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10 Common Grammatical Errors and How to Fix Them

1. Agreement Errors

The subject and verb in a sentence must agree in number (singular vs. plural) and person (first, second, or third person).

Pronouns need to agree with their antecedents in number and person.

A. Subjects and verbs must agree

- ✗ The **books** in the box **is** for sale.
- ✓ The **books** in the box **are** for sale.

Note: the subject in the sentence is “books”. “Books” is plural and the verb in the sentence is “to be”.

B. Pronouns must agree with their antecedents

- ✗ Each **student** collected **their** library card.
- ✓ Each **student** collected **his or her** library card.
- ✓ All the **students** collected **their** library card.

C. Pronouns must agree with each other

- ✗ Once **one** has read the article, **you** have to answer the questions.
- ✓ Once **one** has read the article, **one** has to answer the questions.

2. Comma Splices

Joining two independent clauses with only a comma creates a comma splice.

Adding periods, semicolons, a comma and a coordinating conjunction, or a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb can fix a comma splice.

Example: Comma Splice

- ✗ The politician gave his **speech**, **the** crowd cheered and applauded.

“The politician gave his speech” and “The crowd cheered and applauded” are independent clauses.

Fix a comma splice using a period (.)

- ✗ The politician gave his **speech**, **the** crowd cheered and applauded.
- ✓ The politician gave his **speech**. **The** crowd cheered and applauded.

Fix a comma splice using a semicolon (;)

- ✗ The politician gave his **speech**, **the** crowd cheered and applauded.
- ✓ The politician gave his **speech**; **the** crowd cheered and applauded.

Fix a comma splice using a comma and a coordinating conjunction

- ✗ The politician gave his **speech**, **the** crowd cheered and applauded.
- ✓ The politician gave his **speech**, **and the** crowd cheered and applauded.

Common Coordinating Conjunctions

- And
- But
- Or

Fix a comma splice using a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb

- ✗ The book was **interesting**, **the** conclusion was very abrupt.
- ✓ The book was **interesting**; **however**, **the** conclusion was very abrupt.

Common Conjunctive Adverbs

- Also
- Therefore
- Then
- Consequently
- Finally
- Furthermore
- However
- Otherwise

3. Word Choice

Avoid using words that you don't understand.

If you don't know the meaning of a word, look it up. Sometimes words have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used.

Example:

- ✗ An examination of the current literature will help **distill** this myth.
- ✓ An examination of the current literature will help **dispel** this myth.

4. Misplaced Modifiers

A modifier is a word that describes or limits another word. A misplaced modifier is placed incorrectly in a sentence. It changes the meaning of a wrong word and alters the author's meaning.

A. Squinting Modifier

A squinting modifier affects more than one word in the sentence.

- ✗ The student being taught **carefully** listened to the professor

Is the student being taught carefully? Is the student listening carefully?

Fix the squinting modifier by changing its position:

- ✓ The student being taught listened **carefully** to the professor.
- ✓ The student being **carefully** taught listened to the professor.

B. Dangling Modifier

A dangling modifier affects a word that does not appear in the sentence.

- ✗ Watching the sunset, the sky was breathtaking.

What is “watching the sunset”?

Fix this dangling modifier by adding a subject:

- ✓ Watching the sunset, **I** thought the sky was breathtaking.
- ✓ **I** watched the sunset and thought the sky was breathtaking.

5. Possessive Case

Apostrophes are often added to the end of a word to show possession. However, this is not always the case.

Check out each of these examples for the different ways possession can be shown.

Words that do NOT end with “s”

Add “apostrophe s” (’s) to the end of the noun.

- ✗ This is Johns house.
- ✓ This is John’s house.

Singular nouns that end with “s”

Add an apostrophe (’) or “apostrophe s” (’s) to the end of the noun.

- ✓ The bus’ tire is flat
- ✓ The bus’s tire is flat.

Plural nouns

Add an apostrophe (’) to the end of the word.

- ✓ These are the boys’ shirts.

The above sentence means that the shirts belong to many boys.

“Its” versus “it’s”

“Its” is the possessive form of “it”.

“It’s” is the contraction of “it is”.

- ✗ The company held it’s annual party in June.

This sentence actually says: The company held it is annual party in June.

- ✓ The company held its annual party in June.

6. Pronoun Reference

The word that pronoun replaces is called an “antecedent”. For example:

“Jester” can be the antecedent for “he” or “him”.

