

Grammar Girl's Editing Checklist

<http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>



Wrong Word

affect/effect, lay/lie, sit/set, who/whom, toward/towards, etc.

Vague Pronoun Reference

Confusing: Bob annoyed Larry, but that didn't stop *him* from asking for a meeting.

Clear: Bob annoyed Larry, but that didn't stop Larry from asking for a meeting.

Lack of Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

Frequently Disparaged: Everyone withdrew their money.

Uncontroversial: Everyone withdrew his or her money.

Uncontroversial: People withdrew their money.

Missing or Unnecessary Capitalization

Capitalize proper nouns—the names of things such as the *Golden Gate Bridge*.

Lowercase common nouns—descriptions such as *that famous bridge*.

Unnecessary Shift in Verb Tense

Wrong: John Wilkes Booth *barricaded* the door while Lincoln *is* watching the play.

Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragments aren't always wrong, but don't use them accidentally.

Fragments: Because she was late. And I held the door.

Monotonous Sentence Structure

Monotonous: We were late. I called the office. Bob answered the phone. Bob told Sue. Sue stalled the investors.

Better: I called the office because we were late. Bob answered the phone and told Sue, who stalled the investors.

Adjective Drift

Confusing: The property has seasonal creeks and trail access.

Clear: The property has trail access and seasonal creeks.

Unnecessary Adverbs and Prepositions

Bloated: I was *very* angry that Bob sat *down* on the wet paint.

Better: I was furious that Bob sat on the wet paint.

□ **Parallelism Errors**

Not Parallel: Kids like singing, chatting, and *check* their phones.

Parallel: Kids like singing, chatting, and checking their phones.

□ **Passive Voice**

Passive voice isn't wrong, but active sentences are often better.

Passive: The bell was rung by zombies.

Active: Zombies rang the bell.

□ **“There Are” Sentences**

You can often improve on sentences that start with *There are*.

OK: There are usually 54 cards in a deck.

Better: A deck usually has 54 cards.

□ **Jargon**

Jargon: You can often improve on expletive sentences.

More Accessible: You can often improve on sentences that start with *There are*.

□ **Missing Comma After Introductory Element**

Right: In the past, we bought vinyl records.

□ **Unnecessary Comma**

Wrong: Bob likes pandas, and visits the zoo often.

Right: Bob likes pandas and visits the zoo often.

□ **Comma Splice**

Wrong: I ate cake, I played games.

Right: I ate cake, and I played games.

Right: I ate cake and played games.

□ **Run-On Sentence**

Wrong: I ate cake I played games.

Right: I ate cake, and I played games.

Right: I ate cake and played games.

□ **Missing Comma in a Compound Sentence**

Wrong: All my friends came over for my birthday Tuesday and Bobby visited me the next day.

Right: All my friends came over for my birthday Tuesday, and Bobby visited me the next day.

□ **Missing Comma with a Nonrestrictive Element**

Wrong: Shoes which are worn on your feet come in many styles.

Right: Shoes, which are worn on your feet, come in many styles.

□ **Mechanical Problems with Quotations**

In the US, periods and commas go inside the closing quotation mark. Semicolons, colons, and dashes go outside the closing quotation mark. The position of question marks and exclamation points varies: They stay with their question or exclamation. Correct: She yelled, "Help!" I won a copy of "Wrecking Ball"! She asked, "Are you hungry?" Did he just ask, "Are we in Hungary"?

□ **Quotation Marks for Emphasis**

Wrong: "Free" soda on Saturdays.

Right: Free soda on Saturdays.

□ **Apostrophe Errors**

Nouns take apostrophes to become possessive. Pronouns don't. *It's* means "it is" or "it has." *Its* is the possessive form of *it*. Acronyms, initialisms, and years don't take apostrophes to become plural (*CDs*, *1980s*).

□ **Unnecessary or Missing Hyphen**

Don't hyphenate phrasal verbs.

Wrong: Log-in to your account.

Right: Log in to your account.

Do hyphenate compound adjectives. These mean different things: *silver jewelry cart* and *silver-jewelry cart*.

□ **Spelling Errors**

Remember to run a spellcheck. It's obvious but easy to forget.

Search for these words and phrases to do a quick check: *there are*, *it is*, *its*, *it's*, *your*, *you're*, *their*, and *they're*.

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