Grammar and mechanics are nothing more than the way words are combined into sentences. Usage is the way words are used by a network of people—in this case, the community of businesspeople who use English. You'll find it easier to get along in this community if you know the accepted standards of grammar, mechanics, and usage. This handbook offers you valuable opportunities in two sections:

- **Diagnostic Test of English Skills.** Testing your current knowledge of grammar, mechanics, and usage helps you find out where your strengths and weaknesses lie. This test offers 60 items taken from the topics included in this Handbook.
- **Assessment of English Skills.** After completing the diagnostic test, use the assessment form to highlight those areas you most need to review.

To quickly review the basics, you can visit www.prenhall.com/thill and select "Handbook of Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage Practice Sessions." Test yourself and reinforce what you learn. Use this essential review not only to study and improve your English skills but also as a reference for any questions you may have during this course.

Without a firm grasp of the basics of grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and vocabulary, you risk being misunderstood, damaging your company's image, losing money for your company, and possibly even losing your job. However, once you develop strong English skills, you will create clear and concise messages, you will enhance your company's image as well as your own, and you will not only increase your company's profits but expand your own chances of success.

**DIAGNOSTIC TEST OF ENGLISH SKILLS**

Use this test to help you determine whether you need more practice with grammar, punctuation, mechanics, or vocabulary. When you've answered all the questions, ask your instructor for an answer sheet so that you can score the test. On the Assessment of English Skills form (page H-2), record the number of questions you answered correctly in each section.

The following choices apply to items 1–10. In each blank, write the letter of the choice that best describes the problem with each sentence.

- A. sentence incomplete
- B. too many phrases/clauses strung together
- C. modifying elements misplaced (dangling)
- D. structure not parallel
- E. nothing wrong

1. Stop here.
2. Your duties are interviewing, hiring, and also to fire employees.
3. After their presentation, I was still undecided.
4. Speaking freely, the stock was considered a bargain.
5. Margaret, pressed for time, turned in unusually sloppy work.

6. Typing and filing, routine office chores.
7. With care, edit the report.
8. When Paul came to work here, he brought some outmoded ideas, now he has accepted our modern methods.
9. To plan is better than improvising.
10. Hoping to improve performance, practice is advisable.

The following choices apply to items 11–20. In each blank, write the letter of the choice that identifies the underlined word(s) in each sentence.

- A. subject
- B. predicate (verb)
- C. object
- D. modifier
- E. conjunction/preposition

11. Take his memo upstairs.
12. Before leaving, he repaired the photocopier.
13. Velnor, Inc., will soon introduce a new product line.
14. We must hire only qualified, ambitious graduates.
15. They are having trouble with their quality control systems.
16. After she wrote the report, Jill waited eagerly for a response.
17. The route to the plant isn’t paved yet.
18. See me after the meeting.
19. Your new home is ready and waiting.
20. BFL is large but caring.

In the blanks for items 21–30, write the letter of the word that best completes each sentence.

21. Starbucks (A. is, B. are) opening five new stores in San Diego in the next year.
22. There (A. is, B. are) 50 applicants for the job opening.
23. Anyone who wants to be (A. their, B. his or her) own boss should think about owning a franchise.
24. Neither of us (A. was, B. were) prepared for the meeting.
25. Another characteristic of a small business is that (A. they tend, B. it tends) to be more innovative than larger firms.
26. After he had (A. saw, B. seen) the revised budget, Raymond knew he wouldn’t be getting a new desk.
27. The number of women-owned small businesses (A. has, B. have) increased sharply in the past two decades.

28. If I (A. was, B. were) you, I’d stop sending personal e-mails at work.

29. Eugene (A. lay, B. laid) the files on the desk.

30. Either FedEx or UPS (A. has, B. have) been chosen as our preferred shipping service.

The following choices apply to items 31–40. In each blank, write the letter of the choice that best describes each sentence.

A. all punctuation used correctly
B. some punctuation used incorrectly or incorrectly omitted

31. The president who rarely gave interviews, agreed to write an article for the company newsletter.

32. Give the assignment to Karen Schiff, the new technical writer.

33. Could you please send a replacement for Item No. 3–303.

34. Debbie said that, “technicians must have technical degrees.”

35. We’ll have branches in Bakersfield, California, Reno, Nevada, and Medford, Oregon.

36. Before leaving her secretary finished typing the memo.

37. How many of you consider yourselves “computer literate?”

38. This, then, is our goal: to increase market share by 50 percent.

39. They plan to move soon, however, they still should be invited.

40. Health, wealth, and happiness—those are my personal goals.

The following choices apply to items 41–50. In each blank, write the letter of the word that best completes each sentence.

A. affect
B. effect

41. Most of last year’s sales came from the midwest.

42. We can provide the items you are looking for @ $2 each.

43. Alex noted: “few of our competitors have tried this approach.”

44. Address the letter to professor Elliott Barker, Psychology Department, North Dakota State University.

45. They’ve recorded 22 complaints since yesterday, all of them from long-time employees.

46. Leslie’s presentation—“New Markets for the Nineties”—was well organized.

47. We’re having a sale in the childrens’ department, beginning Wednesday, August 15.

48. About 50 of the newly inducted members will be present.

49. Mister Spencer has asked me to find ten volunteers.

50. Let’s meet in Beth and Larry’s office at one o’clock.

In the blanks for items 51–60, write the letter of the word that best completes each sentence.

A. error in punctuation
B. error in use of abbreviations or symbols
C. error in use of numbers
D. error in capitalization
E. no errors

51. Will having a degree (A. affect, B. effect) my chances for promotion?

52. Place the latest drawings (A. beside, B. besides) the others.

53. Try not to (A. loose, B. lose) this key; we will charge you a fee to replace it.

54. Let us help you choose the right tie to (A. complement, B. compliment) your look.

55. The five interviewers should discuss the candidates’ qualifications (A. among, B. between) themselves.

56. New employees spend their time looking for (A. perspective, B. prospective) clients.

57. Are the goods you received different (A. from, B. than) the goods you ordered?

58. He took those courses to (A. farther, B. further) his career.

59. We are (A. anxious, B. eager) to see you next Thursday.

60. All commissions will be (A. disbursed, B. dispensed, C. dispersed) on the second Friday of every month.

**ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH SKILLS**

In the space provided below, record the number of questions you answered correctly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number You Got Correct</th>
<th>Skill Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sentence structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar: Parts of speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–30</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar: Verbs and agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–40</td>
<td></td>
<td>Punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41–50</td>
<td></td>
<td>Punctuation and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51–60</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you scored 8 or lower in any of the skills areas, focus on those areas in the appropriate sections of this Handbook.
1.0 Grammar

Grammar is the study of how words come together to form sentences. Categorized by meaning, form, and function, English words fall into various parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and interjections. You will communicate more clearly if you understand how each of these parts of speech operates in a sentence.

1.1 Nouns

A noun names a person, place, or thing. Anything you can see or detect with one of your other senses has a noun to name it. Some things you can’t see or sense are also nouns—ions, for example, or space. So are things that exist as ideas, such as accuracy and height. (You can see that something is accurate or that a building is tall, but you can’t see the idea of accuracy or the idea of height.) These names for ideas are known as abstract nouns. The simplest nouns are the names of things you can see or touch: car, building, cloud, brick.

1.1.1 Proper Nouns and Common Nouns

So far, all the examples of nouns have been common nouns, referring to general classes of things. The word building refers to a whole class of structures. Common nouns such as building are not capitalized.

If you want to talk about one particular building, however, you might refer to the Glazier Building. The name is capitalized, indicating that Glacier Building is a proper noun.

Here are three sets of common and proper nouns for comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common</th>
<th>Proper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>city</td>
<td>Kansas City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company</td>
<td>Blaisden Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>store</td>
<td>Books Galore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the dictionary says nothing about the plural of a word, it’s formed the usual way: by adding s. If the plural is formed in some irregular way, the dictionary often shows the plural spelling.

1.1.2 Nouns as Subject and Object

Nouns may be used in sentences as subjects or objects. That is, the person, place, idea, or thing that is being or doing (subject) is represented by a noun. So is the person, place, idea, or thing that is being acted on (object). In the following sentence, the nouns are underlined.

The secretary keyboarded the report.

The secretary (subject) is acting in a way that affects the report (object). The following sentence is more complicated:

The installer delivered the carpeting to the customer.

Installer is the subject. Carpeting is the object of the main part of the sentence (acted on by the installer), whereas customer is the object of the phrase to the customer. Nevertheless, both carpeting and customer are objects.

1.1.3 Plural Nouns

Nouns can be either singular or plural. The usual way to make a plural noun is to add s to the singular form of the word:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rock</td>
<td>rocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>picture</td>
<td>pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>song</td>
<td>songs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many nouns have other ways of forming the plural. Letters, numbers, and words used as words are sometimes made plural by adding an apostrophe and an s. Very often, ’s is used with abbreviations that have periods, lowercase letters that stand alone, and capital letters that might be confused with words when made into plurals:

Spell out all St.’s and Ave.’s.

He divided the page with a row of x’s.

Sarah will register the A’s through the G’s at the convention.

In other cases, however, the apostrophe may be left out:

They’ll review their ABCs.

The stock market climbed through most of the 1980s.

Circle all ths in the paragraph.

In some of these examples, the letters used as letters and words used as words are italicized (a mechanics issue that is discussed later).

