

Grammar and Revision Guide

Table of Contents

Looking For:	Page:
Grammar Glossary	1
Function of Phrases	5
Word Choice	6
Commas	11
Fragments and Run-Ons	15
Verb Tenses	19
Semi-Colons, Colons, and Dashes	21
Active and Passive Voice	26
Sentence Variety	31

GRAMMAR GLOSSARY

A

ABBREVIATION: a shortened form of a word, usually followed by a period.

ACTIVE VOICE: a verb is active if the subject of the sentence is performing the action.

ADJECTIVE: a word that describes; an adjective modifies a noun or pronoun.

ADJECTIVE CLAUSE: a clause that modifies a noun or pronoun.

ADVERB: a word that describes a verb, explaining where, when, how, or to what extent; an adverb modifies a verb, adjective, or adverb.

ADVERB CLAUSE: a clause that modifies a verb, adjective, or another adverb.

ANTECEDENT: a word or group of words that a pronoun refers to or replaces.

APOSTROPHE: a punctuation mark used in contractions to replace a letter, or added to the last letter of a noun followed by an s to indicate possession.

APPOSITIVE: a noun, pronoun, or phrase that identifies or extends information about another noun or pronoun in a sentence.

C

CAPITALIZATION: using a capital letter for words that begin sentences, titles, or for proper nouns.

CLAUSE: a group of words that has a subject and predicate.

CLOSING: in a letter, the words preceding the signature at the end of a letter.

COLLECTIVE NOUN: a singular noun that names a group of persons or things.

COLON: a punctuation mark used to introduce a series, before a list, between hour and minute, after the salutation in a business letter, etc.

COMMA: a punctuation mark used between items in a series, after an introductory clause or prepositional phrase, or to set off appositives and nonessential phrases, etc.

COMMON NOUN: a word that names a person, place, or thing.

COMPLEMENT: a word that completes the meaning of an active verb (direct object, indirect object, predicate adjective, and predicate nominative).

COMPLEX SENTENCE: one independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

COMPOUND ADJECTIVE: an adjective formed by two words separated by a hyphen and treated as one word.

COMPOUND COMPLEMENT: two or more words used as direct objects of the same verb, objects of the same preposition, predicate nominatives or predicate adjectives of the same verb, or indirect objects of the same understood preposition.

COMPOUND-COMPLEX SENTENCE: two or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses.

COMPOUND NOUN: a noun composed of more than one word.

COMPOUND PREPOSITION: a preposition composed of more than one word.

COMPOUND SENTENCE: a sentence consisting of two or more independent clauses.

COMPOUND SUBJECT: two or more subjects that share the same verb.

COMPOUND VERB: two or more verbs that share the same subject.

CONJUNCTION: a word that connects words or groups of words (and, or, nor, but, yet, for, so, etc.).

CONTRACTION: a word formed by combining two words and using an apostrophe to replace any missing letters; inappropriate for formal essays.

D

DASH: a punctuation mark used to set off abrupt changes in thought, an appositive, a parenthetical expression, or an appositive that contains commas.

DECLARATIVE SENTENCE: a sentence that makes a statement.

DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUN: a pronoun used to point out a specific person, place, thing, or idea (this, that, these, those).

DEPENDENT CLAUSE: another name for a subordinate clause.

DIRECT OBJECT: a noun or pronoun that receives the action of the verb.

DIRECT QUOTATION: the exact words spoken.

E

ELLIPTICAL CLAUSE: a subordinate clause in which a word or words are omitted, but understood.

ELLIPSIS: a punctuation mark consisting of three periods (...) used to indicate the omission of words or a pause.

ESSENTIAL PHRASE OR CLAUSE: necessary to the meaning of a sentence and therefore not set off with commas; also known as *restrictive clause*.

EXCLAMATION POINT: a punctuation mark (!) used after an interjection and at the end of an exclamatory sentence.

EXCLAMATORY SENTENCE: expresses strong emotion and ends with an exclamation point.

EXPLETIVE: a word inserted in the subject position of a sentence that does not add to the sense of the thought.

G

GERUND: a verbal ending in *-ing* used as a noun.

GERUND PHRASE: a gerund with all of its modifiers.

H

HELPING VERBS: a verb that precedes the main verb (am, is, are, has, have, had, shall, will, can, may, should, would, could, might, must, do, did, does).

HYPHEN: punctuation mark (-) used to divide words at the end of a line, between certain numbers, to separate compound nouns and adjectives, and between some prefixes and their roots.

I

IMPERATIVE SENTENCE: a sentence that gives a command or makes a request.

INDEFINITE PRONOUN: a word that refers to an unnamed person or thing (all, anybody, anything, both, each, someone, everyone)

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE: a clause that expresses a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence.

INDIRECT OBJECT: a noun or pronoun that precedes a direct object and answers the questions *to whom*, *for whom*, *to what*, or *for what*.

INFINITIVE: a verbal that begins with *to* that is used as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

INFINITIVE PHRASE: an infinitive with its object and modifiers.

INTERJECTION: a word that is used to express strong feeling that is not related grammatically to the rest of the sentence.

INTERROGATIVE SENTENCE: a sentence that asks a question and ends with a question mark.

INTRANSITIVE VERB: a verb that does not require an object.

INVERTED ORDER: a sentence that does not follow the typical order of a sentence (subject-verb-object).

IRREGULAR VERB: a verb that does not form the past tense or past participle by adding *-ed* or *-d* to the present tense.

L

LINKING VERB: a verb that links the subject with a predicate nominative or a predicate adjective (is, became, remain, look, appear, seem).

LOOSE SENTENCE: an independent clause followed by a dependent clause.

M

MODIFIERS: words that describe or provide more meaning to a word; modifiers include adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositional phrases, verbals, and clauses.

N

NOMINATIVE PRONOUN: a pronoun used as a subject or predicate nominative.

NONESSENTIAL PHRASE OR CLAUSE: not necessary to the meaning of a sentence and, therefore, set off with commas.

NOUN: a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea.

NOUN CLAUSE: a subordinate clause used as a subject, direct object, object of a preposition, appositive, or predicate nominative.

O

OBJECT OF PREPOSITION: the noun or pronoun with its modifiers that follows a preposition.

OBJECTIVE CASE: pronouns used as direct objects, indirect objects, or as objects of a preposition.

OBJECTIVE COMPLEMENT: a noun or adjective that renames or describes a direct object.

P

PARALLELISM: arranging words and phrases consistently to express similar ideas.

PARENTHETICAL EXPRESSION: words that are not grammatically related to the rest of a sentence and set off by parentheses.

PARTICIPIAL PHRASE: a participle with its modifiers and complements.

PARICIPLE: a verbal ending in *-ing*, *-ed*, *-d*, or an irregular form that is used as an adjective.

PARTS OF SPEECH: the eight parts of speech are verb, noun, adjective, adverb, preposition, interjection, and conjunction.

PASSIVE VOICE: indicates that the subject receives the action of the verb in a sentence.

PERIOD: a punctuation mark (.) used at the end of a declarative or imperative sentence or an abbreviation.

PERIODIC SENTENCE: a dependent clause followed by an independent clause.

PERSONAL PRONOUN: refers to a particular person, place, thing, or idea (I, me, we, us, you, he, him, she, her, it, they, them).

PHRASE: a group of related words that do not have a subject or verb.

POSSESSIVE PRONOUN: a pronoun form used to show ownership (my, mine, our, ours, your, yours, his, hers, its, their).

PREDICATE: a word or group of words that tells something about the subject.

PREDICATE ADJECTIVE: an adjective that modifies the subject in the sentence with a linking verb.

PREDICATE NOMINATIVE: a noun or pronoun that identifies, renames, or explains the subject in a sentence with a linking verb.

PREFIX: a word part added to the beginning of a word to change its basic meaning.

PREPOSITION: a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and another word in a sentence.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE: a group of words that begins with a preposition, ends with a noun or pronoun, and is used as an adjective or adverb.

PRONOUN: a word that takes the place of one or more nouns.

PROPER ADJECTIVE: a capitalized adjective formed from a proper noun.

PROPER NOUN: a capitalized noun that names a particular person, place, thing, or idea.

PUNCTUATION: punctuation marks include apostrophe, colon, comma, dash, ellipsis, exclamation point, hyphen, period, question mark, quotation mark, and semicolon.

Q

QUESTION MARK: a punctuation mark (?) used to indicate a question or to end an interrogative sentence.