“Shahad” can be the antecedent for “she” or “her”.

“The table” can be the antecedent for “it”.

“The books” can be the antecedent for “they” or “them”.

Don’t overuse the pronoun “this”

- ✗ Most of the class earned a passing grade on the exam; however, only a few students did well on the essay. **This** caused concern for the professor.

You can’t tell what “this” is referring to. Is the professor concerned that most of the class passed the exam or that only a few students did well on the essay?

- ✓ Most of the class earned a passing grade on the exam; however, only a few students did well on the essay. **This inconsistency** caused concern for the professor.

Ensure the pronoun only refers to one antecedent

- ✗ Doris told Shirley that her watch was broken.

Whose watch is broken? Is it Doris’ or Shirley’s?

- ✓ Doris told Shirley, “My watch is broken.”

Don’t overuse the pronoun “it”

- ✗ **In the report, it states** that the reign of King George III was a prosperous time for England.
- ✓ **The report states** that the reign of King George III was a prosperous time for England.

7. Punctuation

The Comma

- A mild separator used to separate words, phrases, and clauses from each other when no heavier mark is required.

Use commas to separate items in a series of three or more

- ✗ I love to eat **pineapples apples oranges and raspberries.**
- ✓ I love to eat **pineapples, apples, oranges, and raspberries.**

Use commas between two coordinate adjectives that modify the same noun

- ✗ The speaker delivered an **insightful dynamic** speech.

- ✓ The speaker delivered an **insightful, dynamic** speech.

Use commas between independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions

- ✗ The sun was **shining but** the air was very cold.
- ✓ The sun was **shining, but** the air was very cold.

Coordinating conjunctions include words like: and, but, so, nor, for, yet, or.

Use commas after an introductory element

- ✗ **In the spring** I will plant my garden.
- ✓ **In the spring,** I will plant my garden.

Introductory elements include: clauses, phrases, and transitional expressions.

Use commas for non-restrictive elements in a sentence

- ✗ My friend who has brown hair called me last night.
- ✓ My **friend, who** has brown **hair, called** me last night.

Non-restrictive elements are descriptors that provide additional non-essential information.

Do NOT use commas to separate a verb from its subject

- ✗ The **dogs, are** jumping over lazy foxes.
- ✓ The dogs are jumping over lazy foxes.

Do NOT use commas with restrictive elements in a sentence

- ✗ Many provinces re-test **drivers, who** are over **sixty-five, to** check their driving competency.
- ✓ Many provinces re-test drivers who are over sixty-five to check their driving competency.

Restrictive elements are descriptors that provide essential information. You need to specify the type of driver because not all of them are re-tested.

The Semi-colon

- A heavy separator, often equivalent to a period.

Semi-colons are used to connect independent clauses that are closely related in meaning.

Use semi-colons between independent clauses closely related in meaning

- ✗ The sky turned **grey, the** wind died suddenly.
- ✓ The sky turned **grey; the** wind died suddenly.

Use semi-colons between independent clauses when the second one starts with a conjunctive adverb or transitional expression.

- ✗ The man entered the **shop however,** he did not buy anything.

- ✓ The man entered the **shop; however**, he did not buy anything.

The Colon

- A full stop that draws attention to the words that follow

Colons commonly introduce a list or a quotation. They can only be used at the end of an independent clause.

Use colons to introduce a list after an independent clause

- ✗ There are three parts to this **essay an** introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
- ✓ There are three parts to this **essay: an** introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

Use colons to introduce a quotation after an independent clause

- ✗ Hamlet's speech in the graveyard speaks to the fragility of **life "Alas**, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio."
- ✓ Hamlet's speech in the graveyard speaks to the fragility of **life: "Alas**, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio."

8. Passive Voice

"Voice" tells the reader whether a subject is acting or is being acted upon.

The active voice shows the subject as the doer of the action. Using the active voice promotes good sentence structure.

In contrast, the passive voice shows that the subject is being acted upon.

Generally, using the active voice is preferred, but there are cases where you should be writing in the passive voice. For instance, scientific writing often uses the passive voice.

Passive Voice Structure

["to be" conjugation] + [past participle of desired verb] + by

Let's say we want to write this sentence using the passive voice:

Active Voice: The cat **ate** the cake.

The cat – doer of the action

Ate – the action

Passive Voice: The cake **was eaten by** the cat.

9. Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragments look like sentences, but they are actually incomplete.

