

# Bill's Style Sheets

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## Grammar 101

**Sentence:** a word or group of words expressing a complete thought.

**Clause:** a sentence part having a subject and a predicate.

**Predicate:** the part of a sentence or clause that states something about the subject.

**Phrase:** a meaningful group of words, yet not a full clause.

### Parts of a sentence:

*Once decided, John, a witness, told them the truth, though reluctantly.*  
introductory subject appositive verb indirect direct subordinate phrase with  
adverbial object object subordinating conjunction

### Parts of speech:

Meg gave a solemn oath to her and him, speaking boldly.  
noun verb article adjective noun prep. pronoun conj. pronoun participle adverb.

### Grammatical terms:

**Gerund:** A noun derived from a verb, ending in *-ing*. *Swimming is good exercise.* A gerund may be modified: *Swimming slowly . . . Her speaking to him pleased me.*

**Idiom:** A form of speech peculiar to itself and unmeaningful dissected. *He gave himself away . . . She all but failed . . . Come what may . . . Many a year . . .* Idioms are part of the language, acceptable, even necessary in writing. (Not to be confused with clichés.)

**Infinitive:** A verb form usually preceded by *to* and serving as a noun. *To run would be futile.* *To* is omitted with some verbs. *Do you dare [to] enter his cell?* Don't split the infinitive unless avoidance would be awkward or misleading: *To go would be boring; to not go, rude.* *I wanted to really help my son* is not the same as *I really wanted to help . . .*

**Mood:** the **indicative mood** makes a statement or asks a question: *Kilroy was here.* The **imperative** is used to command, request, or direct: *Take care.* The **subjunctive** is used in demands, resolutions, clauses contrary to fact, etc.: *We insist that she go . . . I move that his words be stricken . . . If I were you . . .* Don't overdo: *If this be correct . . .* (Use *is*.)

**Restrictive, nonrestrictive:** A **restrictive** phrase or clause defines the subject. *The dog tied to a tree barked all night.* (Not some other dog.) **Nonrestrictive:** *The dog, tied to a tree, barked all night.* (Why wouldn't it?) Note commas around the nonessential phrase.

**Verbs transitive or intransitive:** A verb that requires an object to make a complete statement is **transitive**. *I require* is a **vt**; it needs an object. A verb that stands alone is **intransitive**. *I hesitate* is a **vi**; it won't take a direct object. *I speak* can be either: *I speak Greek (vt)* or *I speak at dinners (vi)*. Does your verb take an object? Check a dictionary.

**Voice:** A verb with a direct object is in the **active** voice: *He told her.* When the direct object is used as subject, the verb is **passive**. *She was told by him.* Use the active voice unless the passive sense is intended: *Romulus and Remus were raised by wolves.* (See further information in "Taboos and Their Judicious Disregard.")