QUOTATION MARKS: a punctuation mark (") used at the beginning and end of a direct quotation, or to enclose titles.

R

REFLEXIVE PRONOUN: a pronoun formed by adding *-self* or *-selves* to a personal pronoun.

REGULAR VERB: a verb that forms its past tense and past participle by adding *-ed* or *-d* to the present tense.

RELATIVE PRONOUN: a pronoun that relates an adjective clause to its antecedent.

RESTRICTIVE PHRASE OR CLAUSE: another name for *essential* phrase or clause.

S

SALUTATION: the opening greeting that comes before the body of a letter.

SEMICOLON: a punctuation mark (;) used to separate the independent clauses of a

compound sentence that are not joined by conjunctions, before certain transitional words (however, furthermore, therefore), and between items in a series if the items contain commas.

SENTENCE: a group of words with a subject and verb that expresses a complete thought.

SENTENCE FRAGMENT: a group of words that lacks either a subject or a verb that does not express a complete thought.

SERIES: three or more words or phrases in succession separated by commas or semicolons.

SIMPLE PREDICATE: the verb; the main word or phrase in the complete predicate.

SIMPLE SENTENCE: a sentence that is one independent clause.

SUBJECT: a word or group of words that names the person, place, thing, or idea the sentence is about.

SUBORDINATE CLAUSE: a clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence because it does not express a complete thought.

SUFFIX: a word part added to the end of a word that changes its meaning.

T

TENSE: the form a verb takes to show time.

TRANSITIVE VERB: an action verb that requires an object.

U

UNDERSTOOD SUBJECT: a subject that is understood rather than stated.

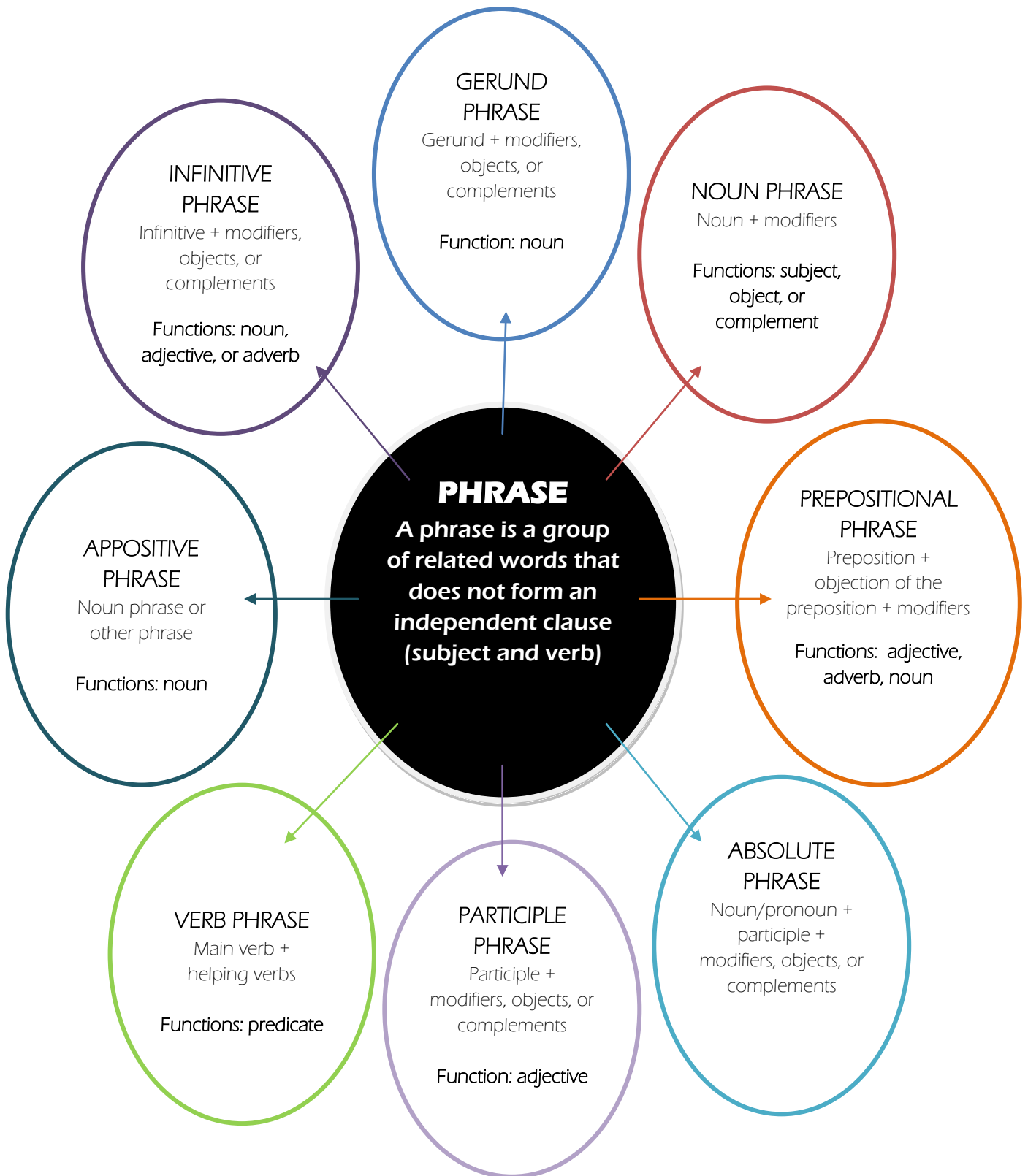
V

VERB: a word or words that show the action in the sentence and tell what the subject is doing.

VERBAL: a verb form used as some other part of speech; the three verbals are participles, gerunds, and infinitives.

VERBAL PHRASE: the main verb plus one or more helping verbs.

FUNCTION OF PHRASES IN SENTENCES



WORD CHOICE

Introduction

Writing is a series of choices. As you work on a paper, you choose your topic, your approach, your sources, and your thesis; when it's time to write, you have to choose the words you will use to express your ideas and decide how you will arrange those words into sentences and paragraphs. As you revise your draft, you make more choices. You might ask yourself, "Is this really what I mean?" or "Will readers understand this?" or "Does this sound good?" Finding words that capture your meaning and convey that meaning to your readers is challenging. When your instructors write things like "awkward," "vague," or "wordy" on your draft, they are letting you know that they want you to work on word choice.

"Awkward," "Vague," or "Unclear" Word Choice

So: you write a paper that makes perfect sense to you, but it comes back with "awkward" scribbled throughout the margins. Why, you wonder, are instructors so fond of terms like "awkward"? Most instructors use terms like this to draw your attention to sentences they had trouble understanding and to encourage you to rewrite those sentences more clearly.

Difficulties with word choice aren't the only cause of awkwardness, vagueness, or other problems with clarity. Sometimes a sentence is hard to follow because there is a grammatical problem with it or because of the syntax (the way the words and phrases are put together).

Sometimes, though, problems with clarity *are* a matter of word choice.

- **Misused words**—the word doesn't actually mean what the writer thinks it does.
Example: Cree Indians were a *monotonous* culture until French and British settlers arrived.
Revision: Cree Indians were a *homogenous* culture.
- **Words with unwanted connotations or meanings.**
Example: I sprayed the ants in their *private* places.
Revision: I sprayed the ants in their *hiding* places.
- **Using a pronoun when readers can't tell whom/what it refers to.**
Example: My cousin Jake hugged my brother Trey, even though he didn't like him very much.
Revision: My cousin Jake hugged my brother Trey, even though Jake doesn't like Trey very much.
- **Jargon or technical terms** that make readers work unnecessarily hard. Maybe you need to use some of these words because they are important terms in your field, but don't throw them in just to "sound smart."
Example: The dialectical interface between neo-Platonists and anti-disestablishment Catholics offers an algorithm for deontological thought.
Revision: The dialogue between neo-Platonists and certain Catholic thinkers is a model for deontological thought.
- **Loaded language.** Sometimes we as writers know what we mean by a certain word, but we haven't ever spelled that out for readers. We rely too heavily on that word, perhaps repeating it often, without clarifying what we are talking about.
Example: Society teaches young girls that beauty is their most important quality. In order to prevent eating disorders and other health problems, we must change society.
Revision: Contemporary American popular media, like magazines and movies, teach young girls that beauty is their most important quality. In order to prevent eating disorders and other health problems, we must change the images and role models girls are offered.