Often sentence fragments are missing a subject or a verb, or they begin with a subordinating word that turns them into a dependent clause.

Sentence fragment: Missing a subject

- ✗ Went out to play.
- ✓ **The child** went out to play.

Sentence fragment: Missing a verb

- ✗ The girl in her house.
- ✓ The girl **stayed** in her house.

Sentence fragment: Dependent clause

- ✗ Because it was raining very hard.
- ✓ Because it was raining very hard, the car skidded on the road.

10. Wordiness

“Wordiness” occurs when you use empty words or phrases that do not contribute to the meaning of the sentence.

Remember, a sentence should express only one idea or a closely linked set of ideas.

Example:

- ✗ Although there are many humorous moments in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* and there are many things which are satiric, there are also some important points to be made about Victorian England, namely how the upper classes were extremely pretentious and often they were very superficial.
- Although there are many humorous and satiric elements in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the play also makes a serious statement about the pretension and superficiality of Victorian upper-class society.
- ✓ Through the use of humour and satire in his play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Oscar Wilde makes a serious statement about the pretension and superficiality of Victorian upper-class society.

Interested in learning more about grammar and writing?

Check out the Professional English Language Skills (PELS) workshop series for a Grammar Boot Camp.

Participating in these workshops can develop your confidence in applying academic language and improving your writing skills. Learn more:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/professional-english-language-skills-pels>.

Do you want to learn more about the writing process?

Participate in the Elements of Academic Writing workshops to develop your writing skills and apply them in your courses. Learn more:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/elements-academic-writing-workshop-series>.

Transition Words and Phrases

Transitions are used in formal and informal writing to demonstrate the relationship or hierarchy of ideas within a paper. Many times the paper will not make sense without transitions. The lists below are grouped based upon the relationships between two or more ideas.

Addition or Sequence:

after, afterward, again, also, and then, and, as well as, at first, at the same time, at this point, at this time, before this, besides, concurrently, consequently, coupled with, earlier, equally important, finally, first of all, first, following this, further, furthermore, having said that, hence, in addition, in conclusion, in light of, in the first place, in the meantime, in time, in turn, last, lastly, later on, later, likewise, meanwhile, moreover, next, nor, now, previously, second, secondly, similarly, simultaneously, soon, still, subsequently, the next step, then, therefore, third, thirdly, thus, to begin with, too, what is more, while, with this in mind

Comparison:

also, by comparison, compared to, conversely, however, in the same way, instead, likewise, on one hand, rather, similarly, still, this may be true, where, whereas

Consequence:

accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this purpose, for this reason, hence, if, otherwise, since, so then, subsequently, then, therefore, thereupon, thus, to this end, wherefore

Contrast:

and yet, but at the same time, but, by the same token, conversely, despite, even so, even though, for all that, however, in contrast, in spite of, nevertheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the other hand, regardless, still, though, yet

Emphasis:

above all, absolutely, after all, always, certainly, chiefly, emphatically, especially, eternally, even, extremely, forever, in any case, in fact, indeed, naturally, never, obviously, of course, particularly, perennially, positively, singularly, surprisingly, truly, undeniably, unquestionably, with attention to, without a doubt, without reservation

Exception:

aside from, barring, besides, despite, except, excepting, excluding, exclusive of, however, in spite of, nevertheless, of course, once in a while, other than, outside of, save, sometimes, yet

Exemplification:

chiefly, especially, for instance, including, in particular, markedly, namely, particularly, specifically, such as

Generalization:

as a rule, as usual, for the most part, generally, generally speaking, ordinarily, usually

Illustration:

as an example, as an illustration, for example, for instance, for one thing, illustrated with, in another case, in fact, in this case, in this situation, on this occasion, specifically, take the case of, to demonstrate, to illustrate

Location:

above, adjacent to, ahead, behind, below, beyond, close, elsewhere, farther on, here, near, nearby, on the other side, opposite to, there, to the east (west, north, south, etc.), to the left (right)

Passing of time:

after a while, afterward, as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, before, during this time, earlier, finally, formerly, immediately, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, next, now, presently, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, subsequently, then, thereafter, until, when, while

Proof:

because, besides, evidently, for the same reason, for, furthermore, in addition, in any case, in fact, indeed, moreover, obviously, since, that is

Restatement:

as has been noted, as has been said, as was previously stated, given these points, in brief, in essence, in other words, in short, namely, that is to say, that is, to put it differently

Similarity:

comparatively, coupled with, correspondingly, identically, in comparison, likewise, moreover, similarly, together with