## Some Commonly Misused Verbs

<i>Present Tense</i>	<i>Past Tense</i>	<i>Pluperfect Tense</i>
<p><b>Lie</b> (vi) <i>To recline</i> I <i>lie</i> in bed at night.</p> <p><b>Present participle: Lying.</b> Drunks were <i>lying</i> everywhere.</p> <p><b>Lay</b> (vt) <i>To put down</i> He <i>lays</i> the book on the table.</p> <p><b>Present participle: Laying.</b> The roofers are <i>laying</i> tiles.</p>	<p><b>Lay</b> Yesterday we <i>lay</i> in clover.</p> <p><b>Laid</b> She <i>laid</i> the baby in the crib.</p> <p><b>Woke</b> Yesterday I <i>woke</i> (or <i>woke up</i>) late. Today they <i>woke</i> us at dawn.</p> <p><b>Awoke</b></p> <p><b>Awakened</b></p> <p><b>Brought</b></p> <p><b>Dived or Dove</b></p> <p><b>Did</b></p> <p><b>Dragged</b></p> <p><b>Dreamed or Dreamt</b></p> <p><b>Drank</b></p> <p><b>Ate</b></p> <p><b>Forgot</b></p> <p><b>Got</b></p> <p><b>Went</b></p> <p><b>Hung</b></p> <p><b>Hanged</b></p> <p><b>Led</b></p> <p><b>Mistook</b></p> <p><b>Passed</b></p> <p><b>Paid</b></p> <p><b>Payed</b></p> <p><b>Rose or Arose</b></p> <p><b>Ran</b></p> <p><b>Sought</b></p> <p><b>Set</b></p> <p><b>Shrank or Shrunk</b></p> <p><b>Sang or Sung</b></p> <p><b>Sank or Sunk</b></p> <p><b>Sat</b></p> <p><b>Sat down or Sat</b></p> <p><b>Sprang or Sprung</b></p> <p><b>Swam</b></p> <p><b>Would</b> (not <i>if I would have</i> . . . Use <i>if I had</i> or <i>had I</i> . . .)</p> <p><b>Wrote</b></p>	<p><b>Lain</b> She <i>had lain</i> on the floor till the doctor came.</p> <p><b>Laid</b> I <i>had laid</i> the bricks before sundown.</p> <p><b>Woken or Waked</b> I <i>had woken</i> before she arrived. They <i>had waked</i> us with their chirping.</p> <p><b>Awaked</b></p> <p><b>Awakened</b></p> <p><b>Brought</b></p> <p><b>Dived</b></p> <p><b>Done</b></p> <p><b>Dragged</b></p> <p><b>Dreamed or Dreamt</b></p> <p><b>Drunk</b></p> <p><b>Eaten</b></p> <p><b>Forgotten or Forgot</b></p> <p><b>Gotten or Got</b></p> <p><b>Gone</b></p> <p><b>Hung</b></p> <p><b>Hanged</b></p> <p><b>Led</b></p> <p><b>Mistaken</b></p> <p><b>Passed</b></p> <p><b>Paid</b></p> <p><b>Payed</b></p> <p><b>Risen or Arisen</b></p> <p><b>Run</b></p> <p><b>Sought</b></p> <p><b>Set</b></p> <p><b>Shrunk or Shrunk</b></p> <p><b>Sung</b></p> <p><b>Sunk</b></p> <p><b>Sat</b></p> <p><b>Sat down or Sat</b></p> <p><b>Sprung</b></p> <p><b>Swum</b></p> <p><b>Written</b></p>
<p><b>Wake</b> (vi or vt) <i>To cease to sleep or to rouse from sleep</i> We usually <i>wake</i> (or <i>wake up</i>) early. The birds <i>wake</i> us.</p> <p><b>Awake</b> (same as <i>wake</i>)</p> <p><b>Awaken</b> (same as <i>wake</i>)</p> <p><b>Bring</b> (not <i>brung</i> in pluperfect)</p> <p><b>Dive</b></p> <p><b>Do</b> (not <i>would have did that</i> in pluperfect)</p> <p><b>Drag</b> (not <i>drug</i> in past tenses)</p> <p><b>Dream</b></p> <p><b>Drink</b></p> <p><b>Eat</b></p> <p><b>Forget</b></p> <p><b>Get</b></p> <p><b>Go</b> (not <i>had went</i> in pluperfect)</p> <p><b>Hang</b> (to suspend, hook)</p> <p><b>Hang</b> (to execute by hanging)</p> <p><b>Lead</b> (not <i>lead</i> in past tenses)</p> <p><b>Mistake</b></p> <p><b>Pass</b> (not <i>past</i> in past tenses)</p> <p><b>Pay</b> (to give money)</p> <p><b>Pay</b> (to let out a line or cable)</p> <p><b>Rise or Arise</b> (vi)</p> <p><b>Run</b> (not <i>had ran</i> in pluperfect)</p> <p><b>Seek</b></p> <p><b>Set</b> (to place, fix, arrange)</p> <p><b>Shrink</b></p> <p><b>Sing</b></p> <p><b>Sink</b></p> <p><b>Sit</b> (to be in a seated position)</p> <p><b>Sit down</b> (to take a seated position)</p> <p><b>Spring</b></p> <p><b>Swim</b></p> <p><b>Will</b></p> <p><b>Write</b> (not <i>wrote</i> in pluperfect)</p>	<p><b>Woke</b> Yesterday I <i>woke</i> (or <i>woke up</i>) late. Today they <i>woke</i> us at dawn.</p> <p><b>Awoke</b></p> <p><b>Awakened</b></p> <p><b>Brought</b></p> <p><b>Dived or Dove</b></p> <p><b>Did</b></p> <p><b>Dragged</b></p> <p><b>Dreamed or Dreamt</b></p> <p><b>Drank</b></p> <p><b>Ate</b></p> <p><b>Forgot</b></p> <p><b>Got</b></p> <p><b>Went</b></p> <p><b>Hung</b></p> <p><b>Hanged</b></p> <p><b>Led</b></p> <p><b>Mistook</b></p> <p><b>Passed</b></p> <p><b>Paid</b></p> <p><b>Payed</b></p> <p><b>Rose or Arose</b></p> <p><b>Ran</b></p> <p><b>Sought</b></p> <p><b>Set</b></p> <p><b>Shrank or Shrunk</b></p> <p><b>Sang or Sung</b></p> <p><b>Sank or Sunk</b></p> <p><b>Sat</b></p> <p><b>Sat down or Sat</b></p> <p><b>Sprang or Sprung</b></p> <p><b>Swam</b></p> <p><b>Would</b> (not <i>if I would have</i> . . . Use <i>if I had</i> or <i>had I</i> . . .)</p> <p><b>Wrote</b></p>	<p><b>Woken or Waked</b> I <i>had woken</i> before she arrived. They <i>had waked</i> us with their chirping.</p> <p><b>Awaked</b></p> <p><b>Awakened</b></p> <p><b>Brought</b></p> <p><b>Dived</b></p> <p><b>Done</b></p> <p><b>Dragged</b></p> <p><b>Dreamed or Dreamt</b></p> <p><b>Drunk</b></p> <p><b>Eaten</b></p> <p><b>Forgotten or Forgot</b></p> <p><b>Gotten or Got</b></p> <p><b>Gone</b></p> <p><b>Hung</b></p> <p><b>Hanged</b></p> <p><b>Led</b></p> <p><b>Mistaken</b></p> <p><b>Passed</b></p> <p><b>Paid</b></p> <p><b>Payed</b></p> <p><b>Risen or Arisen</b></p> <p><b>Run</b></p> <p><b>Sought</b></p> <p><b>Set</b></p> <p><b>Shrunk or Shrunk</b></p> <p><b>Sung</b></p> <p><b>Sunk</b></p> <p><b>Sat</b></p> <p><b>Sat down or Sat</b></p> <p><b>Sprung</b></p> <p><b>Swum</b></p> <p><b>Written</b></p>

## I or Me, Who or Whom?

Consider whether the pronoun is subject or object.

- Subjects: I, he, she, it, they, who. *It was I who took the money.*
- Objects: me, him, her, it, them, whom. *It was her whom they accused.*
- Joint subjects and objects: *She and I belong together. Pay her and me.*

Use of *I/me* or *who/whom* depends in some situations on degree of formality.

- Formal: *She is younger than I (am).* Informal: *She is younger than me.*
- Formal: *It is I.* Informal: *It's me.*
- Formal: *Whom do you love?* Informal: *Who do you love?*
- *Whom* can often be omitted: *The man (whom) she loved got married.*

Sometimes the choice between *who* or *whom* depends on its relation to the subsequent phrase. Use *whom* if it is the object of the phrase; *who* if the phrase is parenthetical.

- *The man whom he recommended got the job.* (Object of *he recommended*.)
- *The man who I think got the job was Jones.* (*I think* is parenthetical.)
- *Paul is a man whom we know well.* (*Whom* is the direct object of *we know*.)
- *Paul is a man who we know is honest.* (*Who* is the subject of the second *is*.)