Wordiness

Sometimes the problem isn't choosing exactly the right word to express an idea—it's being "wordy," or using words that your reader may regard as "extra" or inefficient. Take a look at the following list for some examples. On the left are some phrases that use three, four, or more words where fewer will do; on the right are some shorter substitutes:

I came to the realization that	I realized that
She is of the opinion that	She thinks that
Concerning the matter of	About
During the course of	During
In the event that	If
In the process of	During, while
Regardless of the fact that	Although
Due to the fact that	Because
In all cases	Always
At that point in time	Then
Prior to	Before

Clichés

In academic writing, it's a good idea to limit your use of clichés. Clichés are catchy little phrases so frequently used that they have become trite, corny, or annoying. They are problematic because their overuse has diminished their impact and because they require several words where just one would do.

The main way to avoid clichés is first to recognize them and then to create shorter, fresher equivalents. Below you will see five common clichés, with some alternatives to their right.

Agree to disagree	Disagree
Dead as a doornail	Dead
Last but not least	Last
Pushing the envelope	Approaching the limit
Up in the air	Unknown/undecided

Writing for an Academic Audience

Some writers think that academic audiences expect them to “sound smart” by using big or technical words. But the most important goal of academic writing is not to sound smart—it is to communicate an argument or information clearly and convincingly. The danger is that if you consciously set out to “sound smart” and use words or structures that are very unfamiliar to you, you may produce sentences that your readers can’t understand.

When writing for your professors, think simplicity. Using simple words does not indicate simple thoughts. Keep in mind, though, that simple and clear doesn’t necessarily mean casual. Most instructors will not be pleased if your paper looks like an instant message or an email to a friend. It’s usually best to avoid slang and colloquialisms.

Words and Phrases to Avoid in College-Level Academic Writing

INTENSIFIERS	These words are intended to emphasize an idea, but instead, they usually weaken it by using more words than necessary. Forceful writing uses as few words as possible to communicate the idea.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. very 2. actually 3. extremely 4. basically 5. really 6. definitely 7. perfectly 8. a lot
SUPERFLUITIES	These groups of words are unnecessary because, unless readers are told otherwise, they safely assume that you are writing your own thoughts.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I feel... 2. I believe... 3. I think... 4. In my opinion... 5. It seems to me... 6. Personally...
EXTRAVAGANCES	These words should be saved for special occasions, and even then, they should be supported with specifics.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. great 2. super 3. wonderful 4. fantastic 5. terrific 6. awesome 7. !* <p><i>*Exclamation points are rare in academic writing.</i></p>
ABSOLUTES	These words often turn a generalization into a lie by indicating that a situation has no exceptions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. always 2. never 3. none 4. invariably 5. everybody/everyone 6. anybody
VAGUE WORD CHOICES	These words suggest that the writer did not care enough to think of an exact word.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a lot 2. find myself (himself, herself, etc.) 3. clichés (“You can’t judge a book by its cover,” “when push comes to shove.”) 4. sentences beginning with “there” or “it” 5. “this” (as in, “this shows...”) 6. when it comes to... 7. “there” in any situation in which it does not indicate a specific place (“Of course, there are many differences between...”) 8. needless to say 9. it goes without saying

Repetition vs. Redundancy

When writing academic papers, it is often helpful to find key terms and use them within your paper as well as in your thesis. This section comments on the crucial difference between repetition and redundancy of terms.

These two phenomena are not necessarily the same. Repetition can be a good thing. Sometimes we have to use our key terms several times within a paper, especially in topic sentences. Sometimes there is simply no substitute for the key terms, and selecting a weaker term as a synonym can do more harm than good. Repeating key terms emphasizes important points and signals to the reader that the argument is still being supported. This kind of repetition can give your paper cohesion and is done by conscious choice.

In contrast, if you find yourself frustrated, tiredly repeating the same nouns, verbs, or adjectives, or making the same point over and over, you are probably being redundant. In this case, you are swimming aimlessly around the same points because you have not decided what your argument really is or because you are truly fatigued and clarity escapes you.

Strategies for Successful Word Choice

1. Be careful when using words you are unfamiliar with. Look at how they are used in context and check their dictionary definitions.
2. Be careful when using the thesaurus. Each word listed as a synonym for the word you're looking up may have its own unique connotations or shades of meaning. Use a dictionary to be sure the synonym you are considering really fits what you are trying to say.
3. Don't try to impress your reader or sound unduly authoritative. For example, which sentence is clearer to you: "a" or "b"?
 - a. *Under the present conditions of our society, marriage practices generally demonstrate a high degree of homogeneity.*
 - b. *In our culture, people tend to marry others who are like themselves.* (Longman, p. 452)
4. Before you revise for accurate and strong adjectives, make sure you are first using accurate and strong nouns and verbs. For example, if you were revising the sentence "This is a good book that tells about the Civil War," think about whether "book" and "tells" are as strong as they could be before you worry about "good." (A stronger sentence might read "The novel describes the experiences of a Confederate soldier during the Civil War." "Novel" tells us what kind of book it is, and "describes" tells us more about how the book communicates information.)
5. Try the slash/option technique, which is like brainstorming as you write. When you get stuck, write out two or more choices for a questionable word or a confusing sentence, e.g., "questionable/inaccurate/vague/inappropriate." Pick the word that best indicates your meaning or combine different terms to say what you mean.
6. Look for repetition. When you find it, decide if it is "good" repetition (using key terms that are crucial and helpful to meaning) or "bad" repetition (redundancy or laziness in reusing words).

7. Write your thesis in five different ways. Make five different versions of your thesis sentence. Compose five sentences that express your argument. Try to come up with four alternatives to the thesis sentence you've already written. Find five possible ways to communicate your argument in one sentence to your reader. (We've just used this technique—which of the last five sentences do you prefer?)

Whenever we write a sentence we make choices. Some are less obvious than others, so that it can often feel like we've written the sentence the only way we know how. By writing out five different versions of your thesis, you can begin to see your range of choices. The final version may be a combination of phrasings and words from all five versions, or the one version that says it best. By literally spelling out some possibilities for yourself, you will be able to make better decisions.

8. Read your paper out loud and at... a... slow... pace. You can do this alone or with a friend, roommate, TA, etc. When read out loud, your written words should make sense to both you and other listeners. If a sentence seems confusing, rewrite it to make the meaning clear.
9. Instead of reading the paper itself, put it down and just talk through your argument as concisely as you can. If your listener quickly and easily comprehends your essay's main point and significance, you should then make sure that your written words are as clear as your oral presentation was. If, on the other hand, your listener keeps asking for clarification, you will need to work on finding the right terms for your essay. If you do this in exchange with a friend or classmate, rest assured that whether you are the talker or the listener, your articulation skills will develop.
10. Have someone not familiar with the issue read the paper and point out words or sentences he/she finds confusing. Do not brush off this reader's confusion by assuming he or she simply doesn't know enough about the topic. Instead, rewrite the sentences so that your "outsider" reader can follow along at all times.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Am I sure what each word I use really means? Am I positive, or should I look it up?
- Have I found the best word or just settled for the most obvious, or the easiest, one?
- Am I trying too hard to impress my reader?
- What's the easiest way to write this sentence? (Sometimes it helps to answer this question by trying it out loud. How would you say it to someone?)
- What are the key terms of my argument?
- Can I outline out my argument using only these key terms? What others do I need? Which do I not need?
- Have I created my own terms, or have I simply borrowed what looked like key ones from the assignment? If I've borrowed the terms, can I find better ones in my own vocabulary, the texts, my notes, the dictionary, or the thesaurus to make myself clearer?
- Are my key terms too specific? (Do they cover the entire range of my argument?) Can I think of specific examples from my sources that fall under the key term?
- Are my key terms too vague? (Do they cover more than the range of my argument?)

SOURCE:

"Word Choice." *The Writing Center*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012. Web. 23 March 2013.

COMMAS

SEVEN EASY STEPS TO BECOMING A COMMA SUPERHERO

Commas help your reader figure out which words go together in a sentence and which parts of your sentences are most important. Using commas incorrectly may confuse the reader, signal ignorance of writing rules, or indicate carelessness. Although using commas correctly may seem mysterious, it can be easy if you follow a few guidelines.

Beware of popular myths of comma usage:

- **MYTH: Long sentences need a comma.** A really long sentence may be perfectly correct without commas. The length of a sentence does not determine whether you need a comma.
- **MYTH: You should add a comma wherever you pause.** Where you pause or breathe in a sentence does not reliably indicate where a comma belongs. Different readers pause or breathe in different places.
- **MYTH: Commas are so mysterious that it's impossible to figure out where they belong!** Some rules are flexible, but most of the time, commas belong in very predictable places. You can learn to identify many of those places using the tips in this handout.