Other nouns, such as those below, are so-called irregular nouns; they form the plural in some way other than by simply adding s:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tax</td>
<td>taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specialty</td>
<td>specialties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cargo</td>
<td>cargoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shelf</td>
<td>shelves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child</td>
<td>children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman</td>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tooth</td>
<td>teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mouse</td>
<td>mice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parenthesis</td>
<td>parenthenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>son-in-law</td>
<td>sons-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>editor-in-chief</td>
<td>editors-in-chief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rather than memorize a lot of rules about forming plurals, use a dictionary. If the dictionary says nothing about the plural of a word, it’s formed the usual way: by adding s. If the plural is formed in some irregular way, the dictionary often shows the plural spelling.
1.1.4 Possessive Nouns

A noun becomes possessive when it’s used to show the ownership of something. Then you add ’s to the word:

- the man’s car
- the woman’s apartment

However, ownership does not always need to be legal:

- the secretary’s desk
- the company’s assets

Also, ownership may be nothing more than an automatic association:

- a day’s work
- the job’s prestige

An exception to the rule about adding ’s to make a noun possessive occurs when the word is singular and already has two “s” sounds at the end. In cases like the following, an apostrophe is all that’s needed:

- crisis’ dimensions
- Mr. Moses’ application

When the noun has only one “s” sound at the end, however, retain the ’s:

- Chris’s book
- Carolyn Nuss’s office

With hyphenated nouns (compound nouns), add ’s to the last word:

- Hyphenated Noun Possessive Noun
  - mother-in-law’s
  - mayor-elect’s

To form the possessive of plural nouns, just begin by following the same rule as with singular nouns: add ’s. However, if the plural noun already ends in an ’s (as most do), drop the one you’ve added, leaving only the apostrophe:

- the clients’ complaints
- employees’ benefits

1.2 Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that stands for a noun; it saves repeating the noun:

Drivers have some choice of weeks for vacation, but they must notify this office of their preference by March 1.

The pronouns they and their stand in for the noun drivers. The noun that a pronoun stands for is called the antecedent of the pronoun, drivers is the antecedent of they and their.

When the antecedent is plural, the pronoun that stands in for it has to be plural; they and their are plural pronouns because drivers is plural. Likewise, when the antecedent is singular, the pronoun has to be singular:

- We thought the contract had expired, but we soon learned that it had not.

1.2.1 Multiple Antecedents

Sometimes a pronoun has a double (or even a triple) antecedent:

Kathryn Boettcher and Luis Gutierrez went beyond their sales quotas for January.

If taken alone, Kathryn Boettcher is a singular antecedent. So is Luis Gutierrez. However, when together they are the plural antecedent of a pronoun, so the pronoun has to be plural. Thus the pronoun is their instead of her or his.

1.2.2 Unclear Antecedents

In some sentences the pronoun’s antecedent is unclear:

Sandy Wright sent Jane Brougham her production figures for the previous year. She thought they were too low.

To which person does the pronoun her refer? Someone who knew Sandy and Jane and knew their business relationship might be able to figure out the antecedent for her. Even with such an advantage, however, a reader might receive the wrong meaning. Also, it would be nearly impossible for any reader to know which name is the antecedent of she.

The best way to clarify an ambiguous pronoun is usually to rewrite the sentence, repeating nouns when needed for clarity:

Sandy Wright sent her production figures for the previous year to Jane Brougham. Jane thought they were too low.

The noun needs to be repeated only when the antecedent is unclear.

1.2.3 Gender-Neutral Pronouns

The pronouns that stand for males are he, his, and him. The pronouns that stand for females are she, hers, and her. However, you’ll often be faced with the problem of choosing a pronoun for a noun that refers to both females and males:

- Each manager must make up his . . .
  (Not all managers are men.)

- Each manager must make up her . . .
  (Not all managers are women.)

Each manager must make up his or her . . .

(This solution is acceptable but becomes awkward when repeated more than once or twice in a document.)

- Each manager must make up her . . . Every manager will receive his . . . A manager may send her . . .
  (A manager’s gender does not alternate like a windshield wiper!)

- Each manager must make up their . . .
  (The pronoun can’t be plural when the antecedent is singular.)

Each manager must make up its . . .

(It never refers to people.)

The best solution is to make the noun plural or to revise the passage altogether:

Managers must make up their minds . . .

Each manager must decide whether . . .

Be careful not to change the original meaning.

1.2.4 Case of Pronouns

The case of a pronoun tells whether it’s acting or acted upon:

- She sells an average of five packages each week.
In this sentence, she is doing the selling. Because she is acting, she is said to be in the nominative case. Now consider what happens when the pronoun is acted upon:

After six months, Ms. Browning promoted her.

In this sentence, the pronoun her is acted upon. The pronoun her is thus said to be in the objective case.

Contrast the nominative and objective pronouns in this list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominative</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who</td>
<td>whom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whoever</td>
<td>whomever</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Objective pronouns may be used as either the object of a verb (such as promoted) or the object of a preposition (such as with):

Rob worked with them until the order was filled.

In this example, them is the object of the preposition with because Rob acted upon—worked with—them. Here's a sentence with three pronouns, the first one nominative, the second the object of a verb, and the third the object of a preposition:

He paid us as soon as the check came from them.

He is nominative; us is objective because it's the object of the verb paid; them is objective because it's the object of the preposition from.

Every writer sometimes wonders whether to use who or whom:

(Who, Whom) will you hire?

Because this sentence is a question, it's difficult to see that whom is the object of the verb hire. You can figure out which pronoun to use if you rearrange the question and temporarily try she and her in place of who and whom: “Will you hire she?” or “Will you hire her?” Her and whom are both objective, so the correct choice is “Whom will you hire?” Here's a different example:

(Who, Whom) logged so much travel time?

Turning the question into a statement, you get:

He logged so much travel time.

Therefore, the correct statement is:

Who logged so much travel time?

1.2.5 Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns work like possessive nouns. They show ownership or automatic association.

her job their preferences
his account its equipment

However, possessive pronouns are different from possessive nouns in the way they are written. That is, possessive pronouns never have an apostrophe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessive Noun</th>
<th>Possessive Pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the woman's estate</td>
<td>her estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Franklin's plans</td>
<td>his plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the shareholders' feelings</td>
<td>their feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the vacuum cleaner's attachments</td>
<td>its attachments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The word its is the possessive of it. Like all other possessive pronouns, its has no apostrophe. Some people confuse it with it’s; the contraction of it is. Contractions are discussed later.

1.3 Verbs

A verb describes an action:

They all quit in disgust.

It may also describe a state of being:

Working conditions were substandard.

The English language is full of action verbs. Here are a few you'll often run across in the business world:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Verb</th>
<th>Action Verb</th>
<th>Action Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verify</td>
<td>perform</td>
<td>fulfill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hire</td>
<td>succeed</td>
<td>send</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave</td>
<td>improve</td>
<td>receive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accept</td>
<td>develop</td>
<td>pay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You could undoubtedly list many more.

The most common verb describing a state of being instead of an action is to be and all its forms:

I am, was, or will be; you are, were, or will be

Other verbs also describe a state of being:

It seemed a good plan at the time.

She sounds impressive at a meeting.

These verbs link what comes before them in the sentence with what comes after; no action is involved. (See Section 1.7.5 for a fuller discussion of linking verbs.)

1.3.1 Verb Tenses

English has three simple verb tenses: present, past, and future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Tense</th>
<th>Sentence Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Our branches in Hawaii stock other items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>We stocked Purquil pens for a short time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Rotex Tire Stores will stock your line of tires when you begin a program of effective national advertising.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With most verbs (the regular ones), the past tense ends in ed, and the future tense always has will or shall in front of it. But the present tense is more complex, depending on the subject:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb Tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Person</td>
<td>I stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Person</td>
<td>you stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Person</td>
<td>he/she/it stocks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The basic form, stock, takes an additional s when he, she, or it precedes it. (See section 1.3.4 for more on subject-verb agreement.)

In addition to the three simple tenses, there are three perfect tenses using forms of the helping verb have. The present perfect tense uses the past participle (regularly the past tense) of the main verb, stocked, and adds the present-tense have or has to the front of it:

(I, we, you, they) have stocked.

(He, she, it) has stocked.

The past perfect tense uses the past participle of the main verb, stocked, and adds the past-tense had to the front of it:

(I, you, he, she, it, we, they) had stocked.
The future perfect tense also uses the past participle of the main verb, stocked, but adds the future-tense will have:
(I, you, he, she, it, we, they) will have stocked.

Keep verbs in the same tense when the actions occur at the same time:
When the payroll checks came in, everyone showed up for work.
We have found that everyone has pitched in to help.

When the actions occur at different times, you may change tense accordingly:
The shipment came last Wednesday, so if another one comes in today, please return it.
The new employee had been ill at ease, but now she has become a full-fledged member of the team.