*Whoever* or *whomever*, also, depends on its function in the phrase it introduces.

- *Give it to whoever wants it.* (*Whoever* is the subject of *whoever wants it*.)
- *We will accept whomever they elect.* (*Whomever* is the object of *they elect*.)

After *than* or *as*, the pronoun depends on the following verb, stated or implied.

- *He likes us more than (he likes) them.*
- *No one cares more than I (care).*
- *The player is as skilled as they (are).*

*But* may function as a conjunction or a preposition.

- *Everyone but I ate the salad.* (The conjunction *but* ties *everyone* to *I*.)
- *Everyone ate the salad but me.* (The preposition *but* [or *except*] takes an object.)

Use the possessive case before a gerund (verbal noun).

- **Their** *buying the house was unexpected.*
- *Dad approved of **my** joining the Marines.* (Not **me** *joining the Marines*.)

**Myself, himself, etc.**

- *I myself will go.* (Intensive pronoun). *I must see for myself.* (Reflexive pronoun.)
- Avoid *myself* as a substitute for *I* or *me*. Wrong: *He attacked my dad and myself.*

**It's, its**

- *It's* is a contraction of *it is*. *Why does the cat stray?*
- *Its* is a possessive pronoun. *It's just its way.*

## Point of View

A narrative may be told in the first, second, or third person, or from mixed viewpoints.

First person: **Little I ask; my wants are few . . .** —Oliver Wendell Homes.

Second person: **Call me Ishmael.** (*You* is understood.) —Herman Melville.

Third person: **But most he loved a happy human face.** —Leigh Hunt.

Mixed: **The skies they were ashen and sober . . . Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her . . .** (Moves from third to first person.) —Edgar Allen Poe.

The first person is the most intimate, but is limited by what the protagonist sees or knows.

The second person is usually imperative and may sound antiquated. (Dear Reader . . .)

The third person has the advantage of mobility—can shift from one character to another, one mind to another. Such shifts, though, demand clear transition. Steinbeck, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, alternates the p.o.v. and never actually speaks as the author:

The driver squinted judiciously ahead and built up the speed of the truck a little. “Goin’ far?”

“Uh-uh! I’d a walked her if my dogs wasn’t pooped out.”

The questions of the driver had the tone of a subtle examination. He seemed to spread nets, to set traps, with his questions. “Lookin’ for a job? he asked.

\* \* \*

The driver . . . waited to let the whole emphasis of the preceding passage disappear and be forgotten. At last, when the air seemed neutral again, he said, “A guy that never been a truck skinner don’t know nothin’ what it’s like. Owners don’t want us to pick up nobody. So we got to set here an’ just skin her along ’less we want to take a chance of gettin’ fired like I just done with you.”

“Preciate it,” said Joad.

### Some pitfalls:

- Needless shifts in subject or voice: **Joe liked pizza, but burgers were also enjoyed by him.** (Awkward: subject shifts from Joe to burgers, and voice shifts to passive.) **Joe liked pizza, but also burgers.** (Better: the subject doesn’t shift, and both verbs are active.)
- Needless shifts in person: **We watched the earth shrink, and everyone felt a twinge of anxiety.** (Shift from first to third person.) **Watching the earth shrink, everyone [or we] felt a twinge of anxiety.** (No shift of person.)
- Needless shifts in number: **Each of the passengers was frisked and their luggage searched.** (*Each* is singular, *their* plural.) **All of the passengers were frisked, and their luggage was searched.** (Better: *All* and *their* are plural.) Or: **Passengers were frisked and luggage was searched.**

Once you are in a character’s head, thoughts needn’t be placed in quotes or italics unless emphasis or direct quotation is intended. Keep point of view distinct at all times. Usually stay in one character’s head throughout a paragraph or section.

*She unlocked the front door and opened it quietly. From this, Vince inferred that her parents had retired. Her hair, kindled by light from the hall, spilled to her shoulders like bright pennies. To feel it just once, lush, warm in his hands . . . Her coat was open, and a glimpse of her bosom took his breath away. She backed off smiling as the massive door closed in his face.* —Bill Carrigan, *The Burden of Matter*

## Dialogue

The following excerpt from Ian Rankin's "The Hanged Man," first published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, will illustrate the main conventions of dialogue.

1. He shook his head, looked into the ball, saw her face reflected there, stretched and distorted. And floating somewhere within was his own face, too, surrounded by licking flames.
2. "What do you see?" he asked, needing to know now.
3. "I see a man who is asking why he is here. One person has the answer, but he has yet to ask this person. He is worried about the thing he must do—rightly worried, in my opinion."
4. She looked up at him again. Her eyes were the color of polished oak. Tiny veins of blood seemed to pulse in the whites. He jerked back in his seat.
5. "You know, don't you?"
6. "Of course I know, Mort."
7. He nearly overturned the table as he got to his feet, pulling the gun from his waistband. "How?" he asked. "Who told you?"
8. She shook her head, not looking at the gun, apparently not interested in it. "It would happen one day. The moment you walked in, I felt it was you."
9. "You're not afraid." It was a statement rather than a question.
10. "Of course I'm afraid." But she didn't look it. "And a little sad, too."

