

GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, ETC. QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS:

If there's a version of a word with an apostrophe and a version without one, **the version with the apostrophe is always the contraction**, the shortened form of several words put together.

it's = it is	its = belonging to it	
you're = you are	your = belonging to you	
they're = they are	their = belonging to them	there = a place (there/here/where); also There are...
who's = who is/has	whose = belonging to someone	
They have two dogs.	We're going to school. She likes to cook.	I ate too much. He thinks so, too .

APOSTROPHES:

1) In contractions, put the apostrophe where a letter or letters are missing.
isn't = is not don't = do not I've = I have what's = what is/has

2) To show possession, use 's on words that don't end in -s
and just an apostrophe on plurals that already end in -s.

Jim's car one dog's bowl the men's room anybody's guess
the twins' room my in-laws' house

3) DON'T use apostrophes to make ordinary nouns plural!

The office is closed on Fridays. [NO APOSTROPHE!]

CAPITALIZATION:

Capitalize...

- "I"
- the first word in a sentence
- the first word & major words in titles of books/movies/songs
- names of particular people/places/things (e.g., Dorothy, Corvallis, the Washington Monument)
- brand names
- days of the week
- months
- holidays
- languages
- nationalities
- geographical regions (e.g., the Midwest)
- names of specific courses (e.g., Math 60)
- titles and family terms that come right in front of a person's name or that are used as names (e.g., Senator Ron Wyden, Uncle Bob, Mom)

DON'T capitalize...

- the seasons (e.g., summer)
- general school subjects (e.g., math)
- general direction words (e.g., go south two miles)
- titles and family terms with possessives or with the/a/an (e.g., my mom, the doctor)
- the first word after a semicolon

PARALLELISM:

Make sure listed items have the same pattern (ending, tense, part of speech, etc.).

NOT OK: She likes hiking and to cook.

OK: She likes hiking and cooking.

OK: She likes to hike and to cook.

MODIFIERS:

If a sentence starts with an -ing phrase that ends in a comma, the word immediately after the comma should be who or what is doing the -ing'ing.

NOT OK: Digging in her purse, her keys fell out.

[The keys are not digging in her purse.]

OK: **Digging** in her purse, **she** dropped her keys.

also OK: As she was digging in her purse, her keys fell out.

[The sentence doesn't start with -ing.]

CONNECTORS

AND/OR/BUT/SO: [coordination]

<sentence> , and <sentence>.

They went out to dinner, **and** they had a great time.

[COMMA—too heavy for just the connector]

<sentence> and <fragment>.¹

They went out to dinner **and** had a great time.

[NO COMMA—connector alone strong enough]

HOWEVER, THEREFORE, FOR EXAMPLE, IN ADDITION, FURTHER, ON THE OTHER HAND

[transitions & conjunctive adverbs]

<sentence> . However, <sentence>.

<sentence> ; however, <sentence>. [less common]

I love the Northeast. **However**, the winters are brutal.

I love the Northeast; **however**, the winters are brutal.

[lowercase after the semicolon]

ALTHOUGH/BECAUSE/IF/WHEN/SINCE/BEFORE/AFTER/WHILE/UNLESS [subordination]

Because <sentence> , <sentence>.

Because she wanted to know what to study, she took a pretest. [comma between the 2 parts]

<sentence> because <sentence>.²

She took a pretest **because** she wanted to know what to study. [no comma]

ADVANCED NOTES (See me for a more detailed discussion of these points.):

¹ The fragment indicated here is one missing a subject so that the whole thing involves a compound verb rather than a compound sentence. Note that just with “BUT” or “YET” there are other sorts of connected fragments for which a comma is appropriate, such as “I love the Northeast, but not the winters there.”

² Some grammar books say that *to emphasize great contrast*, you may use a comma in front of “although” when “although” is in the middle. In addition, there’s an exception to the “no

comma before BECAUSE" rule. If the "because" doesn't indicate a direct reason, you do use a comma in front after all, as in "I knew she was sick, because she told me so." (Her telling me wasn't the cause of her being sick). Still, the ordinary case doesn't have a comma: "She was sick because she ate bad seafood." (Eating bad seafood was the cause of her being sick.) Generally speaking, you DON'T use a comma when a subordinating conjunction is in the middle.

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS:

A complete sentence has a verb (action word or form of "is") and a subject (who or what is doing the action or being a certain way). It also expresses a complete thought.

A fragment fails at least one of these conditions.

Common types of fragments:

1) ones beginning with ALTHOUGH/BECAUSE/IF/WHEN that don't complete the thought

NOT OK: If it rains tomorrow.

NOT OK: When I get my next paycheck.

2) ones starting with -ing or to

NOT OK: Learning to drive a stick shift.

NOT OK: To make his vegetable garden grow better.

3) ones adding extra detail

NOT OK: He loves sports. Especially football and baseball.

4) ones missing a subject or a verb

NOT OK: The meeting a week from Wednesday.

To correct most fragments, you need to complete the thought, either by adding new material or by connecting the fragment to the previous sentence.