### 1.3.2 Irregular Verbs

Many verbs don't follow in every detail the patterns already described. The most irregular of these verbs is to be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present:</td>
<td>I am</td>
<td>we are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you are</td>
<td>you are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>he, she, it is</td>
<td>they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past:</td>
<td>I was</td>
<td>we were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you were</td>
<td>you were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>he, she, it was</td>
<td>they were</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The future tense of to be is formed in the same way that the future tense of a regular verb is formed.
The perfect tenses of to be are also formed as they would be for a regular verb, except that the past participle is a special form, been, instead of just the past tense:

- **Present perfect:** you have been
- **Past perfect:** you had been
- **Future perfect:** you will have been

Here's a sampling of other irregular verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>begin</td>
<td>began</td>
<td>begun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shrink</td>
<td>shrunk</td>
<td>shrunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know</td>
<td>knew</td>
<td>known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rise</td>
<td>rose</td>
<td>risen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>become</td>
<td>became</td>
<td>became</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>did</td>
<td>done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dictionaries list the various forms of other irregular verbs.

### 1.3.3 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Many people are confused by three particular sets of verbs:

- **Transitive:** lie/lay
- **Intransitive:** sit/set
- **Transitive:** rise/raise

Using these verbs correctly is much easier when you learn the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs. Transitive verbs convey their action to an object; they "transfer" their action to an object. Intransitive verbs do not. Here are some sample uses of transitive and intransitive verbs:

- **Transitive**
  - We should include in our new offices a place to lie down for a nap.
  - Even the way an interviewee sits is important.
  - The workers will be here on Monday to lay new carpeting.
  - That crate is full of stemware, so set it down carefully.
  - They raise their level of production every year.

The workers lay carpeting, you set down the crate, they raise production; each action is transferred to something. In the intransitive sentences, one lies down, an interviewee sits, and salaries rise without (at least grammatically) affecting anything else. Intransitive sentences are complete with only a subject and a verb, transitive sentences are not complete unless they also include an object, or something to transfer the action to.

Tenses are a confusing element of the lie/lay problem:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I lie</td>
<td>I lay</td>
<td>I have lain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I lay (something)</td>
<td>I laid (something)</td>
<td>I have laid (something)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The past tense of lie and the present tense of lay look and sound alike, even though they're different verbs.

### 1.3.4 Subject-Verb Agreement

Whether regular or irregular, every verb must agree with its subject, both in person (first, second, or third) and in number (singular or plural).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Person</th>
<th>Second Person</th>
<th>Third Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singular</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am; I write</td>
<td>you are; you</td>
<td>he/she/it is;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>write</td>
<td>he/she/it writes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plural</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we are; we</td>
<td>you are; you</td>
<td>they are;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>write</td>
<td>they write</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a simple sentence, making a verb agree with its subject is a straightforward task:

Hector Ruiz is a strong competitor. (third-person singular)

We write to you every month. (first-person plural)

Confusion sometimes arises when sentences are a bit more complicated. For example, be sure to avoid agreement problems when words come between the subject and verb. In the following examples, the verb appears in italics, and its subject is underlined:

The analysis of existing documents takes a full week.

Even though documents is a plural, the verb is in the singular form. That's because the subject of the sentence is analysis, a singular noun. The phrase of existing documents can be disregarded. Here is another example:

The answers for this exercise are in the study guide.

Take away the phrase for this exercise and you are left with the plural subject answers. Therefore, the verb takes the plural form.

Verb agreement is also complicated when the subject is not a specific noun or pronoun and when the subject may be considered either singular or plural. In such cases, you have to analyze the surrounding sentence to determine which verb form to use.

The staff is quartered in the warehouse.
The staff are at their desks in the warehouse. The computers and the staff are in the warehouse.

Neither the staff nor the computers are in the warehouse. Every computer is in the warehouse. Many a computer is in the warehouse.

Did you notice that words such as every use the singular verb form? In addition, when an either/or or a neither/nor phrase combines singular and plural nouns, the verb takes the form that matches the noun closest to it.

In the business world, some subjects require extra attention. Company names, for example, are considered singular and therefore take a singular verb in most cases—even if they contain plural words:

Stater Brothers offers convenient grocery shopping.

In addition, quantities are sometimes considered singular and sometimes plural. If a quantity refers to a total amount, it takes a singular verb; if a quantity refers to individual, countable units, it takes a plural verb:

Three hours is a long time.
The eight dollars we collected for the fund are tacked on the bulletin board.

Fractions may also be singular or plural, depending on the noun that accompanies them:

One-third of the warehouse is devoted to this product line.

One-third of the products are defective.

For a related discussion, see Section 1.7.2, “Longer Sentences,” later in this Handbook.

1.3.5 Voice of Verbs

Verbs have two voices, active and passive. When the subject comes first, the voice is active. When the object comes first, the voice is passive:

Active: The buyer paid a large amount.
Passive: A large amount was paid by the buyer.

The passive voice uses a form of the verb to be, which adds words to a sentence. In the example, the passive-voice sentence uses eight words, whereas the active-voice sentence uses only six to say the same thing. The words was and by are unnecessary to convey the meaning of the sentence. In fact, extra words usually clog meaning. So be sure to opt for the active voice when you have a choice.

At times, however, you have no choice:

Several items have been taken, but so far we don’t know who took them.

The passive voice becomes necessary when you don’t know (or don’t want to say) who performed the action, the active voice is bolder and more direct.

1.3.6 Mood of Verbs

You have three moods to choose from, depending on your intentions. Most of the time you use the indicative mood to make a statement or to ask a question:

The secretary mailed a letter to each supplier.
Did the secretary mail a letter to each supplier?

When you wish to command or request, use the imperative mood:

Please mail a letter to each supplier.

Sometimes, especially in business, a courteous request is stated like a question; in that case, however, no question mark is required:

Would you mail a letter to each supplier.

The subjunctive mood, most often used in formal writing or in presenting bad news, expresses a possibility or a recommendation. The subjunctive is usually signaled by a word such as if or that. In these examples, the subjunctive mood uses special verb forms:

If the secretary were to mail a letter to each supplier, we might save some money.

I suggested that the secretary mail a letter to each supplier.

Although the subjunctive mood is not used as often as it once was, it’s still found in such expressions as Come what may and If I were you. In general, it is used to convey an idea that is contrary to fact: If iron were lighter than air.

1.4 Adjectives

An adjective modifies (tells something about) a noun or pronoun. Each of the following phrases says more about the noun or pronoun than the noun or pronoun would say alone:

an efficient staff a heavy price
brisk trade poor you

Adjectives always tell us something that we wouldn’t know without them. So you don’t need to use adjectives when the noun alone, or a different noun, will give the meaning:

a company employee (An employee ordinarily works for a company.)
a crate-type container (Crate gives the entire meaning.)

Verbs in the ing (present participle) form can be used as adjectives:

A boring job can sometimes turn into a fascinating career.

So can the past participle of verbs:

A freshly painted house is a sold house.

Adjectives modify nouns more often than they modify pronouns. When adjectives do modify pronouns, however, the sentence usually has a linking verb:

They were attentive. It looked appropriate.
He seems interested. You are skillful.

At times, a series of adjectives precedes a noun:

It was a long and active workday.

Such strings of adjectives are acceptable as long as they all convey a different part of the phrase’s meaning. However, adjectives often pile up in front of a noun, like this:

The superficial, obvious answer was the one she gave.

The most valuable animal on the ranch is a small black horse.

The question is whether a comma should be used to separate the adjectives. The answer is to use a comma when the two adjectives...
independently modify the noun; do not use a comma when one of
the adjectives is closely identified with the noun. In the first example
above, the answer was both superficial and obvious. But in the sec-
ond example, the black horse is small.

Another way to think about this is to use the word and as a
replacement for the comma. Study the following example:

We recommend a diet of leafy green vegetables.

We recommend a diet of green, leafy vegetables.

Because some green vegetables are not leafy (cucumbers and zuc-
chini, for example), it is correct to leave out the comma in the first
example so that you know which kind of green vegetables are being
discussed. But because all leafy vegetables are also green (green and
leafy), the comma must be included in the second example.

You might also try switching the adjectives. If the order of the
adjectives can be reversed without changing the meaning of the
phrase, you should use a comma. If the order cannot be reversed,
you should not use a comma. Consider these examples:

Here's our simplified credit application.

Here's our simplified, easy-to-complete application.

Here's our easy-to-complete, simplified application.

A credit application may be simple or complex; however, you cannot
talk about a credit, simplified application; therefore, leave the comma
out of the first example. The application in the second and third
examples is both simplified and easy to complete, no matter how you
arrange the words, so include the comma in these examples.

1.4.1 Comparative Degree

Most adjectives can take three forms: simple, comparative, and
superlative. The simple form modifies a single noun or pronoun. Use
the comparative form when comparing two items. When comparing
three or more items, use the superlative form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>harder</td>
<td>hardest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>safe</td>
<td>safer</td>
<td>safest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dry</td>
<td>drier</td>
<td>driest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparative form adds er to the simple form, and the superlative
form adds est. (The y at the end of a word changes to i before the er
or est is added.)

A small number of adjectives are irregular, including these:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td>worse</td>
<td>worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little</td>
<td>less</td>
<td>least</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the simple form of an adjective is two or more syllables, you
usually add more to form the comparative and most to form the
superlative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>useful</td>
<td>more useful</td>
<td>most useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exhausting</td>
<td>more exhausting</td>
<td>most exhausting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expensive</td>
<td>more expensive</td>
<td>most expensive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common exceptions are two-syllable adjectives that end in y:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>happier</td>
<td>happiest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>costly</td>
<td>costlier</td>
<td>costliest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you choose this option, change the y to i, and tack er or est onto
the end.

