenty minutes to think about it.
- The newspaper will *allot* a full page to each of the recent disappearances.
- We collected **a lot** of money this week.
- A **lot** of thugs are scared of us.

Many people spell **a lot** as *alot*. Don’t be one of them.

We are not going to *allot** a lot** of time explaining this.

Don’t mix them up.
Another tip from the Grammar Guys

No double negatives in English!

Don’t use two negative words in a simple sentence. In most cases, you can change the second negative word to ANY or ANYTHING.

Wrong:
I don’t have no money.
This means I do have some money.

Right:
I don’t have any money.
Or
I have no money.

Al never did nothing for us.

Al never did anything for us.

Louie doesn’t know nothing.

Louie doesn’t know anything.

We don’t have none.

We have none. OR We don’t have any.

If Shorty doesn’t have no money, it means he does have some money, and we’re going to get it.

Negative Words:
no not none never nothing

They all begin with the letter N.
ANY MORE vs. ANYMORE

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ANY MORE and ANYMORE are two terms that sound alike but cannot be used interchangeably.

Any more (two words) refers to quantities. It is a determiner meaning “even the smallest amount” and is usually followed by a noun.

Anymore (one word) refers to time. It is an adverb meaning “any longer” and is never followed by a noun. It is only seen in questions and negative statements.

EXAMPLES

If Tony takes any more bribes from the Brooklyn gang, he will not be walking on two legs anymore.

If he does it anymore, we will not give him any more chances to continue working for us - or anyone else for that matter.

Whether or not he likes it does not matter anymore.

We don’t buy property anymore because we don’t need any more property.

CHECK IT AND CUFF IT. TEST YOURSELF.

1. The price of gas is not cheap (anymore any more).
2. Louie can’t track a suspect (any more anymore) than Jimmy and I can fly to Mars.
3. Ever since Gino got married, he doesn’t have (any more anymore) time to party (any more anymore).
The Apostrophe

Grammar Guys

This is called an apostrophe.

It is used to show possession.

It is also used to show that one or more letters is missing when you ram two words together to create a new word called a contraction.

d + not = don’t
The apostrophe takes the place of the ‘o’ in not.

does + not = doesn’t
The apostrophe takes the place of the ‘o’ in not.

is + not = isn’t
The apostrophe takes the place of the ‘o’ in not.

could + have = could’ve
The apostrophe takes the place of the ‘ha’ in have.

should + have = should’ve
The apostrophe takes the place of the ‘ha’ in have.

it + is = it’s
The apostrophe takes the place of the ‘i’ in is.

we + are = we’re
The apostrophe takes the place of the ‘a’ in are.
The Apostrophe Part 2

Grammar Guys

Use the apostrophe to indicate possession: that something belongs to someone or something.

Learn it and apply it.

- When you want to show one person owns something, the apostrophe goes before the ‘s’. Example: the guy’s money.

- When you want to show more than one person owns something, the apostrophe goes after the ‘s’. Example: the guys’ money.

- Apostrophes are NEVER used to make a word plural.

Check it and Cuff it!

Which dinner party promises to be more entertaining, Number 1 or Number 2?

1. My mama is throwing a dinner party, and all my sisters’ boyfriends will be coming.

2. My mama is throwing a dinner party, and all my sister’s boyfriends will be coming.

Which is going to cost us less, Number 1 or Number 2?

1. All the limo’s tires need to be changed.

2. All the limos’ tires need to be changed.

Both of our parents are still living, and they just bought a house. My sister lives with them, so which is correct, Number 1 or Number 2?

1. My sister lives in my parent’s house.

2. My sister lives in my parents’ house.
There is no such word as **aks** in English. There is a word that sounds like it, but it’s spelled **axe**. When you **axe** someone, you put an axe through his skull, or you chop off an arm or finger with an axe. If you **axe** a man for money, it means you kill him for money. That can get you in big trouble.

If you can say **task**, you can say **ask**.

If you mean **ask**, say **ask**; don’t say **axe**.
English has a lot of capitalization rules, most of which are tied to common sense.

Here is some advice on when to capitalize the word “president”, “governor”, and other power distinctions.

Capitalize the word “president” when it comes before someone’s name. Don’t when it doesn’t:

- She saw President Trump at the airport.
- She saw the president at the airport.
- Tomorrow, Governor Brown will be speaking at the conference.
- Tomorrow, the governor will be speaking at the conference.
- The mayor of New York City will be there.
- The president of the United States will not be there.

Capitalize president and its derivatives when part of a multi-word term:

- The Presidential Council on Foreign Relations

In all other cases, don’t capitalize it.

Some people insist on capitalizing president when referring to “the” president of a country or organization - out of “respect”. It’s not necessary. If you capitalize it, don’t expect others to follow suit . . . because they don’t have to.

- The president will now speak. Please welcome the president of the United States, Donald Trump.
Don’t capitalize words just because you think they are important. Capitalization is not used to emphasize the importance of a word or concept.