Summarization:

accordingly, after all, all in all, all things considered, altogether, as a result, briefly, by and large, consequently, given these points, hence, in any case, in any event, in brief, in conclusion, in other words, in short, in simpler terms, in summary, in the final analysis, in the long run, on the whole, therefore, thus, to conclude, to put it differently, to sum up, to summarize

Please be aware that some transitions are specific to certain situations or are stronger than others listed. Try out multiple options, and use the best fit. Also, although this is an extensive list of transitions, it is not a complete list; these are just some suggestions to help you tie your ideas together and help your reader follow your line of thinking. The greater variety of appropriate transitions you use, the more interesting your paper will be.



COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

CONFUSING CONTRACTIONS

it's (it is)	its (of it)
they're (they are)	their (of them)
	there (at that place)
who's (who is)	whose (of whom)
you're (you are)	your (of you)

ONE-WORD OR TWO-WORD PAIRS

all ready (completely prepared)	already (previously)
all together (all in one place)	altogether (thoroughly)
all ways (all methods)	always (at all times)
a lot (a large amount)	allot (distribute, assign)
every day (each day)	everyday (ordinary)
may be (could be)	maybe (perhaps)
some time (an amount of time)	sometime (at some unspecified time)

WORDS WITH SIMILAR SPELLINGS

advice (noun)	advise (verb)
breath (noun)	breathe (verb)
chose (past tense)	choose (present tense)
cloths (fabrics)	clothes (garments)
device (noun)	devise (verb)
envelope (noun)	envelop (verb)
human (of people)	humane (merciful)
later (after more time)	latter (in final position)
prophecy (noun)	prophecy (verb)

OTHER CONFUSABLES

good (adjective)	well (adverb)
may (asking permission)	can (have the ability)
bring (moving toward)	take (to carry off)
fewer (something you can count)	less (something you can't count)
lay (to place)	lie (to recline or tell an untruth)
sit (to rest the body)	set (to place something)
which or that (one of several things)	who (what person)
who (subjects)	whom (objects)

SIMILAR-SOUNDING WORDS (AKA HOMONYMS)

accept (receive)		except (leave out)
affect (influence, verb)		effect (result, noun)
allowed (permitted)		aloud (clearly heard)
ate (past tense of eat)		eight (the number)
break (smash, split)		brake (stopping device)
by (preposition)		buy (purchase)
capital (city, wealth)		capitol (building)
cite (mention)		sight (vision)
coarse (rough)		course (way or path)
complement (make complete)		compliment (praise)
conscience (moral judgment)		conscious (aware)
council (committee)		counsel (advice, adviser)
desert (dry land)		dessert (sweet food)
do (to act)	dew (moisture)	due (deadline)
dual (having two parts)		duel (fight)
dye (color)		die (perish)
faze (disturb, bother)		phase (stage)
for (preposition)		four (number)
forth (forward)		fourth (comes after third)
hear (perceive)		here (in this place)
heard (perceived)		herd (group)
heroin (drug)		heroine (principal character)
hole (opening)		whole (entire)
knot (twist)		not (negative)
know (be aware)		no (opposite of yes)
knows (be aware)		nose (part of face)
lead (metal)		led (guided)
loose (free, united)		lose (misplace, fail to win)
meat (food)		meet (encounter)
metal (element)		medal (award)
miner (excavator)		minor (young person)
one (less than two)		won (to acquire)
passed (went by)		past (earlier time)
peace (absence of war)		piece (part, portion)
plain (simple)		plane (flat surface)
poor (not rich)	pour (liquids)	pore (opening in skin)
principle (rule)		principal (chief person, sum)
quiet (silent)	quit (stop)	quite (really, positively)
rain (precipitation)		reign (rule, authority)
read (process words)		red (color)
right (proper)	rite (ritual)	write (put pen to paper)
road (path)	rowed (a boat)	rode (past tense of ride)
scene (stage, setting)		seen (perceived)
sense (perception)		since (from that time)
stationary (not moving)		stationery (writing paper)
straight (not curved)		strait (narrow place)
than (word of comparison)		then (at that time)
threw (past tense of throw)		through (by way of)
to (in the direction of) two (number)		too (also)
waist (center of body)		waste (squander)
weak (feeble)		week (seven days)
wear (carry on the body)		where (in what place)
weather (atmospheric conditions)		whether (if, in case)

which (what one)

witch (sorceress)



Commonly Confused Words



This handout addresses commonly confused and misused words.