Some adjectives cannot be used to make comparisons because
they themselves indicate the extreme. For example, if something is
perfect, nothing can be more perfect. If something is unique or ulti-
mate, nothing can be more unique or more ultimate.

1.4.2 Hyphenated Adjectives

Many adjectives used in the business world are actually combinations
of words: up-to-date report, last-minute effort, fifth-floor suite, well-built
engine. As you can see, they are hyphenated when they come before
the noun they modify. However, when they come after the noun they
modify, they are not hyphenated. In the following example, the adjec-
tives appear in italics, and the nouns they modify are underlined:

The report is up-to-date because of our team’s last-minute efforts.

Hyphens are not used when part of the combination is a word ending
in ly (because that word is usually not an adjective). Hyphens are also
omitted from word combinations that are used frequently.

- We live in a rapidly shrinking world.
- Our highly motivated employees will be well paid.
- Please consider renewing your credit card account.
- Send those figures to our data processing department.
- Our new intern is a high school student.

1.5 Adverbs

An adverb modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb:

- Modifying a verb: Our marketing department works efficiently.
- Modifying an adjective: She was not dependable, although she was highly
  intelligent.
- Modifying another adverb: His territory was too broadly diversified, so he moved
  extremely cautiously.

Most of the adverbs mentioned are adjectives turned into adverbs by
adding ly, which is how many adverbs are formed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>efficient</td>
<td>efficiently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extreme</td>
<td>extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>highly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>official</td>
<td>officially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>separate</td>
<td>separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>special</td>
<td>specially</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some adverbs are made by dropping or changing the final letter of
the adjective and then adding ly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>due</td>
<td>duly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>busy</td>
<td>busily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other adverbs don’t end in ly at all. Here are a few examples of
this type:

- often, fast, too
- soon, very, so

Some adverbs are difficult to distinguish from adjectives. For exam-
ple, in the following sentences, is the underlined word an adverb or
an adjective?
They worked well.
The baby is well.

In the first sentence, well is an adverb modifying the verb worked. In the second sentence, well is an adjective modifying the noun baby. To choose correctly between adverbs and adjectives, remember that verbs of being link a noun to an adjective describing the noun. In contrast, you would use an adjective to describe an action verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He is a good worker.</td>
<td>He works well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(What kind of worker is he?)</td>
<td>(How does he work?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a real computer.</td>
<td>It really is a computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(What kind of computer is it?)</td>
<td>(To what extent is it a computer?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The traffic is slow.</td>
<td>The traffic moves slowly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(What quality does the traffic have?)</td>
<td>(How does the traffic move?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.5.1 Negative Adverbs
Negative adverbs (such as neither, no, not, scarcely, and seldom) are powerful words and therefore do not need any help in conveying a negative thought. In fact, using double negatives gives a strong impression of illiteracy, so avoid sentences like these:

- I don’t want no mistakes.
  
  (Correct: “I don’t want any mistakes,” or “I want no mistakes.”)

- They couldn’t hardly read the report.
  
  (Correct: “They could hardly read the report,” or “They couldn’t read the report.”)

- They scarcely noticed neither one.
  
  (Correct: “They scarcely noticed either one,” or “They noticed neither one.”)

### 1.5.2 Comparative Degree
Like adjectives, adverbs can be used to compare items. Generally, the basic adverb is combined with more or most, just as long adjectives are. However, some adverbs have one-word comparative forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One Item</th>
<th>Two Items</th>
<th>Three Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>quickly</td>
<td>more quickly</td>
<td>most quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sincerely</td>
<td>less sincerely</td>
<td>least sincerely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>faster</td>
<td>fastest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.6 Other Parts of Speech
Nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs carry most of the meaning in a sentence. Four other parts of speech link them together in sentences: prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and interjections.

#### 1.6.1 Prepositions
Prepositions are words like these:

- of
- to
- for
- with
- at
- by
- from
- about

Some prepositions consist of more than one word—like these:

- because of
- in addition to
- out of
- except for

And some prepositions are closely linked with a verb. When using phrases such as look up and wipe out, keep the phrase intact and do not insert anything between the verb and the preposition.

Prepositions most often begin prepositional phrases, which function like adjectives and adverbs by telling more about a pronoun, noun, or verb:

- of a type
- by Friday
- to the point
- with characteristic flair

To prevent misreading, prepositional phrases should be placed near the element they modify:

- Of all our technicians, she is the best trained.
- They couldn’t see the merit in my proposal.
- Someone left a folder on my desk.

It was once considered totally unacceptable to put a preposition at the end of a sentence. Now you may:

- I couldn’t tell what they were interested in.
- What did she attribute it to?

However, be careful not to place prepositions at the end of sentences when doing so is unnecessary. In fact, avoid using any unnecessary preposition. In the following examples, the prepositions in parentheses should be omitted:

- All (of) the staff members were present.
- I almost fell off (of) my chair with surprise.
- Where was Mr. Steuben going (to)?
- They couldn’t help (from) wondering.

The opposite problem is failing to include a preposition when you should. Consider the two sentences that follow:

- Sales were over $100,000 for Linda and for Bill.
- Sales were over $100,000 for Linda and for Bill.

The first sentence indicates that Linda and Bill had combined sales over $100,000; the second, that Linda and Bill each had sales over $100,000, for a combined total in excess of $200,000. The preposition for is critical here.

Prepositions are also required in sentences like this one:

- Which type of personal computer do you prefer?
- Certain prepositions are used with certain words. When the same preposition can be used for two or more words in a sentence without affecting the meaning, only the last preposition is required:

  - We are familiar (with) and satisfied with your company’s products.

But when different prepositions are normally used with the words, all the prepositions must be included:

- We are familiar with and interested in your company’s products.

Here is a partial list of prepositions that are used in a particular way with particular words:

- among/between: Among is used to refer to three or more
  
  (Circulate the memo among the staff); between is used to refer to two
  
  (Put the copy machine between Judy and Dan).

- as if/like: As if is used before a clause (It seems as if we should be doing something); like is used before a noun or
  
  pronoun (He seems like a nice guy).
have/of: Have is a verb used in verb phrases (They should have checked first); of is a preposition and is never used in such cases.

in/into: In is used to refer to a static position (The file is in the cabinet); into is used to refer to movement toward a position (Put the file into the cabinet).

And here is a partial list of some prepositions that have come to be used with certain words:

- according to
- independent of
- agree to (a proposal)
- inferior to
- agree with (a person)
- prefer to
- buy from
- prior to
- capable of
- reason with
- comply with
- responsible for
- conform to
- similar to
differ from (things)
talk to (without interaction)
differ with (person)
talk with (with interaction)
different from
in search of
get from (receive)
wait for (person or thing)
get off (dismount)
wait on (like a waiter)
in accordance with

1.6.2 Conjunctions

Conjunctions connect the parts of a sentence: words, phrases, and clauses. You are probably most familiar with coordinating conjunctions such as the following:

- and
- for
- or
- yet
- but
- nor
- so

Conjunctions may be used to connect clauses (which have both a subject and a predicate) with other clauses, to connect clauses with phrases (which do not have both a subject and a predicate), and to connect words with words:

We sell designer clothing and linens. (Words with words)

Their products are expensive but still appeal to value-conscious consumers. (Clauses with phrases)

I will call her on the phone today, or I will visit her office tomorrow. (Clauses with clauses)

Some conjunctions are used in pairs:

- both . . . and
- neither . . . nor
- whether . . . or
- either . . . or

With paired conjunctions, you must be careful to construct each phrase in the same way:

They not only are out of racquets but also are out of balls.

They are not only out of racquets but also out of balls.

They are out of not only racquets but also balls.

In other words, the construction that follows each part of the pair must be parallel, containing the same verbs, prepositions, and so on. The same need for parallelism exists when using conjunctions to join the other parts of speech:

He is listed in either your roster or my roster.

He is listed neither in your roster nor on the master list.

They both gave and received notice.

A certain type of conjunction is used to join clauses that are unequal—that is, to join a main clause to one that is subordinate or dependent. Here is a partial list of conjunctions used to introduce dependent clauses:

- although
- before
- once
- unless
- because
- if
- when

Using conjunctions is also discussed in sections 1.7.3 and 1.7.4.

1.6.3 Articles and Interjections

Only three articles exist in English: the, a, and an. These words are used, like adjectives, to specify which item you are talking about.

Interjections are words that express no solid information, only emotion:

Wow! Well, well!

Oh, no! Good!

Such purely emotional language has its place in private life and advertising copy, but it only weakens the effect of most business writing.

1.7 Sentences

Sentences are constructed with the major building blocks, the parts of speech:

Money talks.

This two-word sentence consists of a noun (money) and a verb (talks). When used in this way, the noun works as the first requirement for a sentence, the subject, and the verb works as the second requirement, the predicate. Now look at this sentence:

They merged.

The subject in this case is a pronoun (they), and the predicate is a verb (merged). This is a sentence because it has a subject and a predicate. Here is yet another kind of sentence:

The plans are ready.

This sentence has a more complicated subject, the noun plans and the article the, the complete predicate is a state-of-being verb (are) and an adjective (ready).

Without a subject (who or what does something) and a predicate (the doing of it), you have merely a collection of words, not a sentence.

1.7.1 Commands

In commands, the subject (always you) is only understood, not stated:

(You) Move your desk to the better office.

(You) Please try to finish by six o’clock.