### Illustrated principles

- Each speaker gets a separate paragraph.
- Periods and commas go inside quote marks.
- Speakers are identified as needed, using pronouns where clear (*he, she*), an occasional name (line 6), and mostly simple verbs (*he said, she asked*).
- The last person mentioned is usually the next speaker. The last sentence of 4 shows that Mort speaks 5. His name in 6 confirms it. (If the woman had spoken line 5, we should be told early, as: *She peered at him. "You know, don't you?"*)
- Successive lines of dialogue may not need identification (8, 9, 10).
- Contractions keep dialogue realistic (5, 9, 10). (The lack of contractions in the woman's speech, 3, is appropriate for a fortune teller.)
- Point of view remains clear: Mort is the observer throughout. Note how, in 10, we stay in Mort's head though the woman speaks next. (You can shift back and forth, or be the storyteller, but be sure we know who's speaking.)
- In a long speech, you may prefer several paragraphs. Use quote marks at the start of each, and close only the last spoken line.
- In passages of dialogue, keep the reader aware of the setting and body action.
- Don't ramble, even though people do in real life. Every line should further the story, giving information, drawing character, or building suspense.
- Repeat *said* and *asked* rather than *stated, uttered, etc.* The reader won't notice. Don't describe unnecessarily, as in, "*Well . . .*" *he said hesitantly.*

## Introductory Adverbials

An introductory phrase or clause that modifies a subsequent verb should (with some exceptions) be followed by a comma.

- *When I go to a beauty parlor, I always use the emergency entrance.* —Phyllis Diller
- *In every fat book, there's a thin book trying to get out.* —Unknown
- *If God lived on earth, people would break his windows.* —Jewish proverb
- *If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one?* —Abraham Lincoln

**Exception: the phrase (or single adverb) is short and perfectly clear**

- *When I was a boy I was told that anybody could become President; I'm beginning to believe it.* —Clarence Darrow
- *When turkeys mate they think of swans.* —Johnny Carson
- *I don't know anything about music. In my line you don't have to.* —Elvis Presley
- *Presently my soul grew stronger . . .* —Edgar Allan Poe
- *If called by a panther  
Don't anther.* —Ogden Nash

### Exceptions to the exception

- Use the comma when a short introductory adverbial refers to the whole sentence: *Seriously, I've run out of jokes.*
- Or could be misleading: *Now, I think he lied.* (Compare: *Now I think he lied.*) *To be sure, she seldom spoke. Before shooting, the man in the doorway cried out.*
- Or is a participle (verb-form modifier): *Rising, he staggered. Confused, they wandered.*
- Or is strongly transitional: *However . . . Therefore . . . Meanwhile . . . Hence . . .* Also, when transition is emphasized: *Yet, But, Thus, So, Then, etc.* Note: *Thus, all survived.* But: *Thus Spake Zarathustra.* (One *thus* refers back, the other ahead.)

### Dangling modifiers

An element introducing a sentence must be clearly tied to the main clause. If not, it is said to dangle. (A comma won't help.) The following sentences could be misleading:

- *Sitting in the back row, the blackboard was blurred.* (What was sitting?)
- *The time passed swiftly, eating, drinking, and talking.* (The time was eating?)
- *To save stamps, banks encourage use of the Internet.* (Banks will save stamps?)
- *When only a child, my father took me hunting.* (When who was a child?)
- *By exercising regularly, your fat will melt away.* (Your fat should exercise?)

But a phrase introducing a general truth is acceptable: *To sum up, germs cause disease.*

## Commas and Semicolons in a Series

Authorities speak of “open” and “close” punctuation. (Pronounced clōs, not clōz.)

- Open: *The flag is red, white and blue.*
- Close: *The flag is red, white, and blue.*

Most authorities prefer the close form: *Chicago Manual of Style*, *Strunk and White*, *Webster II*, etc. All insist on the close form if the phrases are long.

Journalist, however, following the *Associated Press Stylebook*, omit the final comma when the phrases are short. Fowler’s *Modern English Usage* defends this: In the sentence “French, German, Italian and Spanish are taught,” the two commas take the place of *and*; a comma after *Italian* would serve no purpose. Fowler agrees, though, that the final comma may be needed to avoid ambiguity: *The smooth grey of the beech stem, the silky texture of the birch, and the rugged pine.* “If there is no comma after *birch*, the pine is given a silky texture. The use of the comma before the *and* is here recommended.”

The possibilities of ambiguity, it seems, have persuaded most authorities to call for close punctuation invariably. If you still prefer the open form, as many good writers do, at least use a comma before the *and* when misreading is possible or the phrases are long. Though editors tend to be compulsive, few would alter *red, white and blue.*

The same principles apply to the use of semicolons in a series where the separated phrases contain internal punctuation. *The French flag is blue, white, and red; the Russian, white, blue, and red; and the Italian, green, white, and red.* In any case, don’t replace the last semicolon with a comma.

Three or more clauses can be linked by commas: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom . . .”—Dickens. But the use of a comma to link two clauses is forbidden (“comma splice”) except when they are very short: “Sighted sub, sank same.”—D.F. Mason, message to U.S. Navy base, 1942. Use a semicolon to link two closely related clauses without a conjunction: *The word “style” is fading as applied to a writer’s manner; we now use “voice.”*

### Some further points

- *Or* is treated the same as *and*. *He accepted no ifs, ands, or buts.*
- Don’t use commas when the elements are simple and joined by conjunctions. *It makes no difference whether you use nails or screws or bolts.*
- *Etc.* used after a series should be followed by a comma. *The guests brought salads, beverages, desserts, etc., and placed them on the table.*
- When referring to the title of a company, law firm, or the like, don’t edit the punctuation: *Burgess, Harrell, Mancuse, Olson & Colton.*
- The final conjunction can often be omitted: *She reads novels, plays, poems.*
- Be consistent in using open, close, or mixed punctuation in a series.



## Comma in a Compound Sentence

A sentence is *compound* if it comprises two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction—*and, or, nor, but, yet, for*. A comma should usually precede the conjunction. For example: *The man approached on a white horse, and a large dog walked beside them*. Note how the sentence might read at first sight without the comma: *The man approached on a white horse and a large dog . . .* The verb of the first clause seems to govern the second as well.

This example may be extreme. But the rule applies even where danger of misreading is slight, mainly to lend balance or emphasis:

- *Eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath.*—Shakespeare, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*.
- *I was gratified to answer promptly, and I did. I said I didn't know.*—Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*.