Our associate, Wes ‘The Pimp’ Hooker, asked, “If I am trying to show something is Important, shouldn’t I always Capitalize it? Anyway that is what I do, and it’s my Choice!”

We set him and his choices straight, and now he knows, and so do you, so stop it, or we’ll send one of your fingers to the boss, too. (Notice comma usage here.)

Capitalization is reserved for proper nouns and the official names of things, like Sharky’s Loan Palace, Vinnie’s Diner and Funeral Home, Homeland Security, Deadman’s Wharf, Russo’s Gun Emporium, and other things we will discuss on an upcoming page. For now, stop capitalizing words you want to emphasize.
Check it and Cuff it with Grammar Guys

Here's some logic about commas and quotation marks.

If what appears in quotation marks is a complete sentence (or part of a conversation), put the comma **before** the end quotation marks.

If what appears in quotation marks is a word, group of words, or incomplete thought, put the comma **after** the end quotation marks.

"You better pay up," he warned. Buddy's making some "cement boots", just your size. When Jimmy gets "difficult", be careful. He'll show you "difficult". "I never said you took the money," pleaded Tony.
All research requires citations; in fact, you cannot conduct research without them. If you turn in a research paper without citations, you deserve to fail, so don’t whine if you do. And don’t say you didn’t know because I’m telling you now.

A citation is information about who wrote something, what the title of it was, where you found it on the Internet, where and when it was published, the date you looked it up, etc. Some instructors require you to give them a web address (URL) as well. If your instructors ask for something, and you don’t provide it, you’re not earning an A.

Here’s an MLA citation for an article about Bugsy Siegel I found online:


Here’s an APA citation for the same article:


Ask your instructors which format they require for research papers in the courses they teach.
Always Strive for CLARITY

Grammar Guys

Readers can’t read your mind.

They can only read what you write, so don’t make them have to consult a crystal ball to figure out what you’re trying to say. Chances are they don’t have one.

Some questions to ask yourself before submitting any piece of writing:

- Do I need to elaborate further on some unclear point?
- Could I express it in another way?
- Have I provided examples and/or illustrations?
- Have I presented evidence that what I am saying is true, and have I explained why readers should believe me?
- Have I skipped over any important details and included all the information readers need in order to understand me?
- Have I used any jargon that needs to be defined?
- Have I said what any acronym stands for?
- Have I assumed readers know something they might not know?
- Could readers misinterpret something I’ve written - and have I cleared it up?
A clause is a group of words. There are two basic kinds of clauses: independent clauses and dependent clauses.

An independent clause is also called a simple sentence.

Here are some simple sentences (or independent clauses):

- Joey signed the contract.
- His hand was shaking.
- Freddy joined the organization.
- He had to start at the bottom.
- Louie could not afford to make payments.
- He borrowed money from the Boss.

When you are independent, you don’t need help from anyone. You pay your own bills. You stand on your own two feet. You don’t need assistance of any kind.

An independent clause doesn’t need help from anyone or anything. It stands alone as a complete sentence. It is the simplest kind of sentence.

Sometimes you want to combine two independent clauses to make a longer sentence. When you do this, you can use a coordinating conjunction to join them together, but you have to use a comma when you do it.
Remember these independent clauses?

Joey signed the contract.
His hand was shaking.
Freddy joined the organization.
He had to start at the bottom.
Louie could not afford to make payments.
He borrowed money from us.

Let’s combine them using a comma and a coordinating conjunction:

Joey signed the contract, and his hand was shaking.
Freddy joined the organization, but he had to start at the bottom.
Louie could not afford to make payments, so he borrowed money from us.

If you don’t put a comma in the sentences above, they all end up being punctuated wrong!

Review of RULE 1

You can join two independent clauses using a comma and a coordinating conjunction, but they both have to be independent clauses to do this. If one of them isn’t an independent clause, forget about it. We’ll deal with that later.

You can come with us now, or you can take a swim in the river.
Shorty was warned, yet he continues to accept cash under the table.
Pleading with the boss won’t do him any good, nor will it gain him any sympathy.
Vinnie is a loser, for he doesn’t think we’ll go after him.
Come and Came

Grammar Guys

In the South, we often hear people misusing the words come and came.

Yesterday, Joe come by my house.
Yesterday, Joe came by my house.

He has came to my house on many occasions.
He has come to my house on many occasions.

Look how far you’ve came!
Look how far you’ve come.
Look how far you came!
Look how far you came.

On Thursday, the Boss come by and told us to give Szonia $5000.
On Thursday, the Boss came by and told us to give Szonia $5000.

Szonia had came to the crib wanting money to go shopping, but Joe didn’t have any to give her (or so he told her).
Szonia had come to the crib wanting money to go shopping, but Joe didn’t have any to give her (or so he told her).

When you use “have”, “has”, or “had”, you need to use COME, not CAME.

For English Nerds:
COME is the present tense.
CAME is the past tense.
COME is the past participle, not CAME.
The Comma

You have to play by the rules if you want a paycheck in any organization. You have to play by the rules when you use commas, too. Too many people misuse them when they could learn a few basic rules and handle them correctly.