1.7.2 Longer Sentences

More complicated sentences have more complicated subjects and predicates, but they still have a simple subject and a predicate verb. In the following examples, the subject is underlined once, the predicate verb twice:

Marex and Contron enjoy higher earnings each quarter.
(Marex [and] Contron do something; enjoy is what they do.)

My interview, coming minutes after my freeway accident, did not impress or move anyone.

(Interview is what did something. What did it do? It did [not] impress [or] move.)

In terms of usable space, a steel warehouse, with its extremely long span of roof unsupported by pillars, makes more sense.

(Warehouse is what makes.)

These three sentences demonstrate several things. First, in all three sentences, the simple subject and predicate verb are the “bare bones” of the sentence, the parts that carry the core idea of the sentence. When trying to find the subject and predicate verb, disregard all prepositional phrases, modifiers, conjunctions, and articles.

Second, in the third sentence the verb is singular (makes) because the subject is singular (warehouse). Even though the plural noun pillars is closer to the verb, warehouse is the subject. So warehouse determines whether the verb is singular or plural. Subject and predicate must agree.

Third, the subject in the first sentence is compound (Marex [and] Contron). A compound subject, when connected by and, requires a plural verb (enjoy). Also in the second sentence, compound predicates are possible (did [not] impress [or] move).

Fourth, the second sentence incorporates a group of words—coming minutes after my freeway accident—containing a form of a verb (coming) and a noun (accident). Yet this group of words is not a complete sentence for two reasons:

• Not all nouns are subjects. Accident is not the subject of coming.

• Not all verbs are predicates. A verb that ends in ing can never be the predicate of a sentence (unless preceded by a form of to be, as in was coming).

Because they don’t contain a subject and a predicate, the words coming minutes after my freeway accident (called a phrase) can’t be written as a sentence. That is, the phrase cannot stand alone; it cannot begin with a capital letter and end with a period. So a phrase must always be just one part of a sentence.

Sometimes a sentence incorporates two or more groups of words that do contain a subject and a predicate; these word groups are called clauses:

My interview, because it came minutes after my freeway accident, did not impress or move anyone.

The independent clause is the portion of the sentence that could stand alone without revision:

My interview did not impress or move anyone.

The other part of the sentence could stand alone only by removing because:

(because) It came minutes after my freeway accident.

This part of the sentence is known as a dependent clause; although it has a subject and a predicate (just as an independent clause does), it’s linked to the main part of the sentence by a word (because) showing its dependence.

In summary, the two types of clauses—dependent and independent—both have a subject and a predicate. Dependent clauses, however, do not bear the main meaning of the sentence and are therefore linked to an independent clause. Nor can phrases stand alone, because they lack both a subject and a predicate. Only independent clauses can be written as sentences without revision.

1.7.3 Sentence Fragments

An incomplete sentence (a phrase or a dependent clause) that is written as though it were a complete sentence is called a fragment. Consider the following sentence fragments:

Marilyn Sanders, having had pilferage problems in her store for the past year. Refuses to accept the results of our investigation.

This serious error can easily be corrected by putting the two fragments together:

Marilyn Sanders, having had pilferage problems in her store for the past year, refuses to accept the results of our investigation.

Not all fragments can be corrected so easily. Here’s more information on Sanders’s pilferage problem.

Employees a part of it. No authority or discipline.

Only the writer knows the intended meaning of those two phrases. Perhaps the employees are taking part in the pilferage. If so, the sentence should read:

Some employees are part of the pilferage problem.

On the other hand, it’s possible that some employees are helping with the investigation. Then the sentence would read:

Some employees are taking part in our investigation.

It’s just as likely, however, that the employees are not only taking part in the pilferage but are also being analyzed:

Those employees who are part of the pilferage problem will accept no authority or discipline.

Even more meanings could be read into these fragments. Because fragments can mean so many things, they mean nothing. No well-written memo, letter, or report ever demands the reader to be an imaginative genius.

One more type of fragment exists, the kind represented by a dependent clause. Note what because does to change what was once a unified sentence:

Our stock of sprinklers is depleted.

Because our stock of sprinklers is depleted.

Although the second version contains a subject and a predicate, adding because makes it a fragment. Words such as because form a special group of words called subordinating conjunctions. Here’s a partial list:

after if unless
although since whenever
even if though while

When a word of this type begins a clause, the clause is dependent and cannot stand alone as a sentence. However, if a dependent clause is combined with an independent clause, it can convey a complete meaning. The independent clause may come before or after the dependent clause:

We are unable to fill your order because our stock of sprinklers is depleted.

Because our stock of sprinklers is depleted, we are unable to fill your order.
Also, to fix a fragment that is a dependent clause, remove the subordinating conjunction. Doing so leaves a simple but complete sentence:

Our stock of sprinklers is depleted.

The actual details of a situation will determine the best way for you to remedy a fragment problem.

The ban on fragments has one exception. Some advertising copy contains sentence fragments, written knowingly to convey a certain rhythm. However, advertising is the only area of business in which fragments are acceptable.

### 1.7.4 Fused Sentences and Comma Splices

Just as there can be too little in a group of words to make it a sentence, there can also be too much:

All our mail is run through a postage meter every afternoon someone picks it up.

This example contains two sentences, not one, but the two have been blended so that it’s hard to tell where one ends and the next begins. Is the mail run through a meter every afternoon? If so, the sentences should read:

All our mail is run through a postage meter every afternoon. Someone picks it up.

Perhaps the mail is run through a meter at some other time (morning, for example) and is picked up every afternoon:

All our mail is run through a postage meter. Every afternoon someone picks it up.

The order of words is the same in all three cases; sentence division makes all the difference. Either of the last two cases is grammatically correct. The choice depends on the facts of the situation.

Sometimes these so-called fused sentences have a more obvious point of separation:

Several large orders arrived within a few days of one another, too many came in for us to process by the end of the month.

Here the comma has been put between two independent clauses in an attempt to link them. When a lowly comma separates two complete sentences, the result is called a comma splice. A comma splice can be remedied in one of three ways:

- Replace the comma with a period and capitalize the next word: "... one another. Too many ... ."
- Replace the comma with a semicolon and do not capitalize the next word: "... one another; too many ... ." This remedy works only when the two sentences have closely related meanings.
- Change one of the sentences so that it becomes a phrase or a dependent clause. This remedy often produces the best writing, but it takes more work.

The third alternative can be carried out in several ways. One is to begin the blended sentence with a subordinating conjunction:

Whenever several large orders arrived within a few days of one another, too many came in for us to process by the end of the month.

Another way is to remove part of the subject or the predicate verb from one of the independent clauses, thereby creating a phrase:

Several large orders arrived within a few days of one another, too many for us to process by the end of the month.

Finally, you can change one of the predicate verbs to its ing form:

Several large orders arriving within a few days of one another, too many coming in for us to process by the end of the month.

At other times a simple coordinating conjunction (such as or, and, or but) can separate fused sentences:

You can fire them, or you can make better use of their abilities.

Margaret drew up the designs, and Matt carried them out.

We will have three strong months, but after that sales will taper off.

Be careful using coordinating conjunctions: Use them only to join simple sentences that express similar ideas.

Also, because they say relatively little about the relationship between the two clauses they join, avoid using coordinating conjunctions too often; and is merely an addition sign; but is just a turn signal; or only points to an alternative. Subordinating conjunctions such as because and whenever tell the reader a lot more.

### 1.7.5 Sentences with Linking Verbs

Linking verbs were discussed briefly in the section on verbs (Section 1.3). Here you can see more fully the way they function in a sentence. The following is a model of any sentence with a linking verb.

A (verb) B.

Although words such as seems and feels can also be linking verbs, let’s assume that the verb is a form of to be:

A is B.

In such a sentence, A and B are always nouns, pronouns, or adjectives. When one is a noun and the other is a pronoun, or when both are nouns, the sentence says that one is the same as the other:

She is president.

Rachel is president.

When one is an adjective, it modifies or describes the other:

She is forceful.

Remember that when one is an adjective, it modifies the other as any adjective modifies a noun or pronoun, except that a linking verb stands between the adjective and the word it modifies.

### 1.7.6 Misplaced Modifiers

The position of a modifier in a sentence is important. The movement of only changes the meaning in the following sentences:

Only we are obliged to supply those items specified in your contract.

We are obliged only to supply those items specified in your contract.

We are obliged to supply only those items specified in your contract.

We are obliged to supply those items specified only in your contract.
In any particular set of circumstances, only one of those sentences would be accurate. The others would very likely cause problems. To prevent misunderstanding, place such modifiers as close as possible to the noun or verb they modify.

For similar reasons, whole phrases that are modifiers must be placed near the right noun or verb. Mistakes in placement create ludicrous meanings.

Antia Information Systems has bought new computer chairs for the programmers with more comfortable seats.

The anatomy of programmers is not normally a concern of business writers. Obviously, the comfort of the chairs was the issue:

Antia Information Systems has bought new computer chairs with more comfortable seats for the programmers.

Here is another example:

I asked him to file all the letters in the cabinet that had been answered.

In this ridiculous sentence the cabinet has been answered, even though no cabinet in history is known to have asked a question. That had been answered is too far from letters and too close to cabinet. Here’s an improvement:

I asked him to file in the cabinet all the letters that had been answered.

In some cases, instead of moving the modifying phrase closer to the word it modifies, the best solution is to move the word closer to the modifying phrase.