•Accept and Except:

Accept is a verb that means to receive. *Except* is both a preposition and a verb: meaning but and to leave out.

Example: “He **accepted** a present” is different from “Everyone **except** Laurie received presents.”

•Advice and Advise:

Advice is a noun that refers to guidance or recommendations. *Advise* is a verb meaning to offer suggestions about the best course of action to someone. Example: A person who **advises** students gives them **advice** on the best courses to take.

•Affect and Effect:

In terms of usage, *affect* is usually a verb and *effect* is usually a noun. Example: The party was **affected** by the weather. The **effect** of the plastic surgery was astounding. However, the tricky part is that these words can also be used in other ways. *Affect* can be a noun, specifically when describing psychological conditions. *Effect* can be a verb meaning to bring about or to accomplish. Example: The drug created a happy **affect**. The political party hoped to **effect** change with new policies.

•Allude and Elude:

Allude means to make an indirect reference to something. *Elude* means to escape from something or to fail to grasp (a concept). Example: Although he **alluded** to the secret, his meaning **eluded** me.

•Allusion and Illusion:

An *allusion* is an indirect reference, often to a literary work or historical event. An *illusion* is a misconception or false impression.

•Aloud and Allowed:

Aloud is an adverb that means out loud or audibly. Example: She sang the song **aloud** to her class. *Allowed* is a verb that means permitted. Example: The boy was not **allowed** to play video games until he finished his homework.

•‘Alright’ or All Right?:

...technically ‘*alright*’ is not a word, it’s slang. It’s a one-word derivation from the expression *all right*, which you should always use in lieu of ‘*alright*’, especially in formal writing. Example: Your use of ‘**alright**’ is the only thing I am not **all right** with in your dissertation.

•Bad and Badly:

Bad is used after verbs that express emotion or states of being like looked or felt, whereas *badly* should be used with action verbs. These two most commonly get confused when verbs are used that can be either emotion or action verbs such as feel. A trick to stop making this mistake is by checking with the ‘to be’ verb. Example: I feel **bad** or I am **bad** works where as I feel **badly** or I am **badly** does not work.

•Compliment and Complement:

A *compliment* expresses admiration for something. To *complement* means to enhance or complete something else. Example: The student received a wonderful **compliment** after his speech. A dessert of cherry pie **complements** a delicious turkey dinner.

•Continuous and Continual:

While similar, these two words imply very different meanings. *Continuous* implies an unending period of time or action without interruption, while *continual* does not have to mean uninterrupted, only repeated. Example: My roommate played her music **continuously** in our room from 9PM until 12:30AM, even though I **continually** urged her to use her earphones.

•Could've, Should've, and Would've:

These are contractions for *could have*, *should have*, and *would have*. Though not mistaken for each other, they are often spelled incorrectly because of the way they sound: *could of*, *should of*, and *would of*. *Of* is not a substitute for *have* and should never be used as such. Thus, all three words should always be spelled correctly, as contractions: *could've*, *should've*, and *would've*.

•Cite, Sight, and Site:

Cite means to quote or document. Example: Students must **cite** their sources when writing research papers. *Sight* usually refers to the power of seeing or to a thing that can be seen. Example: There are many **sights** to see in New York City. *Site* refers to a particular area, position, or place. Example: We visited the **site** of the September 11th monument.

•Deserts and Desserts:

Arid land is a *desert*. People who get what they deserve are getting their *deserts*—the accent is on the second syllable. People who get goodies like ice cream and cake are getting *desserts*. Example: While in the **desert**, I will have a popsicle for **dessert**.

•Disinterested and Uninterested:

They are not the same: *disinterested* means impartial or neutral; *uninterested* means bored or lacking interest. Example: A good umpire should be **disinterested** but certainly not **uninterested**.

•e.g. and i.e.:

E.g. is short for the Latin term *exempli gratia*, which means “for example.” *I.e.* is short for the Latin *id est*, which means “that is.” Example: Kirk and Spock had much in common, **e.g.**, their interest in astronomy and their concern for the ship and its crew. They had one obvious difference, **i.e.**, their ears.

•Elicit and Illicit:

These words are not synonymous. *Elicit* means to evoke or draw out. Example: The teacher tried to **elicit** comments from the students. *Illicit* refers to something that is illegitimate or unlawful. Example: Mary was arrested for possessing **illicit** drugs.