1. Introductory Bits (Small-Medium-Large)

Setting off introductory words, phrases, or clauses with a comma lets the reader know that the main subject and main verb of the sentence come later. There are basically three kinds of introductory bits: small, medium, and large ones. No matter what size they are, *an introductory bit cannot stand alone as a complete thought. It simply introduces the main subject and verb.*

There are **SMALL** (just one word) introductory bits:

*Generally, extraterrestrials are friendly and helpful.
Moreover, some will knit booties for you if you ask nicely.*

There are **MEDIUM** introductory bits. Often these are two- to four-word prepositional phrases or brief *-ing* and *-ed* phrases:

*In fact, Godzilla is just a misunderstood teen lizard of giant proportions.
Throughout his early life, he felt a strong affinity with a playful dolphin named Flipper.
Frankly speaking, Godzilla wanted to play the same kinds of roles that Flipper was given.
Dissatisfied with destruction, he was hoping to frolick in the waves with his Hollywood friends.*

There are **LARGE** introductory bits (more than 4 words). You can often spot these by looking for key words/groups such as *although*, *if*, *as*, *in order to*, and *when*:

*If you discover that you feel nauseated, then you know you've tried my Clam Surprise.
As far as I am concerned, it is the best dish for dispatching unwanted guests.*

2. FANBOYS

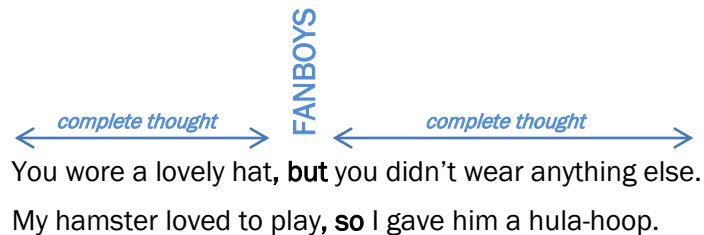
FANBOYS is a handy mnemonic device for remembering the coordinating conjunctions: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So. These words function as connectors. They can connect words, phrases, and clauses, like this:

Words: I am almost *dressed and ready*.

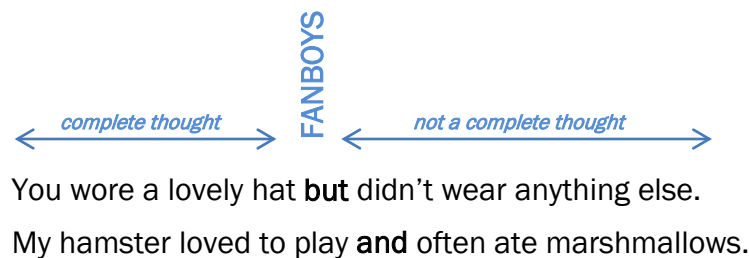
Phrases: My socks are *in the living room or under my bed*.

Clauses: *They smell really bad, so they will be easy to find*.

Notice the comma in the final example. You should always have a comma before **FANBOYS** that join two independent clauses (two subjects and two verbs that make up two complete thoughts). Look carefully at the next two sentences to see two independent clauses separated by **comma + FANBOYS**.



If you do not have two subjects and two verbs separated by the **FANBOYS**, you do not need to insert the comma before the **FANBOYS**. In other words, if the second grouping of words isn't a complete thought, don't use a comma. Try reading the words after **FANBOYS** all by themselves. Do they make a complete thought?



You can read your own writing in the same way. Read what comes after **FANBOYS** all by itself. If it's a complete thought, you need a comma. If not, you don't.

3. FANBOYS Fakers

However, therefore, moreover, and other words like them are **not FANBOYS** (they are called conjunctive adverbs). They go between two complete thoughts, just like FANBOYS, but they take different punctuation. Why? Who cares? You just need to recognize that they are **not FANBOYS** (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so—remember?), and you'll make the right choice.

When you want to use one of these words, you have two good choices. Check to see if you have a complete thought on both sides of the “conjunctive adverb.” If you do, then you can use a period to make two sentences, or you can use a semicolon after the first complete thought. Either way, you'll use a comma after the faker in the second complete thought. Notice the subtle differences in punctuation here:

GOOD: Basketball is my favorite sport. *However*, table tennis is where I excel.

ALSO GOOD: Basketball is my favorite sport; *however*, table tennis is where I excel.

BAD: Basketball is my favorite sport, *however* table tennis is where I excel.

ALSO BAD: Basketball is my favorite sport, *however*, table tennis is where I excel.

4. The Dreaded Comma Splice

If you don't have **FANBOYS** between the two complete and separate thoughts, using a comma alone causes a “comma splice” or “fused sentence” (some instructors may call it a run-on). Some readers (especially professors) will think of this as a serious error.

BAD: *My hamster loved to play, I gave him a hula-hoop.*

ALSO BAD: *You wore a lovely hat, it was your only defense.*

To fix these comma splices, you can do one of four simple things: just add **FANBOYS**, change the comma to a semicolon, make each clause a separate sentence, or add a subordinator (a word like *because, while, although, if, when, since*, etc.)

GOOD: *You wore a lovely hat, for it was your only defense.*

ALSO GOOD: *You wore a lovely hat; it was your only defense.*

STILL GOOD: *You wore a lovely hat. It was your only defense.*

TOTALLY GOOD: *You wore a lovely hat because it was your only defense.*

5. X,Y, and Z

Put commas between items in a list. When giving a short and simple list of things in a sentence, the last comma (right before the conjunction—usually *and* or *or*) is called an Oxford comma and is optional, but it is never wrong. If the items in the list are longer and more complicated, you should always place a final comma before the conjunction.

EITHER: *You can buy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in Los Angeles.*

OR: *You can buy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in Los Angeles.*

NOTE: Oualline REQUIRES the comma before the conjunction in a list.

BUT ALWAYS: *A good student listens to his teachers without yawning, reads once in a while, and writes papers before they are due.*

6. Describers

If you have two or more adjectives (words that describe) that are *not* joined by a conjunction (usually *and*) and both/all adjectives modify the same word, put a comma between them.

He was a bashful, dopey, sleepy dwarf.

The frothy, radiant princess kissed the putrid, vile frog.

7. Interrupters

Two commas can be used to set off additional information that appears within the sentence but is separate from the primary subject and verb of the sentence. These commas help your reader figure out your main point by telling him or her that the words within the commas are not necessary to understand the rest of the sentence. In other words, you should be able to take out the section framed by commas and still have a complete and clear sentence.

Bob Mills, a sophomore from Raleigh, was the only North Carolina native at the Japanese food festival in Cary.

Aaron thought he could see the future, not the past, in the wrinkles on his skin.

My chemistry book, which weighs about 100 pounds, has some really great examples.

To see if you need commas around an interrupter, try taking the interrupter out of the sentence completely. If the sentence is still clear without the interrupter, then you probably need the commas.

SOURCE:

“Commas.” *The Writing Center*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012. Web. 23 March 2013.

FRAGMENTS AND RUN-ONS

LOCATE AND CORRECT SENTENCE FRAGMENTS AND RUN-ONS

The Basics

Before we get to the problems and how to fix them, let's take a minute to review some information that is so basic you've probably forgotten it.

What is a complete sentence?

A complete sentence is not merely a group of words with a capital letter at the beginning and a period or question mark at the end. A complete sentence has three components:

1. a subject (the actor in the sentence)
2. a predicate (the verb or action), and
3. a complete thought (it can stand alone and make sense—it's independent).

Some sentences can be very short, with only two or three words expressing a complete thought, like this:

John waited.

This sentence has a subject (*John*) and a verb (*waited*), and it expresses a complete thought. We can understand the idea completely with just those two words, so again, it's independent—an **independent clause**.

But independent clauses (i.e., complete sentences) can be expanded to contain a lot more information, like this:

John waited for the bus all morning.

John waited for the bus all morning in the rain last Tuesday.

Wishing he'd brought his umbrella, John waited for the bus all morning in the rain last Tuesday.

Wishing he'd brought his umbrella and dreaming of his nice warm bed, John waited for the bus all morning in the rain last Tuesday because his car was in the shop.