### Exceptions:

- The clauses are short or closely connected: *He mixed drinks and she watched*.
- The sentence starts with an introductory phrase that governs both clauses: *Seeing him draw his gun, I dropped behind the sofa and the woman ran from the room*. A comma before the *and* would disconnect the introductory phrase from the woman's action. This type of sentence should be scanned carefully for readability. Consider: *Seeing him draw his gun, I dropped behind the sofa and the woman, shrieking hysterically, ran from the room*. Better rewrite this one.

Don't confuse the compound sentence with the *complex* sentence, where one verb governs both clauses. *Many magazine editors urge the prospective contributor to read their website before submitting material but usually specify in writers' guides the months in which they accept manuscripts*. The sentence, though long, doesn't strictly require a comma before *but*. A comma, though, may be used judgmentally.

The word *then*, preceded by a comma, can be a coordinating conjunction in a complex but not a compound sentence. *I got up and shaved, then went downstairs*. (Acceptable.) In a compound sentence—where the clauses could stand alone—the use of *then* as a conjunction is viewed as two sentences run together. *I got up and shaved, then I went downstairs*. (Unacceptable. Use a semicolon or a separate sentence.)

Oddly, we are permitted to join *three* independent clauses by commas: *I came, I saw, I conquered*. Or as someone put it: *Veni, vidi, Visa—I came, I saw, I went shopping*.

**The main thing to remember: Place a comma before a conjunction joining independent clauses, except very short ones.**

## Commas with a Nonrestrictive Phrase

A phrase or clause is *restrictive* (limiting) if essential to the meaning of the sentence. Don't set it off with commas. **A man *carrying a rifle* entered the tavern.** If a phrase or clause is *nonrestrictive* (parenthetical, not essential), use commas. **Wyatt Earp, *carrying a rifle*, entered the tavern.**

**Consider the difference in meaning of the following sentences:**

*The people of Acadia, who refused to be British, migrated south.* (All went.)  
*The people of Acadia who refused be British migrated south.* (Some went.)

*The theory, which Darwin set forth, was outlawed.* (The point is made without the parenthetical element.) *The theory that Darwin set forth was outlawed.* (This specifies the theory that was outlawed. Note the preferred use of *that* in the restrictive phrase.)

**The comma or its absence plays a similar role in distinguishing the meaning of conjunctions, prepositions, participles, etc., before a supportive phrase or clause.**

*She didn't like the dress, because it was red.* (She doesn't wear red.) *She didn't like the dress because it was red, but because it was stylish.*

*He has been sick, since he ate a raw oyster.* (The oyster caused his sickness.) *He has been sick since he ate a raw oyster.* (He wasn't sick before.) The comma is used before *since*, *for*, or *as* when it means *because*.

*She feared the stranger, whose face was scarred.* (His scars frightened her.) *She feared the stranger whose face was scarred.* (Not another stranger.)

*He surfed in Durban, where the waves were huge.* (A good place to surf.) *He surfed in Durban where the waves were huge.* (Not some other part of Durban.)

*I like to jog at dawn, when no one is out.* (Tells why I like to do it then.) *I like to jog at dawn when no one is out.* (But not when others are around.)

*Nanook faced the north wind, screaming like a banshee.* (Nanook was screaming.)  
*Nanook faced the north wind screaming like a banshee.* (The wind was screaming?)  
Use a comma if the participle (the *-ing* word) modifies the main verb—unless the meaning is perfectly clear: *She went through the house calling for the children.*

*They are smart and successful, so (or yet) he hates them.* (Use a comma or semicolon when *so* means *therefore*.) But: *He let the dog out so it would stop barking.*

*He bought the magazine though he'd already read it.* (*Though* is restrictive. Sometimes the distinction is fine—a matter of emphasis.) *He bought the magazine, though he'd already read it.* (The nonrestrictive clause stresses his unusual purchase.)

## The Comma with Certain Adverbs

Whether certain adverbs should be set off with a comma(s) depends on their function. The following are often in question: *too*, *either*, *now*, *then*, *of course*, *indeed*, *thus*.

**Consider the difference in meaning between “too” in the following exchanges:**

A. “I like football.”

“I like football, too.” *The second speaker means he, too, likes football.*

B. “I like baseball.”

“I like football too.” *The second speaker means he likes football as well as baseball.*

[See example in Webster II: **too** . . . 1:As well . . . <I’m coming too.>]

**The comma with “either” also depends on its function.**

A. “I don’t like Mary.”

“I don’t like her, either.” *The second speaker agrees with the first.*

B. “How about Jane?”

“I don’t like her either.” *The second speaker doesn’t like either Mary or Jane.*

**The meaning of “Now” depends on the comma or its absence.**

A. “Yesterday I liked her. Now I’m not so sure.”

*The speaker may change his mind. “Now” indicates the time of the action.*

B. “Now, I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

*Here “Now” is a mild interjection.*

**“Then” is preceded by a comma when used as a conjunction.**

A. “He crossed the room, then picked up the gun.”

*“Then” indicates when he picked up the gun.*

B. “He crossed the room then and picked up the gun.”

*“Then” indicates when he crossed the room.*

**“Of course” and “indeed” without commas are intensifiers; with the comma, transitional.**

A. “He had of course accepted my explanation.” “They were indeed friends before they entered politics.” *Used for emphasis.*

B. “Of course, he accepted my explanation.” “Indeed, they were friends before they entered politics.” *Transitional (and emphatic).*

