

•• GREAT GRAMMAR & CONCISE WRITING ••

The Loft Literary Center
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1. Apostrophe

- a. Possession: Think of the apostrophe as pointing to the person/thing doing the possessing/owning.
- b. Possession singular: add ('s) to the word.
 - i. Superman's cape is red.
 - ii. Lois's boyfriend is hunky.
 - iii. *Exception:* Leave the "s" off when adding it makes the spoken word sound awkward.
 1. Yes: Sophocles' plays have stood the test of time.
 2. No: Sophocles's plays have stood the test of time
- c. Possession plural: make the word plural and then add (').
 - i. The villains' plan was diabolical.
 - ii. The Simsos' house is painted red.
 - iii. The Joneses' house has a green door.
- d. If two or more people possess the same thing, the last listed gets the ('). If they each have their own plan, then each gets an (').
 - i. **Mary and John's** plans for their vacation are very different. They want to swim naked with sharks and literally worship the sun. (They have the same plan.)
 - ii. **Mary's and John's** plans for their vacation are very different. She wants to swim naked with sharks. He wants to literally worship the sun. (Each has a separate plan.)
- e. Represent missing letter(s): movin' and can't.
- f. Do not use apostrophes to make words plural (1960s).
 - i. *Exception:* Instances like i's where not including the apostrophe creates confusion ("is" is a word).

2. Single Quotation Marks

- a. Quote within a quote: My boyfriend said, “We’ll go next week because my mom was all, ‘You can’t go until you clean up that pigsty of a room.’”

Exercise #1: “John and the Smith parties were each called Lightin It Up,” explained Sue.
“We weren’t surprised the cops came rollin down the street.”

3. Comma

- a. Separates items in a list.
 - i. I like diet coke, wine and caramel.
- b. Use the oxford/serial comma if omitting it creates confusion.
 - i. I dedicate this book to my parents, Mother Theresa and Barak Obama.
(honors the two people who are your parents)
 - ii. I dedicate this book to my parents, Mother Theresa, and Barak Obama.
(honors four people)
 - iii. I only like specific truffle flavors: chocolate Kahlua and cream and mint. (need commas to separate the flavors)
- c. Introduces quotations and dialogue. And it stands in for a period when the dialogue/quotation doesn’t end the sentence.
 - i. Tim said, “I’m not your IT slave.”
 - ii. Tim said, “I’m not your IT slave,” but I don’t believe him.
- d. Sets off introductory words.
 - i. In 2013, John made the biggest mistake ever.
 - ii. In 2013 John made the biggest mistake ever. (okay to omit)
 - iii. Having made the biggest mistake ever, John quit his job.
 - iv. Inside the kitchen was bright and welcoming. (huh?)
- e. Indicates direct address.
 - i. John, you made the biggest mistake ever.
 - ii. Look, John, you made the biggest mistake ever.
 - iii. You made the biggest mistake ever, John.
 - iv. You made the biggest mistake ever: John.
 - v. It’s time to eat John. (ouch)

Comma continued...

- f. Separates non-essential information (non-restrictive): the meaning of the sentence won't change if you delete it.
 - i. My husband, who works in L.A., sent me flowers. (one husband)
 - ii. My husband who works in L.A. sent me flowers. (more than one)
 - iii. Ellery's book, *Popcorn in the Morning*, won a national book award.
(she's written only one and the author mentions the title)
 - iv. Ellery's book *Popcorn in the Morning* won a national book award.
(she's written more than one so we have to know the title)
- g. Separates modifiers. (The comma stands in for *and*.)
 - i. The big, puffy dog kept me warm.
 - ii. The big, fluffy Alaskan malamute kept me warm.
 - iii. She has a bright red car coat.

Exercise #2: Lets kiss a little Pete. Then after we change shoes we can walk to the movie and order Diet Coke popcorn with butter and chocolate.

4. Semicolon

- a. Separates items in a complicated list.
 - i. I like baking bread, cupcakes and pies; cooking candy, frosting and truffles; and steaming peas, carrots and corn.
 - ii. Before I came to The Loft, I worked in Paris, France, where I sold hats; in Hyderabad, India, where I sang show tunes; and in Bagdad, Iraq, where I herded camels.
- b. Connects two ideas that are linked but can stand alone as sentences.
 - i. We'll be eating Swiss chard smoothies for dinner; therefore, I will be fasting tonight.
 - ii. We'll be eating cantaloupe all week; I really hate orange food. (ideas are closely connected)
 - iii. I'm on jury duty all week. My library card is burning up.
(ideas are not closely connected)

Exercise #3: Our neighbors werewolf cousins moved into our town yesterday I stocked up on canned onion soup AK-47's and silver bullets.