As your sentences grow more complicated, it gets harder to spot and stay focused on the basic elements of a complete sentence, but if you look carefully at the examples above, you'll see that the main thought is still that *John waited*—one main subject and one main verb. No matter how long or short the other sentence parts are, none of them can stand alone and make sense.

Being able to find the main subject, the main verb, and the complete thought is the first trick to learn for identifying fragments and run-ons.

Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is an **incomplete sentence**. Some fragments are incomplete because they lack either a subject or a verb, or both. The fragments that most students have trouble with, however, are **dependent clauses**—they have a subject and a verb, so they look like complete sentences, but they don't express a complete thought. They're called "dependent" because they can't stand on their own (just like some people you might know who are SO dependent!). Look at these dependent clauses. They're just begging for more information to make the thoughts complete:

Because his car was in the shop(What did he do?)

After the rain stops (What then?)

When you finally take the test (What will happen?)

Since you asked (Will you get the answer?)

If you want to go with me (What should you do?)

Does each of these examples have a subject? Yes. Does each have a verb? Yes. So what makes the thought incomplete?? It's the first word (*Because, After, When, Since, If*). These words belong to a special class of words called **subordinator** or **subordinating conjunctions**. If you know something about subordinating conjunctions, you can probably eliminate 90% of your fragments.

First, you need to know that subordinating conjunctions do three things:

1. join two sentences together
2. make one of the sentences dependent on the other for a complete thought (make one a dependent clause)
3. indicate a logical relationship

Second, you need to recognize the subordinators when you see them. Here is a list of common subordinating conjunctions and the relationships they indicate:

Cause / Effect: because, since, so that

Comparison / Contrast: although, even though, though, whereas, while

Place & Manner: how, however, where, wherever

Possibility / Conditions: if, whether, unless

Relation: that, which, who

Time: after, as, before, since, when, whenever, while, until

Third, you need to know that the subordinator (and the whole dependent clause) doesn't have to be at the beginning of the sentence. The dependent clause and the independent clause can switch places, but the whole clause moves as one big chunk. Look at how these clauses switched places in the sentence:

Because his car was in the shop, John took the bus.

John took the bus because his car was in the shop.

Finally, you need to know that every dependent clause needs to be attached to an independent clause (remember, the independent clause can stand on its own).

How do you find and fix your fragments?

Remember the basics: subject, verb, and complete thought. If you can recognize those things, you're halfway there. Then, scan your sentences for subordinating conjunctions. If you find one, first identify the whole chunk of the dependent clause (the subject and verb that go with the subordinator), and then make sure they're attached to an independent clause.

John took the bus. (independent clause)

Because his car was in the shop. (Dependent clause all by itself. Uh oh! Fragment!)

John took the bus because his car was in the shop. (Hooray! It's fixed!)

Run-Ons

These are also called fused sentences. You are making a run-on when you put two complete sentences (a subject and its predicate and another subject and its predicate) together in one sentence without separating them properly. Here's an example of a run-on:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky.

This one sentence actually contains two complete sentences. But in the rush to get that idea out, I made it into one incorrect sentence. Luckily, there are many ways to correct this run-on sentence.

You could use a **semicolon**:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus; it is very garlicky.

You could use a **comma and a coordinating conjunction** (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, for it is very garlicky.

-OR- My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, and it is very garlicky.

You could use a **subordinating conjunction** (see above):

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus because it is very garlicky. -OR- Because it is so garlicky, my favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus.

You could make it into **two separate sentences** with a period in between:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus. It is very garlicky.

You could use an **em-dash** (a long dash) for emphasis:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus—it is very garlicky.

You CANNOT simply add a comma between the two sentences, or you'll end up with what's called a "comma splice." Here's an example of a comma splice:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, it is very garlicky.

You can fix a comma splice the same way you fix a run-on—either change the punctuation or add a conjunction. The good news is that writers tend to be either comma splicers or run-on artists, but almost never both. Which one are you?

Finding Run-Ons

As you can see, fixing run-ons is pretty easy once you see them—but how do you find out if a sentence is a run-on if you aren't sure? Rei R. Noguchi, in his book *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*, suggests that you test your sentences with two methods:

1. Turn them into yes/no questions.
2. Turn them into tag questions (sentences that end with a questioning phrase at the very end—look at our examples below).

These are two things that nearly everyone can do easily if the sentence is not a run-on, but they become next to impossible if it is.

Look at the following sentence:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus.

Yes/No: *Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus?*

Tag: *My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, isn't it?*

The first sentence is complete and not a run-on, because our test worked.

Now, try the test with the original run-on sentence:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky.

Yes/No: *Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus? Is it very garlicky?*

Tag: *My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, isn't it? It's very garlicky, isn't it?*

The yes/no and tag questions can also only be made with each separate thought, rather than the whole. See how the following two examples do not work in one question because the original sentence is a run-on.

Not this: *Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus is it very garlicky?*

Or this: *My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky, isn't it?*

Neither test works for you, does it? That's because when you try, you immediately see that you have more than one complete concept in that sentence, and you can't make the whole thing turn into one question.

Make sure you try both tests with each of your problem sentences, because you may trick yourself by just putting a tag on the last part and not noticing that it doesn't work on the first. Some people might not notice that "My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky isn't it?" is wrong, but most people will spot the yes/no question problem right away.

Every once in a while, you or your instructor will see a really long sentence and think it's a run-on when it isn't. Really long sentences can be tiring but not necessarily wrong—just make sure that yours aren't wrong by using the tests above.

SOURCE:

"Fragments and Run-Ons." *The Writing Center*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012. Web. 23 March 2013.

VERB TENSES

These three verb tenses account for approximately 80% of the verb tense use in academic writing. This handout will help you understand how present simple, past simple, and present perfect verb tenses are used in academic writing.

Present Simple Tense

The **present simple** tense is the basic tense of most academic writing. Use this as your first choice unless you have a good reason to use another tense. Specifically, the present simple is used:

- To “frame” your paper: in your introduction, the present simple tense describes what we *already know* about the topic; in the conclusion, it says what we *now know* about the topic and what further research *is still needed*.
- To make general statements, conclusions, or interpretations about previous research or data, focusing on what is known *now* (*The data suggest ... The research shows ...*).
- To cite a previous study or finding without mentioning the researcher in the sentence:

*The dinoflagellate's TFVCs **require** an unidentified substance in fresh fish excreta* (Environmental Science)[1]

- To introduce evidence or support in the structure:
There is evidence that ...
- To show strong agreement with a conclusion or theory from a previous paper (*Smith suggests that ...*), but not specific findings or data (use the past simple)

Past Simple Tense

Past simple tense is used for two main functions in most academic fields:

- To introduce other people’s research into your text when you are describing a specific study, usually carried out by named researcher. The research often provides an example that supports a general statement or a finding in your research. Although it is possible to use the past tense to distance yourself from a study’s findings, this appears to be rare, at least in scientific writing.[2]

...customers obviously want to be treated at least as well on fishing vessels as they are by other recreation businesses. [General claim]

*De Young (1987) **found** the quality of service to be more important than catching fish in attracting repeat customers.* [Specific supporting evidence] (Marine Science)

- To describe the methods and data of your completed experiment. However, look at examples of the Methods and Results sections in journals in your fields to check that this is good advice for you to follow. In many fields, the passive voice is most usual in methods sections, although the active voice may be possible.

*We **conducted** a secondary data analysis ...* (Public Health)

*Descriptive statistical tests and t-student test **were used** for statistical analysis.* (Medicine)

*The control group of students **took** the course previously ...* (Education)

Present Perfect Tense

The **present perfect** is mostly used for referring to previous research in the field or to your own previous findings. Since the present perfect is a *present* tense, it implies that the result is still true and relevant today.

- The subject of active present perfect verbs is often general: *Researchers have found, Studies have suggested*. The present simple could also be used here, but the present perfect focuses more on *what has been done* than on *what is known to be true now* (present simple). In the following example, there are two opposite findings, so neither is the accepted state of knowledge:

*Some studies **have shown** that girls have significantly higher fears than boys after trauma (Pfefferbaum et al., 1999; Pine & Cohen, 2002; Shaw, 2003). Other **studies have found** no gender differences (Rahav & Ronen, 1994). (Psychology)*

- A new topic can be introduced with this structure:

There have been several investigations into ...

- The present perfect forms a connection between the past (previous research) and the present (your study). So, you say what *has been found* and then how you will contribute to the field. This is also useful when you want to point out a gap in the existing research.