**“Thus” without the comma can mean “in this way”; with the comma, “therefore.”**

A. “Thus I pacified Psyche . . .” (Poe) “And smote him thus.” (Shakespeare)

B. “He said he would come. Thus, I expect him.”

## The Apostrophe

The apostrophe (') is used to show possession, omission, or certain plurals.\*

### Possession

- Add an apostrophe + *s* to singular nouns—*Jane's car, one's own, yesterday's toys, nobody's business, for pity's sake, the boss's desk, Lenz's way, Marx's theories, Malraux's works*—or to plural nouns not ending in an *s* or *z* sound—*women's rights, men's room, children's books*. (Some proper names omit the apostrophe: *Harpers Ferry, Saint Johns River*.)
- Certain exceptions are made for euphony or tradition: *Sophocles' plays, for appearance's sake, Dickens' novels, New York Times' ads, Jesus' life, Moses' laws, Xerxes' kingdom*. Let your ear guide you and be consistent.
- To plural nouns ending in an *s* or *z* sound, add only the apostrophe: *two cents' worth, ladies' room, three days' time, farmers' market, Joneses' house* (house of the Joneses).
- Treat closely linked nouns as a single unit: *my aunt and uncle's family*. But: *my mother's and father's jobs*.
- Use roman type for the *s* applied to an italicized title: *the Saturday Review's fiction, the Washington Post's editorials*.
- Hyphenated possessives show the *s* at the end: *my brother-in-law's car*. (But the first word takes the *s* of a hyphenated plural: *brothers-in-law, passers-by*.)
- Don't use the apostrophe in the pronouns *his, hers, its, ours, yours, theirs, or whose*. Distinguish the possessive *its* from the contraction *it's* (*it is* or *it has*).

### Omission

- Use an apostrophe to mark omission in a contraction: *can't, couldn't, didn't, needn't, shouldn't, won't, she'll, he'd, who's* (who is), *ma'am, etc.* This applies also to dialect: *'em, 'cause, s'pose, fixin', etc.* But note: *gonna* (going to), *wouldn'a* (wouldn't have), *outa* (out of), *etc.* Use *would have*, not *would've*.

### Plurals

- Use an apostrophe + *s* to form the plural or possessive of an abbreviation with periods—*Ph.D.'s, P.O.W.'s*—or the plural of a single letter or symbol—*dots his i's and crosses his t's, mind your p's and q's, the I's have it*.
- A plural abbreviation, coinage, or number doesn't take the apostrophe if the meaning is clear: *IOUs, his ABCs, her howdy-dos, the 1940s, the '80s*.
- Don't use an apostrophe to form the plural of a proper name: *the Bushes, two mild Aprils, ten Hail Marys; the two Dumas, Alexandre Dumas père and fils*.

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\*In Microsoft Word, the apostrophe is found as a symbol (Insert, Symbol, General Punctuation) or as a mark on the keyboard. The keyboard result will be backward (´) unless it follows a symbol or letter. To write *'cause, 'em, etc.*, type the full word, insert the apostrophe, and delete the unwanted part.

## Hyphenation

### Two words, hyphenated word, or one word?

If the accent is on the first syllable, a one-word form is probably correct, but check a good dictionary: *football*, *postman*, *jailbird*, *milestone*, *ponytail*, *milkman* (but *milk shake*), *tugboat* (but *tug of war*), *underdog* (but *under-the-table payment*).

Some words are always hyphenated: *tête-à-tête*, *son-in-law*, *hand-me-down*, *matter-of-fact*, *robin's-egg blue*, *rock-and-roll* (but *rock 'n' roll*), *side-glance* (but *side effect*).

Some combinations remain separated, unless used in the adjective position: *skin test* (but *skin-test reaction*), *test tube* (but *test-tube baby*), *flea market* (but *flea-market sale*), *plate glass* (but *plate-glass window*). *Anyone* is one word, but *no one* is two words.

### Two or more words used as an adjective

Hyphenate when used before the noun: *bluish-green dress*, *sleep-inducing drug*, *well-known poem*, *chocolate-covered nuts*. *One-*, *two-*, and *three-part harmony*.

Don't hyphenate such combinations when used after the noun: *her dress was bluish green*, *the drug was sleep inducing*, *the poem was well known*.

Don't hyphenate if the combinations are common units not likely to be misread: *a Red Cross nurse*, *Vice President Adams*, *New York lawyer*, *a middle school student* (but perhaps *a high-school student*).

Don't hyphenate after an *-ly* adverb: *a gently sloping terrace*, *a slightly worn tire*.

Hyphenate where necessary for clarity: *a fast-sailing ship*, *a fast sailing-ship*; *a toy-repair store*, *a toy repair-store*; *recreation*, *re-creation*; *recovered*, *re-covered*.

### Numbers

Compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine and fractions are hyphenated: *a two-thirds majority* (but *two thirds of the voters*). *Three hundred and twenty-seven*. *Tenth-century prose*. *A four-year-old boy*. *The four-year-old*. (But: *the boy is four years old*.)

### Prefixes and Suffixes

Most are written solid: *ante* (*anteroom*), *anti*, *bi*, *bio*, *co*, *counter*, *extra*, *infra*, *inter*, *intra*, *macro*, *meta*, *micro*, *mid*, *mini*, *multi*, *non*, *over*, *post*, *pre*, *pro*, *pseudo*, *re*, *semi*, *sub*, *super*, *supra*, *trans*, *ultra*, *un*, *under*. But hyphenate *co-op*, *co-opt*, and *anti-inflammatory* (wherever two *i*'s come together). *Webster II* likes *coworker*, and *Chicago Manual of Style* likes *co-worker*. Hyphenate *self-* words. Medical terms are bumped—*intrauterine*, *gastrointestinal*; but in lay text, a hyphen may be used where vowels meet.

## Dots and Dashes

### Dots

Three dots ( . . . ), called *ellipsis points*, are used as follows:

- To show hesitation or a trailing off: *Maybe . . . well, maybe . . . I'm not sure . . .*
- To show omission: *To be, or not to be . . . To sleep: perchance to dream . . .*

*The Chicago Manual of Style* likes four dots where an omission occurs between two full sentences. Thus, the second example above could be punctuated as follows: *To be, or not to be. . . . To sleep . . .* Note that there is no space between *be* and the first dot, which serves as a period to end the sentence. Four dots are used mostly in quotations; there is no need for them otherwise in fiction.

The position of ellipsis points after a question or exclamation depends on whether or not the sentence is complete.