A comma can be your friend or your enemy. Make it your friend. We’ll show you how.

Rule 1

Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction – not after it.

What is a coordinating conjunction?

- When we coordinate something, like a plan, we have to make sure every player is on the same page; otherwise, the plan doesn’t go well.
- One of my girls, Bibi, has to coordinate her outfit before she’ll leave the house. She wants to make sure everything matches and works to her benefit.
- A conjunction is something that joins two things together.
- So a coordinating conjunction is a word that joins one sentence to another, making the final sentence complete. There are seven coordinating conjunctions.
COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

FOR  AND  NOR  BUT  OR  YET  SO

The best way to remember the seven coordinating conjunctions is to think of

FANBOYS

Not one of the seven is more than three letters long.

Remember them.
The trick is to look for the coordinating conjunction and ask yourself if the clauses on either side of it are independent. (i.e. Can both stand alone as complete sentences?) If they can, use a comma. If the clause following the coordinating conjunction is not a complete sentence, do not use a comma.

The rule is simple. Now, smile and nod.

Does the following sentence need a comma after Shorty’s?

Micky ate dinner at Shorty’s and went to work.

Does the following sentence need a comma after Shorty’s?

Micky ate dinner at Shorty’s and he went to work.

Let’s check your understanding.

Can you punctuate these sentences correctly?

Some might need a comma; others might not:

I saw Tony loading something into the back of his limo and walked up to him.

I saw Tony loading something into the back of his limo so I walked up to him.

Doc told Louie to stop eating pasta yet he continues to eat it every day.

Joey knew about the meeting but forgot about it on Tuesday.

When you learn something, you have to be able to prove it.
Here's some logic about commas and quotation marks.

If what appears in quotation marks is a complete sentence (or part of a conversation), put the comma **before** the end quotation marks.

If what appears in quotation marks is a word, group of words, or incomplete thought, put the comma **after** the end quotation marks.

This is a general rule. As with most structures in English, there are exceptions.

“You better pay up,” he warned. Buddy’s making some “cement boots”, just your size. When Jimmy gets “difficult”, be careful. He’ll show you “difficult”. “I never said you took the money,” pleaded Tony.
We hear people speak English wrong every day, and there is no good excuse for it. One of the worst errors we hear is the misuse of the word **DON’T**.

You might have heard it used incorrectly all your life, but that doesn’t make it okay – especially in college!

It is wrong to say “it don’t” or “he don’t” or “she don’t”. Andy Griffith might talk that way, but the folks in Mayberry don’t know how to speak well. That is a fact, not an opinion.

It should be: “it **doesn’t**” and “he **doesn’t**” and “she **doesn’t**”. If you insist on speaking English incorrectly, that’s your problem. We are here to help you succeed, not fail.

**CORRECT**

I don’t
You don’t
We don’t
They don’t
These don’t
Those don’t

**INCORRECT**

It don’t
He don’t
She don’t
That don’t
This don’t
Buddy don’t

Vinnie don’t show up for work most days, but it don’t matter because he’s going to be fired tomorrow. That don’t mean we are going to hire someone new. He thinks he don’t have any responsibilities, but he will know tomorrow he’s wrong. If that don’t make sense, it’s because there are errors in every sentence posted here.
Vinnie doesn’t show up for work most days, but it doesn’t matter because he’s going to be fired tomorrow. He thinks he doesn’t have any responsibilities, but he will know he’s wrong tomorrow. That doesn’t mean we are going to hire someone new. If this doesn’t sound right, it’s because you still think it’s okay to use don’t when you mean doesn’t.

Let’s check your understanding.

Choose the correct word in each of the sentences below.

My contract ( don’t doesn’t ) say anything about overtime.

The new guys ( don’t doesn’t ) know how to get someone to talk.

If Louie ( don’t doesn’t ) show up, we will have to go get him.

I saw the news article about Al’s accident, but it ( don’t doesn’t ) give all the details.

Their opinions of the Boss ( don’t doesn’t ) matter to anyone.

There ( don’t doesn’t ) seem to be anything wrong.
EVERYDAY vs EVERY DAY

There are two terms: everyday and every day.

The one-word term everyday is an adjective that describes something we do each day – like an everyday routine. It can also describe something we use each day, like our everyday limo.

The two-word term every day answers the question: “When?”

Do not confuse them.

Here are two example sentences using both versions:

I wear my everyday suits every day.

Vinnie called me every day, but I couldn’t get my everyday duties out of the way to call him back.

Two More

Every day Buddy conducts his everyday business.

Judy’s everyday hostility annoys everyone in the office every day.

So how well do you understand?

Test yourself!

Which of the sentences below are correct – and which are not?

I go to work everyday. —or— I go to work every day.

Louie’s screw-ups are an everyday occurrence. —or— Louie’s screw-ups are an every day occurrence.
**FARThER vs FURTHER**

**Grammar Guys**

Use the word "farther" for physical distance.