*More recently, advances **have been made** using computational hydrodynamics to study the evolution of SNRs in multidimensions ...(citation) ... [previous research]*

*However, a similar problem **exists** in the study of SNR dynamics. [gap] (Astrophysics)*

- The passive voice is common in the present perfect tense to describe previous findings without referring directly to the original paper: *... has been studied; it has been observed that ...* You should usually provide citations in parentheses or a footnote. The passive voice allows you to move the subject of your research into a place in the sentence where it will have more focus.
- You can also use the present perfect to tell the history of your idea (what has created it?), describe the results of your research (*we have developed a new ...*), or to draw conclusions (*this has led us to conclude that ...*).

“TO BE” Verbs

“To be, or not to be—that is the question.” (Shakespeare)

Not another “to be”—that is the answer! (De Rosa)

LIST OF “TO BE” VERBS:

am	are	is	was
were	be	become	became

TO BE

will be different
is interesting to me
the first step is for the editor to find
to insure that the project is doable
this paper is an analysis of leadership skills
this is a caricature of Donald Duck
this is important to the project because

NOT TO BE

will differ
interests me
the editor must first identify
to insure the project’s feasibility
this paper analyzes leadership skills
this comic strip caricatures Donald Duck
its importance stems from

SOURCE:

“Verb Tenses.” *The Writing Center*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012. Web. 23 March 2013.

SEMI-COLONS, COLONS, AND DASHES

BECOME A PRO AT USING SEMI-COLONS (;), COLONS (:), AND DASHES (—)

Semi-Colons

The semi-colon looks like a comma with a period above it, and this can be a good way to remember what it does. A semi-colon creates more separation between thoughts than a comma does but less than a period does.

Here are the two most common uses of the semi-colon:

1. To help separate items in a list, when some of those items already contain commas.

Let's look at an example, as that is the easiest way to understand this use of the semi-colon. Suppose I want to list three items that I bought at the grocery store:

- *apples*
- *grapes*
- *pears*

In a sentence, I would separate these items with commas:

- *I bought apples, grapes, and pears.*

Now suppose that the three items I want to list are described in phrases that already contain some commas:

- *shiny, ripe apples*
- *small, sweet, juicy grapes*
- *firm pears*

If I use commas to separate these items, my sentence looks like this:

- *I bought shiny, ripe apples, small, sweet, juicy grapes, and firm pears.*

That middle part is a bit confusing—it doesn't give the reader many visual cues about how many items are in the list, or about which words should be grouped together. Here is where the semi-colon can help. The commas between items can be "bumped up" a notch and turned into semi-colons, so that readers can easily tell how many items are in the list and which words go together:

- *I bought shiny, ripe apples; small, sweet, juicy grapes; and firm pears.*

2. To join two sentences.

An independent clause is a group of words that can stand on its own (independently)—it is a complete sentence. Semi-colons can be used between two independent clauses. The semi-colon keeps the clauses somewhat separate, like a period would do, so we can easily tell which ideas belong to which clause. But it also suggests that there may be a close relationship between the two clauses—closer than you would expect if there were a period between them. Let's look at a few examples. Here are a few fine independent clauses, standing on their own as complete sentences:

- *I went to the grocery store today. I bought a ton of fruit. Apples, grapes, and pears were on sale.*

Now—where could semi-colons fit in here? They could be used to join two (but not all three) of the independent clauses together. So either of these pairs of sentences would be o.k.:

- *I went to the grocery store today; I bought a ton of fruit. Apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.*

OR

- *I went to the grocery store today. I bought a ton of fruit; apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.*

I could NOT do this:

- *I went to the grocery store today; I bought a ton of fruit; apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.*

But why I would want to use a semi-colon here, anyway? One reason might have to do with style: the three short sentences sound kind of choppy or abrupt. A stronger reason might be if I wanted to emphasize a relationship between two of the sentences. If I connect “I bought a ton of fruit” and “Apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale” more closely, readers may realize that the reason why I bought so much fruit is that there was a great sale on it.

Colons

Colons follow independent clauses (clauses that could stand alone as sentences) and can be used to present an explanation, draw attention to something, or join ideas together.

Common Uses of Colons

1. To announce, introduce, or direct attention to a list, a noun or noun phrase, a quotation, or an example/explanation. You can use a colon to draw attention to many things in your writing. The categories listed below often overlap, so don't worry too much about whether your intended use of the colon fits one category perfectly.

- Lists/series example: *We covered many of the fundamentals in our writing class: grammar, punctuation, style, and voice.*
- Noun/noun phrase example: *My roommate gave me the things I needed most: companionship and quiet.*
- Quotation example: *Shakespeare said it best: “To thine own self be true.”*
- Example/explanation example: *Many graduate students discover that there is a dark side to academia: late nights, high stress, and a crippling addiction to caffeinated beverages.*

2. To join sentences. You can use a colon to connect two sentences when the second sentence summarizes, sharpens, or explains the first. Both sentences should be complete, and their content should be very closely related. Note that if you use colons this way too often, it can break up the flow of your writing. So don't go colon-crazy!

- Example: *Life is like a puzzle: half the fun is in trying to work it out.*

3. **To express time, in titles, and as part of other writing conventions.** Colons appear in several standard or conventional places in writing. Here are a few examples:

- With numbers. Colons are used to separate units of time (4:45:00 expresses four hours, forty-five minutes, and zero seconds); ratios (2:1), and Bible verses and chapters (Matthew 2:24).
- In bibliography entries. Many citation styles use a colon to separate information in bibliography entries.
 - Example: *Kurlansky, M. (2002). Salt: A world history. New York, NY: Walker and Co.*
- With subtitles. Colons are used to separate titles from subtitles.
 - Example: *Everest: The Last Frontier*
- After the salutation in a formal business letter. A colon can be used immediately after the greeting in a formal letter (less-formal letters tend to use a comma in this location).
 - Example:
To Whom it May Concern:
Please accept my application for the position advertised in the News and Observer.

Common Colon Mistakes

Using a colon between a verb and its object or complement

- Example (incorrect): *The very best peaches are: those that are grown in the great state of Georgia.*

Using a colon between a preposition and its object

- Example (incorrect): *My favorite cake is made of: carrots, flour, butter, eggs, and cream cheese icing.*

Using a colon after “such as,” “including,” “especially,” and similar phrases. This violates the rule that the material preceding the colon must be a complete thought. Look, for example, at the following sentence:

- Example (incorrect): *There are many different types of paper, including: college ruled, wide ruled, and plain copy paper.*

Should you capitalize the first letter after a colon?

The first word following the colon should be lower-cased if the words after the colon form a dependent clause (that is, if they could not stand on their own as a complete sentence). If the following phrase is a complete (independent) clause, you may choose to capitalize it or not. Whichever approach you choose, be sure to be consistent throughout your paper.

Example with an independent clause, showing two different approaches to capitalization:

- *The commercials had one message: **The** geeks shall inherit the earth. (correct)*
- *The commercials had one message: **the** geeks shall inherit the earth. (correct)*

Example with a dependent clause (which is not capitalized)

- *There are three things that I love more than anything else in the world: **my** family, my friends, and my computer. (correct)*

Dashes

The first thing to know when talking about dashes is that they are almost never required by the laws of grammar and punctuation. Overusing dashes can break up the flow of your writing, making it choppy or even difficult to follow, so don't overdo it.

It's also important to distinguish between dashes and hyphens. Hyphens are shorter lines (-); they are most often used to show connections between words that are working as a unit (for example, you might see adjectives like "well-intentioned") or to spell certain words (like "e-mail").

To set off material for emphasis. Think of dashes as the opposite of parentheses. Where parentheses indicate that the reader should put less emphasis on the enclosed material, dashes indicate that the reader should pay more attention to the material between the dashes. Dashes add drama—parentheses whisper. Dashes can be used for emphasis in several ways:

A single dash can emphasize material at the beginning or end of a sentence.

- Example: *After eighty years of dreaming, the elderly man realized it was time to finally revisit the land of his youth—Ireland.*
- Example: *"The Office"—a harmless television program or a dangerously subversive guide to delinquency in the workplace?*

Two dashes can emphasize material in the middle of a sentence. Some style and grammar guides even permit you to write a complete sentence within the dashes.

- Example: *Everything I saw in my new neighborhood—from the graceful elm trees to the stately brick buildings—reminded me of my alma mater.*
- Example (complete sentence): *The students—they were each over the age of eighteen—lined up in the streets to vote for the presidential candidates.*

Two dashes can emphasize a modifier. Words or phrases that describe a noun can be set off with dashes if you wish to emphasize them.