Emigrate From and Immigrate To:

Emigrate means to leave one country or region to settle in another. *Immigrate* means to enter another country and reside there. Example: In 1910, my grandmother **emigrated** from Russia. Yet, many foreigners **immigrate** to the U.S. to find work.

•Ensure and Insure:

Ensure is a verb meaning something you do to guarantee an event or condition. Example: To **ensure** that Bill would finish his paper on time, he started writing it a week in advance. *Insure* is a verb that can be done to a person, place, or thing, but it mainly refers to limiting financial liability.

•Farther and Further:

Use *farther* when referring to physical distance; use *further* to refer to abstract ideas or to indicate a greater extent or degree. Example: Jerry insisted that he could walk no **farther**, and he refused to discuss it any **further**.

•**Fewer and Less:** *Fewer* is used with nouns that can be counted, and *less* is used with nouns that cannot be counted. For example: notice how grocery items can be counted and a noun like water cannot be counted. The grocery line only accepts ten items or **fewer**. There is **less** water in the lake than last summer.

•**Good and Well:**

Both *good* and *well* are often used incorrectly. *Good* is an adjective and is used to modify nouns and linking verbs, such as the verb ‘to be’. *Well* is an adverb and is used to modify action verbs. When someone asks how you are, it is perfectly acceptable to reply, “I am good” because “am” is part of the verb ‘to be’ and is therefore modified by *good* instead of *well*. Eat, play, sleep, run, jump, walk, hike, talk, act, and write are all examples of action verbs, and they are all done *well*, not *good*! Any noun—that is, any person, place, or thing—is *good*, not *well*.

•**Hopefully:** There’s only one way to use *hopefully* correctly: as an adverb meaning “in a hopeful manner.” Remember: adverbs are using to modify verbs, adverbs, and adjectives—not nouns or pronouns. Strictly speaking, *hopefully* (and other introductory words like happily, sadly, honestly, seriously, frankly, etc.) shouldn’t be used to replace phrases like “It is hoped” or “I hope.” However, such usage is common in American speech. Example: Genevieve looked **hopefully** at the lottery numbers.

•**I and Me:**

Although it is sometimes obvious when to use *me* and when to use *I*, it can be harder to tell when more than one person is listed. The best way to determine which to use is to temporarily remove any references to other people from the sentence and see what fits. Example: Would you say, “meet Sam and **I** at the writing center”, or “meet Sam and **me** at the writing center”? By removing the reference to Sam, the answer becomes clear. You would not ask someone to meet *I*, you’d ask them to meet *me*. Therefore, the correct form is: “Meet Sam and **me** at the writing center.” Example: Would you say, “if you’ll be at the writing center, Sam and **I** can meet you there”, or “if you’ll be at the writing center, Sam and **me** can meet you there”? Again, remove Sam. You would tell someone *I* can meet them, not *me* can meet them. Therefore, the correct form is: “If you’ll be at the writing center, Sam and **I** can meet you there.”

•**Irregardless:**

Irregardless has become a commonly used term; however, the dictionary and other grammar sources list the word as incorrect usage of regardless or irrespective. It is the words pairing of the prefix (ir) and the suffix (less), which creates a double negative.

•**It’s and Its:**

It’s and *its* are two different words. *It’s* is a contraction for ‘it is’. *Its* is possessive. Apostrophes are usually used with words that are contractions and words that are possessive, but with *it’s* and *its* the apostrophe is kept in the contraction form but eliminated from the possessive form because *its* is a possessive pronoun. Other possessive pronouns such as yours, theirs, and ours do not use apostrophes either, but they are less confusing because they are not also contractions! Just remember that *it’s* is only used when ‘it is’ or ‘it has’ could be used instead. If ‘it is’ or ‘it has’ does not fit in the sentence, then use the possessive form: *its*. Example: **It’s** sometimes difficult to determine the proper use of a word and **its** apostrophe.

•**Loose and Lose:**

Loose is the opposite of tight and *lose* is the opposite of win. A funny way to remember this important difference: The Pats are going to **lose** if their defensive end plays a **loose** defense again!

•**Principal and Principle:**

Principal refers to the person with the highest authority in a school, organization, institution, or group. A *principle* is a fundamental rule or belief.