Use the word "further" for metaphorical, or figurative, distance.

Remember this: "farther" has the word "far" in it, and "far" relates to physical distance.

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**Let’s Check Your Understanding:**

We need to take Tony **farther** away from prying eyes.

Frankie says we beat him up, but nothing could be **further** from the truth.

Our office is **farther** down the road near the docks.

We need to discuss this **further**.

Jimmy asked Louie some **further** questions.

Louie moved **farther** away from him when Joe clenched his fist.
Grammar Guys

Know the Difference Between
FEWER and LESS

Generally speaking:

If you *can* count it, use **fewer**.
If it has a plural ‘s’ on the end, use **fewer**.
Examples: fingers, opportunities, cars, chances, crimes, guns, people, solutions

If you *can’t* count it, use **less**.
Examples: money, freedom, happiness, culture, class, attitude, concrete, foolishness

Of course, there are exceptions, but you’re smart enough to learn them.

Sample sentences

⭐ Tony has fewer fingers than he did yesterday. He also has less money.

⭐ My advice to you: Less attitude and fewer mistakes.

⭐ It takes less time to do it right when fewer people are involved.
Grammar Guys

The hyphenated one works as an adjective.

FIVE-YEAR-OLD vs FIVE YEARS OLD

Sometimes you have to hyphenate age, and sometimes you don’t. There is a trick to knowing when to add hyphens.

If it’s **year**, add hyphens.

If it’s **years**, don’t add hyphens.

If there is no ‘s’ on ‘year’, hyphenate.

**EXAMPLES:**

- My nine-year-old Glock is nine years old.
- The one-year-old Ferrari Tony drives is one year old.
- Our organization is 150 years old, so we belong to a 150-year-old organization.

Let’s see how well you understand this **concept**.

Two of the sentences below are correct.
- The other two are wrong.
- Do you know which two are correct?

The boss just gave me a three-year contract.
The boss just gave me a three year contract.
Buddy completed a three-day job in two days.
Buddy completed a three day job in two-days.
A word about writing an introduction from the Grammar Guys

You must introduce your readers to your paper. Let them know what it’s going to be about. Prepare them for what’s to come. Make them want to read further.

Very important

7 hard-hitting ways to write a winning introduction:

☆ Startle readers with a remark or statistic.
☆ Present a problem, or ask a question.
☆ Challenge a popular assumption or opinion.
☆ Compare or contrast two things, or make an analogy.
☆ Tell a short, quick story, or describe a scene.
☆ Use a quotation relevant to your paper.
☆ Define an important term or concept.

Many people write their introductions after they’ve written the rest of the paper. It’s easier to go back and introduce something that’s already been written.
Another tip from the Grammar Guys

Learn the difference!

**its**

means "belonging to it"
It never means "it is".

It’s beyond me why people make this mistake because it’s pretty easy to understand.

We keep the money in its own special place.

We kicked Tony’s door off its hinges.

**it’s**

means "it is"
or "it has"
It never means anything else.

It’s been done many times before.

When the boss says do it, we make sure it’s done.

It’s come to our attention that Tony stole money.
LOAN is a noun - a thing.

We gave Nico a loan of 20 grand. That means we lent him 20 grand.

If we lend you money, you can best believe there will be interest on that loan.

We do not loan someone money; we lend someone money.

LEND is a verb - something you do.

Joe lends money to Jimmy.

LOANED is not even a word in English, so stop treating it like it is.

We lend money.

This is a loan.

The past tense of LEND is LENT, as in:

Last week, we lent Louie $12,000. We consider it a loan he will have to pay back.

The next time we lend you money, pay back the loan, or Vinnie will break your kneecaps.

U.S. of A., people say “She loaned me something,” and it has become a part of the common vernacular (acceptable). It is grammatically wrong, however.
LETS vs LET’S
Grammar Guys

LETS and LET’S both come from the verb LET.

LETS means “let us”.
- Let’s go down to Shorty’s and see if we can collect.
- Let’s not waste any more time on this.
- Let’s meet at midnight.
- Let’s go!

LETS means allows.
- The boss lets us handle business our own way.
- Jimmy lets Louie get away with murder.
- If Shorty lets Vinnie’s guys start trouble in his bar, the boss is not going to be happy.

Let’s get something straight.
If you work for us, no one lets you off the hook if you steal from us.

LET’S
Let + Us = Let’s.
The apostrophe takes the place of the “u” in “us”.

Let’s not forget how to use these two words.

Let’s talk about the difference between these two words.
Joe never lets anyone touch the books.

When your moll says, “Let’s go shopping,” be sure you have a lot of extra cash on hand!
**LIE vs. LAY**

**LIE**

is an *intransitive* verb: the action *is not transferred* to something else. Nothing receives the action from whatever or whoever is doing it - other than whatever or whoever is doing it. *Lie* means *to be in a horizontal position*. It is usually followed by a preposition (such as *on, in, over, down, across, around*).