- Example: *The fairgrounds—cold and wet in the October rain—were deserted.*
- Example: *Nettie—her chin held high—walked out into the storm.*

To indicate sentence introductions or conclusions. You can sometimes use a dash to help readers see that certain words are meant as an introduction or conclusion to your sentence.

- Example: *Books, paper, pencils—many students lacked even the simplest tools for learning in nineteenth-century America.*
- Example: *To improve their health, Americans should critically examine the foods that they eat—fast food, fatty fried foods, junk food, and sugary snacks.*

To mark “bonus phrases.” Phrases that add information or clarify but are not necessary to the meaning of a sentence are ordinarily set off with commas. But when the phrase itself already contains one or more commas, dashes can help readers understand the sentence.

- Slightly confusing example with commas: *Even the simplest tasks, washing, dressing, and going to work, were nearly impossible after I broke my leg.*
- Better example with dashes: *Even the simplest tasks—washing, dressing, and going to work—were nearly impossible after I broke my leg.*

To break up dialogue. In written dialogue, if a speaker suddenly or abruptly stops speaking, hesitates in speech, or is cut off by another speaker, a dash can indicate the pause or interruption.

- Example: *“I—I don’t know what you’re talking about,” denied the politician.*
- Example: *Mimi began to explain herself, saying, “I was thinking—”*
“I don’t care what you were thinking,” Rodolpho interrupted.

SOURCE:

“Semi-Colons, Colons, and Dashes.” *The Writing Center*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012. Web. 23 March 2013.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE


Active Voice

In sentences written in active voice, the subject performs the action expressed in the verb; the **subject acts**. In each example below, the subject of the sentence performs the action expressed in the verb.


The dog bit the boy.



Pooja will present her research at the conference.


Scientists have conducted experiments to test the hypothesis.



Watching a framed, mobile world through a car's windshield reminds me of watching a movie.


Passive Voice

In sentences written in the passive voice, the subject receives the action expressed in the verb; the **subject is acted upon**. The agent performing the action may appear in a “by the...” phrase or may be omitted entirely. Sometimes the use of passive voice can create awkward sentences, as in the last example below. Also, the overuse of passive voice throughout an essay can cause your prose to seem flat and uninteresting.


The boy was bitten by the dog.


Research will be presented by Pooja at the conference.

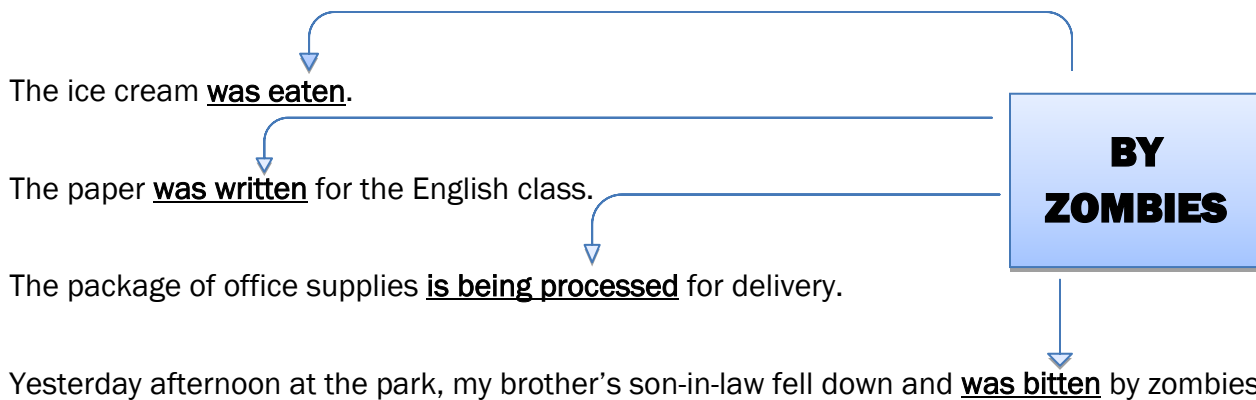

Experiments have been conducted by scientists to test the hypothesis.


I am reminded of watching a movie or TV by watching a framed, mobile world through a car's windshield.

Recognizing Passive Voice

You can recognize passive-voice expressions because the verb phrase will always include a form of *be*, such as: *am*, *is*, *was*, *were*, *are*, or *been*. The presence of a *be*-verb, however, does not necessarily mean that the sentence contains a passive construction.

Another way to recognize passive-voice sentences is that they may include a “by the” phrase after the verb; the agent performing the action, if named, is the object of the preposition in this phrase. Even if there is no “by” in the sentence, you can insert your own “by” phrase to check for passive voice. Try using the phrase “by zombies”:



Choosing Active Voice

In most nonscientific writing situations, active voice is preferable to passive voice. Even in scientific writing, overuse of passive voice or the use of passive voice in long and complicated sentences can cause readers to lose interest or become confused. Sentences written in active voice are generally—though not always—clearer and more direct than those in passive voice.

PASSIVE (indirect):	ACTIVE (direct):
<u>The entrance exam</u> <i>was failed</i> by <u>over one-third of the applicants</u> to the school.	<u>Over one-third of the applicants</u> to the school <i>failed</i> <u>the entrance exam</u> .
<u>The breaks</u> <i>were slammed on</i> by <u>her</u> as the car sped downhill.	<u>She</u> <i>slammed on</i> <u>the brakes</u> as the car sped downhill.
<u>Your bicycle</u> <i>was damaged</i> . <i>By who/what?? Agent omitted</i>	<u>I</u> <i>damaged</i> <u>your bicycle</u> .

Sentences in active voice are also more concise than those in passive voice because fewer words are required to express action. While a word or two on short sentences does not seem like much, the extra words can significantly increase the overall sense of wordiness in essays.

PASSIVE (wordy):	ACTIVE (concise):
<u>Action on the bill</u> <i>is being considered</i> by <u>the committee</u> . ↗	<u>The committee</u> <i>is considering</i> <u>action on the bill</u> . ↘
By then, <u>the soundtrack</u> <i>will have been remixed</i> by <u>the sound engineers</u> . ↘	By then, <u>the sound engineers</u> <i>will have remixed</i> <u>the soundtrack</u> . ↗

Changing Passive to Active

If you want to change a passive-voice sentence to active voice, find the agent in a “by the...” phrase, or consider carefully who or what is performing the action expressed in the verb. Make that agent the subject of the sentence, and change the verb accordingly. Sometimes you will need to infer the agent from the surrounding sentences which provide context.

PASSIVE VOICE:	AGENT	CHANGED TO ACTIVE:
<u>The book</u> <i>is being read</i> by <u>most of the class</u> . ↘	most of the class	<u>Most of the class</u> <i>is reading</i> <u>the book</u> . ↗
<u>Results</u> <i>will be published</i> in the next issue of the journal. <i>By ??</i> ↘	agent not specified; could be “researchers”	<u>The researchers</u> <i>will publish</i> <u>results</u> in the next issue of the journal. ↗
<u>A policy of whitewashing and cover-up</u> <i>has been used</i> by <u>the CIA director and his close advisors</u> . ↗	the CIA director and his close advisors	<u>The CIA director and his advisors</u> <i>has used</i> <u>a policy of whitewashing and coverup</u> . ↘
<u>Mistakes</u> <i>were made</i> . <i>By ??</i> ↘	agent not specified; could be “we”	<u>We</u> <i>made</i> <u>mistakes</u> . ↗

Choosing Passive Voice

While active voice helps to create clear and direct sentences, sometimes writers find that using an indirect expression is rhetorically effective in a given situation. Politicians are especially notorious for their use of the passive voice to avoid placing themselves too closely to unpopular policies. In scientific writing, passive voice is more readily accepted since using it allows one to write without using personal pronouns or the names of particular researchers as the subjects of sentences. This practice helps to create the appearance of an objective, fact-based discourse because writers can present research and conclusions without attributing them to particular agents and convey information that is not limited or biased by individual perspectives or personal interests.

Passive voice makes sense when the agent performing the action is obvious, unimportant, or unknown or to avoid mentioning the agent at all because it highlights the action and what is acted upon rather than the agent performing the action.

ACTIVE:	PASSIVE:
The dispatcher <i>is notifying</i> police that three prisoners have escaped.	Police <i>are being notified</i> that three prisoners have escaped.
Surgeons successfully <i>performed</i> by a new experimental liver transplant yesterday.	A new experimental liver transplant <i>was performed</i> successfully yesterday.
“ Authorities <i>make</i> rules to be broken,” he said defiantly.	“ Rules <i>are made</i> to be broken,” he said defiantly.