2.0 Punctuation

On the highway, signs tell you when to slow down or stop, where to turn, when to merge. In similar fashion, punctuation helps readers negotiate your prose. The proper use of punctuation keeps readers from losing track of your meaning.

2.1 Periods

Use a period (1) to end any sentence that is not a question, (2) with certain abbreviations, and (3) between dollars and cents in an amount of money.

2.2 Question Marks

Use a question mark after any direct question that requests an answer:

Are you planning to enclose a check, or shall we bill you?

Don’t use a question mark with commands phrased as questions for the sake of politeness:

Will you send us a check today.

2.3 Exclamation Points

Use exclamation points after highly emotional language. Because business writing almost never calls for emotional language, you will seldom use exclamation points.

2.4 Semicolons

Semicolons have three main uses. One is to separate two closely related independent clauses:

The outline for the report is due within a week; the report itself is due at the end of the month.

A semicolon should also be used instead of a comma when the items in a series have commas within them:

Our previous meetings were on November 11, 2003; February 20, 2004; and April 28, 2005.

Finally, a semicolon should be used to separate independent clauses when the second one begins with a word such as however, therefore, or nevertheless or a phrase such as for example or in that case:

Our supplier has been out of part D712 for 10 weeks; however, we have found another source that can ship the part right away.

His test scores were quite low; on the other hand, he has a lot of relevant experience.

Section 4.4 has more information on using transitional words and phrases.

2.5 Colons

Use a colon after the salutation in a business letter. You also use a colon at the end of a sentence or phrase introducing a list or (sometimes) a quotation:

Our study included the three most critical problems: insufficient capital, incompetent management, and inappropriate location.

In some introductory sentences, phrases such as the following or that is are implied by using a colon.

A colon should not be used when the list, quotation, or idea is a direct object or part of the introductory sentence:

We are able to supply staples wood screws nails toggle bolts

This shipment includes 9 DVD’s, 12 CDs, and 14 USB flash drives.

Another way you can use a colon is to separate the main clause and another sentence element when the second explains, illustrates, or amplifies the first:

Management was unprepared for the union representatives’ demands: this fact alone accounts for their arguing well into the night.

However, in contemporary usage, such clauses are frequently separated by a semicolon.

2.6 Commas

Commas have many uses, the most common is to separate items in a series:

He took the job, learned it well, worked hard, and succeeded.

Put paper, pencils, and paper clips on the requisition list.

Company style often dictates omitting the final comma in a series. However, if you have a choice, use the final comma; it’s often necessary to prevent misunderstanding.

A second place to use a comma is between independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or or) unless one or both are very short:

She spoke to the sales staff, and he spoke to the production staff.

I was advised to proceed and I did.
A third use for the comma is to separate a dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence from an independent clause:

Because of our lead in the market, we may be able to risk introducing a new product.

However, a dependent clause at the end of a sentence is separated from the independent clause by a comma only when the dependent clause is unnecessary to the main meaning of the sentence:

We may be able to introduce a new product, although it may involve some risk.

A fourth use for the comma is after an introductory phrase or word:

Starting with this amount of capital, we can survive in the red for one year.

Through more careful planning, we may be able to serve more people.

Yes, you may proceed as originally planned.

However, with short introductory prepositional phrases and some one-syllable words (such as hence and thus), the comma is often omitted:

Before January 1 we must complete the inventory.

Thus we may not need to hire anyone.

In short the move to Tulsa was a good idea.

Fifth, commas are used to surround nonrestrictive phrases or words (expressions that can be removed from the sentence without changing the meaning):

The new owners, the Kowacks, are pleased with their purchase.

Sixth, commas are used between adjectives modifying the same noun (coordinate adjectives):

She left Monday for a long, difficult recruiting trip.

To test the appropriateness of such a comma, try reversing the order of the adjectives: a difficult, long recruiting trip. If the order cannot be reversed, leave out the comma (a good old friend isn’t the same as an old good friend). A comma is also not used when one of the adjectives is part of the noun. Compare these two phrases:

- a distinguished, well-known figure
- a distinguished public figure

The adjective-noun combination of public and figure has been used together so often that it has come to be considered a single thing: public figure. So no comma is required.

Seventh, commas are used both before and after the year in sentences that include month, day, and year:

It will be sent by December 15, 2006, from our Cincinnati plant.

Some companies write dates in another form: 15 December 2006. No commas should be used in that case. Nor is a comma needed when only the month and year are present (December 2006).

Eighth, commas are used to set off a variety of parenthetical words and phrases within sentences, including state names, dates, abbreviations, transitional expressions, and contrasted elements:

- They were, in fact, prepared to submit a bid.
- Our best programmer is Ken, who joined the company just a month ago.


Our goal was increased profits, not increased market share.

Service, then, is our main concern.

The factory was completed in Chattanooga, Tennessee, just three weeks ago.

Joanne Dubiik, M.D., has applied for a loan from First Savings.

I started work here on March 1, 2001, and soon received my first promotion.

Ninth, a comma is used to separate a quotation from the rest of the sentence:

Your warranty reads, “These conditions remain in effect for one year from date of purchase.”

However, the comma is left out when the quotation as a whole is built into the structure of the sentence:

He hurried off with an angry “Look where you’re going.”

Finally, use dashes to set off a phrase that contains commas:

- All our offices—Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Phoenix—have sent representatives.
- Don’t confuse a dash with a hyphen. A dash separates and emphasizes words, phrases, and clauses more strongly than a comma or parentheses can; a hyphen ties two words so tightly that they almost become one word.

On computer, use the em dash symbol. When typing a dash in e-mail or on a typewriter, type two hyphens with no space before, between, or after.

2.7 Dashes

Use a dash to surround a comment that is a sudden turn in thought:

Membership in the IBSA—it’s expensive but worth it—may be obtained by applying to our New York office.

A dash can also be used to emphasize a parenthetical word or phrase:

Third-quarter profits—in excess of $2 million—are up sharply.

Finally, use dashes to set off a phrase that contains commas:

- All our offices—Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Phoenix—have sent representatives.

Don’t confuse a dash with a hyphen. A dash separates and emphasizes words, phrases, and clauses more strongly than a comma or parentheses can; a hyphen ties two words so tightly that they almost become one word.

On computer, use the em dash symbol. When typing a dash in e-mail or on a typewriter, type two hyphens with no space before, between, or after.

2.8 Hyphens

Hyphens are mainly used in three ways. The first is to separate the parts of compound words beginning with such prefixes as self-, ex-, quasi-, and all-:

- self-assured
- quasi-official
- ex-wife
- all-important

However, omit hyphens from and close up those words that have prefixes such as pro, anti, non, re, pre, un, inter, and extra:

- prolabor
- antifascist
- nonunion
- interdepartmental
Exceptions occur when (1) the prefix occurs before a proper noun or (2) the vowel at the end of the prefix is the same as the first letter of the root word:

- pro-Republican
- anti-American
- anti-inflammatory
- extra-atmospheric

When in doubt, consult your dictionary.

Hyphens are also used in some compound adjectives, which are adjectives made up of two or more words. Specifically, you should use hyphens in compound adjectives that come before the noun:

- an interest-bearing account
- well-informed executives

However, you need not hyphenate when the adjective follows a linking verb:

- This account is interest bearing.
- Their executives are well informed.

You can shorten sentences that list similar hyphenated words by dropping the common part from all but the last word:

- Check the costs of first-, second-, and third-class postage.

Finally, hyphens may be used to divide words at the end of a typed line. Such hyphenation is best avoided, but when you have to divide words at the end of a line, do so correctly (see Section 3.5). A dictionary will show how words are divided into syllables.

### 2.9 Apostrophes

Use an apostrophe in the possessive form of a noun (but not in a pronoun):

- On his desk was a reply to Bette Ainsley's application for the manager's position.

Apostrophes are also used in place of the missing letter(s) of a contraction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole Words</th>
<th>Contraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>we will</td>
<td>we'll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do not</td>
<td>don't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are</td>
<td>they're</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.10 Quotation Marks

Use quotation marks to surround words that are repeated exactly as they were said or written:

- The collection letter ended by saying, "This is your third and final notice."

Remember: (1) When the quoted material is a complete sentence, the first word is capitalized. (2) The final comma or period goes inside the closing quotation marks.

Quotation marks are also used to set off the title of a newspaper story, magazine article, or book chapter:

- You should read "Legal Aspects of the Collection Letter" in Today's Credit.

The book title is shown here in italics. When typewritten, the title is underlined. The same treatment is proper for newspaper and magazine titles. (Appendix B explains documentation style in more detail.)

Quotation marks may also be used to indicate special treatment for words or phrases, such as terms that you're using in an unusual or ironic way:

- Our management “team” spends more time squabbling than working to solve company problems.

When you are defining a word, put the definition in quotation marks:

- The abbreviation etc. means “and so forth.”

When using quotation marks, take care to insert the closing marks as well as the opening ones:

- Although periods and commas go inside any quotation marks, colons and semicolons go outside them. A question mark goes inside the quotation marks only if the quotation is a question:

- All that day we wondered, “Is he with us?”

If the quotation is not a question but the entire sentence is, the question mark goes outside:

- What did she mean by “You will hear from me”? 

### 2.11 Parentheses

Use parentheses to surround comments that are entirely incidental:

- Our figures do not match yours, although (if my calculations are correct) they are closer than we thought.