NOT OK: I'll be able to pay for my test. When I get my next paycheck.

OK: I'll be able to pay for my test when I get my next paycheck.

RUN-ONS:

A run-on occurs when one sentence runs into another without an appropriate connector. A comma by itself is NOT an appropriate connector.

NOT OK: It rained heavily all night long the carport flooded.

NOT OK: It rained heavily all night long, the carport flooded.

Several ways to fix run-ons:

1) period & capital letter

OK: It rained heavily all night long. The carport flooded.

2) comma and an AND/OR/BUT/SO word [coordinating conjunction]

OK: It rained heavily all night long, so the carport flooded.

3) semicolon, fancy connector word (HOWEVER, THEREFORE, FOR EXAMPLE, etc.), and a comma

OK: It rained heavily all night long; therefore, the carport flooded.

4) ALTHOUGH/BECAUSE/IF/WHEN "hanging" word [subordinating conjunction] [Note different punctuation, depending on whether the conjunction is in the middle or at the beginning.]

OK: The carport flooded because it rained heavily all night long.

OK: Because it rained heavily all night long, the carport flooded.

COMMAS:

1) between cities and states & between states and countries

I live in Corvallis, Oregon. I once worked in Montréal, Canada.

2) between days, dates, and years

Joseph was born on Monday, July 28, 1997.

3) when listing *three or more items* in a series

The US flag is red, white, and blue.

She likes jogging, skiing, and swimming.

4) before **AND/BUT/OR/SO** to connect two complete sentences

I wanted to try again, but he wouldn't listen.

5) between the 2 connected parts when starting with **ALTHOUGH/BECAUSE/IF WHEN**

If he wants to get a better job, he should finish his degree.

6) after an introductory word or group of words

However, it's not good news.

After a detailed financial investigation, the team presented its findings.

7) on both sides of an interrupting phrase or bit of extra info

On page 112, for example, you'll see several sentence fragments.

[Notice that "for example" is used here as an interrupter, not to connect 2 sentences.]

Ted Johnson, my new assistant, will start next week.

Jack, my neighbor for twenty years, will take in my mail while I'm away.

NOTE: If the sentence ends where you would have put the 2nd comma, that's OK.

You'll see several sentence fragments on page 112, for example.

I want you to meet Ted Johnson, my new assistant.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Use "fewer" if you can count items.

Use "less" if you can't.

This ice cream has fewer calories and less fat.

[You can count grams of fat, but you don't count 1 fat, 2 fats, 3 fats...]

Don't use 2 negatives in a row.

NOT OK: He doesn't live here no more.

OK: He doesn't live here any more.

PRONOUNS:

NOT OK: Me and my friends had a good time.

OK: My friends and I had a good time.

[Always mention other people first.]

Words that end in "one," "body," or "thing" are singular.

OK: Everyone is welcome. Everybody needs to have her own equipment.

subjects (doing the action)		objects (receiving the action)
She	saw	him.
I		me
you		you
she/he/it		her/him/it
we		us
they		them

TRICKY SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:

1) If the subject of a sentence is complicated, try replacing the subject with "they" (plural) or "he/she/it" (singular). That can make it easier to decide if the verb should be plural or singular.

People who live in glass houses in the Pacific Northwest probably [have/has] high heating bills.
[people --> they] They probably **have** high heating bills.

A person who has the courage to do what's right even in tough situations [are/is] admirable.
[person --> she/he] She/he **is** admirable.

2) If you see a phrase with OF/FOR/FROM/WITH/WITHOUT/ABOUT, cross it out. [Say that aloud--the 1st 3 words and then the next 3--until you memorize it.] Crossing out such phrases makes it easier to spot subjects and verbs so you can make sure they agree.

~~One of the boys hanging out by the cars~~ is responsible. [The subject is "one." One is (not are) responsible.]

~~The woman with two toddlers behind her and another infant in her arms~~ needs help. [The subject is "woman." She needs (not need) help.]

3) Be on the lookout for extra detail phrases with a comma at the front and another comma at the end. You can cross out the whole packet to check whether the subject and verb agree.

~~Emily Johnson, a recent graduate of OSU and the winner of several poetry awards,~~ is going to speak to us. [Emily Johnson is....]

~~The new registration process, a dramatic change from the procedure we've been using for years,~~ is complicated. [The process is....]

ORGANIZATION:

For organization questions, remember that a "standard" paragraph focuses on a single topic, starts with a main idea sentence (topic sentence), and continues with relevant, logically ordered supporting detail.

To achieve that, you might need to choose the option that does one of the following:

- 1) move what should be the main idea sentence to the beginning of a paragraph
- 2) split a paragraph so that the new bottom paragraph starts with its own main idea sentence and goes on with its supporting detail
- 3) remove an irrelevant (off-topic) sentence
- 4) make the order of supporting detail sentences more reasonable (e.g., put things in time order)
- 5) combine two paragraphs when the second is really just more supporting detail for the first [rare]