5. Colon

- a. Introduces additional information (as opposed to connecting ideas).
 - i. I have three favorite movies: *Terminator*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *The Princess Bride*.
 - ii. My three favorite movies are *Terminator*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *The Princess Bride*. (“are” is introducing the information)
- b. Introduces an explanation.
 - i. I broke up with my boyfriend for a very good reason: He hates *Terminator*.
- c. Introduces quotations.
 - i. Amy’s favorite movie quote is from *Terminator*: “Come with me if you want to live.”
 - ii. Amy’s favorite quote from *Terminator* is “Come with me if you want to live.”
 - iii. Amy’s favorite quote is when Reece says, “Come with me if you want to live.”

Exercise #4: My husbands’ favorite dog breeds have three things in common they’re big; they drool and they don’t need much brushing.

6. Hyphen, En-dash & Em-dash

- a. Hyphens divide words at line breaks. (next to 0 on keyboard)
- b. Hyphens create compound adjectives and nouns.
 - i. My in-house talent did all my writing for me.
 - ii. That is not a sky-blue bird.
- c. En-dash is used for duration. (Mac: opt-)
 - i. May–April: I will be handing out free chickens.
 - ii. My hours are 4:00–5:00.
- d. Em-dash can be used in place of many punctuation marks — colons, commas, parenthesis and others. (Mac: type 2 hyphens)
 - i. I like apples—especially crispy ones.
 - ii. Kids get an espresso and a puppy—for free—if I see them running around my store.

7. Ellipses (...)

- a. To indicate missing information in a direct quotation.
 - i. “I cannot help it ... I love her against reason.” (middle missing)
 - iii. “I cannot help it....” (end missing)
 - iv. “...I love her against reason.” (beginning missing)
 - v. “I love her against reason....
“...But her dog is an irritating hound.”
(end of one paragraph and the beginning of another missing)
- b. Stands in for em-dashes.
 - i. I love him against all reason... against even bad breath
- c. Indicates speech that is halting or trailing off.
 - i. I love her against all reason... against even... bad breath.
 - ii. I’m pretty sure I love her more than.... (speech trailing off)
 - iii. I love her against all reason—“ (speech cut off)

8. Talk to your audience.

- Avoid corporate speak and jargon.
- Do not warm up to your topic.
- Use “You” and talk to your reader instead of “we.”
- Think about what will motivate them and talk to that
- Use language and ideas they’ll understand.

9. Write vibrantly — KISS: Keep It Short and Simple

- Aim for shorter sentences (but still vary sentence length)
 - 12 words in a sentence.
 - Short paragraphs of no more than 7 sentences.
 - Shorter in an opening sentence.
 - 2-3 sentences in an opening paragraph.
 - Even shorter for web.
- Only six (!) per year.
- Watch for overuse of...
 - Am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being
 - Prepositional phrases (of, to, with, on, etc.)
- Avoid passive voice. (The ball was thrown.)

Exercise #5:

I am writing to you today because I want to tell you about a great opportunity for your business. A few years ago I decided to start a freelance writing business. Today, my business is thriving because in addition to my own skills as a copywriter, I have been lucky enough to hire and retain some of the best talent in the industry. They are all experienced professionals who have been working in the industry for years and who are able to leverage those skills to simplify your job.

10. Make the most of punctuation.

- Use punctuation, bold, italics to visually highlight key ideas.
- Use em-dashes and ellipses to break up text or highlight ideas.

11. Choose words and tone that reinforce your message

- What motivates your reader?
- Choose vibrant/colorful words: scarlet vs. red.
- Match your tone to your purpose and message.

•• RESOURCES ••

If in doubt, look it up (two or three times).

Grammar Girl

- Website: Quickanddirtytips.com
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/GrammarGirl
- Book: *Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing*
- Podcast

Chicago Manual of Style

- Website: chicagomanualofstyle.org
- Book: *The Chicago Manual of Style*
- Twitter: @ChicagoManual

Associated Press Manual of Style

- Website: apstylebook.com
- Book: "Associated Press Stylebook"
- Twitter: @APStylebook