The past tense of *lie* is *lay*, not *laid* or *lied*.

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**LAY**

is a *transitive* verb: the action *is transferred* to something else. Something receives the action from whatever or whoever is doing it - other than whatever or whoever is doing it. *Lay* means *to set or put something down*. You have to have something to lay. *Lay* is usually followed by the name of the thing being laid.

The past tense of *lay* is *laid*.

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**EXAMPLES**

I *lie* in bed when I’m tired. Yesterday I *lay* in bed all day.

When Maria goes to the beach, she *lays* the blanket on the sand, and then she *lies* on it. She *lies* out in the sun; she doesn’t *lay* out.

Where did you *lay* the money? Is it *lying* on the table over there?

The boss *laid* the contract on the desk. It was *lying* there when I walked in. It had *lain* there all day. (”*Lain*” is used with “had”.)

The gun *lies* where you left it. Why did you *lay* it there, anyway?
Loose vs. Lose

Grammar Guys

Loose lips can lose you a job.

*Loose* is an adjective that means not firmly or tightly fixed in place; detached or able to be detached; not fitting tightly or closely.

*Lose* is a verb that means be deprived of or cease to have or retain (something); undergo a reduction of; waste or fail to take advantage of (time or an opportunity); unable to find.

You will lose your job if you’re loose with the boss’s money.

My tie is a little loose so I don’t lose my ability to breathe.

Losers lose their teeth when we break them loose.
There is a simple way to know when to use me and when to use I. Take the following sentence, for example:

One day the boss told my partner and I to pay Vinnie a visit.

Make two sentences out of it – one for each person:

One day the boss told my partner to pay Vinnie a visit.

One day the boss told I to pay Vinnie a visit.

See how I doesn’t make sense in the second sentence? That means you should use me instead. If you break down this kind of sentence into two sentences, you will know which to use: I or me.

✓ One day the boss told my partner and me to pay Vinnie a visit.

Think you got it?

Let’s see. Which of the following sentences are correct – and which are wrong? Hint: Only one of them is correct!

My partner and me paid Vinnie a visit.

The boss gave Jimmy and I a cash bonus after our visit.

After our visit, Jimmy and I went to Shorty’s bar.

Shorty told Jimmy and I that Louie had been asking questions.
PAST PARTICIPLE

Many people do not use the past participle when it is needed, using the simple past instead. This has the tendency to make them sound ignorant. Unless you want to sound that way, don’t follow their lead.

Below are the most common mistakes we have heard. The wrong versions are under Buddy. The correct versions are directly under me.

**WRONG**

× She **had came** to the house before going to the store.

× Tony **has went** to the Boss for instructions.

× They **have spoke** to him on several occasions.

× The guys **had rode** with Tony that night.

× Vinnie **had ran** from us when he saw us.

× BiBi **had wrote** her paper the night before it was due.

**CORRECT**

✓ She **had come** to the house before going to the store.

✓ Tony **has gone** to the Boss for instructions.

✓ They **have spoken** to him on several occasions.

✓ The guys **had ridden** with Tony that night.

✓ Vinnie **had run** from us when he saw us.

✓ BiBi **had written** her paper the night before it was due.
Listen to the Grammar Guys

Also called The Period

The period is used to end a sentence.

If a sentence ends with an abbreviation, the period used for the abbreviation also serves as the period for the sentence, so don’t add another one.

Do not use a period after an incomplete thought. That creates a sentence fragment.

If you don’t know what a sentence is, you’re in BAD shape and won’t work for us.

PERIOD!
Plagiarism is stealing, lying, and cheating. We have zero tolerance for it. So should you.
PRINCIPLE vs. PRINCIPAL

Grammar Guys

These two words are pronounced exactly the same. Use **PRINCIPAL** to refer to a person in a leadership position, hopefully your “pal”. Use it also to describe something that is first or important, as in “Our **principal** concern is your education.”

My principal task right now is to kick back and relax.

I am the **principal** collector of our firm. Joe is the **principal** enforcer. It’s a good **principle** not to mess with either of us.

A **PRINCIPLE** is a rule of action or conduct - or a basic doctrine or standard. We do not have or follow any moral **principles** in our business.

In college, you might study the **principles** of economics or the **principles** of biology or business.

The **principal** objective of having **principles** is to guide one’s actions or conduct. We have **principles**, but the **principal** of your school might not like them.
Another important tip from the Grammar Guys

Writing errors cause you to lose credibility, not gain it, so . . .

PROOFREAD your work before submitting it - not after!

This checklist applies to papers, e-mails, blogs, posts, and anything else written for others to read.

- Are all words spelled correctly?
- Are all sentences and paragraphs in the best order?
- Do all sentences make sense?
- Have you repeated yourself?
- Is all information necessary?
- Are there grammatical errors?
- Is the work coherent?
- Is the work unified?
- Have you gone off on tangents?