- Complete sentence followed by an omission: *I quit! . . . take it or leave it.*
- Question trailing off: *Why did I . . . ? I don't know why.*

Microsoft's one-stroke ellipsis (...) is seldom seen in well-designed books. Spaced periods are much preferred ( . . . ). If you use the one-stroke symbol, leave a space before and after it. The short cut to produce it is Ctrl+Alt+dot (period).

### Dashes

Not to be confused with the hyphen (-), dashes come in two sizes: 1-em and the 1-en. The 1-em dash is as wide as the capital M of its font. The 1-en dash is as wide as the N.

The 1-em dash (Microsoft Alt+d) has two uses:

- To show a sudden break: *"I'll be a—!"* (But use ellipsis points for trailing off.)
- To set off a phrase with internal commas: *He gathered up his gear—rod, knife, lures, creel—and left the dock. "Don't forget," I called—"we're having lunch."*

The 1-en dash (Microsoft Ctrl+d) has two uses:

- To separate the years in dates: *Henry James, American novelist (1843–1916), lived in England after 1876.*
- To join compounds where a hyphen could be misleading: *HarperCollins–Regan Books has published such strange bedfellows as Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh. Yiddish, a High German–Hebrew–Slavic language, is spoken worldwide.*

Ellipsis points or a dash may fall at the end or beginning of a line. It may be followed by an exclamation point or a question mark. Typewriter users, imitate with two hyphens (--).

## Special Treatment of Words

### Emphasis

- Italicize (or underline) a word or phrase for emphasis. Boldface is unacceptable. Possible: *Rhythm is characteristic of stylistic prose, but rhyme is verboten.* Better (no italics needed): **Stylistic prose has rhythm but shuns rhyme.**
- Don't italicize the heading of a story or chapter. But in running text, italicize the title of a major work: book, periodical, play, epic poem, symphony, opera, statue, painting, film. Titles of short works, such as songs and stories, take quote marks.

### Foreign words

Use italics for a word or phrase not adopted into English. The following words are in *Webster's II* and should not be italicized: **a priori, au jus, baroque, bête noire, crèche, crème de menthe, de novo, élan, fait accompli, hacienda, haiku, hoi polloi, hors d'oeuvres, kibitz, maître d', mea culpa, nolo contendere, nom de plume, recherché, rococo, sturm und drang, tête-à-tête, weimaraner, zeitgeist.**

### Words used as words

- Italicize words used as words: **Data is the plural of datum and must be used with a plural verb, as in "The data are incomplete."**
- Use quote marks in definitions: **Histrionics means "exaggerated emotional behavior calculated for effect."**
- Use quote marks in reference to speech: **He said "brave" when he might have said "reckless."**

### Special sense

- Words used in an ironic sense may be placed in double or single quotes: **The "rally" became a riot. Tito was said to be 'our kind' of Communist.**
- The same rule applies to slang, though not in dialogue: **Country-western is lush with 'sob' notes. "With his jones, he'd do anything for junk."**
- A word or phrase introduced in quote marks is subsequently used without them.
- Words following *so-called* receive no special treatment: **The so-called freedom fighter is a rebel to the opposition.**
- Minimize quotes and italics in these senses, trusting the reader to catch the innuendo. You might prefer single quotes as less 'horsy.' **The French for dandelion, *pissenlit*, reads "piss in bed" to 'frogs,' whose *salade de pissenlit* is a known diuretic.**

### Letters as letters

- Italicize letters used as letters: **A terminal *s* or *es* designates the plural in English. The rhyme scheme of an English sonnet is *abab, cdcd, efef, gg.***
- Certain conventional usages are exceptional: **Mind your p's and q's. Alpha to omega. An I-beam in an A-frame house. A song in A minor.**
- Spell out numbers in fiction, especially dialogue. Exceptions: exact time (2.45 A.M.), dates (**May 1, 2005**), calibers (a .22 rifle), big money (**\$3.5 billion**).

## Capitalization in Titles

*The Chicago Manual of Style* gives the following rule for capitalization in the title of a book, chapter, story, or poem:

- Always cap the first and last words. *Of Mice and Men. What to Listen For.*
- Cap all nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and subordinate conjunctions (though, although, where, when, since, etc.) But lowercase the *to* in infinitives.
- Lowercase all coordinating conjunctions (*and, or, for, but, nor*), articles (*a, an, the*), and prepositions regardless of length.

This treatment of prepositions conflicts with the rule followed by many editors:

- Cap all words except articles, coordinating conjunctions, and prepositions of fewer than five letters. (Think “CAP”—conjunctions, **a**rticles, **p**repositions.) Thus, long prepositions—*about, against, around, because, until, though*, etc.—are usually capped: *Much Ado About Nothing, Men Against Death, The Man Without a Country, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.*

This rule is often broken: *Gone With the Wind* (short prep.), *The Sun Also Rises* (short conj.). Some hold that *also*, a four-letter conjunction, is capped because it has two syllables, like *into, onto, and unto*. *That, then, than, when, and yet* are usually capped.

When the rules are broken, the breach is generally on the side of capitalizing. This is commonly seen in song titles: “Down By the Riverside,” “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear,” “Take The ‘A’ Train.” In song titles, all words are often capped.

### Most authorities agree on the capitalization of hyphenated compounds:

- Cap the first word of the compound.
- Cap the word following the hyphen if it is a noun, a proper adjective, or has equal force with the first element. *Banning the H-Bomb* (noun), *My Scotch-Irish Kin* (proper adjective), *A Steak-and-Ale Dinner* (parallel words).
- But *Chicago* says to lowercase the second element if it is a modifying participle (*English-speaking People, Medium-sized Library*) or if both elements constitute a single word (*E-flat Minor, Re-establish, Self-sustaining*).