•That and Which:

Though there are times when it may appear that *that* and *which* can be used interchangeably, one cannot actually be used in place of the other. *Which* is used with nonrestrictive clauses and *that* is used with restrictive clauses. A nonrestrictive clause can be removed from the rest of the sentence without changing the meaning, whereas a restrictive clause cannot be taken out because it would give a different meaning to the sentence. Example: Students work to improve their writing at the writing center, **which** is located in Ham Smith Room 7. *Which* is used here because students work to improve their writing at the writing center regardless of whether or not we refer to the location. Example: Writing center appointments **that** only discuss grammar do not address organization. This is a restrictive clause because it refers specifically to appointments only discussing grammar. If we were to remove the part of the sentence that refers to only discussing grammar, the meaning of the sentence would change. It would make it sound like we never talk about organization at the writing center, and that is definitely not the case! Thus, “only discuss grammar” is a restrictive clause and so *that* is used.

•Their, They’re, and There:

Their, *they’re*, and *there* are all pronounced the same but are three different words with three different uses. *Their* is used to show possession. *They’re* is a contraction for ‘they are’. *There* is used to indicate a place, or when the verb ‘to be’ is used. The easiest way to remember it: if it’s possessive, use *their*. If you could use ‘they are’ instead, use *they’re*. If it is not showing possession and ‘they are’ does not fit, then use *there*. Example: At the writing center, we work with students to improve **their** writing. **They’re** going to the writing center. Look over **there**, that’s the writing center!

•Then and Than:

Then is used to show cause and effect: If this happens, *then* this will happen. *Than* is used to make a comparison between two separate things. Example: If I keep adding more and more words to this example, **then** it will become longer **than** the previous sentence.

•Weather and Whether:

Weather is referred to when using meteorology. *Whether* is used when making a choice. Example: The **weather** for today in Durham, New Hampshire is a chilly 30 degrees. I am going to decide **whether** to plan a trip to the Caribbean or to stay home for Spring Break.

•Who and Whom:

Who is used for subjects and subject complements. *Whom* is used for objects. Issues with these words arise when writing subordinate clauses or questions. It is helpful to check what the word’s function in the clause or question is in order to choose which word. Example: You will work with our senior engineers, **whom** you will meet later. *Whom* is used here because it is the direct object of the verb will meet.

•Your and You’re:

Use *your* to show possession, and use *you’re* to express the contraction for *you are*. It sometimes helps if you break it down while you write: any place you could actually place ‘*you are*,’ write ‘*you’re*’ (except in formal writing when you do not use contractions!). Example: Now **you’re** in possession of the knowledge necessary to correctly complete **your** assignment!

Resources:

- St. Martin’s Pocket Style Manual, 4th edition.
- Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing: <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>

Last updated: Fall 2010.



Sample Scholarship Essay

You have the DREAM. We have the resources.

Read me first

Not sure where to start with your scholarship essay? Here are some sample responses from one of ScholarshipsA-Z's student leaders. These well-written, powerful essays helped this student win scholarships worth over \$1,000. The student's name has been changed to protect the student's identity.

SAMPLE QUESTION 1: What are your career goals, and how will earning a college degree or certificate from PCC help you achieve those goals?

My name is Abigail Lopez. I am a student at Southeastern College completing an associate's degree in science and planning on transferring to a four-year college or university. My educational aspirations consist of acquiring a bachelor's degree in any biological or health science that would assist me in pursuing a medical career as a doctor. On the other hand, my career vision is to one day be able to provide affordable health care to marginalized communities in the United States. However, I am certain that if I do not complete my college degree I could never have the opportunity to achieve my career goals.

I decided that I will attain a career as a doctor since my passion has always been assisting others and trying to improve their quality of life. Therefore, I think that pursuing such a career will provide me the opportunity to help improve the community's health quality conditions and learn about their medical needs. After becoming a certified doctor, I want to specialize in oncology, the study of cancer, and add my knowledge to the cancer research field.

Furthermore, I want to contribute back to undeserved populations in the U.S. that struggle every day to sustain a family, and who do not have as much access to medical assistance as other privileged groups. The first health project I want to accomplish throughout my career as a doctor is to establish a free clinic where affordable medical

assistance can be provided regardless of the patient's immigration status. The diverse health services would include free doctor consultations, low-price or free medication, and nutritional classes to prevent the presence of diabetes or heart disease. I also intend to provide an interpreter for patients in case they do not speak English and establish a financial assistance program to help patients who are not able to pay for any type of surgery that needs to be performed.