It is your responsibility to find and correct writing errors in your work. Not doing so causes you to lose points, and since many students are more interested in grades than learning, they should avoid losing points unnecessarily! Proofreading is an important step. Don’t forget it!
When you put **quotation marks** around something in a paper, you are saying the words inside the quotation marks are *exactly* the way you found them in the original source. If you change a single letter or space, you are lying and committing a crime. You can’t change anything you put in quotation marks.

*Take a minute to think about this. It is simple. It is uncomplicated. It is easy to understand.*
I found this information written by Mike Chamernik on the Concierge Preferred.com website – word for word:

Al Capone. The most famous (or infamous) Chicago gangster. Capone was born to a poor Italian immigrant family in 1899. Capone became the protégé of Johnny Torrio, leader of the Five Points Gang. Torrio was bootlegger, and his gang made a fortune during Prohibition. After Torrio retired in 1925, Capone took over and became the major crime boss of Chicago, running gambling, prostitution, and bootlegging rackets and expanding his turf by the killing rivals. Experts say that Capone was worth $100 million in 1927.

If I copy and paste this into my paper, I have to put quotation marks around it. I cannot change a single thing in it when I do this. Here is what it will look like in my paper:

“Al Capone. The most famous (or infamous) Chicago gangster. Capone was born to a poor Italian immigrant family in 1899. Capone became the protégé of Johnny Torrio, leader of the Five Points Gang. Torrio was bootlegger, and his gang made a fortune during Prohibition. After Torrio retired in 1925, Capone took over and became the major crime boss of Chicago, running gambling, prostitution, and bootlegging rackets and expanding his turf by the killing rivals. Experts say that Capone was worth $100 million in 1927” (Chamernik).

STOP AND THINK. TAKE IT IN.

All Jimmy did was put quotation marks before the first word and after the last word. It’s not rocket science, people! It’s pretty simple. Notice that he removed the period after 1927 and put it after the in-text citation – (Chamernik). He had to tell you who wrote it!
Wait a minute, Jimmy! I see two errors in what Chamernik wrote. I highlighted them in black.

Al Capone. The most famous (or infamous) Chicago gangster. Capone was born to a poor Italian immigrant family in 1899. Capone became the protégé of Johnny Torrio, leader of the Five Points Gang. Torrio was a bootlegger, and his gang made a fortune during Prohibition. After Torrio retired in 1925, Capone took over and became the major crime boss of Chicago, running gambling, prostitution, and bootlegging rackets and expanding his turf by the killing of rivals. Experts say that Capone was worth $100 million in 1927.

It should be Torrio was a bootlegger and by killing rivals.

Can I fix them, or do I need to leave them alone? After all, you can’t change a single letter in a quote. What can I do?

You have 3 choices.

1. You can leave it alone.
2. You can fix it; however, if you fix it, you have to let people know you fixed it.
3. You can write [sic] after each error to let people know Chamernik made the errors, not you.

You’ll see how to do it each way on the next page.
“Al Capone. The most famous (or infamous) Chicago gangster. Capone was born to a poor Italian immigrant family in 1899. Capone became the protégé of Johnny Torrio, leader of the Five Points Gang. Torrio was a bootlegger, and his gang made a fortune during Prohibition. After Torrio retired in 1925, Capone took over and became the major crime boss of Chicago, running gambling, prostitution, and bootlegging rackets and expanding his turf by the killing rivals. Experts say that Capone was worth $100 million in 1927” (Chamernik).
The Word SEEN

Grammar Guys

Stop and Think

I seen what you did.
I saw what you did.

I know what I seen.
I know what I saw.

Shorty seen Tony at the club.
Shorty saw Tony at the club.

If you want to use the word seen, you have to put a helping verb in front of it.

- I have seen Tony hanging out at Shorty’s bar several times.
- He was seen there last night.
- Tony has been seen stealing money on many occasions.
- The boss can be seen only by appointment.
- Jimmy has seen you hanging out near the warehouse.
I want to shoot myself in the head every time I hear someone say, “I seen it” or “She seen him” or “They seen her” or “We seen them” — or anything like it.

You can’t use seen all by itself. I don’t care how you were raised or how many people say it. It’s wrong. You have to use one of the words below before it:

- am
- are
- is
- was
- were
- has
- have
- had
- has been
- had been
- have been

✗ I seen Vinnie hanging out at Shorty’s bar.
✓ I saw Vinnie hanging out at Shorty’s bar. (One time, like yesterday or the day before.)
✓ I have seen Vinnie hanging out at Shorty’s bar. (On several occasions in the past.)
✗ Vinnie seen us coming and tried to run away.
✓ Vinnie saw us coming and tried to run away. (One time, like yesterday or the day before.)
✓ Vinnie had seen us coming and tried to run away. (Before something else happened.)
Sell vs. Sale

Grammar Guys

Sell is a verb.

Sale is a noun.

Sale and Sell cannot be used interchangeably.

If you have something to sell, you have something for sale.

Louie’s bar will soon be up for sale since he owes us money. We will take 90% of the profits from that sale.