Changing Active to Passive

If you want to change an active-voice sentence to passive voice, consider carefully who or what is performing the action expressed in the verb, and then make that agent the object of a “by the” phrase. Make what is acted upon the subject of the sentence, and change the verb form.

ACTIVE VOICE:	AGENT	CHANGED TO PASSIVE:
The presiding officer <i>vetoed</i> the committee’s recommendation .	The presiding officer	The committee’s recommendation <i>was vetoed</i> by the presiding officer .
The leaders <i>are seeking</i> a fair resolution to the crisis.	The leaders	A fair resolution to the crisis <i>is being sought</i> . <small>(agent removed)</small>
Scientists <i>have discovered</i> traces of ice on the surface of Mars..	the CIA director and his close advisors	Traces of ice <i>have been discovered</i> on the surface of Mars. <small>(agent removed)</small>

Some Suggestions

1. Avoid starting a sentence in active voice and then shifting to passive voice.

UNNECESSARY SHIFT IN VOICE:	REVISED:
Many customers in the restaurant <i>found the coffee</i> too bitter to drink, but it was still <i>ordered</i> frequently.	Many customers in the restaurant <i>found the coffee</i> too bitter to drink, but they still <i>ordered it</i> frequently.
He <i>tried</i> to act cool when he slipped in the puddle, but he was still <i>laughed at</i> by the other students .	He <i>tried</i> to act cool when he slipped in the puddle, but the other students still <i>laughed at him</i> .

2. Avoid dangling modifiers caused by the use of active voice. A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence.

DANGLING MODIFIER WITH PASSIVE VOICE:	REVISED:
To save time, the paper <i>was written</i> on a computer. (Who was saving time? The paper?)	To save time, Kristin <i>wrote the paper</i> on a computer.
Seeking to lay off workers without taking the blame, consultants <i>were hired</i> to break the bad news. (Who was seeking to lay off workers? The consultants?)	Seeking to lay off workers without taking the blame, the CEO <i>hired consultants</i> to break the bad news.

3. Don't trust grammar-checking programs in word-processing software. Many grammar checkers flag all passive constructions, but you may want to keep some that are flagged. Trust your judgment, or ask another human being for their opinion about which sentence sounds best.

Source:

"Active and Passive Voice." *The OWL at Purdue University*. Purdue U, 2004. Web. 22 May 2012.

Redesigned by Beth Oualline, College Station High School

SENTENCE VARIETY

Models for effective syntactical variation from the greatest literary voices

1. Begin with a subject.
Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board.
–Zora Neal Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
2. Begin with an article and the subject.
A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.
–William Strunk
3. Begin with an adjective and the subject.
Old Mr. Shimerda is dead, and his family are in great distress.
–Willa Cather, *My Antonia*
4. Begin with an adverb before the subject.
Eagerly, we settled onto the muddy forest floor and waited.
–Mildred D. Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*
5. Begin with a prepositional phrase used as an adverb.
After breakfast, Billy got out his best knife, the one with a needle point.
–John Steinbeck, *The Red Pony*
6. Postpone the subject.
In a hold in the ground lived a hobbit.
–J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*
7. Begin with a conjunction.
But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me.
–Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

And people laugh at me because I use big words. But if you have big ideas you have to use big words to express them, haven't you?
–Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Ann of Green Gables*
8. Begin with a transitional word or phrase.
Now, facing the bull, he was conscious of many things at the same time.
–Ernest Hemingway, “*The Undefeated*”
9. Begin with a subordinate clause.
Because its primary reason for existence was government, Maycomb was spared the grubbiness that distinguished most Alabama towns its size.
–Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

10. Begin with two or more prepositional phrases.
Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting.
–William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*
11. Write a sentence in which repetition plays a role.
There is no influence like the influence of habit.
–Gilbert Parker, *The Translation of a Savage*
12. Begin with an appositive phrase.
One of eleven brothers and sisters, Harriet was a moody, willful child.
–Langston Hughes, “*Road to Freedom*”
13. Begin with a verb.
Look at that sea, girls—all silver and shadow and vision of things not seen.
–Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Ann of Green Gables*
14. Write a sentence in inverted order so that the predicate comes before the subject.
Across the street from their house, in an empty lot between two houses, stood the rock pile.
–James Baldwin, “*The Rock Pile*”
15. Begin with an adverbial clause.
Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house.
–D.H. Lawrence, “*The Rocking-Horse Winner*”
16. Write a periodic sentence in which the sentence base (independent clause) comes last.
When the doorbell rings at three in the morning, it's never good news.
–Anthony Horowitz, *Stormbreaker*
17. Begin with an infinitive as the subject.
To say that Bilbo's breath was taken away is no description at all.
–J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*
18. Begin with a present participial phrase.
Taking the stairs two at a time, he didn't even notice me following behind.
–Olive Ann Burns, *Cold Sassy Tree*
19. Begin with a past participial phrase.
Amazed at the simplicity of it all, I understood everything as never before.
–Alphonse Daudet, “*The Last Lesson*”
20. Begin with a gerund or gerund phrase as the subject.
The teaching which you have heard...is not my opinion, and its goal is not to explain the world to those who are thirsty for knowledge.
–Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*

21. Write a sentence in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are juxtaposed, thus creating an effect of surprise and wit.

It was the saddest and most cruel April of the five. It had held out an almost unbelievable joy and had then struck out in fury at those whose hands were outstretched.

–Irene Hunt, *Across Five Aprils*

22. Write a sentence ending with three parallel elements: words, phrases, or clauses that have the same structure.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

–John F. Kennedy, *Inaugural Address*

Seeking means to have a goal; but finding means to be free, to be receptive, to have no goal.

–Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*

23. Write a sentence beginning with three parallel elements: words, phrases, or clauses that have the same structure.

Hostile to the past, impatient of the present, and cheated of the future, we were much like those whom men's justice, or hatred, forces to live behind prison bars.

–Albert Camus, *The Plague*

24. Write a sentence using polysyndeton to highlight quantity or mass of detail, or to create a flowing, continuous sentence pattern.

She looked fresh and young and very beautiful. I thought I had never seen anyone so beautiful.

–Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*

Oh my piglets, we are the origins of war—not history's forces, nor the times, nor justice, nor the lack of it, nor causes, nor religious, nor ideas, nor kinds of government—not any other thing.

–James Goldman, *The Lion in Winter*

25. Write a sentence using asyndeton.

Bombardment, barrage, curtain-fire, mines, gas, tanks, machine-guns, hand-grenades—words, words, words, but they hold the horror of the world.

–Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

26. Begin with a noun clause.

What most people don't seem to realize is that there is just as much money to be made out of the wreckage of a civilization as from the upbuilding of one.

–Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*

27. Ask a rhetorical question.

Do I walk? Have I feet still?

–Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

28. Write a sentence or series of sentences using anaphora.
We are a people in a quandary about the present. We are a people in search of our future. We are a people in search of a national community.
 –Barbara Jordan, 1976 Democratic Convention Keynote Address
29. Write a sentence using epistrophe.
Everything's a story. You are a story. I am a story.
 –Frances Hodgson Burnett, A Little Princess
30. Begin with an absolute phrase (or more than one).
His hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top.
 –Richard Connell, “The Most Dangerous Game”
31. Write an antithetical sentence that contains two statements which are balanced but opposite.
Nothing is hopeless; we must hope for everything.
 –Madeleine L’Engle, A Wrinkle in Time
32. Write a sentence or a series of sentences using anadiplosis.
Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern, you change your attitude. Once you change your attitude, it changes your behavior pattern and then you go on into some action.
 –Malcom X, The Ballot or the Bullet
33. Write a sentence using antimetabole, in which the arrangement of ideas in the second clause is a reversal of the first.
We do not stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.
 –Benjamin Franklin
- Fair is foul, and foul is fair.*
 –William Shakespeare, Macbeth
34. Write a sentence using epanalepsis.
The time must come. It's enough—enough to go to cemeteries, enough to weep for oceans—it's enough.
 –Elie Wiesel, Speech at Buchenwald Concentration Camp
35. Create a balanced sentence in which the phrases or clauses balance each other by virtue of their likeness of structure.
It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.
 –Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities

Source:

Laying the Foundation, National Math and Science Initiative

Redesigned by Beth Oualline, College Station High School