The second biggest career goal that I want to accomplish is to establish a non-profit organization where I can create internships for medical school students around the U.S., and allow them to travel to isolated communities around the world to provide free medical services. I also want to provide nutrition education to support these marginalized communities, especially indigenous groups from Latin American countries. This will help contribute to the physical development of kids and offer a solution to malnutrition.

I know that all of my goals will remain dreams if I do not complete my medical degree. Therefore, I am committed to working hard in school and looking for opportunities that could help me make my goals a reality.

SAMPLE QUESTION 2: What is the most challenging aspect of attending College for you? What you have done to overcome that challenge?

After I graduated high school, I became certain that if I wanted to pursue a higher education I needed to be persistent and determined to achieve my career aspirations. However, I would not be at this level in my education without my mom's support. Without having my father's emotional and economical assistance, she has learned how to provide me with a decent quality of life. She works as a hair stylist in my hometown, but she knows the money she earns is not enough to pay for my medical career. As a result, I search for scholarships and job opportunities that could contribute to the achievement of my college education and help pay for basic needs in our home.

I also believe that being an immigrant made my decision of attending to college more challenging. I immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico when I was sixteen years old. Luckily I spoke English, but my mom and I did not really understand how the school system worked. Therefore, when senior year of high school arrived I did not really understand the process of attending college. I did not know that I had to talk to a school advisor about attaining a college education or find scholarships to pay for school. I had no knowledge of the types of tests that I had to take like the SATs, ACTs, or even college assessment exams. However, after researching this information online and meeting with college advisors, my mom and I have learned all of these strategies that help students accomplish a higher education.

One of the first things that I have done in order to overcome the challenge of being a low-income student has been looking for a job. As I mentioned before my mom works as a hair stylist, but in order for her to maintain our house and pay the bills, she also cleaned houses for elderly people in our community. Since she worked so much in both jobs, I



thought that my mom was overwhelming herself, so I decided to help her run the cleaning business in June 2008. In order to help my mom focus on her hair-styling business, I later took over the cleaning business in November 2008, and still manage it today. Currently, I clean houses for various families and usually work between three to ten hours per week, which is a flexible schedule that allows me to be a full-time college student. In addition, I help cover my family's basic expenses by babysitting and tutoring other college students in math or chemistry.

While I am constantly trying to find more work and searching for scholarships that will help me pay for my education, I remain grateful to find opportunities like the one your foundation is providing to students. It makes me feel that I am not alone on the journey of accomplishing my educational goals.



SAMPLE QUESTION 3: Why should you be selected for a scholarship? Please describe any academic achievements, community service activities, examples of leadership, or other personal characteristics that make you deserving of this scholarship?

I believe I deserve to be selected for one of your foundation's scholarships because as a hard working student I commit myself to effectively take advantage of the opportunity that the scholarships will provide me. Besides, I am a student that does not only persistently works hard academically, but also I constantly try to improve my own community's quality of life by doing volunteer work.

I believe education is the key to success, and I try to connect my passion for education with my desire of helping others. As a result, I decided to be part of the establishment of a non-profit organization named ScholarshipsA-Z, which provides college educational resources to parents, educators and students regardless of immigration status. Along with other college and university students and advisors, we decided to unite and create such organization in order to establish a more educated community about the steps needed to take in order to attain a higher education. As a board member of the organization, my responsibilities consist of planning and organizing educational discussions about immigration at conferences and high schools, doing research about scholarships for students regardless of immigration status, updating a scholarship list on the ScholarshipsA-Z website, and translating any ScholarshipsA-Z documents including a 60-page student resource guide. I believe that education should be a right not a privilege, and when I see that students are being denied the right of acquiring a college education, I feel the need to take action. Consequently, this is the major reason why I decided to be an

active member of ScholarshipsA-Z.

On the other hand, there are other leadership roles that I played in community organizations. From 2009-2010, I was a programming intern for a leadership program at the university where I organized and planned social events for student participants. In addition, I was the Student Government Vice President at my community college where I organized social, cultural and community service events for the campus, and led group discussions about social justice as a project facilitator for an anti-discrimination club. Prior to this, I was the Community Service Chairperson for the Student Government, and was in charge of organizing community service activities for the campus including blood drives and a monthly cleanup of local neighborhood streets.

I am grateful to find opportunities like the one that your foundation is providing to students like me who are constantly fighting for the right to receive an education. I remain persistent and will keep working hard until I reach my career goals. I am hopeful to become one of your foundation's scholarship recipients, so that I can continue on my pathway to become a doctor.