We just successfully closed a sale.

Our services are for sale if you can afford us.

We sell protection to our clients.

The boss has decided not to sell the business.

We’re not buying what you’re selling.

If you want to sell a stack of tires, and you put a sign on top of them that says “For Sell”, you are a grammar novice and will not be working for us. The sign should say “For Sale”.

The warehouse on 89th Street was for sale, so we bought it and plan to sell it for a huge profit.
It’s funny how some people can’t write a sentence without an error in it, which doesn’t make sense since they have had at least 12 years of education!

By the way, I hear Gino’s been partying hard down at the strip club since he got married.

Some people are slow learners, and others don’t have a lick of sense, but since we’re on the subject, I warned Gino to think twice, but he never has been one to listen to common sense.

► It doesn’t make sense that you have to drive the limo since we just hired a new chauffeur.

► Since the Boss wants to know who did it, I’ll give him a sense of what went down when Al snitched.

► Shorty needs to use more sense when he’s dealing with underaged drinkers since the Boss will fire him if he finds out.

If you use some sense, you’ll know whether to use sense or since.
This is not a word in English.

Mispronouncing words in English can make others assume you’re stupid - even if you’re not. If you don’t want people to think that way, don’t give them a reason to think that way.

supposably

It’s supposedly

It is also not “use to”. It is “used to”.

We are used to getting calls at all hours of the night.

Tony used to steal money from us. He supposedly thought we were fools. The Boss used to get upset, but we got used to it.
A word from the Grammar Guys

Teaching is up to us.
Learning is up to you.

Stamping out grammar crimes is our business.

Education is our goal.
TENSE SHIFTING
and how to avoid it

Grammar Guys

Tense shifting happens when you’re writing in one tense, and then you shift to a different tense for no reason. For readers, it’s like sitting in the back of your vehicle, and you shift into second while doing 60. Don’t do it.

It’s distracting and makes it look like you’re confused by time.

It can also ruin your paper like it can ruin your transmission.

In English, there are three simple verb tenses:

PAST

PRESENT

FUTURE

Don’t mix present and past tense verbs in the same sentence, paragraph, or essay. Choose one tense and stick with it throughout the entire paper.

✗ Gino shows up at the club and walked straight to the back room.

✓ Gino shows up at the club and walks straight to the back room.

✓ Gino showed up at the club and walked straight to the back room.

✗ After Donnie came on board, he tells us he is going to clean house.

✓ After Donnie came on board, he told us he was going to clean house.

✗ Yesterday, when I was at the waterfront, this guy comes up to me and asks for $10.

✓ Yesterday, when I was at the waterfront, this guy came up to me and asked for $10.

This is a general rule.

Unless you are shifting tenses because you have to, don’t do it at all.
Grammar Guys

Too Many That’s

That is the most overused word in English writing.

Before submitting a final draft of any paper, go back through it and get rid of every “that” as possible - without changing the meaning of what you’re saying. You will see many of them are unnecessary!

If I talked to Jimmy the way it’s written in the box below, he’d say, “86 the that’s, man. I got limited time to listen!”

SIDE NOTE
To “86” something means to get rid of it; eliminate it.

I think that Shorty knows that he did the wrong thing. If I find out that he has stolen money from the Boss, we will have to take immediate action. The limo that Tony drives will be waiting for us at midnight. We know that we have to deal with this carefully.

I can get rid of every that and say what I want to say more smoothly. Read it without the that’s and see for yourself.

The same is true in writing, so make the connection and be wary.
LEARN THIS:
When you point out a group of people or things, use those, as in “Those guys are acting suspiciously.” Don’t say “them guys”. It’s wrong. In a structure like this, do not follow “them” with a noun. Let me show you how to correct the wrong use of “them” with some examples.

Pick up them contracts.
Pick up those contracts.
Pick them up today.

Them boys are slacking off.
Those boys are slacking off.

I got them parts you ordered.
I got those parts you ordered.
Yes, I got them.

He never saw them brass knuckles coming.
He never saw those brass knuckles coming.

I saw them guys in the bar.
I saw those guys in the bar.
I saw them in the bar.

Jimmy and Joe don’t trust them boys to work alone.
Jimmy and Joe don’t trust those boys to work alone.
“They carry the burden themselves.”

Grammar Guys

Pay attention, and let’s get something straight . . . right now.

There is no such word as THEIRSELVES in the English language.

The correct word is THEMSELVES. Use it instead.

Also WRONG

hissell
thierself
oursef
theyselves
theyself

Also RIGHT

himself
themselves
ourselves
themselves

Tony and Shorty did it to themselves. They have only themselves to blame. The Grammar Guys can and will do it themselves.

All Students of grammar should be able to learn something on their own, by themselves.
I trust you more than I trust myself.

**THEN**

is used to indicate time. It can mean “next” or “at that time”.
Both *time* and *then* have an “E” in them.
Take him to the bar and then come back.
I was at work then.
If you see us, then we have seen you.