Parentheses are also used in legal documents to surround figures in Arabic numerals that follow the same amount in words:

- Remittance will be One Thousand Two Hundred Dollars ($1,200).

Be careful to put punctuation (period, comma, and so on) outside the parentheses unless it is part of the statement in parentheses.

### 2.12 Ellipses

Use ellipsis points, or dots, to indicate that material has been left out of a direct quotation. Use them only in direct quotations and only at the point where material was left out. In the following example, the first sentence is quoted in the second:

- The Dow Jones Industrial Average, fell 276.39 points or
  2.6% during the week to 10292.31.

According to the Wall Street Journal, “The Dow Jones Industrial Average . . . fell 276.39” during the week.

The number of dots in ellipses is not optional; always use three. Occasionally, the points of ellipsis come at the end of a sentence, where they seem to grow a fourth dot. Don’t be fooled: One of the dots is a period.

### 3.0 Mechanics

The most obvious and least tolerable mistakes that a business writer makes are probably those related to grammar and punctuation. However, a number of small details, known as writing mechanics, demonstrate the writer’s polish and reflect on the company’s professionalism.

#### 3.1 Capitals

Capitals are used at the beginning of certain word groups:

- **Complete sentence:** Before hanging up, he said, “We’ll meet here on Wednesday at noon.”
- **Formal statement following a colon:** She has a favorite motto: Where there’s a will, there’s a way. (Otherwise, the first word after a colon should not be capitalized—see Section 2.5.)
- **Phrase used as sentence:** Absolutely not!
- **Quoted sentence embedded in another sentence:** Scot said, “Nobody was here during lunch hour except me.”
List of items set off from text: Three preliminary steps are involved:
- Design review
- Budgeting
- Scheduling

Capitalize proper adjectives and proper nouns (the names of particular persons, places, and things):
- Darrell Greene lived in a Victorian mansion.
- We sent Ms. Larson an application form, informing her that not all applicants are interviewed.
- Let’s consider opening a branch in the West, perhaps at the west end of Tucson, Arizona.
- As office buildings go, the Kinney Building is a pleasant setting for TDG Office Equipment.

Ms. Larson’s name is capitalized because she is a particular applicant, whereas the general term applicant is left uncapitalized. Likewise, West is capitalized when it refers to a particular place but not when it means a direction. In the same way, office and building are not capitalized when they are general terms (common nouns), but they are capitalized when they are part of the title of a particular office or building (proper nouns). Titles within families, governments, or companies may also be capitalized:
- I turned down Uncle David when he offered me a job, since I wouldn’t be comfortable working for one of my relatives.
- We’ve never had a president quite like President Sweeney.

People’s titles are capitalized when they are used in addressing a person, especially in a formal context. They are not usually capitalized, however, when they are used merely to identify the person:
- Address the letter to Chairperson Anna Palmer.
- I wish to thank Chairperson Anna Palmer for her assistance.
- Please deliver these documents to board chairperson Anna Palmer.
- Anna Palmer, chairperson of the board, took the podium.

Also capitalize titles if they are used by themselves in addressing a person:
- Thank you, Doctor, for your donation.

Titles that are used to identify a person of very high rank are capitalized regardless of where they fall or how much of the name is included:
- the President of the United States
- the Prime Minister of Canada
- the Pope

In addresses, salutations, signature blocks, and some formal writing (such as acknowledgments), all titles are capitalized whether they come before or after the name. In addition, always capitalize the first word of the salutation and complimentary close of a letter:
- Dear Mr. Andrews: Yours very truly,

The names of organizations are capitalized, of course; so are the official names of their departments and divisions. However, do not use capitals when referring in general terms to a department or division, especially one in another organization:
- Route this memo to Personnel.
- Larry Tien was transferred to the Microchip Division
- Will you be enrolled in the Psychology Department?
- Someone from the engineering department at EnerTech stopped by the booth.
- Our production department has reorganized for efficiency.
- Send a copy to their school of business administration.

Capitalization is unnecessary when using a word like company, corporation, or university alone:
- The corporation plans to issue 50,000 shares of common stock.

Likewise, the names of specific products are capitalized, although the names of general product types are not:
- HP computer
- Tide laundry detergent

One problem that often arises in writing about places is the treatment of two or more proper nouns of the same type. When the common word comes before the specific names, it is capitalized; when it comes after the specific names, it is not:
- Lakes Ontario and Huron
- Allegheny and Monongahela rivers

The names of languages, races, and ethnic groups are capitalized: Japanese, Caucasian, Hispanic. But racial terms that denote only skin color are not capitalized: black, white.

When referring to the titles of books, articles, magazines, newspapers, reports, movies, and so on, you should capitalize the first and last words and all nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions and conjunctions with five letters or more. Except for the first and last words, do not capitalize articles:
- Economics During the Great War
- “An Investigation into the Market for Long-Distance Services”
- “What Successes Are Made Of”

When the is part of the official name of a newspaper or magazine, it should be treated this way too: The Wall Street Journal.

References to specific pages, paragraphs, lines, and the like are not capitalized: page 73, line 3. However, in most other numbered or lettered references, the identifying term is capitalized: Chapter 4, Serial No. 382–2203, Item B-11.

Finally, the names of academic degrees are capitalized when they follow a person’s name but are not capitalized when used in a general sense:
- I received a bachelor of science degree.
- Thomas Whitelaw, Doctor of Philosophy, will attend.

Similarly, general courses of study are not capitalized, but the names of specific classes are:
- She studied accounting as an undergraduate.
- She is enrolled in Accounting 201.
3.2 Underscores and Italics

Usually a line typed underneath a word or phrase either provides emphasis or indicates the title of a book, magazine, or newspaper. If possible, use italics instead of an underscore. Italics (or underlining) should also be used for defining terms and for discussing words as words:

In this report net sales refers to after-tax sales dollars.

The word building is a common noun and should not be capitalized.

3.3 Abbreviations

Abbreviations are used heavily in tables, charts, lists, and forms. They’re used sparingly in prose paragraphs, however. Here are some abbreviations often used in business writing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b/l</td>
<td>bill of lading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca.</td>
<td>circa (about)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dol., dols.</td>
<td>dollar, dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>et cetera (and so on)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDIC</td>
<td>Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inc.</td>
<td>Incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.f.</td>
<td>Ledger folio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ltd.</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mgr.</td>
<td>manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSF or N/S</td>
<td>not sufficient funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;L or P/L</td>
<td>profit and loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reg.</td>
<td>regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wholesale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One way to handle an abbreviation that you want to use throughout a document is to spell it out the first time you use it, follow it with the abbreviation in parentheses, and then use the abbreviation in the remainder of the document.

Because etc. contains a word meaning “and,” never write and etc. In fact, try to limit your use of such abbreviations to tables and parenthetical material.

3.4 Numbers

Numbers may be correctly handled many ways in business writing, so follow company style. In the absence of a set style, however, generally spell out all numbers from one to nine and use arabic numerals for the rest.

There are some exceptions to this general rule. For example, never begin a sentence with a numeral:

Twenty of us produced 641 units per week in the first 12 weeks of the year.

Use numerals for the numbers one through ten if they’re in the same list as larger numbers:

Our weekly quota rose from 9 to 15 to 27.

Use numerals for percentages, time of day (except with o’clock), dates, and (in general) dollar amounts.

Our division is responsible for 7 percent of total sales.

The meeting is scheduled for 8:30 A.M. on August 2.

Add $3 for postage and handling.

Use a comma in numbers expressing thousands (1,257), unless your company specifies another style. When dealing with numbers in the millions and billions, combine words and figures: 7.3 million, 2 billion.

When writing dollar amounts, use a decimal point only if cents are included. In lists of two or more dollar amounts, use the decimal point either for all or for none:

He sent two checks, one for $67.92 and one for $90.00.

When two numbers fall next to each other in a sentence, use figures for the number that is largest, most difficult to spell, or part of a physical measurement; use words for the other:

I have learned to manage a classroom of 30 twelve-year-olds.

She’s won a bonus for selling 24 thirty-volume sets.

You’ll need twenty 3-inch bolts.

In addresses, all street numbers except One are in figures. So are suite and room numbers and ZIP codes. For street names that are numbered, practice varies so widely that you should use the form specified on an organization’s letterhead or in a reliable directory. All of the following examples are correct:

One Fifth Avenue 297 Ninth Street
1839 44th Street 11026 West 78th Place

Telephone numbers are always expressed in figures. Parentheses may separate the area code from the rest of the number, but a slash or a dash may be used instead, especially if the entire phone number is enclosed in parentheses:

382–8329 (602/382–8329) 602–382–8329

Percentages are always expressed in figures. The word percent is used in most cases, but % may be used in tables, forms, and statistical writing.

Physical measurements such as distance, weight, and volume are also often expressed in figures: 9 kilometers, 5 feet 3 inches, 7 pounds 10 ounces.

Ages are usually expressed in words—except when a parenthetical reference to age follows someone’s name:

Mrs. Margaret Sanderson is seventy-two.

Mrs. Margaret Sanderson, 72, swims daily.

Also, ages expressed in years and months are treated like physical measurements that combine two units of measure: 5 years 6 months.