### You can’t go far wrong if you follow the CAP rule:

- Cap every word except coordinating conjunctions (*and, or, but, for, nor*), articles (*a, an, the*), and short (under-five-letter) prepositions (*as, at, by, for, from, in, into, of, on, over, unto, up, upon, to, with*, etc.). Note: some of these are not always used as prepositions; consult a dictionary.
- And always cap the first and last word of the title.

**Titles in bibliographies.** Either of two styles is acceptable:

- Copy the capitalization of the work cited, or
- Cap only the first letter of the title, and cap proper nouns.

See *Chicago Manual (Bibliographic Forms)* for variations. Be consistent.



## Taboos and Their Judicious Disregard

Books on writing commonly point out certain usages to be avoided. The *adverb* and the *passive voice* are favorites. The advice is helpful, though “avoid” may be too strong. The usages in question are seen in good writing, but shouldn’t be abused.

**Adverbs.** Check the verb. Is there another that encompasses the adverb? *He walked boldly to the door.* Better: *He strode to the door.* Is the adverb redundant? *She cheered enthusiastically.* Better: *She cheered.* But an adverb may be apt: *He was gravely injured.*

**Adjectives.** Avoid redundancy: *passing fad, fellow colleague, new recruit.* Avoid narrow differences: *old, outmoded clothes.* Avoid excessive use. Some celebrated writers, however, use strings of adjectives. “A growing ecstasy of ordered, formal, passionate, increasing disregard for death . . .”—Hemingway. There are no rules, just taste.

**Was, Had, Progressive Verb.** The past perfect (*had*) is used to move the action behind the simple past. One or two *had*’s usually suffice. *He had driven the car for several years, and it badly needed repairs. Yet he sold it at a good price.* Try to return to the past tense unobtrusively. *The alarm had sounded; men were sliding down the pole. The engine stood ready.* Often a simple indicative can economically replace a progressive verb (*-ing* word): *The ship was riding smoothly under full sail.* Better: *The ship rode smoothly under full sail.* But sometimes the progressive form is best: “*The sun was shining on the sea / Shining with all its might . . .*”—Lewis Carroll.

**Passive Voice.** Consider this sentence: *The word “by” usually introduces the passive.* This could also be worded, *The passive is usually introduced by the word “by.”* A hard choice. Ordinarily the passive is used when the grammatical subject is emphasized. *What became of him? He was abducted by aliens.* Note that “by” is not essential to the passive sense: *He always started a speech with a joke.* The passive has its place, but discriminate.

**Bad Habits.** Don’t overuse *very, suddenly, some, started, was, had, the, now, then.* Minimize sentences beginning with *And* or *But*. Shun emphasizing with capitals or multiple exclamation points. Avoid italics to show thoughts, except for emphasis. Omit *that* unless needed for clarity (but don’t replace it with a comma): *It was one of those things (that) her husband refused to discuss.* Avoid repeating recently used words, unless intended. Use quotation marks sparingly around slang and unusual words. In dialect, tend to warp grammar rather than pronunciation. *Pulled this here gun and I’d have used it.*

**The “Hook.”** We are advised to begin a narrative with a dramatic eye-opener, but the so-called hook need only be interesting. *I guess I never believed that I deserved to live.* —J. C. Oates. *Call me Ishmael.* —Herman Melville (The Biblical Ishmael was an outcast.) “*Hot in here.*” —Stuart Kaminsky. *Damn dog barked at everything.* —Ed McBain.

**The “Cliffhanger.”** Try to end each chapter with an action, situation, or question that will lead the reader on. Mandatory in old magazine serials. In sophisticated prose, the reader should feel compelled to continue, but the cliffhanger may be subtle.

## Miscellanea

### Blond, blonde; brunet, brunette

*Her parents are blond Nordics. Though her mother is a blonde, her father likes brunettes. Blonde*, a noun, can refer only to females. *Brunettes* are dark-haired women. *Brunet* as a noun, as well as *blond and brunette* as adjectives, apply to males or females. *He admired brunet Italians* (those with dark skin, hair, or eyes).

### A while, awhile; alright, already

- *He took a while to do it.* (*While* is a noun.)
- *He stayed awhile.* (*Awhile* is an adverb meaning *for a while*.)
- *Alright* is nonstandard for *all right* and should be avoided. *Already* is all right.

### Due to

Use *due to* after a noun but not after a verb.

- *His hesitancy was due to fear.* (Good.)
- *He hesitated due to fear.* (Poor: Use *because of*, *on account of*, or *through*.)

### Farther, further

Use *farther* for physical distance: *The town was farther than I thought.* Use *further* for degree, quantity, or time: *Further efforts.* (But some authorities are indifferent.)

### Capitalization of family members, other appellatives

- *I was there when my dad arrived.* (Lower case *dad, mom, etc.*, after a pronoun.)
- *I was there when Dad and Sis arrived.* (Here *Dad* and *Sis* are proper names.)
- *All right, dear. Okay, chief.* (Don't capitalize terms of endearment or familiarity.)

### Titles of works in running text

- Use italics for books, periodicals, plays, long poems, operas, paintings, statues, movies. (She liked H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*. He reads the *New York Times*.)
- For short poems, songs, and radio and television programs, use roman type and quote marks: (He learned Joyce Kilmer's "Trees." We watched "The Sopranos.")
- For signs and mottoes, capitalize but don't use italics or quotes. (There was a Do Not Disturb sign on the door. The flag bore the motto Dont Tread on Me.)

### Possessives with and without s

- With few exceptions, add 's to singular nouns: *Marx's theories, Burns's poems.* To plurals, add an apostrophe only: *the Joneses' store.* But: *men's room.* Don't use an apostrophe except for a true possessive: *nurses station* (station for nurses).
- But: *appearance's sake, Jesus' name* (traditional); *Euripides' plays* (polysyllabic name). And drop the s where euphony insists: *Dickens' stories, Gibbons' studies.*

### Plural nouns with single attributes

- *They wore it on their arm.* (Use *arms* to mean both arms.)
- *Some of the ladies brought cookies. Others brought a cake.* (Probably not *cakes*.)