**THAN**

is used to make a comparison.
Both *than* and *comparison* have an “A” in them.
He has more money than he has sense.
This costs more than that.
We follow you more than you know.

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**Check Your Understanding.**
Select the correct word in each sentence.

1. Buddy and Jimmy make more money (than then) Al or Tony.
2. If the Boss needs us to take care of business, (than then) we will take care of it.
3. When you don’t pay your dues, (than then) you risk losing your job with us.
4. We have been working for the organization longer (than then) we can remember.
5. Buddy handles slackers differently (than then) Jimmy does.
6. By the end of the day, Dino had been taken to the wharf and (than then) thrown in the river.
7. We have more questions (than then) answers.
There are **three** words that sound the same, but each one means something different. If you don’t use the right one, your sentence makes no sense. *Don’t write sentences that don’t make sense.*

Let me explain. **There** is a location, like *over there* or *she lives there*. It is also used in phrases like *there is* or *there are* or *there was* or *there were*.

**Their** means something belongs to them, like *their house*, *their jobs*, or *their money*.

**They’re** means *they are*. That’s all it ever means. It can’t mean anything else.

Here’s an example using all three:

Their business is going downhill because **their** business sense is no good. **There** is no way the Boss will lend them money. **Their** warehouse is over **there** near the docks, and they’re unaware that we run that part of town. **They’re** headed for trouble.
Let’s see how well you understand.

Fill in the blanks with the correct word.

there their they’re

____________ is nothing Al can do about it.

We had to go in __________ limo because ours was being serviced.

We need to know if __________ going to pay the Boss.

If Jimmy and I have to go __________, __________ is going to be trouble.

Vinne and Louie don’t know what __________ doing.

____________ brains are fried from drinking every night at Shorty’s.

Be careful when spelling. When you spell something wrong, readers can infer you don’t know what’s correct and what’s not. That causes you to lose credibility, and you don’t want that to happen.

SIDE NOTE

There’s can mean “there is”, like There’s a snitch down by the docks. -or- There’s money to be made in our organization.

There’s can also mean “there has”, like There’s been an accident. -or- There’s been trouble down at Shorty’s bar.
A Tip from the Grammar Guys

THINK before you THINK, and then THINK again!
The number 2 is spelled **two**.

**Grammar Guys**

**TO** vs **TOO**

**TO** is a preposition.

**TOO** means “also” or “excessively”.

There are **two Grammar Guys** who go **to** work seven days a week. They are **too** busy to deal with any nonsense. They know how to **take care of business**, **too**.

Jimmy took **Tony** to see the boss.

Buddy went along, **too**.

The boss said **Tony** had stolen **too** much money and taken **too** much time off, so Jimmy and Buddy drove him **to the docks**. What happened **to him** there was **too horrible** and will remain a secret **to the end**.

**TO** = expressing motion in the direction of (a particular location).

**TO** = identifying the person or thing affected. (You were unkind to him.)

**TOO** = to a higher degree than is desirable, permissible, or possible; excessively. Can mean: in addition; also.
WHO OR WHOM?

Grammar Guys

Are you confused about when to use who and when to use whom?

Well then, let Grammar Guys give you a quick tip.

Go ahead and write your sentence; then decide which word to use.
Sample sentence:

“Who did you give it to?”

Answer it, using he or him (or they or them). “We gave it to him.”
If it ends in ‘m’, use whom. If not, use who. So it should be “Whom did you give it to?”

Example: “Whom did this?”
You wouldn’t say, “Him did this.”
You’d say, “He did this,” so ask “Who did this?”

“Who do you extort?” We extort him. So, it should be “Whom do you extort?”

“Who should we report to about Tony stealing money?”
We should report to him (the boss) about Tony stealing money. So it should be “Whom should we report to about Tony stealing money?”

Pick the pocket that fits your need.
Ask not for whom the bell tolls.  
It tolls for the guy who jumped Shorty in the alley.

Who or whom?

1. ____ are they taking to the wharf?
2. Vinnie, ____ works in accounting, keeps track of every dollar we collect.
3. The Boss wants to know ____ talked to Louie the Rat.
4. At ____ are you pointing that gun?
5. ____ are you talking about?
Grammar Guys

There are two words that sound the same:

Your and You’re

They cannot be interchanged because each one has a meaning of its own.

**Your** means something belongs to you, like *your* name, *your* house, *your* opportunities, *your* education, *your* decision, *your* responsibility, *your* choice, or *your* attitude.

**You’re** means “you are”. It always means “you are” and never means anything else. For instance: *You’re* responsible for *your* learning; *no one* else can learn for you.

Don’t confuse them. If *you’re* confused, you didn’t do *your* part.

Two of the following sentences are correct and two are wrong. Do you know which ones are correct and which two are wrong?

What your doing is going to get you in trouble.
If you’re not going to the meeting, you need to let us know.
Your future is in your hands.
You’re serious attitude about the work will carry you far.
The difference between knowing your shit and knowing you’re shit.