Decimal numbers are always written in figures. In most cases, add a zero to the left of the decimal point if the number is less than one and does not already start with a zero:

1.38 0.07 0.2

In a series of related decimal numbers with at least one number greater than one, make sure that all numbers smaller than one have a zero to the left of the decimal point: 1.20, 0.21, 0.09. Also, express all decimal numbers in a series to the same number of places by adding zeroes at the end:

The responses were Yes, 37.2 percent; No, 51.0; Not Sure, 11.8.

Simple fractions are written in words, but more complicated fractions are expressed in figures or, if easier to read, in figures and words:

two-thirds 9/32 two hundredths

A combination of whole numbers and a fraction should always be written in figures. Note that a hyphen is used to separate the fraction from the whole number when a slash is used for the fraction: 2-1/16.
3.5 Word Division

In general, avoid dividing words at the ends of lines. When you must do so, follow these rules:

- Don’t divide one-syllable words (such as since, walked, and thought), abbreviations (mgr), contractions (isn’t), or numbers expressed in numerals (117,500).
- Divide words between syllables, as specified in a dictionary or word-division manual.
- Make sure that at least three letters of the divided word are moved to the second line: sin-cer-ely instead of sincer-ly.
- Do not end a page or more than three consecutive lines with hyphens.
- Leave syllables consisting of a single vowel at the end of the first line (impediment instead of impedi-ment), except when the single vowel is part of a suffix such as -able, -ible, -ical, or -ity (re-spons-ible instead of re-sponsi-ble).
- Divide between double letters (tomor-row), except when the root word ends in double letters (call-ing instead of cal-ling).
- Wherever possible, divide hyphenated words at the hyphen only: instead of anti-in-de-pendence, use anti-in-de-pendence.

4.0 Vocabulary

Using the right word in the right place is a crucial skill in business communication. However, many pitfalls await the unwary.

4.1 Frequently Confused Words

Because the following sets of words sound similar, be careful not to use one when you mean to use the other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accede</td>
<td>to comply with</td>
<td>council</td>
<td>a panel of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exceed</td>
<td>to go beyond</td>
<td>counsel</td>
<td>advice; a lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accept</td>
<td>to take</td>
<td>defer</td>
<td>to put off until later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>except</td>
<td>to exclude</td>
<td>differ</td>
<td>to be different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>access</td>
<td>admittance</td>
<td>device</td>
<td>a mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excess</td>
<td>too much</td>
<td>devise</td>
<td>to plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advice</td>
<td>suggestion</td>
<td>die</td>
<td>to stop living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advise</td>
<td>to suggest</td>
<td>dye</td>
<td>a tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affect</td>
<td>to influence</td>
<td>discreet</td>
<td>to color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effect</td>
<td>the result</td>
<td>discrete</td>
<td>careful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allot</td>
<td>to distribute</td>
<td>envelop</td>
<td>separate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td>much or many</td>
<td>envelope</td>
<td>to surround</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all ready</td>
<td>completely prepared</td>
<td>forth</td>
<td>a covering for a letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>already</td>
<td>completed earlier</td>
<td>forth</td>
<td>forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>born</td>
<td>given birth to</td>
<td>fourth</td>
<td>number four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>borne</td>
<td>carried</td>
<td>holly</td>
<td>full of holes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capital</td>
<td>money; chief city</td>
<td>holy</td>
<td>sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capitall</td>
<td>a government building</td>
<td>wholly</td>
<td>completely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cite</td>
<td>to quote</td>
<td>human</td>
<td>of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sight</td>
<td>a view</td>
<td>humane</td>
<td>kindly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>site</td>
<td>a location</td>
<td>incidence</td>
<td>frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complement</td>
<td>complete amount; to go well with</td>
<td>incidents</td>
<td>events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compliment</td>
<td>expression of esteem; to flatter</td>
<td>instance</td>
<td>example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correspondent</td>
<td>party in a divorce suit</td>
<td>instants</td>
<td>moments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correspondent</td>
<td>letter writer</td>
<td>interstate</td>
<td>between states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>intrastate</td>
<td>within a state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>later</td>
<td>afterward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>latter</td>
<td>the second of two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lead</td>
<td>a metal; to guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>led</td>
<td>guided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lean</td>
<td>to rest at an angle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lien</td>
<td>a claim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>levee</td>
<td>embankment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>levy</td>
<td>tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>loath</td>
<td>reluctant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>loathe</td>
<td>to hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>loose</td>
<td>free; not tight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lose</td>
<td>to mislay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>material</td>
<td>substance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>materiel</td>
<td>equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>miner</td>
<td>mineworker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>minor</td>
<td>underage person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>moral</td>
<td>virtuous; a lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>morale</td>
<td>sense of well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ordinance</td>
<td>law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ordnance</td>
<td>weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>overdo</td>
<td>to do in excess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>overdue</td>
<td>past due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>peace</td>
<td>lack of conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>piece</td>
<td>a fragment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pedal</td>
<td>a foot lever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>peddle</td>
<td>to sell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>persecute</td>
<td>to torment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>prosecute</td>
<td>to sue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personal</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personnel</td>
<td>employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
precedence priority
precedents previous events
principal sum of money; chief; main
general rule
rap to knock
wrap to cover
residence home
residents inhabitants
right correct
ceremony
write to form words on a surface
role a part to play
roll to tumble; a list
root part of a plant
to defeat
route a traveler's way
shear to cut
sheer thin, steep
stationary immovable
stationery paper
than as compared with
then at that time
their belonging to them
there in that place
they're they are
to a preposition
too excessively; also
two the number
wave to set aside
wave a swell of water; a gesture
weather atmospheric conditions
whether if
who's contraction of “who is” or “who has”
whose possessive form of who

In the preceding list, only enough of each word's meaning is given to help you distinguish between the words in each group. Several meanings are left out entirely. For more complete definitions, consult a dictionary.

4.2 Frequently Misused Words

The following words tend to be misused for reasons other than their sound. Reference books (including the Random House College Dictionary, revised edition; Follett's Modern American Usage; and Fowler's Modern English Usage) can help you with similar questions of usage.

a lot: When the writer means “many,” a lot is always two separate words, never one.
correspond with: Use this phrase when you are talking about exchanging letters. Use correspond to when you mean “similar to.” Use either correspond with or correspond to when you mean “relate to.”
disinterested: This word means “fair, unbiased, having no favorites, impartial.” If you mean “bored” or “not interested,” use uninterested.
etc.: This abbreviated form of the Latin phrase et cetera means “and so on” or “and so forth.” The current tendency among business writers is to use English rather than Latin.

imply/infer: Both refer to hints. Their great difference lies in who is acting. The writer implies; the reader infers, sees between the lines.
lay: This word is a transitive verb. Never use it for the intransitive he. (See Section 1.3.3.)
less: Use less for uncountable quantities (such as amounts of water, air, sugar, and oil). Use fewer for countable quantities (such as numbers of jars, saws, words, pages, and humans). The same distinction applies to much and little (uncountable) versus many and few (countable).
like: Use like only when the word that follows is just a noun or a pronoun. Use as or as if when a phrase or clause follows:
   She looks like him.
   She did just as he had expected.
   It seems as if she had plenty of time.

many/much: See less.
regardless: The less ending is the negative part. No word needs two negative parts, so don’t add ir (a negative prefix) to the beginning. There is no such word as irregardless.
to me/personally: Use these phrases only when personal reactions, apart from company policy, are being stated (not often the case in business writing).
try: Always follow with to, never and.
verbal: People in the business community who are careful with language frown on those who use verbal to mean “spoken” or “oral.” Many others do say “verbal agreement.” Strictly speaking, verbal means “of words” and therefore includes both spoken and written words. Follow company usage in this matter.

4.3 Frequently Misspelled Words

All of us, even the world's best spellers, sometimes have to check a dictionary for the spelling of some words. People who have never memorized the spelling of commonly used words must look up so many that they grow exasperated and give up on spelling words correctly. Don’t expect perfection, and don’t surrender. If you can memorize the spelling of just the words listed here, you’ll need the dictionary far less often, and you’ll write with more confidence.

absence absorption accessible accommodate accumulate achieve advantageous affiliated aggressive alignment aluminum amble analyze apparent appropriate argument asphalt assistant asterisk auditor bankruptcy believable brilliant bulletin calendar campaign category ceiling changeable clientele collateral committee comparative competitor concede
4.4 Transitional Words and Phrases

The following sentences don’t communicate as well as they might because they lack a transitional word or phrase:

Production delays are inevitable. Our current lag time in filling orders is one month.

A semicolon between the two sentences would signal a close relationship between their meanings, but it wouldn’t even hint at what that relationship is. Here are the sentences again, now linked by means of a semicolon, with a space for a transitional word or phrase:

Production delays are inevitable; ______________, our current lag time in filling orders is one month.

Now read the sentence with nevertheless in the blank space. Now try therefore, incidentally, in fact, and at any rate in the blank. Each substitution changes the meaning of the sentence.

Here are some transitional words (called conjunctive adverbs) that will help you write more clearly:

- accordingly
- furthermore
- moreover
- anyway
- however
- otherwise
- besides
- incidentally
- still
- consequently
- likewise
- therefore
- finally
- meanwhile

The following transitional phrases are used in the same way:

- as a result
- in other words
- at any rate
- in the second place
- for example
- on the other hand
- in fact
- to the contrary

When one of these words or phrases joins two independent clauses, it should be preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma, as shown here:

The consultant recommended a complete reorganization; moreover, she suggested that we drop several products.